

In Search of Sir Joseph Ward*

'WHAT ABOUT WARD?' I asked this question of Willis Airey as I began looking for a Master's thesis topic in 1960. Airey replied with what had become the conventional wisdom: Ward's papers had been destroyed. I have always found this a rather intriguing statement about any politician. If true, it suggests a rather carefree attitude to one's place in history; if false, then there is a treasure trove somewhere. Unfortunately, there remains an element of mystery about the papers of New Zealand's longest-serving Cabinet minister.

Ward's will left his papers to his executors — three of his five children. This suggests that some papers might have existed at the time of his death in July 1930. But there are no family stories of destruction, although there are unsubstantiated stories of cartons of material having disappeared between Wellington and Invercargill. Perhaps there weren't many papers? It is true that as the longest-serving Postmaster General (23 years) in New Zealand history Ward made good use of the telephone and the telegram. But what of the letters he received? A clue, perhaps, is the fact that there are signs of systematic destruction of papers from the early days of his career. The Supreme Court records relating to his financial difficulties and bankruptcy (1896-8) are incomplete: documents removed for particular purposes by Ward seem not to have been returned.¹ Ward rather more than his executors must have been responsible for this. His children were only young in the 1890s, and when Vincent Ward, his second son, wrote some memoirs, mostly about his father, more than 40 years later, he made no mention of any personal papers and clearly had no access to any.² It seems unlikely that Vincent would have destroyed them, had they existed. Nor does Cyril Ward, the eldest son, who also embarked on some amateur research into the family's history, provide much documentation. The family papers, such as they are, consist of a few letters and postcards in Ward's

*This article is a revised version of a paper presented to the New Zealand Historians' Conference in May 1983.

1 Court records relating to the many Supreme Court hearings involving the J. G. Ward Farmers' Association are located in the Dunedin High Court.

2 Vincent Ward Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library.

own handwriting and several telegrams. His wife, Theresa, kept books full of newspaper cuttings over the period 1888–1901 which are a mine of information.³ Many letters of Ward's and other details about him surface in the governors' correspondence with the Colonial Office, the best information always being in the quarterly reports from 1896 onwards, reports which the governors invariably took away with them when they left New Zealand. The letters show up in the microfilms of the correspondence at the London end.⁴ Details about Ward's business activities can be pieced together from various sources — the Bank of New Zealand's archives, the Westpac Bank's records, newspapers, and some papers of the J. G. Ward Farmers' Association's first general manager, John Fisher, which are still in the Fisher family's hands.⁵

Family memorabilia are plentiful, but scattered. Large presentations, illuminated addresses and lashings of photographs are in the hands of Ward's descendants. He loved to be photographed. His habit of presenting signed photos to all and sundry, and of sending postcards of photos of himself, became a political joke. There are photos of Ward in youth and old age; in academic robes, court dress and mourning clothes; in cricketing gear, and in an aviator's suit; with full beard in his youth, and in his prime wearing his carefully waxed moustache; on safari, always weighed down with cameras and field glasses, and often smoking a cigar. There are photos with Asquith, Smuts, J. P. Morgan, Seddon and Massey. And there is even a photo of him fast asleep in the back of a boat on Lake Rotorua when meant to be trout-fishing. There are snippets about him in his son Vincent's jottings and in the comments of his colleagues, to be found in particular amongst the Fowlds papers.⁶ Wills, birth, marriage and death certificates provide some details — quite often important information proving such things as that Ward himself never knew precisely where he was born in 1856, believing it was Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) when, in fact, it was North Melbourne. They show also that his knowledge of his family's origin, the time spent in Melbourne, and precise date of arrival in New Zealand were hazy, to say the least—so much so that no published record has the correct date. It is usually assumed that Ward's family arrived in Bluff in 1859–60.⁷ In fact it was 1863.⁸

Ward was essentially a forward-looking man. He lived in the present and the future. His own past, as became evident throughout his life, did not par-

3 Ward family papers in the hands of Joan, Lady Ward; John Ward; and Myrcine Tripp.

4 The Colonial Office (CO) microfilms are kept at the National Archives, Wellington.

5 John Fisher Papers in the hands of Mr A. A. Fisher, Otautau.

6 Sir George Fowlds Papers, University of Auckland Library.

7 *New Zealand Tablet*, 16 July 1930, p. 7; *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1966, III, p. 550.

