

*The Making of the Australian Constitution.* By J. A. La Nauze. Melbourne University Press. 1972. xi, 369 pp. Australian price: \$15.

TO WRITE an interesting book, not about a federal political movement, but about the detailed process of drafting and revising a federal constitution, might well seem one of the most difficult tasks that an historian could face. Professor La Nauze has succeeded. His book is as lively, amusing, witty and interesting to people who would read such books as it could be. He has managed to recapture something of the excitement of moving motions, revising clauses, recording minutes, speech-making and infighting which is part of most committee work, yet which almost always entirely escapes outsiders. Academics are supposed to be unworldly men. Yet it is hard not to believe that the author's judiciousness, the worldly wisdom (for instance in the comments on the failings of Barton and others, or on the formal recognition of God) arise from his academic life. Academics often know more about committee-work, board meetings, and draft clauses and printers' proofs than businessmen or politicians suppose.

Professor La Nauze is incredibly thorough. The precise origin and intent of few phrases in the Australian constitution can have escaped him. Nor does the height, weight, appearance or age of the constitution-makers ('The Constitution emerged from the labours of an overwhelming majority of hairy men'). Nor does the precise salary of the charwomen who worked for the Convention. Nor does Barton's 'providential catarrh' on 13 April 1891. His quick pen portraits of a large number of men are very well done.

On most matters of note or debate concerning the drafting of the constitution, this will remain the authoritative work for a great many years. It is a masterly performance in lucid prose.

Large sections of *The Making of the Australian Constitution* are necessarily of chief interest to Australians. But it has a wider and (British) Commonwealth interest, for the Australians were the first English-speaking and white colonial nationalists to appear in the modern British Empire. That some of their leaders, in the 1890s, wanted 'absolute legislative independence for Australia as far as it could possibly exist consistent with allegiance to the Crown, and also consistent with the power of the Imperial Parliament to legislate for the whole Empire' was important beyond Australia.

New Zealand appears briefly and little. Professor La Nauze rightly does not take seriously talk that it might have joined. Captain Russell thought that Sir John Hall and he were 'undoubtedly of the best social status of them all'. Perhaps he meant 'genteel'? At the end Seddon and Reeves tried to get the British so to amend the constitution that New Zealand would reserve a right to join on the original terms. The New Zealanders lined up with the British in (an insulting) distrust of Australian judges in matters involving non-Australian investors. On this matter (concerning appeals to the Privy Council), La Nauze is justifiably tough. Chamberlain, he writes, presumably 'judged other men by his own standards, for example those applied in his dealings with the Jameson raid and its aftermath'.

Am I right in detecting an asperity, too, in the comment on p. 85, and repeated on p. 226, that W. H. Mercer, who in a Colonial Office minute referred to 'a federation of colonies *inter se*' (a phrase later occasioning much dispute), did so because, having been exposed to classics at school and university, he could assume that 'bits of Latin would not be incomprehensible to his similarly educated superiors'? If so, it is oddly acceptable on p. 101 for an Oxford-educated Australian to quote a bit of French. Not that Professor La Nauze is ever guilty of *bêtises, per se*.

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*The Straits Settlements 1826-67. Indian Presidency to Crown Colony.* By C. M. Turnbull. University of London, Athlone Press, 1972. 428 pp., maps. U.K. price: £5.50.

IN RECENT years several works have amplified our knowledge of the Malay states before the British 'intervention' of the 1870s. But it seems that none has concentrated on the general development of the Straits Settlements, Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, since the publication of L. A. Mills's *British Malaya* in 1925. Dr Turnbull's long-awaited book is the more welcome. It provides an excellent treatment of the Settlements in the period before their transfer from India Office to Colonial Office control in 1867. Her account is divided into a number of sections — dealing with the 'immigrant society', the structure of government, the economy, health, poverty and education, defence, piracy, the relations with the Peninsular states — and in almost all of them she offers some new perception or some new detail, based on wide reading in the official archives, particularly those in Singapore, on unprecedentedly extensive use of the local newspapers, and on access to some private collections, such as the papers of Sir Charles Wood.

In treating the 'immigrant society', for instance, Dr Turnbull observes the difference between the European community of the early days, returning to England only on retirement, small, bachelor-dominated, hospitable, free-and-easy; and the later more middle-class, more domestic, more 'British' community: 'the passing of the early, informal days when wealth, race and colour were of little account' (p. 30). Many Chinese, she points out, did not return to China, as they hoped, three or four years after their arrival, but they did return eventually: 'there were few elderly Chinese to be seen in Singapore, even in the last few years of Indian rule' (p. 36). In dealing with piracy, as another example, Dr Turnbull justifiably appears to amend my date for the Temenggong's mending his ways: she places that significant event in 1843-4 (p. 249). Her account of relations with the Malay states perhaps misses some points. Cavenagh's successful attempts to woo young Abu Bakar should perhaps be put into the context of relations between Johore and Pahang and form part of the description of the shift in policy