

Reviews

The Feel of Truth. Essays in New Zealand and Pacific History Presented to F. L. W. Wood and J. C. Beaglehole. Edited by Peter Munz. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1969. 274 pp. N.Z. price: \$7.50.

A NOVEL FEATURE of this *festschrift* is the inclusion of two pieces by the historians who are honoured. In his delightfully written introductory memoir Peter Munz endeavours to capture the atmosphere in the Wellington history department during the unique thirty year partnership of Professors Fred Wood and John Beaglehole. He concludes the volume by reproducing two beautifully inspiring texts. Professor Wood's George Arnold Wood memorial lecture at Sydney University in 1949, 'The Historian in the Modern Community', examined the reciprocal impact of Australia in the 1890s and his father, an English Liberal historian from Oxford. Professor Beaglehole's Margaret Condliffe memorial lecture at Canterbury of 1954, 'The New Zealand Scholar', included ironic reminiscences of his own days as a research student in London, his return to New Zealand in the depression and his 'conversion' to New Zealand studies at the hands of Joe Heenan and the Centennial Branch. I know at least one New Zealand scholar who returned to his homeland from Home after reading Beaglehole's lecture in London.

But why did Professor Munz include these essays? Was it to exemplify the personal tributes of his introduction? Or was it to provide a yardstick by which we might judge the essays presented in the rest of the volume? There are twelve of these and one poem. The quality is as uneven as their length, which ranges from four pages to twenty-two. I see Wood and Beaglehole (whose essays, frankly, are the best in the volume) as a yardstick and therefore this review will be deliberately selective.

Wood admits that one day he would 'like to break a lance in defence of the view that some of the most valuable research consists in creative thinking about facts which are tolerably well known'. Professor Oliver's essay, 'Reeves, Sinclair and the Social Pattern', is a classic exercise of this sort. I select it as the most important new contribution in the volume. Ostensibly an expanded review of Sinclair's life of Reeves, the essay becomes a challenge to the Reevesian interpretation of New Zealand history. It concludes by wondering 'whether, in fact, "left" is a direction in New Zealand'. While Reeves adopted the rhetoric of 'class' and Sinclair detected in Reeves's 1887 Christchurch campaign the 'beginnings of "class" politics . . . something approaching a conservative-radical struggle', Oliver sees the conflict as 'surely a struggle between different property interests, a struggle within capitalism, not a class struggle'. He suggests that 'mobility' provides a better key to New Zealand politics and that the Liberal reforms were designed to restore mobility where it had been checked. But Oliver has his doubts about Reeves as a Liberal when it comes to the type of society he envisaged — 'social mobility freely operating in a situation of growth' or 'social mobility induced and sustained within a sealed-off

society'. He suspects that Reeves leaned to the latter. His opposition to borrowing and his own personal monument, the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act with its aim of equilibrium, suggest that Reeves, like the contemporary 'Skinflints', wanted a 'tight little Utopia'. Oliver illuminates his argument with interesting analogies from the difference between the American Whigs and the Jacksonian Democrats. Wood need not break his lance; his point is amply made by this elegant essay.

The three other contributions which touch on aspects of New Zealand politics do not come near to Oliver's standard. Dr G. A. Wood, in 'The Electorate's Verdict', shows clearly why the election of 1860-1 ended the first phase of New Zealand politics. During the Stafford government, politics — whether 'centralist' or 'provincialist' — were dominated by the Cook Strait provinces. After the election, new members from Auckland and the southern church settlements disapproved of Wellington and Nelson dominance and a new era of politics emerged. W. B. Harland considers 'The Background to the ANZUS Treaty', in a very sparsely documented essay, which emphasises Australasian fears of Japan and makes no concessions to Cold War revisionism. G. R. Hawke, in 'Economic Decisions and Political Ossification', opens with a page of monumental obscurity, but one gradually discovers that he is puzzled by the fact that in New Zealand electricity for domestic use is cheaper than for industry, and it is 'not easy to find a justification . . .' for this. A brief excursion into the history of electricity supply indicates that the Wellington City Council produced favourable domestic rates to encourage the use of electrical appliances between the wars.