8 The precise date cannot be ascertained. But since his mother remarried in Melbourne on the last day of 1862, and her obituary, *Southland Times*, 14 November 1898, mentioned that she had lived in New Zealand for 35 years, it seems certain that the correct date is 1863. Ward himself told an Invercargill audience it was 1863. Clipping Book No. 1, p. 28.

ticularly interest him, and few details about his business affairs were passed on to his family. His numerous land transactions had to be pieced together from the transfer and mortgage documents at the Land Transfer Office in Invercargill. On large maps of Bluff and Invercargill it has been possible to mark the properties purchased, the dates and prices, and with the aid of the mortgage documents to detect patterns of financing. Quite often these documents reveal personal details of significance, confirming a very close bond between Ward, his wife and his mother, and providing clues about his business associates, Nelson Brothers and (later) Robert Albert Anderson. They also provide useful information of his mother's marital status, which has always been surrounded with conjecture.⁹ But the biggest source of day-to-day information about Southland's most colourful politician will remain the two Invercargill newspapers — the conservative *Southland Times* and the now extinct Liberal evening paper, the *Southland Daily News*.

Ward's achievements are relatively easy to trace. His persona is much harder to detect. The pattern emerging suggests that talent, energy and charm took Ward to 40, by which time he was Colonial Treasurer, and the most powerful man in the country after Seddon. His business collapse in 1896 nearly led to political extinction. Another Ward emerged: no less talented nor energetic, but wrier and occasionally paranoid, with a determination to fight on as if there were some inner drive to justify himself. It is the later Ward that historians know best and have judged him by. The early story has a particular fascination, showing as it does the opportunities and the brittle nature of success in a struggling colony.

Joseph George Ward was born in North Melbourne on 26 April 1856. He was the only child born in Melbourne of William Thomas and Hannah (née Dorney) Ward to survive his parents' harrowing time in that city. William was 24 and Hannah 22 when they arrived from the City of Cork in 1853 as unassisted immigrants. They already had two children — a daughter Mina (their only daughter), who was to play an important part in Joseph Ward's life, and a son William Thomas Jr, whose role was rather more peripheral. Hannah came from a 'fairly comfortable', 'well-educated' and musical Catholic family in Cork;¹⁰ nothing is known of W.T. except that he was powerfully fecund. In a marriage lasting ten years, his wife bore him ten children. Of the seven sons born in Melbourne, only Joseph survived. As the Wards shifted about Melbourne with W.T.'s health deteriorating through excessive drinking, boys died of dysentery or diphtheria with almost monotonous regularity. Ten years after they had been married, and when Joseph was only four and a half, W.T. died. The official story was that he had a riding accident. The truth seems to be that

9 Mina Lenihan to J. G. D. Ward, 30 July 1961, Ward Family Papers (WFP), Joan, Lady Ward.

10 Katie Doherty to Cyril Ward, 7 September 1936, WFP.

his liver gave out.¹¹ Six months after his death, Hannah bore him a posthumous son, who died as a baby. Her next youngest son followed him. By the middle of 1861 Hannah Ward, barely 30, was left with the two children she had brought from Ireland, and only Joseph, and probably some debts, to show for seven years' struggle in Melbourne. The Australian gold-rushes may have brought riches for some; for the Wards they brought only misery.

It was at this point, as she set about providing a new life for her children, that Hannah Ward's strength of character asserted itself. By the end of 1862 her three children were at school, Joseph attending a small Catholic institution called Springs Academy. Hannah was now the licensee of a hotel in North Melbourne. On the last day of the year she remarried — this time to an even more elusive individual, John Barron, a 37-year-old butcher from Northumberland.¹² Till the end of her life in 1898 she was known as Hannah Ward Barron. There were no further children.

