

schoolmasterly clerisy on the merits of the national performance: like Colin McCahon's landscapes, 'written over with promises yet to be fulfilled'.

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THE SOCIAL HISTORY chapters are perhaps the most original part of this work. They contrast sharply with the chapters on political history in particular. The editor's policy appears to have been that, where a substantial body of secondary literature already existed, it should be his contributors' task to synthesize that material and present it in clear form appropriate to a textbook. But social history is one of the principal areas in which the secondary literature is far too thin to enable this to be done. Contributors on that subject have therefore been obliged to undertake a substantial amount of research of their own and write chapters which considerably advance our understanding of the topics which they cover. In other areas what is written in effect marks time, consolidating the consensus amongst historians as to how they should be interpreted. These variations in the originality of the contributions will, however, be discernible mainly by specialist teachers and researchers. For the general reader and the student the bland overall 'Oxford History' style tends to disguise the differences in the type of research upon which the chapters are based.

Jeanine Graham's chapter on pioneer society provides an interesting contrast with the chapters on twentieth-century society written by Erik Olssen and Graeme Dunstall. The contrast is between different approaches to the writing of social history. Jeanine Graham's style might be described as old-fashioned. It is much more of a literary than a sociological exercise, showing little if any influence from the 'new social history'. It is more impressionistic than the Olssen and Dunstall chapters. It relies more on quotations than on statistics for evidence as to trends in society. Perhaps this was the appropriate style in which to write about pioneer society. Certainly it reads well. But one would like to have seen this point argued. Here again the 'Oxford History' style of the book proves irritating. There is a regrettable lack of self-consciousness as to the considerable differences in methodology underlying the contributions on social history.

The impact of the 'new social history' is most clearly seen in Erik Olssen's chapter. Although statistics are plentifully used, there are also numerous fascinating observations on traits of social behaviour, for example the meaning of decline in the Sunday ritual of visiting the cemetery. These are placed firmly in an historical perspective, whereas Dunstall's chapter suffers from being too 'contemporary'. Some of the references to events and trends in the mid and late seventies already appear out-of-date and wrong from a 1981 perspective. Olssen's chapter is particularly significant because it marks the first substantial introduction into the study of New Zealand history at the 'general survey' level of the insights and methodology of work on the history of the family, of women, and of demographic trends. Here is an important starting-point for the interpretation of our history from these new perspectives.

However, there is one major defect of the book as a whole from which even the

social history chapters are not immune. This is its marked inward-looking quality. Little reference is made to trends in or characteristics of new societies which were being settled at the same time as New Zealand. Can New Zealand's social history justifiably be treated in this self-contained way? Olssen, for instance, argues that New Zealand moved 'along the continuum from pre-industrial to industrial, from pre-modern to modern'. This provides a very neat framework of interpretation, but is it realistic when dealing with such a small country, subject to continuing influxes of migrants and to all sorts of external cultural and social influences including the values assimilated by these migrants in the societies from which they originated?

Olssen does at least make use of certain theoretical models such as 'modernisation'. What is disappointing about Jeanine Graham's chapter is that no attempt is made to apply, or to consider the relevance of, the host of explanations of the character of new societies which have been devised over the years—Turner's frontier thesis, for instance, or Hartz's concept of the 'fragment' or Tocqueville and Siegfried's explorations of the social foundations of democracy in the 'New World'. Was anything about New Zealand's social evolution unusual, and, if so, why? How did the 'tyranny of distance' affect us? How does the New Zealand experience compare with that of Australia or the United States? Surely the placing of New Zealand history in this comparative international perspective is an important direction that the study of it is going to have to take. But considerations of this kind too seldom inform the pages of the 'Oxford History'.

The social history chapters in this book are unsatisfactory because they have been forced prematurely into a mould of apparent authoritativeness. The Oxford History format ill suits an area of New Zealand history where so many important subjects are only just starting to come under the scrutiny of researchers. The bibliography demonstrates this defect. It is merely a listing of all the works referred to in the footnotes with no attempt at critical annotation. Important and trivial items are not differentiated. It would have been far better to have had a brief survey of the state of the literature with a strong indication that much of what is written in the text has to be regarded as tentative, controversial, and designed to stimulate research.

What is the general significance of this work in New Zealand historiography? Not so long ago much historical writing about New Zealand seemed to have a strong imperial orientation, perhaps because it needed to appeal to an audience outside New Zealand in order to secure publication. The Oxford History has an orientation which is at the opposite extreme. It is very inward-looking, only minimally concerned with events beyond New Zealand's shores. The strange thing is that it is not New Zealand oriented in any explicitly and self-consciously nationalistic way. The contrast with Keith Sinclair's *Pelican History* is striking. The search for the origins and character of New Zealand's national identity is one of the strongest underlying themes and purposes of that work. Yet at the same time there is considerable discussion of New Zealand's place in the Empire and the impact on New Zealand of external influences. Surely this adds strength and conviction to Sinclair's nationalist treatment of New Zealand history. The perspective is right. The startlingly altered perspective in this book may have its advantages, but one would like to have had a fuller statement of what these are and of the extent to which contributors did take external relations and influences into account in arriving at their generalizations about the character of New

Zealand's social, political, and constitutional evolution.

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FROM ECONOMIC considerations alone—the magnitude of the task of writing and publication—*The Oxford History of New Zealand* is intended to be a seminal work, a landmark in the historical interpretation of New Zealand life. In respect of race relations—the history of interaction between the Polynesian Maoris and European settlers and their descendants—how do the scholars of the early 1980s conceive their task and make their interpretation?

The editor, Professor W.H. Oliver, has written only a three-page Introduction, eschewing the possibility of imposing a 'single personal vision' of the New Zealand past in favour of a 'work of several hands'. He has integrated, very successfully, a range of thematic chapters within a broad chronological framework. Maori history and race relations are the explicit concern of five out of sixteen chapters, and receive considerable discussion in many of the others. Professor Oliver notes that the 'deeper interest in Maori history indicates the current resurgence of Maoris in New Zealand life'.

Chapter I, by Janet Davidson, entitled 'The Polynesian Foundation', makes accessible in a finely written account, much of the product of the recent flowering of Pacific archaeology, linguistics and prehistory. Although it skirts the contentious issue of the size of the pre-European Maori population, this is certainly the best short account of traditional Maori material and social culture available. For example, there are fascinating new insights into characteristic health problems of the traditional Maori, as gleaned from their skeletal remains. If Janet Davidson is unable to probe far into questions about the quality of pre-contact Maori life, the extent of calm and contentment or fear and insecurity, of cultural richness or intellectual narrowness and parochialism of thought, this is only because of inherent limitations in the discipline of prehistory as it has so far developed along scientific lines.

J.M.R. Owens's chapter on New Zealand before the British annexation also reflects meticulous scholarship and careful drawing together of recent scholarship, much of it revising the long-accepted picture (derived from tendentious accounts by missionaries and officials) of growing anarchy on the New Zealand frontier which had to be obviated by the intervention of British authority. Owens's revisions, including his challenge to the generally accepted account of massive depopulation of the Maori due to disease, has much to commend it. But he goes too far in muting or minimizing the evidence of pre-annexation racial antagonism and violence. One can believe in the development of mutual interdependence of Maori and Pakeha, but to suggest that 'a spirit of tolerance and respect generally prevailed' gives too positive an interpretation to what was largely a grudging and temporary acceptance of a balance of physical power in a situation fundamentally rotten with racial prejudice and latent conflict of interest. Herein lay a fundamental instability.

Owens even goes so far as to suggest that the 'good old times' depicted in Frederick Maning's *Old New Zealand* continued for generations in remote parts