

REVIEWS

article to write with insight about the pattern of family life in New Zealand. He thought it significant that although the culture was overtly patriarchal, in fact within the family reality tended to be otherwise. He was observant enough to note that he could not recall 'one significant novel where the European father is treated as the dominating figure in the home, or where a fair degree of tension between the parents is not recorded'. Chapman also noted 'A sour discordant ground-tone in much of New Zealand literature' (and life?) and admitted that novelists tended to focus on rebels, loners and those at odds with authority. So what's new?

It was as a political commentator to a generation — on television as well as in the printed word — that Chapman was most well known and will be most remembered. Given that ours is an intimate democracy — we have only two degrees of separation rather than the proverbial six — we have been blessed by the wisdom, common sense and larger vision of some of our earlier masters of the small screen — John Roberts, Austin Mitchell, Reggie Harrison, Robert Chapman and a few others. They reminded us of our better selves. Chapman mastered the minutiae of electoral returns and the detail of polling booths and he was fascinated by the machinery of democracy. He never lost sight, however, of what it was all really about: 'The possibility here of a truly human ease and depth of living, and an attack on the distortions produced by an irrelevant puritanism of misplaced demands and guilts'.

I am delighted to have this collection of Chapman's ruminations bound in a single volume. Over a long and thoughtful life he has been a true scholar in the sense that he has given himself time to think before committing words to paper. For that reason, as much as for the quality of his mind, his writings have a continuing relevance as we wrestle with the shared task of forging a meaningful collective identity, a humane and civilized society, and a fair and just polity.

Aristotle's *Politics* is thought to be a compilation of his lecture notes. This book is a compilation of the most timeless of Chapman's published pieces. I'll warrant that generations of students who passed through his classes will recognize recurring themes of enduring questions, values and beliefs. Chapman served his students memorably, and in bringing together this compilation of his writings, McLeay has gifted all engaged citizens.

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Christchurch Changing: An Illustrated History. By Geoffrey W. Rice with Jean Sharfe. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 1999. 172 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 0-908812-53-1.

AT THE END of his introduction to *Historic Christchurch: a Walking Tour*, John Wilson admitted that, notwithstanding everything that he had said, he imagined that his readers would be left with the impression of an English city of grey stone buildings. Despite the wonderful picture of the statue of a po-faced Godley bound neck and foot to the back of a truck making its way across Cathedral Square, that, too, is Geoffrey Rice's verdict on a city that he feels 'has the charm and convenience of an English town'.

Christchurch Changing is the popular market's share of the 1993 'Christchurch 2000 History Project'. Stablemate *Southern Capital*, John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall's collection of scholarly essays, will cater for the academic market. Behind the scenes, the Christchurch 2000 History Project has created an electronic database of books, articles

and theses on Christchurch's history and an accompanying Historic Photo Search has captured the photographic record.

Rice defined his ground carefully. This is an illustrated history. The text must be able to stand alone as a reliable narrative of major events and the larger developments that made the city. It does. Eight clearly labelled chapters take the reader through the city's history at a quick, amiable gallop. If Rice sometimes wags his forebears, he is nevertheless whiggishly at home in Vicki Buck's 'let's get on and do it' city of the late 1990s. *Christchurch Changing* serves up most of what you would expect to find in a conventional city history: the international and national milestones that buffeted Christchurch (the wars, recessions, new technologies, migration flows) as well as those of importance to Christchurch alone. In the second category are Lyttelton's 'great snow' of 1895, the 1906 international exhibition, electric tramways, Ballantyne's fire and the 1974 Commonwealth Games.

Christchurch Changing succeeds in meeting the author's aims better than books like the *Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, which was really an essay collection accompanied by photographic decorations. You can read either text or photographs and captions independently and gain a fair idea of the author's intentions. As with the text, the design is conservative and crisp, appealing to the eye. The large format paperback is about half text, half photographs. The printers have reproduced the photographs sharply and at a reasonable size, generally half-page size or larger.

A few of these images have been trotted out a little too often for my liking: Dr Barker's posed portrait 'The Argument' with James Edward FitzGerald stagily wagging his finger at smug, well-fed William Rolleston and the hoary old 'Government Standard Influenza Medicine Depot' of 1918 spring to mind. But others are fresh and illuminating. In the later chapters Rice draws on the *Christchurch Star* archive to include the service stations and suburban shopping malls that brought the late twentieth-century sprawl of suburbs such as Hallswell. Rice does not inject the bouncy jocularity of a Stephen Barnett or David Johnson into the captions, but he nevertheless competently handles that most difficult and underrated art, caption-writing.

What we do not see changing are the people of Christchurch. Their leaders are there. The 'head and shoulders' photographs down the margins feature plenty of big noises. We get authors (Glover roguishly posing with toy sailboat; Ngaio Marsh, fag in hand, striking a dramatic pose), sportspeople (Anthony Wilding, Sir Richard Hadlee), politicians (John Hall, George Forbes, Norm Kirk, and mayors whether important or not) as well as the 'personalities' (Ettie Rout, the Wizard). Rice comments knowledgeably about the elements of the streetscapes, the buildings coming and going, the electric trams and the picture palaces, but the world of dress, food, domestic appliances and cash registers is a closed book to him. There are a few revealing interior photographs, such as the Londontown Drapery in Colombo Street in the 1920s, the twee Quality Inn Tearooms in the 1930s, or a soulless suburban booze-barn of the 1960s, but the interiors of Christchurch's houses and work places are not shown over time. In the preface Rice explains that only a small selection of the photographs rounded up in the Historic Photo Search could be included in this book 'as the great majority were domestic rather than public in nature'. That is both curious and unfortunate. Granted, interior shots are hard to find for the early period, but just a smattering of twentieth-century holiday snaps, domestic photographs or school sports over time would have added a valuable human face to the book. If only we could have been able to peer behind those twitching curtains in Hoon Hay, or, heaven forbid, Fendalton.

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