

A Sort of Conscience: The Wakefields. By Philip Temple. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2002. 584 pp. NZ price: \$69.95. ISBN 1-86940-276-6.

MY FIRST REACTION when asked to review this book was to ask myself, 'is another book on Edward Gibbon Wakefield (EGW) really necessary, can more be wrung from that proverbial "thrice squeezed orange"?' And, if so, need the book be of such length? What Philip Temple establishes in *A Sort of Conscience* is that the answer to these questions must surely be 'yes' and 'yes'.

Because here is a 'panoramic book' (the publisher's term) this review will limit itself to its more striking features. First, the underlying argument. While conceding that the lives of almost the whole of the Wakefield family revolved around the career of 'its most dynamic individual', EGW himself, Temple believes that, in turn, the career of the great colonial reformer can be explained only when placed in the setting of the collective lives of members of the family. The result is a close consideration of the life story of certain dominating Wakefield figures. We learn of Priscilla, EGW's radical Quaker grandmother, whose influence spanned generations, of whom hitherto most of us have known nothing. And there is the anatomization of EGW of course, his brothers William and Arthur, and his son Edward Jerningham (Teddy) about each of whom, after reading this book we must admit that we knew far less than we imagined.

The Wakefields were a dysfunctional family, although Temple carefully does not introduce this concept until the close of the book lest we prejudge its members. In guarded fashion, too, after tracing the disruptive upbringing of a number of them, he leaves open the question of whether their subsequent aberrations were derived from nature or nurture; an interesting speculation in the case of the precociously talented but louche Teddy.

What is not left in doubt is that the defining influence on the prospects of the family was the marital record of EGW. First in sequence was the deviously contrived elopement with Eliza Pattle in 1816, followed by EGW's efforts to wrest the best of all possible marriage settlements from this escapade. But the machinations that lay behind this elopement must also be seen as a kind of dry run, for five years after Eliza's early death, came the much greater scandal, the unscrupulous abduction of the fifteen-year-old heiress Ellen Turner, in the execution of which EGW entangled his brother William.

Wakefield's arrest, conviction, and three-year incarceration in Newgate prison, in Temple's view, 'fractured the family and ruined their reputation'. EGW's notoriety blighted not only his own prospects but those of the whole family as well. Yet this latter-day Machiavel, seemingly so much a law unto himself was, as he once revealingly admitted to his sister Priscilla, not without a 'sort of conscience'. Not egotism, but probably a contrite awareness of the damage he had done to the prospects of his family lay behind his anxiety to recompense its members by involving them in his colonizing schemes in New Zealand.

Showing an admirable sense of context and milieu, Temple then goes on to demonstrate how the characters of the Wakefield brothers were shaped long before they came to New Zealand, and how much of their behaviour in the colony flowed from this background. The great formative influence in the life of William Wakefield before he took up the position of principal agent for the New Zealand Company in the colony was his service as a mercenary army officer between 1832 and 1837. Those were the years when for the first and probably the only time in his life he truly fulfilled himself, first in the Braganza dynastic disputes of Portugal, then in the Carlist wars of Spain. Much of his later behaviour in the Company settlements reflected this unusual background. The colonelcy he won on the Iberian Peninsula may have been regarded by some establishment figures as irregular, but his bravery and capacity to command were never in question. Nevertheless, Temple implies that William defies full characterization. A man of deep reserve with a carefully concealed inner life, he was probably in the last resort unknowable.

Not so his older brother Arthur. His was a stable integrated personality. A courageous and industrious Royal Navy officer, he was able to sustain (as few of his fellow officers did) virtually continuous fulltime service between 1810 and 1837. Yet, like so many of the Wakefields, he ended up as the odd man out. Unlike his siblings, he was set apart in his chosen calling not by any moral shortcoming but by his Evangelical beliefs and his alcohol-free convictions which must have seemed chillingly censorious to fellow officers in the navy of Patrick O'Brien's era. This together with a lack of patronage appeared to have shut him off from the promotion to which his exemplary record should surely have entitled him. Given a new start by EGW, as leader of the Nelson settlement, Captain Arthur Wakefield was predictably conscientious and dutiful in his new post. His tragedy was to bend to the importunate demands of landless settlers in Nelson by attempting to settle the disputed Wairau area. The upshot was the infamous affray in which 26 lives were lost including that of Arthur himself.