Some time in 1863 the Barrons sailed for Bluff. Barron's presence or subsequent whereabouts were never mentioned. 'One day when I was young, I asked mother where he [Barron] was, who he was, and what happened to him', a grand-daughter wrote many years later. 'She did not know, and volunteered the information that she did not know anybody who would have the temerity to mention his name to Grandma!'¹³ What is known is that Hannah was soon describing herself in mortgage documents as 'living separately from her husband', and in possession of a protection order under the Married Women's Property Protection Act 1860. Not until the 1880s did she describe herself as a widow.

The attraction of Bluff seems to have been twofold. It provided (in terms of fares) the cheapest possible escape from the whole Melbourne disaster, and once again there was the lure of gold. Hannah set herself up as a small storekeeper selling essentials to goldminers working at nearby Greenhills and Tiwai Point. Before long the gold petered out and she acquired the lease of a small guesthouse on the Bluff waterfront. By the mid-1860s her children were attending the Bluff (Campbelltown)¹⁴ school. Thus began the Wards' lifelong association with Bluff. Ward maintained a residence there for most of his life; he married a local girl; all but the youngest of his children were born there; he owned a good deal of property there; he was a councillor (1878–86), mayor (1881–6) and chairman of the Bluff Harbour Board (1883–8 and again in the 1890s); and he and his family are buried in the cemetery at the top of the hill. The township of Bluff was the vital core of the Awarua seat that Ward represented for 32 years (1887–1919). And it

11 Told to me by the late Cyril James Ward of Christchurch, January 1983. See also Vincent Ward Papers, MS Paper 241. Death Certificate 61/5516, District of Melbourne, lists his cause of death as 'softening of the brain and delirium tremens'.

12 Marriage Certificate No. 990, District of Melbourne, 31 December 1862.

13 Mina Lenihan to J. G. D. Ward, WFP.

14 Although it was common to refer to 'The Bluff', the township was officially known as Campbelltown until 1917.

was his view of Bluff's needs that led him to establish the Ocean Beach Freezing Company, which played a large part in the collapse of his flourishing commercial empire in the mid-1890s, and eventually bankrupted him in July 1897. The port which he did so much to develop, as well as Ocean Beach, are enduring monuments to Ward. Today they are the principal sustaining forces of a community that once saw itself as a rival to Invercargill.

In the development of the Ward family's association with Bluff, Hannah and her son, Joseph, were the dominant figures. The older son, William, joined the Post Office and was promoted up-country; Mina, Hannah's daughter, married the Bluff Postmaster and lived there most of her life. But Hannah and young Joey were the dynamic members of the family. Joey left school in 1869 aged 13, despite his obvious intelligence. His wages were needed to help accumulate the £150 with which his mother bought the freehold of her boarding house the following year. Hannah had plans. She intended to convert it into a hotel. Joey followed his brother into the Post Office, where he worked as a delivery boy from 1869 to 1871. By the mid-1870s Hannah was borrowing from the Southland Building and Investment Society, and was well on the way to completing the building of the large Club Hotel with the imposing facade to Gore Street that still exists today. She was soon prosperous enough to help Joey along with his own schemes. He worked for a local merchant (1872-6) and then for a year as a senior clerk in the Railways.

In 1877 Ward decided to set up in business on his own account as a grain merchant. Hannah took another mortgage on the Club Hotel and lent her son £800.¹⁵ With this money Ward, who was only 21, rented some stores opposite the waterfront, and in time bought a number of sections along Gore and Barrow Streets in Bluff. Substantial new grain warehouses were soon in place. By the early 1880s — before he was 25 — Ward had shifted his headquarters to Invercargill, 18 miles to the north. There he bought grain for cash, arranged for its transport to Bluff, and for its ultimate export. Mother's commercial instincts had been passed on to son. When he entered Parliament in 1887 as a handsome, fast-talking family man (he was married by this time, with two children) he was one of the larger merchants in Southland, owning a substantial office building on the best site in The Crescent, Invercargill. He also had large storage and general merchant's facilities in both Invercargill and Bluff. By this time, too, he had served many years on the Bluff Borough Council and Harbour Board. He was still only 31 years old.