There are four contributions relating to aspects of Maori history — the best is by Professor Sinclair. While Oliver has been musing in his study, Sinclair has been rummaging again in the archives, this time with a Maori dictionary. To go back to the yardstick: Beaglehole pleaded 'vehemently for technical accomplishment, for professional standards, to the point of pedantry . . . Our history must be unfolded by the trained — let me say it once more, the critical — mind, and by great labour.' He would approve of Sinclair's essay on 'The Maori Anti-Landselling Movements in Taranaki'. Twenty years ago Sinclair published his first paper on this vexed question. He dealt with it again in two later books and now he comes back with a further contribution. He accepts that the settlers of the 1850s believed that there *was* a land league in southern Taranaki, at least, — although he shows that they managed to shift the dates as to when they thought it started. He also accepts that the Puketapu feuds among the Atiawa, to the north (which began after the supposed start of the league) lent colour to the idea. For contemporaries the league was a plausible interpretation of Maori behaviour over a long period. But Sinclair now tries to see it from a Maori point of view. 'The Maoris spoke not of a "league" but of a "plan", a "policy", "*he tikanga*"'. This essay is a fine example of professional persistence, of how an author can worry over fragments of evidence for years. It also gives a glimpse of the possibilities for Maori history when historians are competent to use Maori sources. A further glimpse, of a different sort, is provided by Ruth Ross in her charming essay, 'The Autochthonous New Zealand Soil', which recounts experience in a Maori community in Hokianga, including a cemetery cleaning at Hairini, where she tried to trace a Waitangi signatory.

Two other essays touch on the Maoris. Ian Wards, in a tightly written assessment of the 'Generalship of Governor Grey', cuts down to size Grey's military role in the fighting at the Bay of Islands, Hutt Valley, Porirua and Wanganui. He goes on to accuse Grey of writing 'ridiculous despatches', of 'lying his way' out of trouble, and he concludes that Grey was really an 'expert confidence man'. This is rather extreme. I am aware that Grey's stock has fallen rather low, but surely it is not really surprising that a man who was 'viewed with abhorrence by many men of discernment' could emerge as 'Good Governor Grey'. What did men of discernment make of Seddon or Massey or Holyoake? And was Grey really a 'liar'; did he not believe what he wrote in those despatches? Some of the events covered in this essay may be seen from another viewpoint in Janet Murray's contribution on 'The Rev. Richard Taylor and Christianity among the Wanganui Maoris in the 1840s and early 1850s'.

On the subject of the Pacific Islands there are four essays. Professor Davidson's contribution, 'Understanding Pacific History — The Participant as Historian', bears out a point made by Wood. 'The clue to a historian's work lies . . . in his view of life'; Arnold Wood's impact on students in Sydney stemmed from the fact that, as a radical liberal, he 'lived' history by his own political commitment, as well as taught it. Davidson shows vividly how his own participation in Western Samoa, the Cook Islands and Nauru gave him an understanding of the history of these islands which written records could not convey.

Mary Boyd's essay on 'The Decolonisation of Western Samoa' is the most useful of the Pacific contributions. In a clear exposition of New Zealand's role in Samoa from 1944 to 1962 she brings out the originality of the result. New Zealand 'departed' from British precedents by pushing to Samoan majority rule 'in one big stride' in 1948, and then in moving to 'full independence' in 1962. As the 'first administering authority to re-examine and reject prevailing beliefs about the readiness of dependent peoples for self-government', New Zealand unwittingly made a notable contribution to the history of decolonisation and the constitution has been long-lived by comparison with those of many other new states. Frank Corner's short contribution argues that the U.N. Trusteeship Council was 'remarkably effective'. J. A. Salmond's long one, on 'New Zealand and the New Hebrides', is a narrative of how Presbyterian hysteria stopped a very sensible Anglo-French agreement in the Pacific Islands in the 1880s.

Collections of essays of this sort are often very useful in the teaching of up-to-date interpretations of history. As this is the second New Zealand example, it invites comparison with the Auckland volume of essays presented to Willis Airey in 1963. *Studies of a Small Democracy*, with its ten valuable essays, is now well-established in the book lists. Apart from the essays of Oliver and Sinclair, and perhaps those of Mary Boyd, Ian Wards and Anthony Wood, *The Feel of Truth* will, I fear, be less useful to students. The two distinguished recipients will, I suspect, find it less 'professional'. Perhaps this is why Peter Munz included their own essays — to redeem it!

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