

fully than in any previous study. Sheppard was held in high regard by leaders of the women's movement elsewhere and, Devaliant suggests, she could have played a more prominent role on the international stage. Distance posed difficulties and Sheppard pulled back from personal participation in international gatherings after 1894, apparently on account of her fluctuating health (there is an intriguing reference to a nervous 'stumble' in public speaking while overseas which may have affected Sheppard's confidence in this arena).

Those seeking a 'reveal all' biography will be disappointed by this book; historians who have undertaken research into the first wave of the New Zealand women's movement will not gain radically new insights from it. *Kate Sheppard* is nonetheless a book they will want to own, a useful complement to the existing literature. It gives an overview of the women's movement in New Zealand from the 1880s to the end of the First World War from the perspective of its key participant, and fleshes out, as much as was possible, one of New Zealand's more attractive public figures.

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Ettie: A Life of Ettie Rout. By Jane Tolerton. Penguin, Auckland, 1992. 283pp. NZ price: \$39.95.

ETTIE ROUT was not a popular figure in New Zealand, nor is she today well-known in her homeland, though Jane Tolerton's book will do much to recover her memory and explain the process by which she was deliberately excised from many parts of the historical record. At her death, she had few friends or admirers with the power to prevent her being 'hidden from history' and many, indeed, believed she was best forgotten. In this the centenary year of women's suffrage in New Zealand, one can understand the antagonism she roused among those who might have been her allies in her comment to some visiting English suffragists that votes for women in New Zealand had spread 'a blighting mildew of "wowsersism"' in the land (p.85). Not that she opposed the vote or believed it had not achieved good, it was just that her perspective was quite different from that of more conventional feminists, middle-class or radical — and she did not mince her words. Her notion of patriotic comforts work during the Great War was far removed from that of the women who sat and waited at home, sewing, knitting and organizing fund-raising events. Reducing the incidence of syphilis and gonorrhoea among the New Zealand soldiers in Egypt, Britain and France became her special mission.

Jane Tolerton has written an absorbing and intelligent biography. Ettie Rout built her career in Christchurch on 'the two great vehicles of women's liberation in the late nineteenth century — the bicycle and the typewriter' (p.26). Her expertise as a shorthand recorder provided plentiful employment in government enquiries and the courts, though her sympathies lay with freethought and the emerging labour movement. She was attracted by radical experiments in communal living and also joined Fred Hornibrook's School of Physical Culture, adopting the loose, uncorseted style of dress he and other physical culturists recommended. Ettie helped found the *Maoriland Worker* in 1910, though it was quickly taken over by the New Zealand Federation of Labour. She was never a good joiner or member but essentially a radical individualist; her socialism was not of the 'scientific' and materialist kind espoused by the Red Feds.

The outbreak of war gave Ettie a theatre of operations more appropriate to her sense of mission. On arriving in Egypt early in 1916, she found the New Zealand authorities in a dilemma about the soaring rate of venereal infection. After touring the prostitute precinct in Cairo, she concluded that, since moral prophylaxis was manifestly ineffective, the only realistic approach was to make proper, safe provision for the sexual needs of the men. Thereafter, she devoted herself to a campaign for free issue of physical prophylactics. In 1917, official sources estimated that 13.4 per cent of New Zealand soldiers had contracted VD in England; the real figure was probably twice that. It took ten months of constant agitation by Ettie before the Defence Minister authorized free distribution of the prophylactic kits she had designed. Even then he did not tell the Prime Minister who — after an outcry from the public — had further mention of Ettie banned from the New Zealand press. Undeterred, Ettie moved to Paris where brothels were licensed; with Fred Hornibrook's assistance she persuaded many soldiers to spend their leave there rather than London, met the men off the trains, gave them directions to her approved brothel and set about establishing clubs for the unlicensed 'joy girls'. While her activities were not authorized by the army, they were conducted with the full knowledge of Generals Godley, Richardson and Russell.

Ettie and Fred were married in London in May 1920. They turned their efforts to physical prophylaxis for the civilian population but Ettie now also devoted attention to sexual awareness among married women, and birth control. She worked and corresponded with Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger, though she soon alienated both of them with her tactlessness and inability to admit fault. She may have similarly alienated Fred. While she was in America early in 1935, he formed the relationship which broke up the marriage. In May 1936, Ettie set sail for New Zealand. All the members of her immediate family were dead and she found few of her old friends now shared her values. She committed suicide while on a trip to the Cook Islands on 17 September 1937. The obituaries that appeared were perfunctory and universally coy about the nature of her wartime work.