Ward stood for Parliament as a supporter of the Stout/Vogel ministry. Such people were a rare commodity in 1887. And yet Ward's belief in expansion, when all round him cried retrenchment, can easily be explained in terms of his own experience. Both he and Hannah were gamblers. In Bluff their projects had paid off. All their experience had taught them to meet

¹⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 16 July 1930, p. 7; *Auckland Star*, 8 July 1930.

fate head on. Alone in Southland, Bluff had been untouched by depression. The developing oyster trade and rapidly-growing export tonnage through the port sustained Bluff while commercially Invercargill contracted. Unbounded confidence and a propensity to speculation were at the core of Ward's economic and political philosophy. But he could only be successful if others became inspired by the spirit that motivated him. After opening the new Invercargill Post Office in August 1893, Ward philosophized over a drink at the Southland Club. The *Southland Times* reports that he told his audience that he had many enemies and they were not just political. Dunedin people resented the determination he was showing to make Southland pre-eminent. The *Times* report continued: 'In endeavouring to further the interests of his district he was also furthering his own interests, and that was what they were all doing. If there was one thing wanted it was that the people of Southland should pull more together than they have done in the past (hear hear). One man might go faster than another, but that was no reason why he should be tripped; tripping him reacted and retarded the progress of those who tried to trip him. Had such a thing succeeded, it would have done many others as well as himself a great injury'.¹⁶

It is tempting to see in this utterance an early version of Charles E. Wilson's 'What's good for General Motors is good for the U.S.A.'. Throughout his career Ward believed that his own prosperity was the key to success for all around him. It was but a short step from this attitude to a belief that in the cause of Southland's economic progress there was no such thing as conflict of interest. Public office was the companion to private enterprise, not its enemy, nor its regulator. Probably no politician in New Zealand's history so blurred the distinction between his own business interests and the wider public interest. Indeed, the notion abroad in New Zealand that parliamentarians are in politics principally to feather their own nests probably owes more to J. G. Ward than to any other politician in our history.

Ward's mixture of public and private roles was open, honest, almost naive, and quite extraordinary. When in 1891 he became Postmaster General in Ballance's Cabinet, Ward administered his department from the headquarters of J. G. Ward and Co. in Invercargill. The state provided him with a full-time secretary, who operated from the same building as the grain company. On Ward's door was the sign: 'J. G. Ward, Managing Director of J. G. Ward Farmers' Association of New Zealand and Postmaster General'. Later a formidable list of his other portfolios was added to the door as he took on extra responsibilities. The telegraph services hummed with state and private business. One of his first acts upon taking office was to double the number of words that could be sent for sixpence. This was done with the aim of expanding the Post Office's business, just as, a little while later, the annual rental for telephones was reduced. Post Office

16 *Southland Times*, 8 August 1893.

business expanded. One of its most enthusiastic users was J. G. Ward, and the company bearing his name.

The welfare of Bluff, and incidentally of its leading citizen, was always uppermost in Ward's mind. In 1891 his resentment at the Southland Frozen Meat Company's plan to build a new freezing works not at Bluff, but at Matakura, too near Otago for comfort, led Ward to rush headlong into the construction of a competing works — Ocean Beach — at Bluff. Every ounce of 'political pull' was used to advance the venture. The local council was persuaded to part with a piece of reserve land to provide a site for Ocean Beach; an amendment to the Slaughterhouses Act was rushed through Parliament in the dying stages of the 1891 session to permit the construction of a freezing works within a mile of a borough boundary; and in time Ward succeeded in having railway cartage rates for livestock south to the Port of Bluff turned into the cheapest rates for freight per mile in Southland.¹⁷ In the cause of Bluff, no favour possible was withheld.

Stopping even more direct competition was equally important to his political-cum-private life. When in the early 1890s Ward's fellow Liberal MP from Wallace tried to get loan money to develop the Port of Riverton, 30 miles from Bluff, Ward used his influence to block the move. When incredulous Rivertonians protested at his intervention and pointed to the vested interest he had in preventing port development anywhere else than Bluff, Ward readily agreed. He told a public meeting in Riverton that in using his influence to prevent port development at Riverton he was simply acting like any good MP and looking after the interests of his constituents.¹⁸ His strategy certainly worked; today Bluff continues to exist principally because of the freezing works and the port. Riverton is a quaint backwater. Much of its interest is to be found in the local museum.

