

more studies of the writings of the early teachers and a history of the curriculum before we can be certain. *Colonial Cap and Gown* will remain a useful starting point for future research, but in failing to complete its promising task, the book does not allow us to go far beyond the existing institutional histories in answering these fundamental questions.

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'This Sin and Scandal': Australia's Population Debate 1891-1911. By Neville Hicks. Australian National University Press, Canberra, A.C.T. and Norwalk, Conn., 1978. xvii, 208pp., figures, illustrated. Australian price: \$13.50 cloth, \$7.95 paper.

IF ONLY Dr Hicks had been given the job of chairing the Royal Commission which is the main subject of his book! When Sir John See, the premier of New South Wales, decided in 1903 to hold a Royal Commission into the decline in the birth-rate his motives were probably not those of a genuine inquirer. Nevertheless he did present the eleven men originally appointed to the Commission a marvellous opportunity to illuminate a demographic revolution. In Australia as in other parts of the Western world a fertility transition was in progress. An Australian woman who began her childbearing in 1903 was likely as not to have four children; her grandmother would probably have had at least seven. Why and how was the transition made? Sadly See chose Charles Kinnaird Mackellar, physician and company director, to chair the Commission. Dr Mackellar lacked just those necessary qualities of open-mindedness, intellectual rigour and competence in demographic techniques displayed by Dr Hicks.

'This Sin and Scandal' demonstrates how Mackellar botched the inquiry he dominated, or, more accurately, how he refused to make an inquiry. No attempt was made to survey family planning practices. There was no adequate investigation of whether a decline in a couple's standard of living, or a threatened decline, affected their thinking about desirable family size. This was all the more surprising since one of the appointees to the Commission, T.A. Coghlan, had for some years been accustomed to draw a connection between the birth-rate and the economy. Nor, apparently, was there any interest on Mackellar's part in whether changing educational practices were increasing the costs of having a large family. Tendentious questioning of witnesses was the rule. At least one witness—Cardinal Moran of all people—was told the answers he might properly make. The Commission brushed aside the evidence of the Victorian statistician, William McLean, who denied that new contraceptive techniques had played any significant role in reducing the birth-rate during the nineties. Nothing was allowed to disturb the assumption that selfishness was breeding smaller families. Women and the lower orders were especially to blame.

This moralism vitiates the value of the Commission's report for the demographic historian. The same is true to a lesser extent of the volume of non-

statistical evidence taken by the Commission. Neville Hicks deserved something better because it was only after some smart detective work that he was able to examine a copy; the limited number of copies printed were suppressed and previously thought to be lost. The very success with which he demonstrated the shortcomings of the Commission denied him the possibility of using its work to explain the vexed problem of fertility transition. For Dr Hicks, the demographer, it must have been very frustrating.

There is much in this book, however, for the social historian. The connections between the Sydney business and medical elite manifested in the appointees to the Commission are startling. Also of interest is the picture of conservative values reasserting themselves under stress: attachment to the family, to religion, to rural virtue and to white civilization consorted with commitment to a high birth-rate. Yet within a decade of the report, all but one of the men behind it had quietly dropped the crusade against contraception. Even the opinionated Dr Mackellar was not so foolish as to swim against such a powerful social tide.

While the main strength of the book is in its critique of the Commission, it also surveys other opinions about Australia's population problems. Dr Hicks is stretching a word in calling these opinions collectively a debate. There was little intellectual engagement, much less any attempt to develop a theory about what was happening. Why this was so is a question this book raises but does not pretend to answer. It was certainly not because Australians were totally isolated from overseas discussion. It is one of the many virtues of his book that Dr Hicks has taken care to establish what people were reading and he demonstrates that the works of the leading European writers were available to those who wanted to be informed.

Was this absence of debate, combined with access to overseas writing, also true of New Zealand? Was there also in this country a phalanx of conservative doctors and businessmen who cried woe and destruction as the crude birth-rate fell further, and at times faster, than in Australia? Or was there less agitation because the yellow peril was less feared or because the cities were smaller and less threatening to rural ideals associated with the large family? Did the decline in the birth-rate lead as in Australia to a compensating determination to care more effectively for the fewer babies that were conceived? Anybody concerned to explore New Zealand's social history might well profit from this fine book. For extra measure, the illustrations will divert and delight.

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