

## Reviews

*A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity.* By Keith Sinclair. Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1986. x, 290 pp. NZ price: \$29.95.

I CAME to *A Destiny Apart* not as a historian but as one engaged in the day-to-day conduct of New Zealand's external relations. It is a special kind of expatriation and perhaps not the worst of vantage points: in the evolution of New Zealand's relations with the outside world are to be found clues to our search for independence and identity.

*A Destiny Apart* is framed and titled in a way that can be misleading. It is presented essentially as a history of New Zealand nationalism up to 1940. But it is also about New Zealand's search for national identity, and Sinclair leaves us, with the briefest of epilogues, on the threshold of a half century marked by social, cultural, and economic developments as significant as those that preceded them. It gives *A Destiny Apart* a narrower focus compared with the broader sweep of his *History of New Zealand*.

Sinclair himself describes the problems of definition. In terms of its development as a distinct geo-political entity, New Zealand was established as a nation state by the time of Seddon. Sinclair's theme is larger than that and includes the search for a more clearly defined and integrated cultural personality. He is thus grappling, as a New Zealand historian, with the Pakeha cultural dilemma never more neatly expressed than by Peter Ireland in his comment on 'the use of the word Home to describe somewhere else'. It is not a new theme and we have seen many fresh contributions to it in recent times from commentators like Vincent O'Sullivan, Ranginui Walker, Hamish Keith, Colin James, and Harvey Franklin and from photographers and photographic historians such as Robin Morrison and William Main.

Sinclair's approach is partly chronological, partly topical. He covers the familiar themes: the lonely, heroic struggle with the land, individualism, egalitarianism, initiative, patriotism and imperialism, national and racial pride, and that sense of destiny that has contributed to the nation's image of itself. He describes how rapidly notions of nationalism, extending even to the possibility of separation from Great Britain, emerged in the new colony. It is nevertheless sobering to recall that in 1956 S. G. Holland, as Prime Minister, was still talking of building a strong British empire and of standing by the British through thick and thin. Sinclair takes us carefully and with admirable detail through the rise of colonial sentiment, the emergence of strong nationalism and patriotism expressed in super-Britishness, ideas about federation with Australia, and dreams of a South Pacific empire. He also describes the rise and fall of the New Zealand Natives Association, the radical social reform legislation, and the integrating effect of improved communications.

The picture that emerges is of a country in which, in terms of a nation state, pretty well everything was in place by the beginning of the twentieth century. The New Zealand version of God's Own Country, prosperous and very proud of itself, was in being. Moreover, it could be argued that by this time a New Zealand 'national type' had already been formed and that we still bear its enduring stamp. Sinclair notes a 1906 questionnaire about whether such a type existed. The replies listed qualities that would show up in much the same way today.

The chapters on war (marred by a slip in the spelling of Le Quesnoy) and sport are important. Sinclair sees both as being of key significance in shaping New Zealanders. Some already well-established myths and images were thereby reinforced. The overtones of imperial pride and mission, of being the best of the best, were much stronger than any sense that the terrible wartime losses might not have been worth it. A not dissimilar analysis could be applied to our passion for sport, especially for rugby. Sinclair puts the defeat at Gallipoli with the defeat in Wales in 1905 as major episodes in the mythology of New Zealandism. Somehow we seemed to absorb the defeat in war better. The defeat in Wales gave rise to an obsessive search for invincibility that had its apotheosis in 1924 and its apocalypse in 1981.

I share, therefore, the view of those who see the South African War and World War I as having given rise to a period of imperialist sentiment and colonial dependence that put a check to the growth of nationalism. That check is discernible in New Zealand's external relations in a quite dominant way, at least until the 1930s, and to a varying and declining extent thereafter. Our clinging to ideas of imperial federation and dislike of the loose Commonwealth of the Balfour Declaration and the Statute of Westminster have been amply chronicled. Any publicly-implied weakening of our ties with Britain was denied. As McIntosh noted in his 1962 article on the administration of an independent New Zealand foreign policy, the terms in which New Zealand declared its identity with Britain in 1939 might equally well have been employed in 1840. He notes, too, the irony that it was World War II that provided the setting in which New Zealand was to assume responsibility for an independent foreign policy. In 1928 New Zealand signed, with Japan, its first trade agreement and in 1941 established, with the United States, its first diplomatic relations with a foreign power. The Pacific was beginning to reclaim us, though our almost total economic dependence on Great Britain was to last well into the 1960s.

There are few now who would argue that the geographic fact of New Zealand's South Pacific location should not be central to the way in which we approach the world. Corner, in his seminal article 'New Zealand and the South Pacific', in 1962, related New Zealanders' loss of confidence in themselves to the death of Seddon's dreams of a Dominion of Oceania, dreams Corner described as 'full-rigged imperialism . . . which had some contact with a New Zealand reality'. It has taken a long time for the focus to come back to the Pacific. We saw the gradual transmutation of imperialism and defence of empire into global and regional collective security and internationalism, both in the 1930s and the post-World War II period. Much has changed since then, but the first instinctive reactions to the 1956 Suez crisis and the Falklands War of 1982 were reminders that deep-seated attitudes change only slowly. At this very moment we face in Fiji developments that will provide a measure of the evolution of our reorientation to the Pacific. What is done will probably be a better test than what is said. In these days of the South Pacific Forum there is no Seddon 'howling empire', though the odd ghostly echo of his voice may still be heard.