Like Ettie herself, Jane Tolerton writes with passion and conviction; it is hard to put this book down. Unlike Ettie, however, she has the historian's scrupulous respect for evidence. This book is meticulously researched and documented, though one or two 'good stories' get through the net (like the one about the only soldier who refused Ettie's advice in Paris and — by Ettie's account — suffered just retribution when he became infected). Tolerton situates her subject clearly in contemporary social movements — rationalism, socialism, feminism (of a sort), eugenics, health and fitness. But none of these — separately or together — explains her particular world view. The nearest Tolerton comes to offering a 'key' is her suggestion that Ettie's adoption of freethought was but a short step from her earlier Congregational values (p.32). The link between free religion and freethought deserves further examination, though perhaps not in this book. What could have been added here was that Ettie, in rejecting religious belief, still retained the religious sense of mission, and the intolerant, single-minded conviction of the zealot. Tolerton has certainly not written a hagiography but she is sometimes too gentle and restrained in her assessments. Nevertheless, she provides the warts-and-all evidence in the book for a more critical reading, particularly of the later period when Ettie's judgement was obviously faltering. The analysis of her motives and methods of data collection in *Maori Symbolism*, for example, seems, on the information Tolerton gives us, excessively kind. So too is her discussion of the conflict with Margaret Sanger. Yet Tolerton is right to affirm the courage, humanity and intelligence of a woman whose determination to attain her goal sometimes caused her to be impatient about the means of getting there.

Ettie Rout's story demonstrates the limitations of hegemonic theories of culture. Where the dominant feminist discourse of the early twentieth century was characterized by social purity, Ettie espoused a set of values about sex and society that only became common fare

from the 1960s. Her writing was direct and unadorned, exhibiting none of the circumlocution and 'high diction' common to her contemporaries. Tolerton could have made more of these factors, for it seems to me that Ettie's life signifies a moment when two competing discourses about the body intersected — the idealized chalice or vessel of the spirit envisioned by the social purists, and the medicalized, biological conception of the scientists. Perhaps it was because the New Zealand medical profession was slower than its counterparts elsewhere to propound the strictly medical view of venereal disease that Ettie was so unequivocally designated an outcast. By 1918, Australia's doctors in nearly all the states had brought about legislation redefining venereal diseases as a medical rather than a moral problem, and views like Ettie's were no longer controversial.

Ettie did make some compromises in order to achieve her ends. She had no children of her own but she espoused the current ideal of maternal citizenship and constructed an image of herself as the social mother. She also found it necessary to be married to have credibility as an exponent of ideas about love, sex and child-bearing. Tolerton here confesses some frustration in reconstituting Ettie's life and laments the biographer's difficulty with a subject who leaves no record of motives and feelings. She suggests, however, that Ettie's life was primarily a public one and that she may even have deliberately constructed it that way. It would be interesting to pursue this insight further and look at differences in the ways men and women construct their world views. For women, unlike men, perhaps there is no fundamental dichotomy between the public and the private, the personal and the political. The causes Ettie chose, the relationships she built with soldiers and with her husband were nurturing and maternal ones, and none of the conventional political categories satisfactorily describes her ideas. But these are matters more appropriately taken up in academic journals or seminars for one of the great merits of Tolerton's book is that it is accessible to a wide reading public and, while she alludes to some methodological and conceptual difficulties, she does not interrupt the flow of a compelling narrative.

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Women in History 2. Edited by Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992. 322pp. NZ Price: \$34.95.

FOR THE SECOND TIME Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant have brought together a rich variety of writers and subjects offering valuable, sometimes remarkable, insights into the past experiences of New Zealand women. Clearly the fast-developing fields of feminist theory and the exciting wealth of women's history appearing worldwide have energized New Zealand historians in constructive ways. There is in the pieces clear acknowledgment of intellectual debts to scholars outside the country. At the same time these writers are alert to the specificities of New Zealand women's particular historical situations, and above all remain sensitive to the unexpected in the texts, oral or written, with which they deal. What perhaps draws the various studies together is their authors' display of the multiple ways in which New Zealand women have confronted cultural expectations of proper femininity, of appropriate female behaviour, with compliance or resistance, sometimes with denial and now and then, tragically.