But this book inevitably stands or falls by its treatment of EGW, an abiding presence whether in the forefront of the action or lurking behind the scenes, propagandizing, manipulating, and pulling strings. In a book unpeopled by heroes and villains, Temple is anxious to show EGW exactly as he was; as a kind of flawed genius. Is genius too strong a term? I think not. It is Temple's regret that whereas EGW's contemporaries tended to 'overpraise him, or condemn him out of hand', today 'his doubtful morals have made him the perfect fall guy for the evils of colonisation'. That is well said. In his own day EGW resented both the reluctance to recognize his contribution to colonization over many years, and (conversely) the pirating of his ideas without acknowledgment. In 1848, he wrote that he wished to 'claim my own' and not 'by halves'. He continued: 'Many, doubtless have shared my labours, and done much independently of me; but more have made profit and reputation out of my slavery without offering me a share'. While not unmindful of the shortcomings of Wakefield's theories, the most notorious of which was the blind disregard of the rights of aboriginal people, Temple presents Wakefield as a great innovator in the cognate fields of economic and colonial theory. By so doing Temple is in good company. Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, two philosophical giants of the nineteenth century, thought so too.

Though extremely well informed on Wakefield and his circle, Temple's grasp of the broad sweep of the history of colonial New Zealand is in places less than secure. While he is judiciously even-handed when dealing with the issues and personalities of the Cook Strait area, his touch becomes less sure as he moves north towards the early capital. For instance, his assessment of Hobson, William Swainson, Shortland and the CMS tends to be partial, in both senses of that word. Henry Williams emerges as a rather two-dimensional figure. Surely, he was abler than Temple indicates? In the early years of colonization, Williams probably understood the motives of both Maori and settlers better than anyone else in New Zealand. In his own generation Henry Williams (a Trollopean Reverend Quiverful if ever there was one) was condemned for buying Maori land for his numerous sons. Today apparently he is not to be forgiven for his imperfect translation into Maori of the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi. Unpopular though the suggestion may be, has not the time come for us to see Williams as we must see Edward Gibbon Wakefield, in the round?

But these are minor misgivings that I must voice without in any way detracting unnecessarily from what is, all things considered, a splendid book. *A Sort of Conscience* is as readable as any good novel — perhaps family saga would be a more accurate term. There is a strong narrative line, the flow of which is never broken by psychological excursions or historiographical detours. The author gives abundant evidence to help general readers to make their own judgements. To satisfy the specialist who expects conclusions, however tentative, he gives an admirable final summation in the form of an epilogue.

A Sort of Conscience is stylishly written, exhaustively researched and pleasing in format. It is the most satisfying monograph on New Zealand history I have read over the last five years or so.

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Treasury: The New Zealand Treasury, 1840–2000. By Malcolm McKinnon. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2003. 526 pp., NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-86940-296-0.

IN TELLING THE STORY of New Zealand's Treasury, Malcolm McKinnon takes a sensible two-pronged approach: first, to show a government department's progression from a band of clerks, to accountants, to economists, to economic advisers; then secondly, to try to assess the contribution of the Treasury, as an institution and as a collection of individuals, to the economic history of New Zealand.

The result is a large volume that will provide historians with a useful reference for understanding the Treasury's changing character from colonial times to the present day. Its division of the story into three parts is logical. The nineteenth-century Treasury was primarily a counting house run by 'clerks', distant from any decision making role. From around 1910 the 'accountants' came to the fore and the department became involved in financial management. Investigating officers helped the government control expenditure. Then, from the time of Bernard Ashwin's tenure as Treasury Secretary (1939–1955), the 'economists' began to predominate in substance, if not in numbers. The first of these economists, heavily influenced by Keynes, were interventionist, the more recent group were intimately involved in New Zealand's reforms.

McKinnon's book summarizes Treasury insights into many of the key issues in the nation's economic history, and, in the later stages, adds some useful oral history to the record. One suspects, however, on the latter point that the transcripts of McKinnon's full interviews, if they exist, could be enlightening to future historians. There are moments of humour, such as Thomas Wilford, the High Commissioner in London, recounting the tale that the British government had 'consulted six of the world's greatest economists and received seven opinions — two of which came from Keynes', but for the most part the book reads a bit like a Treasury report. McKinnon's determination to be non-judgemental drains the life from a saga that raises passions in the ordinary heart.

One Treasury report from 1970 stated the obvious about the New Zealand economy then: 'the absence of effective competition for many classes of goods has erected an environment which has reduced employer resistance to attempts by unions to exploit more vigorously than in the past the shortage of labour' (p.257). The leading hands at Treasury were among the 'guilty men' who offered no resistance to the three big federations — farmers, manufacturers and labour — and did little to stem New Zealand's relative economic decline for a couple of decades. And yet there is no detailed explanation for the lack of rigour that was the hallmark of Treasury at that time. Why was there so little intelligent analysis of the issues the country was facing, for so long? Nor is there a deep insight into the increasingly fierce internal battles within Treasury that raged from the late 1970s. *Treasury* tells the story of the development of a think tank within the Treasury, Economics II, the new thinking that people like Graham Scott, Rob Cameron and Roger Kerr introduced and the debates that ensued. But there is little sense of the passion or of the deep inter-generational divide that arose around the 'Think Big' programme, for example.

McKinnon struggles with the fundamental issue that at the heart of the latter part of the story: exactly how influential was the Treasury in the key economic decisions taken