

The Josephite congregations grew out of a plan concocted in South Australia by a pious but resolute young woman named Mary McKillop and an intellectually gifted priest named Julian Tenison Woods. Their idea was to found an order of nuns, the Sisters of St Joseph, to provide a Catholic education for poor children living in small, scattered communities. That was accomplished in 1866, and met with marked success. In 1872 they expanded to the Bathurst diocese of New South Wales. Then a schism occurred. Were the Sisters to have as their primary superior the bishop of the diocese or the Mother General of the order? It is a classic problem. (Suzanne Aubert also encountered it.) The Bathurst community opted for the former arrangement. Accordingly, they split with McKillop, and later adopted a black habit, in contrast to her 'Brown Joes'.

It was from Bathurst that the Sisters came to New Zealand in 1880, where they soon became a major presence in the Wellington diocese. From their base in Wanganui, where they had eight foundations by 1942, they spread mainly through southern Taranaki and Hawke's Bay and up to Ohakune. The 253 women who made this growth possible helped make the local convent school an influential element in the social landscape of small-town New Zealand. There Catholic children acquired religious knowledge with their education, and there children of all denominations were taught music and elocution and art. If not of the world, the Sisters were firmly in it.

In telling their story Strevens identifies them individually (the last recruit joined in 1977) and describes their conditions of life. She also explains the evolution and organizational structure of their religious congregation, paying particular attention to the way it responded to and was affected by the tsunami politely known as Vatican II. Moreover, the text is enhanced by clear maps and tables and by many illustrations so that narrative and analysis are well balanced and reader-friendliness is ensured. If there is anything to quibble about it is Strevens's use of the politically loaded and etymologically false neologism 'Aotearoa-New Zealand'. That term is not one for scholars. Her book is, though.

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Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna: The Illustrated Biography. By Geoffrey W. Rice. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2001. 383 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-877257-03-6.

ROBERT HEATON RHODES had a long life (1861–1956), an unusually large portion of it spent in the public eye. His father, who bore the same name, was one of three brothers who were among the earliest settlers in the South Island, having arrived in Canterbury and jointly established estates on Banks Peninsula before the coming of the first four ships of the Canterbury Association. Their partnership (says Geoffrey Rice) was 'very successful'. Each made a fortune from wool exports, town supply and land speculation, actualizing the dictum of which Gary Hawke has long reminded us, that those in the beginnings of the colonial pastoral economy had a head start on the highway to wealth.

Consequently, when the father of Heaton Rhodes died in 1884, the son inherited a landed estate, which made him, according to Rice, 'one of the wealthiest young men in Canterbury, if not New Zealand'. At the time he was in the midst of an extended sojourn in England where he acquired a public school and Oxford education and was called to

the Bar. On his return to New Zealand, he did not practise law. Blessed with a splendid fortune, he did not need to.

Yet his was not the leisurely life of a rentier. Shortly after his return, he bought a farm just south of Christchurch, building there a fine 40-room house named 'Otahuna', where he installed his new wife. In time the homestead grounds, spectacularly planted with trees and gardens, became a byword in horticultural circles. But this was no 'fancy farm'. Rhodes shrewdly employed able farm managers and staff who ensured that, through wool and stock-breeding, the estate always more than paid its way. Heaton Rhodes died a very wealthy man.

It was towards the public sphere, however, not into money-making, that Rhodes channelled his abundant energies. In earlier life he made his mark as a fine horseman and sportsman, and long-serving cavalry officer who saw service in the South African War. Latterly he intensified his efforts in many community activities, above all as a generous philanthropist, sometimes giving by stealth.

In 1899 he entered politics as an MHR. As Rice admits, he spoke little in the House and was an ineffectual debater. In 1912, Massey appointed him to his first Reform Cabinet, perhaps unfairly looking on him as a makeweight. Rhodes was not invited to be part of the wartime coalition government in 1915. But over 1920–1925, he held Cabinet rank once again. As a minister he was notable for his tireless attention to departmental affairs, and his loyalty (not always fully appreciated) to the premier whom he served.

These details Rice carefully lays before us in the way that we have learned to expect from the meticulous editor of *The Oxford History of New Zealand*. But that said, we are obliged to ask the question, of which, it seems, Rice himself was not unmindful: why a book of such length? Though not of the doorstep dimensions of some recent American biographies, this is an immensely detailed book, longer than, for example, Jeanine Graham's *Frederick Weld*, Raewyn Dalziel's *Julius Vogel*, or Michael Bassett's *Sir Joseph Ward* — all public figures of considerably greater stature than Rhodes. The justification for so extended a treatment is, I believe, twofold. Either, the author is bale to use the life of his subject as a vehicle to carry to us the social character and mentality of a significant social group to which that subject belonged, or perhaps to bring to us an understanding of the general context of the times of which he was a part. Only for the 1920s does Rice really succeed in using Rhodes's life to illuminate a distinctive decade. Elsewhere we are left with a sense of the particularity of Rhodes. The other justification for an extended investigation of the life of a lesser figure is that the biography enables us to traverse what J.J. Saunders once referred to as the battlefields of the soul. Through aspects of that individual life — ambitions, personal dilemmas, the gap between profession and performance, and so forth — we encounter issues of abiding interest and concern to all humankind. But to this, as Rice ruefully conceded, the Rhodes biography did not lend itself. On the old man's death his most personal papers were consigned to a bonfire. Too often, therefore, was Rice forced to resort to unprofitable speculation as to probabilities and possibilities such as 'Rhodes must have thought'; 'Rhodes must have feared'; 'we do not know . . . but something happened to change Massey's attitude'.

We are left with the impression that regardless of these lacunae, Rice was confident that Canterbury readers would be grateful for a detailed reconstruction of the life of a venerated colonist and philanthropist. If this surmise is correct, then Rice has succeeded in providing an exhaustive account, supplemented by many fine illustrations.

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