

Reviews

Te Rangi Hiroa: The Life of Sir Peter Buck. By J. B. Condliffe. Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch, 1971. 314 pp. N.Z. price: \$9.95.

PROFESSOR CONDLIFFE modestly describes his biography of Peter Buck as 'rather a personal tribute to an old friend than an essay in biography, and certainly not an ethnological treatise' (p. 15). The disclaimer was not needed. This is indeed a warm and moving tribute, but it is also a rounded and comprehensive study of Buck's splendid career, from his birth of Maori and Irish parentage in an obscure Taranaki village, through Urenui primary school, Te Aute College, the Otago Medical School, the Maori Hygiene Division of the Department of Health, M.P. for Northern Maori, 2-i-c of the Maori Pioneer Battalion, Director of Maori Hygiene, ethnologist and eventually Director of the Bishop Museum at Hawaii. Buck became a legend in his life time; Condliffe has ensured the continuation of that legend.

The biography has had a chequered career. It was started by the journalist, Eric Ramsden; handed over on his death to Professor Ernest Beaglehole, who died before he could add to it; and completed by Condliffe who, at 82, has demonstrated a stamina that would shame most men half of his age. Condliffe has made considerable use of Ramsden's draft chapters, and includes several of them in the text or as appendices. He generously acknowledges this debt but the finished work is very much better than anything Ramsden could have written. The other debt, also acknowledged with generous quotation, is to the Buck-Ngata correspondence which started just as Buck was about to leave for Hawaii in 1927. Indeed this provides a framework for the rest of the book: a record of Buck's doings and achievements, and of his craving for news of New Zealand and the 'race'.

The book has a good many minor faults. There is too much repetition in the early chapters: too many thumb-nail sketches of Buck's career; some rather trivial incidents, like the mid-night flight of William and the young Peter from Urenui, are told repeatedly. There are too many factual errors, especially in background material. And there are some rather quaint assumptions that are reminiscent of an earlier age. Take, for example, the assertion that children of mixed marriages 'are likely to be enterprising and successful individuals' (p. 21), apparently supported by the fact that all the Maori leaders of the 'renaissance' were of part European descent.

More important, the book as a whole is something of a period piece, for Professor Condliffe is perhaps the last survivor of that generation of Maori and Pakeha scholars and publicists which both lived and made the Maori renaissance. Ngata, Buck and the other Te Aute graduates did indeed con-

tribute substantially to the revival of Maori population and Maoritanga in this century. But it was the coterie of Pakeha scholars, with their first degrees from New Zealand and their doctorates from overseas universities, who articulated and gave academic repute to the concept of the Maori renaissance; the anthropologists F. M. Keesing and Raymond Firth; psychologists I. L. G. Sutherland and Ernest Beaglehole; and J. B. Condliffe himself, a Canterbury and Cambridge trained economist, who, like Buck, became an expatriate academic while also retaining close links with his homeland. Condliffe's earlier books and notably the Maori chapter in his *Making of New Zealand* (1929), written with due acknowledgement to Ngata and Buck, place great stress on these stalwarts of the Young Maori Party and the Maori renaissance. His life of Buck is from the same mould.

This is not the place to examine the making of the legend of the Maori renaissance. Rather, one should ask why Buck came to personify it. There is no need to doubt that Buck had many outstanding qualities. He was a man of no mean academic calibre, as displayed by his record at Te Aute and the Otago Medical School (where he was one of the top men of his class), his M.D., his ability in middle age to tread the waters of academia, his cluster of honorary degrees, medals and prizes. Buck published a large number of scholarly monographs and articles, most of them on the material culture of Polynesian societies.

Yet in some important respects — not fully admitted by Condliffe — Buck did not quite make the grade. His ethnology was self-taught and he did not grasp the mysteries of the growing 'science' of social anthropology. Despite his great interest in 'acculturation', especially as it applied to Maoris, and despite the assumption which he shared with Ngata that their Maoriness gave them special insights, Buck never published anything of significance on the processes of Maori social change. As Condliffe notes, such comments as Buck made — and they are not very penetrating — remain buried in the correspondence with Ngata. Though sceptical about various oral traditions relating to Maori and Polynesian migrations, Buck's two well-known books, *The Coming of the Maori* and *Vikings of the Sunrise*, were disappointing and failed to provide the all-embracing definitive analysis that many, including Ngata, expected of Buck's life's work.

