

*Dominions Diary. The Letters of E.J. Harding 1913-1916.* Edited by Stephen Constantine. Ryburn Archive Editions, Ryburn, Halifax, 1992. 336 pp. UK price: £28.

BEFORE the First World War, colonial politicians expressed loyalty to the imperial connection, but they avoided formal commitment. On the concept of preferential tariffs, the British were themselves divided. The Imperial Conference of 1911 rejected the Imperial Council suggested by Sir Joseph Ward. But it did accept the idea of a Royal Commission that would investigate the trade and natural resources of the dominions. This got under way in 1913 with visits to Australia and New Zealand, followed by one to South Africa early the following year. The visit to Newfoundland and Canada was interrupted by the outbreak of war. It was thought important enough to renew before the war ended. Indeed the empire became more important in the war, and the Commission was to advocate an Imperial Development Board. Nothing came of it post-war. The dominions became still more independent. The man who had been secretary to the Commission, E.J. Harding, was to be deeply involved in the negotiations that led to the definition of dominion status in 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931.

This volume is made up of the letters Harding wrote to members of his family in England while on tour, well introduced and almost too elaborately footnoted by Stephen Constantine. The publishers describe the volume as one of the Ryburn Archive Editions, and it is well printed and bound and illustrated by reproductions of contemporary postcards. The object of the enterprise is not, however, clear. It is not quite a coffee table book. Nor, however, does it add greatly to our understanding of the empire: given what the scholar could glean from it, he or she might prefer a less elaborate presentation. But let us hope the Ryburn series continues in some form. For there must be other diaries and letters, in the Royal Commonwealth Society or elsewhere, that deserve to appear in print.

These letters are enjoyable. The author is sprightly and candid: prepared to laugh at his contemporary R.E. Stubbs as Governor of Ceylon, suggesting that Lord Liverpool 'looks absolutely brainless', finding the wife of the Queensland premier 'an aggressive and really dreadful woman'. He is not insensitive. Indeed he thought the Maori children who dived for pennies at Rotorua evidence of 'sad demoralisation', but he was stunned by the haka he saw. In some ways Harding's world seems remote: New Zealand, he finds, is short of domestic servants. In others his world is closer to ours than one might at first imagine. 'Johannesburg beggars description . . . There are houses of all kinds from the hovel to the palace'. New Zealand, one witness told the Commission, was 'on the verge of bankruptcy from over borrowing'. The newspapers denied it, but Harding suspected there was 'really a good deal of truth' in the statement. In any case, this reader warms to a correspondent who, not far out of Colombo, wonders how the London premiere of Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* will be going.

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*Coningham: A Biography of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham.* By Vincent Orange. Methuen, London, 1990. 292 pp., plates, maps. NZ price: \$39.95.

VINCENT ORANGE has succeeded in rescuing from obscurity an airman whose command was crucial to the Allied Desert Campaign of 1942-43 and the liberation of Western Europe in 1944-45. Air Marshal Sir Arthur 'Mary' Coningham was responsible for