

"A Bit of a Rebel": The Life and Work of George Arnold Wood, By R.M. Crawford. Sydney University Press, 1975. 386 pp., N.Z. price: \$17.42.

GEORGE ARNOLD WOOD, Sydney University's first professor of history from 1891 to 1928 and a Balliol College man, is the subject of this biography by R.M. Crawford, also a Balliol man and a long-serving professor of history at Melbourne University. One can appreciate Crawford's respect for Wood as a man and as a teacher, but it does not follow that Arnold Wood's achievements merit a full biography. A memoir, which Crawford intended in the first place, would have served the purpose.

The key period of Wood's life, his opposition to the Boer War, covers four chapters, although the source material is hardly extensive. Nevertheless, Crawford does supply a full and lucid account of Wood's liberal commitments and of the social and intellectual pressures which shaped his hostile response to the war. Wood associated with the Anti-War League and some outspoken radicals who were prominent in the labour movement; not the sort of company professors of history were expected to keep. Wood was treated high-handedly by many of his academic colleagues and there were disturbing calls for his dismissal from some of the more excitable conservatives. However, he remained as professor of history and was soon enjoying good relationships with his fellow academics. While Crawford might have spent more time establishing the context of Australian responses to the Boer War and less time and space eking out the exchanges between Wood and his adversaries in the correspondence columns of the daily papers, his account of these years remains the high point of his biography and is a valuable contribution to Australian intellectual history.

While we learn a lot about Wood as the victim of illiberal thinking, Crawford has little to say about dubious or discreditable actions and decisions which must have involved his hero. Crawford explains Wood's enthusiasm for the First World War and conscription, but how did he respond to the often rabid anti-German feeling at Sydney University during the war or, to take another matter, the later dismissal of Professors Irvine and Brennan, the first for being too radical, the second for sexual misconduct? A full academic biography should go into such matters.

It could also be argued that since Wood published so very little, Crawford might have said more about his impact as a teacher. What did Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Myra Willard, among others, owe to Wood's influence? The limits of biography are not easily drawn, but Crawford might have commented more extensively on the intellectual *milieu* of Sydney University during the period of Wood's tenure. It is a comment perhaps on his own priorities that while Balliol College comes in for a great deal of attention, Sydney University is treated more cursorily.

Despite reservations about Crawford's priorities this is a fluent, handsomely produced, nicely illustrated volume.

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