Ward's business affairs in his early years were seldom above suspicion. One of his critics wrote in 1893: 'There is a sort of Yankee look about the whole of the J. G. Ward [Farmers'] Association reports which permeates the type used in the printing, the high falutin' style of the report, and the utter disregard for the conditions usually followed in the disclosures of the real state of affairs in Joint Stock Companies which are suggestive of Mark Twain's editorship of an agricultural journal.'¹⁹

As Colonial Treasurer he had to shepherd legislation through Parliament to prevent the crash of the Colonial Bank in 1895 when he himself was the bank's biggest liability, owing them more than £100,000. His speculation and subsequent misfortunes gave his, and Seddon's, political opponents a stick to beat the Liberals with, nearly tumbling the Government at its weakest moment in 1896-7. Ward resigned as Colonial

17 Details of the establishment of Ocean Beach are to be found in Clive A. Lind, *The Keys to Prosperity: The Centennial History of Southland Frozen Meats Ltd*, Invercargill, 1981, p. 78. See also *Southland Times*, 20, 21, 22, and 23 November 1895.

18 Clipping Book No. 1, pp. 3-6.

19 *Evening Press*, 26 August 1893.

Treasurer in June 1896 and then from Parliament in July 1897. He was adjudged a bankrupt next day, and then stood again at the resulting by-election. He was re-elected with a doubled majority. He sought, while still an undischarged bankrupt, to take his seat. This caused a constitutional crisis. The Court of Appeal decided in his favour, but subsequently the law was changed: an undischarged bankrupt may not sit in Parliament. With the aid of his wife, the then Bank of New South Wales, and old friends such as his colleague, Jock McKenzie, Minister of Lands, Ward picked up his business once more. This time it was more soundly based. He paid off his debts, narrowly escaped prosecution for fraud, and at the end of 1899 re-joined the Cabinet as Seddon's first lieutenant, not this time as Colonial Treasurer, but as Minister of Railways, Colonial Secretary and Postmaster General. Seven years later, in August 1906, he began his first period as Premier.

Ward was a devout Catholic. He worshipped daily. He grew up in a pub. He was anti-prohibition. Yet he succeeded in getting votes during most of his political life from many conservative Protestants who opposed drink, and supported the highest proportion of lodges to population in the country. Above all, Ward showed remarkable perseverance. Bankrupt in 1897, he died 33 years later with a personal fortune of £337,000, two knighthoods (one of them hereditary) and a baronetcy, and with all of his children having attended private schools. Despite all this he enjoyed a reputation, still not totally threadbare at the time of his death, as being the working man's friend.

Ward was a supremely self-confident man, who was worshipped by the women in his life — his mother, Hannah, and his wife, Theresa. Bluff seems to have prostrated itself before him in those early years. He was President of the Cricket and Rowing Clubs, organizer of the Bluff Naval Volunteers, and Chairman of the Annual Regatta Committee. Ward's extended family dominated Bluff society for more than half a century. In the 1887 general election he won 86% of all votes cast in Bluff.

Contemporary politicians saw him in his early years as an engaging, well-dressed young businessman, possessed, as William Pember Reeves put it, of 'the Irishman's fluency'.²⁰ His speeches were delivered in staccato bursts, which Hansard reporters found hard to keep up with. Parliamentary legend still has it that no politician in our history has ever spoken as fast as Ward. Years later the London *Daily Mail* called him the '300 Words-a-Minute Premier'.²¹ Words gushed out of him; perorations would pepper his speeches only to be interrupted by another train of thought that would add many more minutes to the address. Just as there were echoes of Julius Vogel about his message of economic confidence, so were there foretastes of Walter Nash in its delivery.

