

The Farthest Promised Land, English Villagers, New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s. By Rollo Arnold. Victoria University Press with Price Milburn, Wellington, 1981. xiii, 408pp. N.Z. price \$35.

DURING the 1870s just over 101,000 immigrants came to New Zealand on assisted passages, about half of them English. The immigration peaked in 1874, the year when the sudden upsurge of trade-unionism among English farm labourers receded almost everywhere it had appeared. This was also a year when emigration to the USA and British North America slumped sharply in the wake of panic and ensuing depression. Professor Arnold's well-researched study of the English immigration of that decade is divided into three parts. The first section presents a detailed account of New Zealand's official policies and the terms on which assistance was available, of the activities of recruiting agents in England, and of the voyages of several ships carrying these migrants. It draws upon secondary sources for its description of the trade union movement and the condition of agricultural labourers. While incorporating the results of some recent research, the author depicts the farm labourer's situation in terms of utter degradation and poverty and does not take into account some of his own cases, appearing later in the book, of social mobility of farm labourers and their children, especially those who became union leaders.

The pattern of the Revolt of the Fields leads the author in his second section to the examination of the emigration from particular villages. Chapters on Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire, the Midland Vales, Kent and Cornwall eventually focus on a few villages in selected regions of those counties in rich vignettes of local history. After a chapter on the initial adaptation of these migrants in New Zealand, the third section also focuses upon specific settlements in New Zealand, first in some of the older squatter grasslands where large-scale pastoral farmers employed labourers, and then upon examples in the densely forested parts of the country where clearance of those forests in the face of huge problems of transport and supply was beginning in the late seventies and where smaller farms could be obtained by immigrants willing and able to face the daunting pioneer conditions.

The book culminates in an epilogue which constitutes a spirited defence of the immigrants of these years, immigrants who, according to the author, have been maligned and misrepresented in the standard accounts, when not ignored. The assisted immigrants of the 1870s did not mainly settle in towns to contribute to urban unemployment during the depression of the 1880s. Instead, in Professor Arnold's view, farm labourers from England proved to be ideal pioneer farmers. Here his findings and judgements contrast with the view taken of English farm labourers in the USA where many regarded them as too specialized and limited in their skills for the jack-of-all-trades demands of the frontier. Furthermore, largely on the basis of his case histories and occupation figures, Professor Arnold argues that the English labourers did not come mainly from towns, but that passenger lists underestimated the farm labourers by carelessly consigning many of them to the category of general 'labourers'. Even the industrial occupations he associated primarily with village trades. He reconciles his earlier picture of the degradation of the English farm labourers and their apparent success in New Zealand by means of some interesting, if scrappy, evidence that the migrants were more literate and less prone to previous migrations than the populations from which they were drawn. Thus the book raises a number of fascinating questions about the selective nature of migration. The striking contrasts between his

findings on the composition of the assisted migrant population of the seventies with my findings on unassisted English emigrants to the USA in the eighties are not examined.

Where this book goes well beyond the traditional immigrant history is in the construction of life-time careers of scores of ordinary immigrants through painstaking record linkage. Immigrants whose letters were published in union journals, lavishly but critically quoted in the book, are traced back to the census manuscripts of 1871, and sometimes in other local sources, then through passenger lists and other records of assisted migration, and finally in the *Freeholders of New Zealand* (1884) and the six-volume *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* (1897-1908). The results of this time-consuming research are presented by way of illustration and example. One is left with having to trust the author's judgement as to how typical his cases were. The text is crammed with numbers, but statistical tables and summaries are conspicuously absent. Professor Arnold is perhaps too careful a scholar to want to give a false impression of accuracy or comprehensiveness through such means. Yet his caution in this respect limits the possibility of comparison with other work as well as the force of his conclusions. He gives us ages and sex of hosts of individual immigrants but no summary; the members of large families are detailed by name, but the ratio of families to the total migration and the mean size of families not hazarded. Furthermore, the nature of his New Zealand sources leads one to suspect that he has captured more of the successful immigrants. A more formal comparison of these landowners by origin with the total English population immigrating to New Zealand would have been helpful but perhaps impossible.

Professor Arnold takes as a model Alan Everett's ecology of rural dissent in the nineteenth century as associated with open villages, boundary settlements, decayed market towns, industrial villages, dispersed hamlets, recent access to waste and subdivision of land. His test of the coincidence of agrarian revolt and emigration with non-conformism and the 'unusual degree of freedom' arising in such parishes consists mainly of cases which illustrate the theme, though he does also refer from time to time to places which did not evince these features. No mention is made of the findings of other writers on the relationship between agrarian disturbances, emigration and dissent. Some reference to migration histories other than the particular stream here being considered might have led to a comparison with the work of John MacDonald, for example, who found that in rural Italy revolt and emigration were alternative strategies for survival practised in different locales. However, I do not mean to berate Professor Arnold for not doing more than he has in this fine book. He himself is well aware of the unfinished task, as he makes amply clear.

The book is full of illustrations and well-indexed. That it is directed mainly at a rather wide readership in New Zealand rather than the old country is indicated by the helpful detailed and conveniently located maps of sending areas in England and the presence of only one map of New Zealand not situated near the discussion of settlement in Felden and Arden regions. This is simply another indicator of the complexities of carrying out point-to-point studies of migrating populations in which undertaking Professor Arnold has in the main succeeded quite admirably.

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