

Woman's World. Woman's Empire. The Women's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930. By Ian Tyrrell. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1991. xiii, 381 pp. US price: \$45.00.

IAN TYRRELL'S BOOK opens with a vignette that is significant for New Zealand readers: the departure of Mary Leavitt from San Francisco as the first round-the-world missionary of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. New Zealand was included on Leavitt's itinerary and, although temperance women here had already begun to associate, Leavitt's visit was the catalyst for the setting up of a nation-wide organization that eventually became the vanguard of the suffrage and women's movement. The national WCTU has not yet been fully studied; when it is, the lucky historian will have Tyrrell's book to provide the context of the international or World's WCTU.

This is a complex and closely argued work. Starting with the North American founders of the Union, Tyrrell explores efforts to export an American version of temperance round the world, following the policy of Do-Everything. His thesis is that the Americans, and others who joined them in the World's WCTU, were cultural imperialists, dedicated to the notion that women served the state by promoting purity and the sanctity of the home, but circumscribed in their understanding of other cultures and other classes by their own culture and value system. Sometimes WCTU women, especially those who served as missionaries, came to question Western values and to approach an understanding of the non-Western women they worked with. Their relationship with imperial powers which supported the liquor trade, regulated prostitution and maintained armed forces, could be strained and even confrontational. In the end, however, they could not escape their social, ideological and political heritage.

The World's WCTU was first and foremost the product of evangelical Christianity. Tyrrell, correctly in my view, insists that it should be interpreted in this way, rather than as an extension of women's culture or as a manifestation of liberal feminism. From 1883 to 1891 it was largely an informal American organization focusing on the Polyglot Petition, seeking to unite the women of the world in an appeal to men to forsake alcohol and opium. From 1891 it became an international body, aiming at social reform through applied Christianity. The most cherished remark about the WWCTU was Basil Wilberforce's, 'The sun never sets on the Women's Christian Temperance Union.'

The WWCTU was convinced that morality, civilization and women's equality must advance together. Its missionaries did well in countries where Anglo-Saxons had settled — Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa — and in foreign enclaves in Japan, China and India. In these places their brand of religious faith and feminism could be easily adopted and adapted. They made little headway in continental Europe or the Middle East where religion and attitudes to women were quite different. *Woman's World. Woman's Empire* provides an analytical narrative telling how, when and why the WWCTU was set up and operated. It then deals with the major concerns of the organization — temperance, peace, the vote, social purity and social justice. The two sections are linked by a chapter exploring the family — sisterhood, motherhood — terminology used in the movement. In putting forward his case, Tyrrell is keenly aware of the contradictions, conflicts and ambiguities, as well as the values, in the policies and activities of the WWCTU. Although constantly returning to the notion of cultural imperialism, he sees the difficulties in this when WCTU women were themselves members of the colonized, or lived on the colonial periphery rather than at the imperial centre, and when the imperial culture was Anglo-American, not just North American. He examines the early failure to believe that other societies were not drink-sodden, or that alcohol may have had an existence prior to

colonization or a purpose other than a drunken oblivion. Missionaries could be changed as much as they could effect change. Leaders could be charismatic and inspire admiration and devotion, yet have feet of clay.

Occasionally Tyrrell's vision narrows. The chapter on peace focuses almost entirely on the North American WCTU, losing an international dimension. And the chapter on suffrage engages first in a rather dated attempt to argue that WCTU suffragists based their claim for the vote on the grounds of both expediency and justice and then in a brief survey of the way the suffrage success in Australasia impacted back on the imperial politics. These chapters leave plenty of scope for further work.

Although the WWCTU may today seem a rather quixotic venture it was in its time quite extraordinary. One of the earliest of international organizations, aspiring to a universal order, and with 40 national affiliates at its peak, it must impress with its sweep and scale, and with its magnificent commitment in the face of almost constant failure. Tyrrell has written a very clever book, based on a huge amount of scholarship. He comes to fair and balanced conclusions, which, in the long run, do the WCTU more justice than most earlier writings on either the national bodies or the world organization.

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A Question of Adoption: closed stranger adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974. By Anne Else. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991. 241 pp. NZ price: \$29.95.

ANNE ELSE has written a cogent and compelling study of the ideology and practice of closed stranger adoption in New Zealand during the middle decades of this century. The work must surely become essential reading for all whose professional interests in any way impinge upon the area of adoption; but it is also a book for all New Zealanders with a social conscience, and particularly for those oblivious to the key issues involved in the seven-year debate which preceded the passing of the Adult Adoption Information Act in 1985.

The strength of this work lies in its thorough professionalism. Although she is dealing with an area of social policy which has been extremely contentious in recent years, Else has not permitted emotionalism to intrude upon analysis. Right from an introduction in which the author reminds us that adult beliefs, desires and dilemmas are at the heart of the adoption issue (p.xiii), Anne Else engages her reader's attention with a skilful combination of good organization, clear style and thorough documentation.

There are 17 short chapters in this work, each dealing with a different facet of a complex issue. One of the most poignant is that entitled 'The Invisible, Unmarried Father' (pp.14-22) in which Else reveals that for many biological fathers denied all knowledge of their child and, frequently, of the fate of the mother of that child, the pain has been lifelong and intense. Thought-provoking too, are those sections which deal with the deficiencies of official policy during this period. Chapters 10 and 11 on 'Placing the child' (pp.93-112) contrast the model Child Welfare process with the reality. Through a judicious interweaving of oral and documentary evidence, the pressures under which departmental staff were forced to operate are sympathetically detailed and the consequences of such shortcomings outlined. While Else leaves the reader in no doubt about her criticisms of this situation,