Politically, Ward was the perfect foil to Seddon and to Seddon's alter

20 W. P. Reeves, *The Long White Cloud*, 4th ed., London, 1950, pp. 287-8.

21 *Daily Mail*, 16 May 1930.

ego, the burly Jock McKenzie. The working relationship between the three seems to have developed from the time when Ballance's illness began to limit his activity in the autumn of 1892. As Seddon took over more and more of the Premier's functions, he called on Ward's and McKenzie's advice. Seddon needed Ward's undoubted executive capacity. By the time Ballance died in April 1893, the two were working closely together, and the quid pro quo for Ward's lobbying on Seddon's behalf, when the Premiership became vacant, was the Treasurership in the new Cabinet. Ward remained Seddon's closest confidant for the rest of his life; indeed, as McKenzie's health deteriorated in the late 1890s, Ward became Seddon's only confidant. The Premier's faith in Ward wavered only towards the end in 1904-5, when restless reformers began trying to split the pair, the better to open the way to policy changes.

Comparisons have often been made between Ward and Seddon. Apirana Ngata, who saw Seddon at close quarters only in the last year of Seddon's life, noted in 1930 that Ward was 'one of the most brilliant men' when it came to 'political conception', but not as adept as Seddon at stage-managing his schemes.²² Oakley Browne, Ward's private secretary, called them a 'great combination', 'Seddon with his rugged, dominant personality, and Ward with his clear-thinking, financial brain; Ward to make the ammunition and Seddon to fire it.'²³

Such views were widely held by the time of Ward's death, and with good reason. Seddon and Ward had a symbiotic relationship. When Ward's finances collapsed in 1896 and his career seemed in ruins, Seddon went out on a limb for him. He set up a Banking Committee ostensibly to investigate the events behind the merger of the Colonial Bank with the Bank of New Zealand, but in fact to direct the spotlight away from Ward. Sometimes deliberations came near to fisticuffs as some members sought (unsuccessfully) to refocus the light.²⁴ Seddon's government grew tottery, although Ward's rapid rehabilitation quickly restored its equilibrium. After Seddon died, and the reins passed to Ward, no such partnership developed with anyone else. Much of the theatrical flair went out of the Liberals' presentation of policy. No longer the bold stroke, the stage-managed political display, the outrageous diversion, or the timely legislative concession.

The secret of the former partnership's success had been that Seddon and Ward were entirely different types whose styles and concepts of state assistance were directed at distinctly different slices of the Liberal electorate. Seddon was the miner who shunned high society unless he could mildly affront it. In the House he was never happier than when in the middle of an uproar. On returning to the House in 1893, Sir Robert Stout

22 *Southland Times*, 8, 9 July 1930.

23 *Auckland Star*, 8 July 1930.

24 *Southland Times*, 30 September 1896.

quickly learned how to provoke him. During the Budget debate in August 1894 the *Herald's* political reporter captured Seddon in full flight:

The Premier ramped and raged and roared, and when Mr Tom Mackenzie, who sits opposite to him, with ironical seeming innocence, mildly interjected while Mr Seddon was shouting himself hoarse, 'Can't hear', the House could not forebear a hearty laugh. But the Premier was in no laughing humour. . . . In the language of the *New Zealand Times* 'He springs upon Sir Robert at the start, hurling a shout at him which ought to be audible at Karori and Petone and Miramar and Island Bay'. 'Cold blooded speech', he yelled at him. Waving arms, working shoulders, swaying trunk, shaking head, jerking body, blazing eyes, purple complexion, all give force to the term 'cold blooded'. He shook his fist at the knight, or varied the gesture by pointing a finger trembling with emotion at him. And when Sir Robert chuckled or openly laughed, the Premier thumped his desk, and belched forth his invectives like a volcano in eruption.²⁵

Seddon shunned social niceties. Vulgarity could be turned on to suit the occasion. No honours for him except a Privy Councillorship. Ward, on the other hand, enjoyed polite society. He was perfectly at home in the drawing room. In Parliament he rarely attacked his opponents personally; his wardrobe would have aroused the envy of any dandy, and years later the cartoonist David Low said that Ward 'always dressed as though he had a lunch engagement at Downing Street'.²⁶ He loved the company of those with wealth or pretensions to it. Ward was the Liberals' opening to the upwardly mobile, just as Seddon reassured the static that someone cared for them.

