

agricultural ladder by the traumatic events of the Clearances. Land appeared to be abundant and cheap in New Zealand and the climate and farming styles similar to those of Aberdeenshire. But from the late 1850s the local press started to issue less favourable reports. Letters were published complaining about the large amount of capital required to set up in farming, and doubt was expressed about New Zealand's future economic prospects. Complaints about high costs and low wages also appeared throughout the 1860s. Thereafter, the New Zealand honeymoon was over and the press returned to advocating the advantages of the older North American alternative. This swing of opinion helps to explain the difficulties experienced by agents employed during the Vogel immigration drive.

The remainder of Volume I and most of the second volume concentrate on North America and philanthropic schemes directed towards that part of the world. Women migrants also receive special attention, but little is said about single women migrants to New Zealand. It seems that, despite continual comment on the demand for domestic servants, young women of North Eastern Scotland showed little interest in this part of the world.

Harper's study makes abundantly clear how complex the process of immigration is. 'Push' and 'pull' type explanations are shown to be totally inadequate in explaining the complex conjunction of particular personal circumstances and impersonal economic and social forces that determine decisions to migrate. Unfortunately, this valuable contribution to immigration history takes the argument of individual decision too far and produces few helpful generalizations about the Scottish migration experience. This failure is compounded by an unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the considerable body of theory relating to the migration process. One is left wondering if two volumes were really necessary. Tighter editing and a single volume would probably have forced the author to concentrate more on the ways in which this local study related to the broader questions concerning migration.

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Social Welfare 1850-1950. Australia, Argentina and Canada Compared. Edited by D.C.M. Platt. Macmillan, London, 1989. 208pp. NZ price: \$168.00.

THE OUTCOME of a comparative history conference in London, this volume contains ten short articles on charity, health, housing, and labour in 'the three principal regions of recent European settlement: Argentina, Australia and Canada'. New Zealand qualifies as a region of recent European settlement as defined here, and there are indeed 12 references to New Zealand in the index and seven to New Zealand's Liberal reformer, William Pember Reeves. However, New Zealand is generally mentioned only in an Australian context.

In his introduction, the editor slips easily within the same paragraph from discussing Australia to Australasia to New Zealand. Sometimes during a discussion of Australia he draws his examples from New Zealand. One could be excused for coming away with the impression that New Zealand decided to join the Australian Commonwealth in 1900 after all! There are, however, two important chapters for New Zealand historians. Diane Kirkby's chapter on compulsory arbitration in Australia draws out some interesting conclusions on the nature of compulsory arbitration in Australia which would be equally applicable to New Zealand. The discussion in the final chapter by John Fogarty of 'Social

Experiments in Regions of Recent Settlement: Australia, Argentina and Canada', draws on the New Zealand Liberals of the 1890s and provides a useful analysis of the political philosophy underlying their social legislation.

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Mickey Mouse Numbers in World History. The Short View. By D.C.M. Platt. Macmillan, London, 1989. x + 91pp. NZ price: \$135.95 approx.

A FUNNY title, but not a funny book.

Professor Platt makes two points: the first loudly, and often; the second once, and then by constant implication.

First, statistics collected from Victorian times through to 1913, and often beyond, are highly selective and dangerously insecure. Yet book after book refers to a handful of summaries without question, setting up an apparently authoritative series of sources, all nevertheless dependent, at the end of the chain of reference, upon a handful of dubious guesses. The quantitative assertions that result are often 'random, unexplained and unascrbed'; and some of the world-scale speculations are little more than 'a highly imaginative piece of intellectual fun'.

The antidote is not, immediately, a more secure battery of figures but common sense. Often, the question 'Is it likely?' More respectably, perhaps, 'How could they possibly know?'

The second point: 'In the most primitive terms the economist seeks first to create a "model" and only then to confirm it from evidence; the historian, ideally, looks first at the evidence from which he only then derives conclusions'. Well, there we are, scarcely at the bottom of page 1, and I fancy the rug has been pulled from under the feet of many an historian. And we learn why at once: 'all of which was explained more suitably in a friendly engagement between Robert Fogel and Sir Geoffrey Elton'. Battle lines have been drawn up! But the prejudice does lead to a reasonable conclusion: silence is better than bad numbers.

The book is written with passion. There are 56 individual villains (and a few groups); their guilt is reinforced throughout the book, for they bear an asterisk at every mention, like a badge of shame; and bold type in the index directs us quickly to their major sin. Braudel is among them, so we still know where we are. But the Lucifer of demons is Michael Mulhall, of *Dictionary of Statistics* fame, attended by his over-quoted acolyte, the luckless Sir George Paish. Our own J.B. Condliffe is a marked man also: '*The Commerce of Nations* is widely based and well presented, but it belongs to the school of international civil servants . . . for whom the source of a figure, if published under sufficiently impressive authority, remained undiscussed'.

The judgement points to a major and worthy anxiety: the potential misuse of shoddy research. Not only, according to the author, do empire-building economic historians hunger for numbers, any numbers; they also work, as often as not, within the orbit if not under the direct patronage of international and semi-political organizations. Yes, it is conspiracy time again, or at least time to beware of the hidden agenda. Above all, of course, in Professor Platt's eyes, we must bewail the influence of debate on world trade, on the supposed — the badly documented — imbalance between rich and poor, imperial and colonized.

That seems an acceptable warning, given the merciless exposure here of careless trust. Certainly, this short book is worth a quick read, if one is planning a foray into the modern