Perhaps, more than anything else, the Vietnam war called the old certainties of allegiance, legal and moral obligation, and responsibility into question. Economic

stagnation and decline and a revolution in the pattern of our overseas markets have trimmed our sails and injected a new realism. The persistence of national and ideological rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States and the threat of nuclear disaster have weakened alliances. All these things have influenced New Zealand's perception of its place in the world, and perception is linked to identity. It has, however, been a hallmark of New Zealand's evolution in the world that we have backed into the future with reluctance. In 1969 the Nixon doctrine heralded the end of the policy of forward defence in Southeast Asia. Now, 18 years later, the troops are coming home. It should come as no surprise that deep concern in New Zealand over nuclear weapons goes hand in hand with a desire for security guarantees, that there should be a turning towards Australia, and that any suggestion of non-alignment or neutrality should be so firmly rejected.

The persistent reluctance to contemplate open breaks with the past is revealed, too, in Sinclair's chapters under the heading 'Dates and Emblems'. Apart from the abolition in 1950 of the Legislative Council, we have scarcely touched the inherited forms and symbols. The monarchy remains intact, though the vice-regal function has not obstructed the development of a system of government in which the prime minister has many of the attributes of a president. This is especially so abroad, since the monarch does not travel to third countries in right of New Zealand. Access to the Privy Council is preserved. The flag and national hymns enshrine the past. But in slow small ways ostrich plume is yielding to kiwi feather. The recent switch to vice-regal from royal appointment of ambassadors comes closer to the mundane reality. The institution of an Order of New Zealand adds an indigenous touch to the honours and awards system. The kiwi flourishes as a robust, if overworked, symbol of uniquely New Zealand flavour. And overseas, we turn increasingly to the Maori culture for ceremonial expression of New Zealand's identity.

In his epilogue, Sinclair offers some 'reflections and suggestions on the evolution of national feeling since 1940'. His tone is mildly optimistic, but he notes that identity is not permanent and static and that New Zealand nationalism is a much more complicated topic and feeling than it was in the first half of the twentieth century. If one shares that cautious optimism, as I do, it is Sinclair the writer as well as Sinclair the historian who strengthens it. In two chapters on literary nationalism and on those whom he calls the 'Singers of Loneliness', Sinclair charts an important part of the search for cultural identity. It is when things like art and literature are repatriated that the cultural dilemma begins to be resolved, when we cease, as Robin Hyde put it, 'to be forever England'. It was Fairburn, Brasch, Mulgan, Condliffe, J. C. Beaglehole, and others in the twenties and thirties who rediscovered, after the false start of the late nineteenth century, what it meant to be a New Zealander. By discovering what they were not, and by experiencing loneliness, alienation and impermanence, they led us towards 'an imaginative order of our own'.

The journey is not yet over and never will be. It is more a matter of how we travel. Europe, which Vincent O'Sullivan has described as the closest thing many a Pakeha New Zealander has to an extensive birthright, will continue to exercise its influence on art, literature, the theatre, music, television and radio, and the cinema, sometimes to the dimensions of invasion. We need not deny that birthright but we should not deny our birthplace either. We were not 'all one people' in 1840. We are not now. But time and place are inexorable. If as Pakeha we recognize, respect, and share in the Maori culture and reality, that will help us to a new equilibrium between what Ranginui Walker has described as the two truths, the two realities in this land of ours. Perhaps in literature Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Matriarch*, with its blending of

Maori and European influences, illustrates that the way ahead does not lie in xenophobia or rejection of the past, but in its absorption. It is all a more complex, slow business that most of us optimistically imagined. In *A Destiny Apart* Sinclair's perceptions and scholarship show us where we have come from and cast a look ahead. In that sense the book is as much a challenge to the next generation of historians as it is further proof of Sinclair's outstanding contribution to the history of New Zealand. Let us hope that the challenge will be taken up.

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*The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front.* By Nancy M. Taylor. Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Government Printer, Wellington, 1986. 2 vols. 1130 pp. NZ price: \$99.50.

1985-6 was a bumper year for historical publications on New Zealand in the Second World War by women and about women. Prominent is Nancy Taylor's *The Home Front*, originally planned as a social history to complement F.L.W. Wood's *Political and External Affairs* (1958) and J. V. Baker's *War Economy* (1965) in a trilogy, *The New Zealand People at War*. It completes the Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War. The other historical publications are really 'her-stories': Iris Latham, *The WAAC Story*; Eve Ebbett, *When the Boys Are Away*; and Lauris Edmond (ed.), *Women in Wartime*. They add a personal, human dimension to what present-day historians would describe as a total, rather than a social, history of New Zealand life in the war years.

Why has it taken so long for women to prove that they have the professional skills to write war history, not only do archival work, basic research, and sundry other menial tasks for men? Half a dozen or more women were employed in Army Archives and the War History Branch; they were classified as 'clerical assistants', and paid less than the men in the office doing the same work. No woman was originally invited to be the author of any of the campaign, service, unit or civilian volumes, not even *Women at War*, one of 24 booklets published in the *Episodes and Studies* series. The breakthrough came after Wood was published and Baker under way. Taylor was invited to write what was described as a social survey and, later, M. P. Lissington to revise for publication her war history narratives on 'New Zealand and the United States' and 'New Zealand and Japan'.

Taylor was a history graduate who had served a long apprenticeship in the Historical Branch of Internal Affairs. She worked on the ill-fated centennial (later historical) atlas and on the splendidly produced *Introduction to New Zealand* (1945), aimed at middle-brow Americans. Like many other young women who (to quote from her book) 'established bridgeheads in male-work territories' in wartime, she 'took on traditional full-time home-and-children life' in the 1950s, but found time to research, write, and edit for School Publications and the Alexander Turnbull