

## Notes

# Education Articles in the *Wellington Independent* June-July 1849

### A QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP

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IN 1849, two important statements on education were published in Wellington—one taking the form of an official minute, the other a lengthy series of newspaper articles. The minute was submitted by Alfred Domett, the Colonial Secretary for New Munster, who disagreed with Grey's policy of providing public money for denominational schools. Domett tabled his written protest at such a policy in the Legislative Council of New Munster on 22 June. On 5 July, the minute was published in full in the *Government Gazette*. Over this same period, the *Wellington Independent*, a newspaper which opposed Grey and the official régime, began printing a series of articles on the broad topic of national education. The series, which appeared weekly, ran from 27 June to 18 July, and later was reprinted in the *Nelson Examiner* commencing 7 July. The value of these articles has been increasingly recognised in recent years but their authorship has been variously attributed. Although obviously the work of one man, the series was unsigned, and this has led to considerable guesswork about the identity of the author. The purpose of this note is to submit the several suggestions which have been made to critical examination, and then to add my own conclusions concerning the authorship which I believe are more acceptable than those that have been drawn to date.

E. A. Horsman<sup>1</sup> and T. E. Street<sup>2</sup> have attributed the series to Domett while J. Miller<sup>3</sup> has contended that the credit belongs to Thomas Arnold— younger son of Arnold of Rugby and brother of the poet and educator. Miller's conclusion has a number of attractive features and not the least of these is the connection that it enables one to draw between a famous English family and the development of educational thinking and policy in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> But it is my contention that neither of the above suggestions is correct and that the series was in fact written by William Fox, prominent settler, New Zealand Company official, and at a later date, Premier.

Domett's authorship of the minute hardly entitles one to conclude *ipso facto* that he must also have written the newspaper series. Yet this seems to be the tenor of Horsman's argument. He concludes that 'a long series of articles in the *Nelson Examiner* in 1849 can only have come from his [i.e. Domett's] pen'.<sup>5</sup> It is true that some years earlier Domett had acted as editor for this newspaper but he had cut his ties with Nelson by 1849 and apparently did not contract again to write regularly for the *Examiner*

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Horsman, ed., *Diary of Alfred Domett*, London, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> I. E. Street, 'Education in Nelson', Master's thesis, Canterbury University.

<sup>3</sup> J. Miller, *Early Victorian New Zealand*, London, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, J. Bertram, 'Literary Bent', *Times Educational Supplement*, 14 May 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Horsman, p. 26.

until 1857.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the closer one looks at the evidence we have, the more improbable it becomes that the articles could have come from Domett's pen.

Domett, it must be remembered, was a member of an administration which was heartily detested by the radical intelligentsia of Wellington. The *Independent* was deliberately used by them to pour criticism, abuse and ridicule upon the administration and all who took part in it. To find Domett writing for such an unfriendly newspaper would be strange indeed, and especially strange in view of the fact that Domett more than any other official seemed to be singled out for criticism in its columns. Furthermore, the writer of the series made it clear that he was critical not only of Grey's policy but also of the 'official' opposition that had been aroused. It is rather hard to believe that Domett would have had the temerity to dismiss his own official proposals in such a fashion and what is more to describe himself by name as 'showing some symptoms of honest zeal'.<sup>7</sup> Horsman has not looked at these points and Street simply concludes that Domett must have written the articles because like the minute they were critical of Grey's policies.

In terms of the politics of the day, Arnold certainly seems more likely to have been the writer of the series than does Domett. Allegedly, he was opposed to Grey's autocratic methods of government and in sympathy with the views of the Wellington radicals. Moreover, as the son of an illustrious educator and as an experienced teacher, Arnold could well have been capable of making an important written contribution to colonial thinking on education. The suggestion that Arnold was the author is therefore an attractive one but not, however, one that stands up well alongside relevant data.

Miller's evidence is based upon a letter which Arnold wrote from Nelson on 1 August 1849. In this, Arnold declared that he had written 'a paper of some length on the subject of Education',<sup>8</sup> and Miller concludes that this paper was in fact the newspaper series. It will be noted that the letter was not written from Wellington, and this poses a difficulty for Miller's thesis because in fact Arnold was living in Nelson throughout the period we are interested in. This means that he could have no first-hand knowledge of the Council debates and no particular reason for publishing the articles first in Wellington and only at a later date in his adopted settlement.

While it is true that the anti-government tone of the series might have fitted in with Arnold's professed dislike for autocracy, it is difficult to explain the personal criticism and dislike shown of Domett. Arnold's greatest friend in New Zealand was Domett and as a very old man Arnold recalled with admiration the figure Domett had cut in colonial society. It is hard to believe therefore that Arnold should have chosen an occasion like this to denounce a man with whom he was on the friendliest terms. Miller claims that the over-riding impression of the articles is that of a young man delighting in the planning of an ideal society. With this I would agree, but I find it difficult to accept the added implication that Arnold was a thinker cast in the Benthamite mould who believed that the good could be achieved by the application of 'scientific' social principles. The

<sup>6</sup> Domett to C. W. Richmond, 13 March 1857, *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, ed. G. H. Schofield, Wellington, 1960, I, 258.

<sup>7</sup> *Wellington Independent*, 27 June 1849.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold to Jane Arnold, 1 August 1849, *New Zealand Letters of Thomas Arnold the Younger*, ed. James Bertram, Auckland, 1966, p. 128.

Benthamite emphasis in the series stands out, but everything in Thomas Arnold's background and career suggests a different kind of thinker altogether.