Over trade-union issues the differences were at their most stark. After Reeves went, Seddon alone conducted relationships with the unions. He understood them and could alternately bully and cajole. When Seddon was dead, Ward's dilemma ultimately became that of the Liberal Party as a whole. He neither understood unionism, nor fully appreciated the growing political significance of the working-class urban electorates. Unions had been slow to appear in Southland. As a young member in 1888, Ward had no compunction in recounting to a *Southland Times* reporter, with evident relish, a strike-breaking incident he had seen in Melbourne while at the centennial celebrations.²⁷ In 1890, as an employer and exporter, Ward found himself caught up in the maritime strike. His Invercargill office workers were sent to Bluff as strike breakers. His mother's hotel at Bluff was used as a first-aid station for a wounded scab.²⁸ In the election of 1890, before Ballance's government was formed, Ward had lost a few of his working-class supporters. The stigma stayed with him for the rest of his political life. Before Joe Ward had entered Cabinet he had been painted as

25 *New Zealand Herald*, 3 August 1894.

26 David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, London, 1956, p. 39.

27 Clipping Book No. 1, p. 9.

28 *Southland Times*, 2, 3, 10, 11 September 1890.

an enemy of trade unionism. This reputation co-existed with his other side — a good employer and a friend of the 'little man'.

When Ward first entered Parliament it seemed a natural place for one with a passion for administration and a concept of the state as the hand-maiden of progress. The early Ward was industrious, quick-witted and politically agile, if a little too trusting and slightly naive in his enthusiasms. Walter Nash's passion for holding all the reins of power and delegating nothing also marked Ward at first. He thought he could do it all, and failed to read the danger signals. His political career after 1893 increasingly tied him to Wellington while his teetering, under-capitalized merchant's business required urgent attention in Southland. Something had to give. The mid-90s were a major turning point in Ward's life. His business collapse produced in him new political and personal imperatives. Every editorial in 1896-7 that said Joe Ward was finished impelled him to fight on. Ward's crisis as a 40-year-old was his bankruptcy: it turned him into a man obsessed with self-vindication. He endured two years of agony as the Bank of New Zealand liquidated the Colonial Bank and its biggest debtor, the J. G. Ward Farmers' Association. Valuers went through his big house in Bluff and virtually everything he owned was sold up. Every effort he made to dodge bankruptcy proceedings was foiled. Mr Justice Williams, who presided over the case in Dunedin, seemed to feel it was his personal duty, if not a divine mission, to drive the former Colonial Treasurer out of the commercial life of the colony. By July 1897 Ward had nothing except a few properties he had registered in his wife's name, plus the family's unswerving devotion, his shipping colleagues, the Nelson Brothers, and a group of friends who believed in him. They lent money to Theresa, who purchased back much of the real estate of the bankrupt J. G. Ward Farmers' Association from the Official Assignee. Then with the help of £50,000 from the Bank of New South Wales, secured on these properties, Ward and Robert Anderson, a young accountant from the liquidated Farmers' Association, rebuilt a firm called J. G. Ward and Co.

In many respects it was another Ward who rejoined Seddon at the Cabinet table in 1899. He was now subject to occasional fits of paranoia. He was convinced that not only the Opposition, but many of his own Liberals were after him personally. A stubborn, gutsy determination to fight his way back to respectability sustained him. Early in 1899 he went to England, sold some Nelson Brothers' shares which he believed to have been under-valued by the Official Assignee, and ostentatiously paid off outstanding debts. He grandiloquently announced to his children that none of them would ever want for anything. None of his sons was encouraged to enter a profession, though marrying well was a top priority. Ward craved social acceptance, now even more than before. Liberals officially frowned on the award of honours but, as Colonial Secretary during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall in 1901, Ward snapped up one of the KCMGs that were available. Ever more pomp and ceremony marked public functions at which Ward appeared. For example, at the opening of the new

