

immigrants or 'attenuated'. Most of the nineteenth-century immigrants came from that class. This error does not arise from social research but dogma about what the working class ought to think. On p.314 he tells us that in Europe the 1920s was the era of surrealist art and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, whereas in New Zealand it was 'the age of the cow cockies'. Such a comparison is intellectually fraudulent: in many parts of Europe the unemployed might more meaningfully have been mentioned instead of artists.

Len Richardson says that in 1890 the 'ideological gap between the Government and the Opposition was slight'. This is a strange observation, for they were divided by the greatest political issue of the day, land taxation. A page later he virtually contradicts himself over this.

In general, the chapters present well-written surveys of their subjects, and almost all are, in one way or another, of a high standard. One article fits uneasily into the survey scheme. Ann Parsonson wrote a challenging doctoral thesis on Maori land sales which she summarizes here. Her points deserve a page in M.P.K. Sorrenson's over-lapping chapter on 'Maori and Pakeha'. Her views are perverse as well as original. For instance, she maintains that nineteenth-century Maoris sold land to the government so that they could prove their title to it (p.149)! While such actions occurred, as when Teira tried to sell land at Waitara, few people could believe that this motive was a general cause of land sales.

The final section of the book, 'Precarious Maturity', includes excellent chapters by Robert Chapman, G.R. Hawke, Graeme Dunstall and W.H. Oliver. W.H. Oliver's article might be called 'Down Memory Lane', or 'The Recollections of a Former Editor of *Landfall* and *Comment*' but, as always, he makes some very judicious and perceptive remarks. I particularly appreciated (p.454) his comments on the poems of Kendrick Smithyman. It is as difficult to capture his qualities as it is easy to describe those of James K. Baxter.

The final chapter on politics, by Robert Chapman, and to a lesser extent that by Gary Hawke, are surprising. Dunstall and Oliver, on society and high culture, reach almost to the present. Hawke in a bland, sweeping article, just gets into the 1970s. Chapman, as always, offers a thoughtful and stimulating chapter, but it takes him eleven pages to get through Labour's 1935 'manifesto' to social security in 1938; fifteen to 1940; twenty-three to 1949, which leaves ten for the last thirty-two years. His justification for this procedure is that Labour in 1935 set the terms of political debate for forty years. True for—social security or import licences or full employment, but false for—Springbok tours or inflation. The result, however, is that there is more about the National governments of the past generation in the Pelhist than in the Oxhist.

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THE 'programme' of this book is quite decisively set forth. The blurb: 'This is a social history, not only in those chapters dealing with social relationships, class structure, and demography, but also in chapters that focus on economics, politics, Maori history and cultural events.' The editor fixes its place in the historiographical perspective: 'For the last twenty years, readers have depended

upon books which were shaped by the condition of thinking and research in the 1950s. Since then, the self-awareness of New Zealanders has been deepened by a rapid pace of social change, a quickening of intellectual activity, and a pervasive sense of concern.' In his own chapter at the end of the book, 'The Awakening Imagination', Professor Oliver expands his point about the deepening of social self-awareness among New Zealanders: 'Even by the end of the 1950s historians were still more concerned with generalities than specific analysis of New Zealand society: Keith Sinclair (*A History of New Zealand*, 1959) looked for identity in the imposed necessities of the Pacific environment; W.H. Oliver (*The Story of New Zealand*, 1906) in the determining strength of British inheritance. Neither approach encouraged too close a look at the changing forms of behaviour and organization through which a society expresses its character.' The 'archaeologists, historians, economists, sociologists and critics' whose work has been integrated in *The Oxford History of New Zealand* conceive its function as a manifesto of semiotic cultural maturity, whereby intelligent self-consciousness has attained to a condition of being able to scan the programme and read the signals.

Undoubtedly the most interesting and important thing that this book makes us aware of is that the way to this claim to interpretative capacity has been led by the imaginative writers and artists (and by their critics). New Zealand is an excellent example of a deliberate process of searching for cultural identity. In its very earliest days as a British colony it was seen as a potential case study; and in a curious way that character has stuck to its history. Relatively small and homogeneous, isolated, yet big enough eventually to create an autonomy for itself, *Ultima Thule* possessed, if unbeknown to itself until of late, a unique combination of control model factors. This book has indeed something of the quality of an interim laboratory progress report. The great 'task' of exposing the elements of social expression of national character, as Professor Oliver sternly reminds us, 'still awaits its workers'. He pays tribute to the imaginative dimension by pointing out that the 'harvest' of the 'specific tasks of social research' of the 1960s and 1970s has 'not been as abundant as in the arts'.

'Task' is a usage which strikes in some people (including this reviewer) a slight but perceptible chill. The 'workers' are struggling to fulfil the plan; or rather, to fill in the chart. No bones are made on the theme of 'relevance' (though the word itself is eschewed): 'All history is a chart of present concerns, which asks new questions as much as it answers old ones.' If the *Oxford History of New Zealand* represents a comprehensive repudiation of the old Victorian tag that 'all history is past politics', it represents nevertheless a comprehensive endorsement of the other side of that tag, that present politics is future history. In this sense 'social history' is delineated for the purposes of this collection with something of an almost polemical thrust, *is* present politics. We learn, for example, of 'expressions of dissent' from 'the exaggerated high-mindedness of the gentry or the triviality of the lower-middle class'. What 'specific tasks of social research' produced that gem of socio-historical judgement?