Arnold's approach to colonial society was romantic rather than scientific in its orientation; it is people who stand out in his writings not abstract principles and statistics. Fascination with 'ardent poets . . . scholars, the explorers of deserts and mountains' is evident but the dictates of utility and self-interest receive little mention.<sup>9</sup>

A better case can be made for assigning the authorship to Fox. In positions of leadership first in Nelson and later in Wellington, Fox showed himself to be a man who was consistently interested in educational projects of all kinds. His view of the good was based upon the assumption that all men were capable of becoming rational self-calculating beings. The education of all was therefore necessary, as he saw it, if men were to become sufficiently rational to allow the good to be realised.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, by 1849 Fox had become firmly established as a leading critic in the columns of the *Independent*,<sup>11</sup> and it would not therefore have been out of keeping for him to contribute articles on education that emphasised utilitarian argument and at the same time attacked the administration of the day.

The data that we have support such a conclusion. As a thinker Fox lacked originality and he was content to use the same material again and again in his writings. From our point of view this is fortunate indeed, because it enables us to compare the content of the series with articles published before and after 1849—articles which are definitely associated with Fox's name. In December 1846 Fox delivered a lecture on education to the Mechanics' Institute in Richmond, and the lecture was later published in the *Nelson Examiner*.<sup>12</sup> Much of the material appeared again in an editorial in the *Examiner* of 27 November 1847, and it would seem likely that Fox was again the writer. He was known to contribute to the paper and the style of expression and thought is characteristically his. Now the important point is that a similar link in content can be found between this editorial and the 1849 series. To give but one example among the many available, the *Examiner* editorial contains in part the following argument about *laissez-faire* in education:

that it is contrary to the principles of political economy that the State should interfere in those matters which individuals can, if they choose, do for themselves; that demand and supply go together, and that principle having been admitted in the question of free trade, it ought to be admitted in the subject of education also; that if education is wanted, it will by that rule come of itself and so forth.<sup>13</sup>

The second article in the *Independent* covering the same point argues:

We are told that it is contrary to the principles of Political Economy, that the Government should interfere to confer on individuals benefits, which,

<sup>9</sup> T. Arnold, *Passages in a Wandering Life*, London, 1900, p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> J. D. S. McKenzie, 'Education in Utopia', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* (May 1966).

<sup>11</sup> As witness Domett's expressed wish that he could 'do opposition journalist as Fox and Co. do it now'. Domett to Stafford, 5 January 1850, Stafford Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, vol. I.

<sup>12</sup> 6 March 1847.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 27 November 1847.

if they choose, they can confer on themselves, that demand and supply always go together, and that principle having been admitted in free trade, ought to be admitted in education, for by that rule education will come of itself and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

The two statements are so closely parallel that one is surely justified in concluding that either they were written by the same person or that the one was copied from the other. In the latter case, incidentally, if Arnold were the author of the series we would be forced to conclude that he borrowed heavily from another's writing rather than producing a unique contribution of his own. Arnold did not arrive in New Zealand until March 1848. But in view of later developments it seems much more likely that Fox was simply reworking his own writings. In 1854 he compiled an official report on education for the Wellington Provincial Council and this contained much material culled from writings in 1847 and 1849. The fourth article of the newspaper series began by describing French education in this manner:

The Official Branch is thus constituted

1. The head of the whole machinery is the 'Minister of Instruction', one of the chief ministers of State, with a seat in cabinet. It is his office to superintend the whole Educational system of the country, public and private, superior and elementary. He appoints all professors, teachers and other officers engaged in public education, licenses private schools and sanctions the course of study pursued in them . . . .<sup>15</sup>

In his report, Fox described the French machinery thus:

The Official branch consists of

1. The minister of public instruction, who is a minister of state, with a seat in cabinet; his duty is to superintend the whole instruction of France, public and private; to appoint professors and teachers, license schools and fix the course of studies.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, such similarities are too marked to be explained by coincidence.

Finally, the suggestion that Fox was the author of the series is supported by the evidence of contemporaries. One article in the series drew a disparaging connection between the Roman Catholic Church and the state of education in Ireland. This was too much for an irate newspaper correspondent 'Pat' who concluded a long letter by stating, 'out jumps that cunning little animal the fox, whose name many writers on Ireland and the Irish bear even to this day'.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Robert Stokes, editor of the *Wellington Spectator* and a bitter critic of the radicals, later complained that Fox had 'published a series of papers on education written in a very dogmatical style, and chiefly remarkable, as showing how ill-informed the writer was on the subject of which he was treating'.<sup>18</sup> It is obvious, therefore, that contemporary opponents had no doubts concerning the identity of the anonymous author.

<sup>14</sup> *Wellington Independent*, 7 July 1849.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 18 July 1849.

<sup>16</sup> Report of Commission on Education, *Acts & Proceedings*, Wellington Provincial Council, II.

<sup>17</sup> *Wellington Independent*, 7 July 1849.

<sup>18</sup> *New Zealand Spectator* (Wellington), 20 February 1850.

Accordingly, I would claim that viewing Fox as the author makes political and/or geographical sense in ways which suggestions concerning Domett and Arnold do not. Added support is given my contention by a serial analysis of Fox's writings and by evidence from contemporaries. It thus seems highly probable that William Fox, one of the key figures behind early attempts to establish education on a national basis in New Zealand, was indeed the author of the newspaper series in 1849.

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can't hit us no more.'*

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Professor Flynn holds the Chair of Political Science at Otago.

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