

C. Brad Faught, *Kitchener, Hero And Anti-Hero*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2016. xiv + 304pp. ISBN 978-1-78453-350-2. Hardback. Price £25.00.

Is there scope for another biography of Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850 – 1916) and in view of the substantial existing published historiography, is there anything new to glean from his eventful life? Professor Faught, in his new biography of Kitchener, acknowledges this challenge and concedes the element of chronological serendipity of publication occurring in the centenary year of Kitchener's untimely death. However, Professor Faught's book title points towards the distinguishing thread running throughout his narrative, that of reassessing Kitchener's fame and behaviour in the context of Kitchener's 'heroic' personality from the perspectives of the twenty-first century. The book's Preface is used to explain this approach and to juxtapose this biography against other previous and contemporary publications. As a minor quibble, I note that though the Preface was referenced numerically, my review copy did not include these references as end notes, which was a shame as the rest of the end notes were comprehensive and informative without being excessive or distracting.

Professor Faught has written a clear and readable biography with a coherent chronology that is summarised separately at the end of the book. The focus sways more towards Kitchener's political rather than his military battles and especially covers his diplomatic efforts at Fashoda, the thwarted negotiations at Middelburg in 1901, the pyrrhic victory in South Africa in 1902 brokered at Vereeniging, his conflicts with Lord Curzon in India and the challenges of incipient coalition warfare in 1914 – 16 concisely with clarity of detail and pertinent argument. However, Kitchener's experiences of active service are not ignored and Professor Faught describes the Sudanese campaigns particularly well if rather succinctly. For a book that may appeal to the general reader as well as the specialist, the absence of maps is a little surprising although this omission certainly doesn't detract from the value of the book itself. While there are no maps, the book does contain 17 black and white photographs, some from the author's own collection which, though not critical to the narrative provide additional interest, particularly those illustrating places in India associated with Kitchener as they appear today.

The author deals fairly and deftly with some of the more notably contentious episodes in Kitchener's life. These issues, whether Kitchener's disposal of the Mahdi's skeletal remains after Omdurman, the executions of Lieutenants Harry ('Breaker') Morant and Peter Handcock and the discredited refugee ('concentration') camps in the South African War, are considered even-handedly, though Professor Faught does not avoid affirming his own personal conclusions. Furthermore, he deals with the once-popular question of Kitchener's sexuality concisely in a mere two pages whilst also diminishing the import of such allegations in the overall determination of Kitchener's achievements.

REVIEWS

Much of the primary source material used comes from the thoroughly-mined Kitchener Papers held at the National Archives, Kew, UK though the book's bibliography remains extensive stretching to 10 pages and includes many other archival sources as well as up to date scholarly secondary source material. The narrative is referenced comprehensively indicating thorough and wide-ranging research.

The book's excellent final chapter describes the circumstances of Kitchener's drowning and its consequences. In doing so, Professor Faught scotches some of the subsequent conspiracy theories about Kitchener's demise and then considers how Kitchener has been portrayed since his death. The final pages contain a brief but persuasive reassessment of Kitchener as an 'anachronistic hero', neither denigrated nor eulogised but based on an appraisal of his personal achievements viewed from the historical distance of a hundred years. In conclusion, this highly enjoyable biography achieves its stated purpose and provides a suitable and balanced re-appraisal of Kitchener. Though not containing any sensational or startling new facts or anecdotes, the book adds successfully to the already extensive Kitchener 'library' and as such it is recommended to both the casual and expert reader.

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