

Thirteen Facets: The Silver Jubilee Essays surveying the New Elizabethan Age, a Period of Unprecedented Change. Edited by Ian Wards. Government Printer, Wellington, 1978. 388pp. N.Z. price: \$13.95.

FOR a literary event of national importance this volume of essays appears to have a curiously parochial foundation. At least we may legitimately express surprise that virtually all of 'the fourteen New Zealanders most qualified' to discuss developments since 1952 have strong connections with Wellington. But there must be some other reason for the tone of dullness and propriety with which the country hereby celebrates the Queen's silver jubilee.

The chapters on constitutional change, women, education and science are solid and not without interest. W.H. Oliver's look at social history presents an argument which could make the author one of the few historians to free himself from the wreck of the Whig ship 'Leftward Progress' (though he gets tangled in nostalgia for the wasted Holyoake years). Other essays are less enlightening. The one on the Maori people has useful statistics on land incorporations but is badly packaged and contains chunks of embarrassing irrelevance. Writing about the economy, an ex-Governor of the Reserve Bank, lately earning upwards of \$30,000 a year, exhorts New Zealanders to exercise greater self-restraint in their quest to make ends meet.

The book is redeemed by Mary Ronnie and P.S. O'Connor with a splendid analysis of local government. In a striking confirmation of the lower-middle class localism which characterizes the country's history, they point out that after the war there existed 700 local authorities for a population of one and a half million. They also illuminate what seems to be a feature of the New Zealand political process — the spawning of a multitude of institutions which are then inadequately staffed or funded. A scholarly piece, it is nonetheless written with refreshing humour: 'Many small rabbit boards were as expensive to run as they were harmless to the pests they were supposed to eradicate.' Arguably the best chapter, in a volume which stresses change, it indicates that progress in local government reform has been sluggish.

Some of the unprecedented changes examined elsewhere in the book do seem superficial — television, higher divorce rates, a home-grown opera. By contrast it would be a simple matter to draw up a list of continuities more fundamental in nature. What Oliver calls the 'knee-jerk consensuality' of the sixties has not all been lost, certainly, for example, on questions of trade union militancy and immigration. In politics communists are still credited with enormous influence; the present Prime Minister, it might be said is merely a Seddon writ large; and by all accounts unseemly behaviour still pervades Parliament and the cabinet room. New Zealand can still be considered a cultural dependency, and it still has class without class-consciousness. On racial matters New Zealanders have continued to believe that race is a small problem which can be kept in its place. In many of its basic continuities the country has had more in common with other sub-rural white settler communities (South Africa, South Australia and South Dakota) than almost anywhere else one can think of.

The one major change missing from the book is the rise of nativism. The importance of being a 'real New Zealander' grew in the wake of the second world war. It has been heightened by the demise of guaranteed butter sales and the collapse of the British empire as a limited context for the cultivation of international esteem. And now the editor of *Thirteen Facets* seriously detects a new

Elizabethan tradition burning brightly in the Antipodes, with its own Burghley (Holyoake), Cranmer (Marshall) and second Cecil (Kirk). It would be sensible to overlook such crassness were it not indicative of noteworthy phenomenon. The national vice of bombast inflates a pokey airport coffee bar into 'The Flight Deck Restaurant Lounge', an opponent into 'a traitor', and three frigates into the new Elizabethan navy. A choice architectural example appears late in this book: 'The subtlety of their proportions, the careful use of materials, the profound considerations given to landscape conjured up a paradigm of great simplicity, content, and splendour'. The structure being referred to is the average wooden box that most New Zealanders live in. Or does the author deliberately employ hyperbole? If so he is exceptional. For on the whole the book lacks a sense of proportion. With one or two exceptions, the contributors do not stand back and chuckle at the pretensions. Readers will be reminded of something which has persisted in New Zealand life — a staid, pedestrian, colonial earnestness.

M.C. PUGH

Massey University

Archives in New Zealand: A Report. By Wilfred I. Smith. Archives and Records Association of New Zealand, Wellington, 1978. 50pp. N.Z. price: \$2.00.

IN an interview in Auckland shortly after his arrival in New Zealand to report on the country's archives Dr Wilfred Smith, Dominion Archivist of Canada, appears to have said that New Zealand was 'one of the few Western countries with the foresight and imagination to co-ordinate its preservation of historical records', and that his report 'would provide a national development plan to show how archives could be used most efficiently with the limited money available.'¹ At the time he looked to be giving the game away before it had begun. The published report does little to alter that impression. Dr Smith makes a number of practical recommendations, especially with regard to National Archives, but nothing he says is new and he says it in terms of such soothing blandness that the impact is negligible.

At the Archives and Records Association seminar, 'Perspectives on the Smith Report', held in Wellington on 4 September 1978, an administrator in National Archives' own Department of Internal Affairs said: 'Legislators must be convinced that archives warrant a higher priority in the allocation of resources. There must be a clear demonstration of their value.'² But there was no suggestion that the department should participate in this demonstration, only an unerring passing of the buck to the Archives and Records Association. Has the role assumed by ARANZ in sponsoring the report been self-defeating? A report commissioned by government could hardly have been more gently worded than this one. Could a

¹ *New Zealand Herald*, Auckland, 11 February 1978, p.2; also *ibid.*, 6 March 1978, leading article.

² *Archifacts*, Nos 7-8 n.s. (September - December 1978), 31.