

And Captain of Their Souls. An Interpretative Essay on the Life and Times of Captain William Cargill. By Tom Brooking. Otago Heritage Books, Dunedin, 1984. 167 pp. N.Z. price: \$29.95.

TOM BROOKING has carefully subtitled his study of the life and times of Captain William Cargill 'An interpretative essay. . . .', thus indicating that his task was to bring out the meaning, rather than to provide a definitive account, of early Otago and its leading settler. This intention absolves Brooking from some of the responsibility of the historian who sets out to discover, understand and tell all; but it also places a heavy responsibility on him to explain what Cargill and Otago were about.

It should be said at the outset that this sort of essay is probably the most we will ever have on Cargill. It is highly unlikely that a full length biography could, or should, be written. The source materials do not seem to be available and Cargill appears to be of real interest only from 1842, when he became involved in the scheme to establish a Scottish settlement in New Zealand at nearly fifty-eight years of age. Up to that time we have only brief details — his great-grandfather's religious activities, William's date of birth, parentage, when and where he went to school, an apprenticeship as a weaver (surmised from army records), eighteen years in the army in India, Spain, Scotland and Ireland, marriage, resignation of his commission, failure as a wine merchant, and survival as a banker. Further research in Scotland and England may reveal more details but seems unlikely to bestow on Cargill's early career much more significance than does the recital of facts.

Brooking briefly rehearses the known facts of Cargill's pre-Otago life, placing them in context with material on the church and education in late-eighteenth century Scotland and the story of regimental exploits. He details the long and complicated story of the Otago Association, travels with the first two emigrant ships to Otago, examines the social and economic structure of the settlement and explores the politics of Otago as they were shaped and dominated by Cargill on both the local and national stage. Finally — and this is where there is the most extensive 're-interpretation' — he sympathetically and fairly examines Cargill's place in history.

The contours of Cargill's life are already well known from the work of A. H. McLintock. Brooking takes North Islanders to task on page 146 for their lack of awareness of the contribution made by southerners to the richness of New Zealand history. But surely this is the contribution of a former North Islander now living in the deep South. What northern historian, even the most prejudiced Aucklander, can be unaware of the history of Otago which has been told and re-told, often extraordinarily well and with meticulous scholarship, by its historians, amateur and professional? Auckland and Wellington are both far less well endowed with published histories than Otago or Canterbury.

Here and there Brooking has re-evaluated Cargill's contribution to Otago history. He has put more emphasis on Cargill's persistence as the significant factor in bringing the Otago scheme to fruition, rethought his role in the nightmarish tangle of Otago land policy, explored his thinking on the morally redemptive force of emigration, and unshackled him from the much more rigid Burns, who was the religious leader of the settlement. Cargill's relationship with the Anglican 'Little Enemy' and his own relatives, notably W. H. Cutten, is re-interpreted.

The most interesting chapters deal with the voyage to New Zealand and the social and economic structure of the new settlement. In the latter chapters Brooking has

made good use of Otago University students' research essays and theses, a number of them written under his supervision. He is able to put the record straight about the social and religious composition of the settlement (e.g. about the proportion of Free Church adherents among the emigrants). The voyage chapter is a particularly interesting, detailed account of the vicissitudes of sailing from Britain to New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century.

Brooking has made Cargill far more accessible than before. From the fanciful opening, the book continues to be written in a breezy way which makes it a pleasure to read. The breeziness, however, sometimes leads him into slips, verbal and other. For instance it is difficult to see why the *note* on page 25 is *salutary*; on page 46 he surely means parents with young families were struggling to make their position *good* rather than *plain*; is a monopoly really *exerted* as on page 126; and *unwisdom* on page 79 is an unlovely coinage. I would have liked more precision as to whether Cargill thought he was creating a New Edinburgh, a New England, a New Geneva or a New Zion, all of which aims he is credited with. On page 91 it seems rather far-fetched to say that the £389 paid in duty on liquor represented 'far and away the bulk' of the customs revenue of £1,357 raised during 1849. There is at least some confusion between page 130 when it is claimed that Cargill in becoming a member of the House of Representatives took a job 'that nobody else wanted', and page 135 when it is said that 'it was abundantly clear that he was by no means the most able politician available'. On page 153 the introduction of horizontal rather than vertical 'slices' of British society to New Zealand is a novel interpretation of Wakefieldian theory.

Cargill was debunked by McLintock writing in the 1940s and in the *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* in the early 1960s. Brooking's intention has been to separate himself from both myth-making and debunking processes and to evaluate Cargill without prejudice. In this case he has succeeded, partly by the device of a review of the Cargill historiography but also by moderating the claims he makes on Cargill's behalf. Cargill does not emerge as a likeable person (we know almost nothing about what his wife, family, or friends thought of him). The picture remains of a crusty old man (in a country of young men) stomping around Dunedin, seeing himself as the guardian of all that was right, getting his own way (did he have a ferocious temper?), purging the settlement of its enemies (two of them, who might have contested the Superintendency against him in 1853, died before they got the chance), using the Free Church, of which he does not seem to have been an especially devout member, as a tool to keep the community under his control.

Brooking has written a judicious and lively book. It doesn't tell us all we would like to know about Cargill and his times, nor explain them totally. Cargill's importance in the last resort is judged to be his success in persuading a large number of Scots to migrate to New Zealand. How can a descendant of a steerage family on the *Philip Laing* quibble with that?

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