Bluff Post Office in November 1900, Ward appeared like some Antipodean *deus ex machina*. A public holiday was declared for the purpose of opening the new Post Office, naming an extension of Gore Street 'Ward Parade', and the christening of the Harbour Board's new tug the *Theresa Ward*. Eight hundred people were brought down from Invercargill by special trains; trips on the tug were arranged for the public; refreshments were readily available, though at whose expense was not clear. Bands played. The Mayor told the cheering crowd several times how great had been the progress of Bluff under the guidance of J. G. Ward, a sentiment that was emphatically endorsed by no less an authority than J. G. Ward himself. The Bluff Band, the school children, the fire brigade, the Oddfellows, the Mercantile Rifles, the Foresters, the Awarua Boating Club, and the Cricket Club, all followed Ward's carriage in procession towards Foveaux Strait. There he lectured them once more on progress, the virtues of J. G. Ward and, as he looked out to sea, on the healthful practice of sniffing up the ozone. This wisdom was dispensed to the accompaniment of cheers, rifle volleys and a scratchy rendition of the national anthem. The day ended with a banquet at which Ward both spoke and sang, and the trains did not get back to Invercargill till 1.30 a.m.²⁹ Modern political pomp seems petty by comparison.

In his eagerness to expunge memories of his personal financial trauma, Ward became more and more obsessed with consequence. Banquets in his honour; illuminated addresses by the sackful; lavish praise; honorary degrees, and other honours were stage-managed by him, or organized on his behalf. 'Ward has always been a difficulty. He is so vain', Sir James Allen lamented to a friend in 1916.³⁰ Occasionally Ward's determination would falter, as it did following the 1911 election, which he had been supremely confident of winning. The Governor, Lord Islington, commented that the defeat 'seems to have seriously crushed his spirit, and his own idea now — expressed privately to me — is to withdraw altogether from public life in New Zealand'.³¹ Less than a year after resigning as Prime Minister in March 1912, and surrendering control of the Liberal Party to a group of political tyros, Ward was back again as leader and he came within an ace of leading them back to office in the 1914 elections.³² Forty months after resigning from office, when he announced that he considered himself 'past middle life', and in need of more leisure,³³ Ward was in harness again as war-time Minister of Finance in Massey's National Government. The sensational loss of his seat in the 1919 election convinced many that an overlong career was now most certainly ended. Once more, the people of Southland poured valedictory tributes upon him, only to see him bounce

29 *ibid.*, 22 November 1900.

30 Allen to W. Downie Stewart, 7 July 1916, Allen Papers, File 3, Hocken Library.

31 Islington to Harcourt, Colonial Office, 10 January 1912, CO 209/275.

32 Michael Bassett, *Three Party Politics in New Zealand 1911-1931*, Auckland, 1982, pp. 15-20.

33 *New Zealand Tablet*, 4 April 1912, p. 15.

back to contest the Tauranga by-election in 1923 (unsuccessfully), and to return to Parliament as Member for Invercargill in 1925. He was the only candidate returned under the label of 'Liberal', the others travelling under a variety of political *noms-de-plume*. Those enemies who sought to terminate his career in 1897, and even his admirers among the Post Office employees who wished him well in his political retirement that year, had to contend with his prominence for another 33 years. By 1928, when he once more became Prime Minister, possession of office had become nine-tenths of Ward's law. The United Ministry was a tragic finale to a political career which had reached a record 37 years, and which had been crowned by many achievements. His wife was dead, and his daughter, Eileen, on whom he doted, and who became his hostess, was entering what was to be a lingering twilight of mental illness. His own health had been indifferent since 1924; he enjoyed a few months as his old jaunty self until, under the strain of office, in 1929 his constitution cracked completely. By the year's end, after a series of strokes, he could barely sign his will.

Stubborn to the end, he held on to the Prime Ministership until in May 1930 his colleagues would tolerate it no longer. Even then, when his health was failing fast, he stayed in the ministry. Death had the last say on 8 July 1930, almost 40 years after he had become a minister in the first Liberal Government.

The remnants of his Liberal Party were entombed a year later in the National Coalition, never to reappear.

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