But the biggest disappointment of all was Buck's failure to secure an academic post in a New Zealand university. Indeed his distinguished career overseas — the extended stay at the Bishop Museum, the visiting Professorship at Yale, and the Directorship of the Bishop Museum — were, paradoxically, a consequence of his failure to gain an academic post in New Zealand. It was not his fault: New Zealand universities did not then see fit to study Maori or Polynesian culture.

There was yet another paradox. Buck had long hoped to join that select band of Maori knights, Carroll, Pomare and Ngata, but his requests, constantly reiterated through Ngata to Forbes and other colleagues, were turned down on the ground that Buck was living abroad and thought to be an American citizen. When, in despair, he appealed for American citizenship he was rejected on the ground of being an 'Asian'. Finally, the expatriate Buck was awarded his knighthood in 1948 — by the Labour government. In 1949, stricken with cancer, Buck was brought home, at government expense, to receive the honour and to make a triumphal farewell progression through the country. And when he died two years later the politicians vied with one another to bring back his ashes. All New Zealand had come to

share the Buck legend. Why? Primarily, I think, because he had come to embody a New Zealand dream. As a man of mixed ancestry he had made good, overseas. Was not this a demonstration to the rest of the world of New Zealand's achievement in race relations? For Buck was, as Condliffe reminds us in conclusion, 'a Maori, it is true, but he was also Pakeha, and it would be wrong to portray him as entirely one or the other' (p. 226).

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Discovering Monaro: A Study of Man's Impact on his Environment. By W. Hancock. Cambridge University Press, 1972. xii, 209 pp. N.Z. price: \$10.00.

REGIONAL history was until recently given less than its rightful place in Australian academic studies, in spite of the inspiring example of Margaret Kiddle's *Men of Yesterday*. However, the work of some young historians, notably D. B. Waterson and the late G. L. Buxton, has now demonstrated the value of regional studies. An adequate social history of Australia can be written only on the basis of a full range of surveys such as these.

Perhaps nothing has signalized the rise of Australian regional history more than the entry of the country's most eminent living historian into the field. It should be pointed out at once that *Discovering Monaro* is not a regional history in the accepted sense, though I understand that Sir Keith Hancock's original intention was to attempt for Monaro what Margaret Kiddle had done for Western Victoria. He has used wide-ranging studies in Monaro history to illuminate a general theme of Australia's past, present and future. Sir Keith does not 'survey' the Monaro community in all its aspects. Rather, he seeks to 'discover' regional landmarks in the working out of a great theme: man's impact on his environment. Monaro is his canvas, but the picture he paints is continental in its perspectives. *Discovering Monaro* is, in sample, discovering Australia. New Zealand readers will be reminded of W. H. Oliver's *Challenge and Response* in which the aim was 'to examine the history of New Zealand within a regional context'.

In another dimension, Sir Keith seeks to blend history and ecology. His motives in this second exercise are clear. As an Australian, he is concerned about the future of his country's whole environment. As an adopted Canberra, he is concerned about the neighbouring tablelands and high country, especially the latter, which is in danger of being overrun by tourists and skiers. To speak with full authority as both historian and ecologist requires more than one lifetime, as Sir Keith regretfully admits, but his efforts to equip himself in the latter role may be described as both tremendous and successful. In 'exploring' (as distinct from 'discovering') what is meant by ecology, he was led into a range of studies in physical and social sciences which would have frightened or overwhelmed lesser men. The result is a 'synoptic' study in which no one element, whether of historical evidence or of scientific enquiry, is allowed to dominate.

In a third dimension, *Discovering Monaro* has a practical moral purpose: to use past experience to influence the future in public opinion and government policy. The role of 'moralist' is not one which Sir Keith assumes easily or lightly. There is too much in the difficult task of finding out what