

The memoir ends with a short account of the author reluctantly retired, enjoying some success as an artist, but sadly revisiting his relationship with his father, from whom, like so many others throughout his life, Shallcrass felt unable to win approval or even communicate with effectively.

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Final Approaches: A Memoir. By Gerald Hensley. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2006. viii + 320 pp. NZ price: \$50.00. ISBN 978-1-86940-378-2.

SOME PEOPLE ARE EITHER EXTRAORDINARILY LUCKY or extraordinarily adept at making their luck. Gerald Hensley is one of them. A senior New Zealand diplomat and public servant, he seems to have been present at some of the most interesting events in global diplomacy in the post-war period. In this memoir, he shares his experiences and observations of people and places and unfolding events around the globe in the last half of the twentieth century in eloquent, sophisticated, frequently ironic and suitably self-deprecatory prose. It is memoir writing at its very best.

Hensley began his diplomatic career as an apprentice in (Western) Samoa as it was preparing to take its final steps into independence. In the early 1960s, even as Asia and Africa were in the throes of decolonization, independence for Pacific island territories was by no means a certainty. For Samoa, the 'Tonga Solution' (protectorate) was mentioned, along with various combinations of autonomy, internal self-government and independence. Intra-departmental battles, long gone and forgotten, feisty characters fighting over turf, are recounted with a kindly and benign eye. The mood of a somnolent Samoa slowly waking up to its new future is sketched with skill and humour.

From Samoa, Hensley went to the United Nations, 'a kind of terrarium' he calls it, 'not so much the hothouse of its critics as a sealed community where the shape of things could be rearranged' (p.42). From that vantage point, Hensley describes the New Zealand position, the goings-on in the chaotic Committee of Twenty Four, life in the cloistered diplomatic community in Manhattan, and the effort to find a solution to the tangled issue of the Cook Islands' future political status. A 'Free Association' arrangement was eventually agreed upon. This was a remarkable achievement whereupon New Zealand found itself 'being congratulated by Indonesia and hearing countries like Tunisia and Algeria speaking approvingly of New Zealand's readiness to devise new solutions to the problems of small territories' (p.56).

After the United Nations and the Pacific, Hensley went to the fledgling Commonwealth Secretariat in London, in the mid-1960s trying to find a broadly acceptable role for itself in a new world which now extended well beyond the white dominions to include recently independent nations in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean fighting for their own place in the sun. Africa dominated the debate. First, it was Rhodesia and the problem of dealing with its irascible leader Ian Smith. Should sanctions be allowed to have their effect before contemplating other alternatives? Should military force be a live possibility? The war in Nigeria has a full chapter of its own. We get a first-hand view of these developments which once so exercised the minds of international diplomats, but which now lie faded in the vanishing memory of middle-aged men and women.

In the United States, Hensley witnessed the squalidly secretive Nixon administration's China initiative and the gradually intensifying debate about the Vietnam War, and other domestic developments. Much of this material, except for the New Zealand angle, will be familiar to most readers of this journal. But it is the manner in which they are

recounted that enhances their flavour. Anyone who has for any period of time lived in Maryland or Virginia, or indeed on the east coast generally, will recognize Hensley's exquisitely succinct description of life there: the 'seasonal round of blossoming dogwoods and bicycles; summer cicadas and swimming, falling leaves and walks in the Virginia woods; the clank of the snow-plough at night promising winter-blue days with the sleds' (p.150). Hensley has the perfect eye for the mischievous detail as well. Attending a rally in Philadelphia addressed by the widely despised Vice President Spiro Agnew under the huge sign 'Nixon's the One,' he sees another unfold jerkily 'And Agnew's Another!'

After a chapter on New Zealand's engagement with an emergent Asia (in Singapore he was offered seven baby mice and, a second best, eight cockroaches as a cure for asthma), Hensley turns his attention to New Zealand, to the governments of Robert Muldoon and David Lange, about which he writes with sensitivity and care. Muldoon is described as a pugnacious 'counter-puncher,' with a steel-trap mind. 'The art when briefing him was to keep the crocodile's jaws open long enough to poke in enough information before they would snap shut on a decision' (p.229). Muldoon could be brutal but he was also consistent and efficient and correct. Lange was in many respects the complete opposite: voluble, witty ('His wit bubbled up as oil once did from stony ground' p.271), sensitive, quick on his feet, prone to straying from the script, partial to praise and appreciation, always keen to avoid any personal confrontation. Hensley describes Lange as 'a sort of political poltergeist: a restless and perhaps unhappy spirit around whom strange things happened, the equivalent of pictures falling off the wall and objects rising from the table' (p.293). Those interested in the radical transformation of the New Zealand economy in the 1980s, in the heated anti-nuclear debate that engulfed New Zealand, or in the sordid Rainbow Warrior affair will get engaging insights from the inside.

Are there any quibbles? Yes, alas, there is one. Hensley describes his approach as 'keyhole history' 'with the narrow field of vision which comes from recording only one person's point of view' (p.viii). Its advantage is that it enables the author to provide an intimate and inimitable portrait of events he has witnessed from close range, things not found in the usual official sources. But it also has the tendency to exaggerate the importance of events in which the author played a part but which seem small in retrospect. An example is the author's description of New Zealand's reaction to the 1987 Fiji coup. By now, David Lange's views and his contemplation of the use of military force to rescue New Zealand citizens stranded there is well known. The author adds a few details of intra-departmental meetings, but nothing substantially new to alter the picture. He spends much time talking about an attempted hijack of an Air New Zealand plane by a Labour-supporting Indo-Fijian, and his rescue of Dr Bavadra's private secretary William Sutherland to safety overseas, but these moments, dramatic as they were at the time, did not amount to much in the unfolding Fijian crisis. It would have been good to have a more considered treatment of this subject (and some others touched in the book) from this most astute of observers.

But I cavil. New Zealand won when Gerald Hensley declined an offer from the Commonwealth Secretariat for a permanent position because 'a permanent departure [from New Zealand] meant giving up too much' (p.131). And the discipline of history was the loser when he decided to forego the opportunity of writing a DPhil at Oxford to pursue the love of his life, Juliet. But we at least have his *Final Approaches*. It is a book which will long be read with pleasure and profit.

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