The paradox here is that while the assumed hero of this book is the (presumably) adequately high-minded and non-trivial working class and its latter-day self-liberating associates, Maoris and women, the 'chart of present concerns' is coloured in rather bleak tones. The rather anguished emphasis is indeed on the multiplicity of the 'tasks' yet waiting to be done. The last word in the book is, fittingly, 'apprehension'. While it celebrates the process of deepening self-

awareness as defined by a dissident liberal intelligentsia, this work is also, in effect, a compendium of reasons why that intelligentsia is likely to remain in dissent from a stolidly unimpressionable social reality. Thus, Len Richardson's chapter on 'Politics and Political Change' in the period from 1890 to 1935 accurately defines the formative themes as the 'conservatism of the electorate, the predominance of country interests, and the continuity in New Zealand politics'; as written about from the point of view of one who is clearly radical, urban, and a convinced, but despairing, proponent of a most necessary and desirable discontinuity. Graeme Dunstall ends his chapter on 'The Social Pattern' in the modern period by admitting that 'the radicalisation of increasing numbers of New Zealanders' is unlikely. 'In fact the long-established contours of the inequality (economic, racial, and sexual) remained, largely resistant to the pressures for change. In 1980 it was not clear that the social pattern of the next thirty years would differ profoundly from that of the past.'

This history of New Zealand is a case, then, of the writers acting as antennae of a race content with its own alternative modes of groping forward. (It is absolutely characteristic of the New Zealand scene that a high proportion of its best historians have doubled as among its best poets and critics.) As a programme it is in itself a matter of intense interest. It has, consciously, the courage of its self-aware convictions, tempered honourably by a shrewd sense of the very historical limitations it is itself trying to transcend. Unlike almost all other collections of this kind (there are sixteen contributors in all) it is more interesting as a unity than in its components.

Which is not, of course, to say that the component items themselves fail to rise to the occasion. But, since the net is spread so wide, the mesh has inevitably to be rather large-gauge. Given the great burst of high-quality scholarship from the 1950s onwards, a mere twenty-eight pages covering politics from Ballance to Savage, for example, gives little scope for nutritious density of texture or specificity of treatment. One is constantly and rather uncomfortably aware of the heavy pressure on each sentence to extend itself into more or less of a generalization. It is no accident that the best 'political' chapter, by Professor Robert Chapman, is also the longest chapter in the book. Likewise, 'cultural' chapters are under pressure to become lists of 'key' names. Still, nowhere is there any lack of food for thought. I had no idea, for example, that before education became centralized and bureaucratized and authoritarian, 'hierarchically structured and time-dominated', schools in New Zealand were 'community institutions where adults acquired skills of self-government and sought to acquire civilized values'.

Organization is sensible. The chapters are grouped in four parts—'Beginnings', 'Growth and Conflict' (to c.1890), 'A Time of Transition' (to c.1935) and 'Precarious Maturity'. Parts II, III and IV each have an economic, political and social constituent; Parts II and III have, in addition, a Maori, and Parts III and IV a cultural, dimension. The most obvious signal of a new dispensation is the space allotted to the Maori aspect: three chapters, including an authoritative introductory 'Polynesian Foundation' by Janet Davidson.

What abiding impression does all this weight of New Zealand's historical academe leave on the reader? Primarily, for me, the validity of the claims for intellectual maturity, all the more valid for the very explicit reservations as to its precariousness. The last thing this book could be accused of is encouragement to complacency. An interim lab report about the experiment proceeding somewhat according to plan? Perhaps more aptly a school report from the New Zealand

schoolmasterly clerisy on the merits of the national performance: like Colin McCahon's landscapes, 'written over with promises yet to be fulfilled'.

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THE SOCIAL HISTORY chapters are perhaps the most original part of this work. They contrast sharply with the chapters on political history in particular. The editor's policy appears to have been that, where a substantial body of secondary literature already existed, it should be his contributors' task to synthesize that material and present it in clear form appropriate to a textbook. But social history is one of the principal areas in which the secondary literature is far too thin to enable this to be done. Contributors on that subject have therefore been obliged to undertake a substantial amount of research of their own and write chapters which considerably advance our understanding of the topics which they cover. In other areas what is written in effect marks time, consolidating the consensus amongst historians as to how they should be interpreted. These variations in the originality of the contributions will, however, be discernible mainly by specialist teachers and researchers. For the general reader and the student the bland overall 'Oxford History' style tends to disguise the differences in the type of research upon which the chapters are based.

Jeanine Graham's chapter on pioneer society provides an interesting contrast with the chapters on twentieth-century society written by Erik Olssen and Graeme Dunstall. The contrast is between different approaches to the writing of social history. Jeanine Graham's style might be described as old-fashioned. It is much more of a literary than a sociological exercise, showing little if any influence from the 'new social history'. It is more impressionistic than the Olssen and Dunstall chapters. It relies more on quotations than on statistics for evidence as to trends in society. Perhaps this was the appropriate style in which to write about pioneer society. Certainly it reads well. But one would like to have seen this point argued. Here again the 'Oxford History' style of the book proves irritating. There is a regrettable lack of self-consciousness as to the considerable differences in methodology underlying the contributions on social history.

The impact of the 'new social history' is most clearly seen in Erik Olssen's chapter. Although statistics are plentifully used, there are also numerous fascinating observations on traits of social behaviour, for example the meaning of decline in the Sunday ritual of visiting the cemetery. These are placed firmly in an historical perspective, whereas Dunstall's chapter suffers from being too 'contemporary'. Some of the references to events and trends in the mid and late seventies already appear out-of-date and wrong from a 1981 perspective. Olssen's chapter is particularly significant because it marks the first substantial introduction into the study of New Zealand history at the 'general survey' level of the insights and methodology of work on the history of the family, of women, and of demographic trends. Here is an important starting-point for the interpretation of our history from these new perspectives.

However, there is one major defect of the book as a whole from which even the