

experiences and achievements. Like *Beyond Expectations* (1986) and *Head and Shoulders* (1986), *Convent Girls* concentrates on women who have succeeded in their chosen careers. The interviewees in this book are all prominent women who were approached by the author to comment on their convent educations because they had mentioned it in the public arena, and include Fran Wilde, Stephanie Dowrick, Ginette McDonald, Pam Corkery, Maggie Barry, and Moana Maniapoto-Jackson, among others. These women do represent a variety of schools, orders, and age groups, but one is left wondering about the fortunes of those women who did not come to the attention of the author. How do they remember their school days with 'the nuns'? What was the effect on their later lives? Moreover, while many of the experiences documented in this volume are particular to a Catholic education — the excitement of one's First Holy Communion, for instance — others could as well apply to pupils of denominational schools, to private girls' schools, to single-sex schools, or even to all schoolgirls of a particular era.

Convent Girls is both a successful explication of the convent girl experience and a fascinating piece of oral history, which will also appeal to an audience beyond those who can claim a similar Catholic heritage. 'The nuns got hold of me when I had just turned four', confessed Germaine Greer, '[and] at that young age I had no chance of turning into anything but a convent girl, and I'm really rather glad'. Despite the misgivings of some of the women in this book, most would agree with Greer's admission, although few are still practising Catholics. The irony is, as Michael King wrote in *Being Pakeha*, 'Whatever one does or believes subsequently, the cultural conditioning of Catholicism, especially Irish Catholicism, has a certain indelibility You can leave the Faith, but does the Faith leave you?'

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Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth, A History of the New Zealand Health Camps. By Margaret Tennant. Bridget Williams Books with the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1994. 295 pp. NZ price: \$34.95. ISBN 0-908912-68-4.

MOST NEW ZEALANDERS have some familiarity with the institution of the health camp: some have been sent there, some worked there, and many more have bought a first day cover at some time in their lives. *Children's Health* provides a comprehensive and fascinating examination of the New Zealand health camp. Margaret Tennant charts the rise of the health camp from voluntary summer camps, in the 1920s and 1930s, to the construction of permanent health camps in the 1940s and 1950s and a position as one of the last bastions of institutional care for children in the late twentieth century.

The health camp movement, like that other longstanding New Zealand organization, the Plunket Society, has come to symbolize New Zealand's commitment to its children. The camps attained a public profile that has remained strong since their inception. They reflect the changing attitudes to child welfare in the twentieth century. The camps began in the eugenicist atmosphere of the 1920s, where the emphasis was on fattening 'stock' (children) for the future, then flourished in the heyday of the welfare state in the 1940s and 1950s. During this period vast numbers of children were processed and cared for, but the size of camps has steadily diminished since 1960. The camps are in an embattled position in the 1990s, when the value of government intervention is being steadily

questioned. Their aim, to help children 'fit' into society and to give them a change for a different kind of life, remains the same despite a change in emphasis from physical to mental health.

In a comprehensive analysis of the forces shaping attitudes to children and child health, Tennant identifies the main factor behind the rise of the health camp as the growing belief that child health was crucial to the 'nation's health' and therefore too important to be left to individual families. This change was not unique to New Zealand but reflected a general concern for children in Western society, as the rise of compulsory education and changes in the needs of the workplace acted to transform the child from an economic asset to a financial liability. It was a change that working class parents resisted, and part of the impetus for health camps came from the need to impose middle-class ideals of childhood onto working-class children. Tennant suggests that the growth of poverty in the late 1980s and early 1990s has reversed these changes; children have recovered some of their lost economic functions, and again act as part-time workers and child minders.

Although international factors were influential, Tennant suggests that the health camp was a peculiarly New Zealand response to a problem. The way in which health camps developed encapsulated the style of welfare provision in New Zealand. It would have been interesting if she had examined why the New Zealand health camp was unique by looking at similar provisions elsewhere. One useful comparison is with the open-air schools in Britain where the emphasis was on fresh air rather than good food as the medium for improving children's health. In New Zealand weight gain was seen as the main criterion by which the success of the camp could be measured.

Originally a voluntary movement, health camps came increasingly under the direction and financial control of the government, as expense escalated and public contributions dwindled. This increasing government control was inevitable in a country without a longstanding philanthropic tradition, but the voluntary ethos continued to pervade the service throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Camps became more standardized and although each continued to maintain an individual character, some of the more extreme idiosyncrasies of the early years disappeared. Health camps emerged as an integral part of the welfare system established by the first Labour government. The legacy of the early pioneers of the movement remained to give the camps a character that seemed somehow removed from mere 'charity'. As a result, the health camp never acquired the same stigma as other institutions, and parents continued to be willing to send their children away to a health camp without having to fear undue social repercussions. Tennant adopts the viewpoint that health camps were generally beneficial for children and their families, and certainly her evidence seems to support this claim. A more critical examination of the ideals behind this socialization of children, however, would have been useful as a balancing exercise.

This book's structure offers a good balance between theoretical considerations, narrative, and the actual experience of working in or being sent to a health camp. The use of personal reminiscences vividly conveys the experiences of the children who were considered sickly or malnourished and sent away to recover. The extensive use of photographs serves a purpose other than mere adornment of the text, conveying much of the character of the health camp.

Theory, politics, and the importance of individual effort are balanced in this thoughtful and lively book. This excellent study makes a valuable contribution to the study of child health in New Zealand, and to the history of New Zealand childhood.

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