

Reviews

Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life: Twenty-six years in Canterbury, New Zealand. By Sarah Amelia Courage. Whitcoulls, Christchurch, 1976. 250 pp. N.Z. price: \$9.95.

SARAH AMELIA COURAGE came to New Zealand in 1864 as the nineteen year old bride of Frank Courage. Her husband was the younger son of a prosperous middle-class family who turned, as many younger sons did, to the colonies to make his fortune. Less is known about Sarah's background, but the names of her parents, Charles Eliot Marriot Hopwood and Mary Lascelles, suggest genteel upper middle-class origins as well. Pioneering in New Zealand was an enormous change in life style for two such young people.

Lights and Shadows of a Colonial Life is a straightforward chronicle of life on a Canterbury sheep station in the 1860s. As such it covers much familiar material – the vicissitudes of farming, changing seasons, the difficulties of housekeeping in the 'outback', servant problems, colonial amusements and 'colonial manners'. For other reasons, however, *Lights and Shadows* achieved some notoriety when it was first published about 1896. Of the original eighteen copies printed, a number were destroyed by irate neighbours. This is scarcely to be wondered at. Mrs Courage showed her neighbours little understanding or mercy. Mrs F.J. Carter, a widow struggling to keep up a large run, was pilloried as Mrs Iscariot, 'a tart, angular person of about forty years old, with a hooked nose, light hair and cold, small grey eyes' (p. 50). Mrs Courage's animosity towards her neighbour is never explained. She visits her, dines with her, picnics with her and yet is almost totally hostile. Is the secret in the remark that Frank got the worst of some business deal with the lady? (p. 212.) Likewise Mr Solomon Jolliboys (W.C. Fendall who defeated Frank Courage for the Ashley County Council in 1876) gets some rough handling. Yet he was genial, generous and usually the life and soul of the local parties. Others, especially clergymen, get similar caustic treatment. In a small society where these characters were easily identifiable the initial reception of the book is understandable.

Sarah Courage described her book as 'gossiping'. However the gossip of past centuries is a valuable source for the historian, especially the social historian. Attitudes to other people, of the same social class, and of other classes; relationships within marriage; attitudes to children; views of status and role; the everyday activities and anxieties of people like Sarah Courage can be used to construct models for the social history of New Zealand.

As a member of the colonial 'landed gentry' Sarah Courage was both privileged and deprived. She was aware of the need to feel her deprivation –

witness her remarks about the lack of anything exciting to write about (p. 76), about the simple amusements afforded by the colony (p. 209) – yet clearly this life appealed to her – to unpack was ‘exciting’ (p. 98), her health improved (p. 165), a dance was ‘a thing of light and joy to look back upon’ (p. 217), a picnic ‘very delightful’ (p. 207). The privileges consisted of money, servants, who although a constant source of annoyance made life a great deal easier than it would have been otherwise, position and a careless awareness of superiority without much responsibility.

Sarah Courage’s memoirs are a *genre* in which New Zealand is fairly rich – the memoirs of the pioneering middle-class woman. They invite comparison with the earlier works of Charlotte Godley and Lady Barker. To my mind *Lights and Shadows* is less interesting and less lively. Sarah Courage did not have the same polish or style, despite the literary pretensions evident in the verses at the beginning of each chapter, nor the same perception of people and events. Yet in a way her book is equally as valuable. Sarah Courage unwittingly shows herself warts and all.

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New Zealand in World Affairs, Volume I. By Sir Alister McIntosh and others. Price Milburn for the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 1977. 204 pp. N.Z. price: \$12.15.

THIS collection of papers is the most informative recent publication on New Zealand foreign policy. Sir Alister McIntosh discusses the origins of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of an independent policy. Dr Stenson explores New Zealand attitudes to Asia. The core of the book is four articles by Professors Wood and McIntyre, Mr M.A. McKinnon and Mr I.C. MacGibbon on our foreign policy from 1930 to about 1960.

To a much greater extent than most readers would remember or expect, we find New Zealand agonizing between an attachment to the Commonwealth and the realities of American power and Asian problems. New Zealand governments hankered after a royalist and collective Commonwealth, which was dying on its feet, and for a universal collective security that was no more possible in the 1950s than in the 1930s. In both decades they sought unattainable absolutes.

When the question of admitting a republican India into the bosom of the Commonwealth in the years 1947-49 arose Peter Fraser said he did not want ‘a flabby Commonwealth’: he wanted an ‘organic entity united by a common allegiance’. Fraser, it seems, was as royalist and imperialist as Forbes and Coates. On Peter Fraser’s Commonwealth, David McIntyre presents new information from PM files in the New Zealand archives as well as from British sources.

Fraser’s successor, Sidney Holland (and of course his ultra-imperialist Minister of External Affairs, F.W. Doidge) were even more empire-minded. They clung to the idea that New Zealand’s defence role should be a Commonwealth one, and in the Middle East. In short, New Zealand was