
Section One: Departures

In their recent study of migration from England, Ireland and Scotland to New Zealand, Jock Phillips and Terry Hearn observe that the colony was 'comparatively attractive for those with a white collar background'.¹ Throughout the nineteenth century, their 'absolute' numbers were never great, perhaps representing 'one in eight' of all migrants in New Zealand and a similar proportion in Australia.² Attempts to characterise the motivations of these 'children of clerks and professionals', as Phillips and Hearn describe them, have been necessarily broad-brush.³ The most prevalent characterisation is that as members of Britain's 'troubled middle classes' they were uncertain of their place in a rapidly changing society, and hopeful that they might find in the new settler societies of the Empire a less troubled future with widened opportunities for themselves and their families. Moreover, generalisations about a group as diverse as that embraced by such phrases as 'the children of clerks and professionals', imply greater coherence than is warranted. A recent study by K. Theodore Hoppen of the mid-Victorian generation (defined as the years between 1846 and 1886) provides a useful analysis of the group.⁴ Hoppen classifies them as belonging collectively to an 'inclusive' middle class and calculates that roughly one-fifth of the non-agricultural

1 Phillips and Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants*, p. 83.

2 Phillips and Hearn, *Settlers*, pp. 83–84; Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australasia*, passim.

3 Phillips and Hearn, *Settlers*, p. 84.

4 Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 31–55.

male workforce fell within its boundaries. He then suggests that his 'middling sort of people' might be divided into a 'more affluent half made up of higher professionals, employers and managers, and a lesser one of lower professionals, foremen and clerks'.⁵ Hoppen's analysis of these 'middling sort of people' sees members of the ancient or learned professions (law, medicine and the Church) as constituting something of an 'exclusive' middle class that was inclined to abrogate to itself the leadership of the 'great English middle class'.⁶

The mystique of moral leadership was protected by lengthy, costly and arcane processes of admission.⁷ Aspirant professionals without the family connection or wealth that would smooth the pathway might often struggle to break into a seemingly closed shop. Indeed, by the late 1850s, books offering advice to middle-class parents on the prospective employment of their sons described the law as a 'sinking profession' and almost all professions as 'grossly overcrowded'.⁸ While these perceptions have been judged to be exaggerated and overly pessimistic, at particular times and in some places aspirant professionals, in Hoppen's words, 'had a hard time of it'.⁹ Prone to depict themselves as thwarted by traditions and customs of British society, the aspirant professionals were also inclined to idealise the liberating possibilities of British colonies and their emergent settler societies. It is an area of individual experience where 'illusions' often did 'sterling duty for reality', and which has been fruitfully explored in Miles Fairburn's *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies*.¹⁰ Most accounts, however, while acknowledging the role of ideas and ideals, prefer the more concrete certainties provided by real or imagined economic circumstances.¹¹ And, insofar as the 'family' features in assessments of the motivations that lay behind migration, it is answered within broader economic considerations.

5 Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 33–34.

6 Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 42–43.

7 Reader, *Professional Men*, passim.

8 Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 43.

9 Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 43; Richards, *Britannia's Children*, pp. 174–206.

10 The phrase, used in a slightly different context, is from Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 40; Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies*; Miles Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the Urban Frontier, 1870–1940', *NZJH*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, pp. 3–21.

11 Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australasia*; Janet Doust, 'English Migrants to Eastern Australia 1815–1860'; Jupp, *The English in Australia*; Nicole T. McLennan, 'From Home and Kindred: English Emigration to Australia 1860–1900', PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2009; Phillips and Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants*.

In his seminal *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880*, Harold Perkin sets out an argument that links the growing number of middle-class professionals with an increasingly coherent and distinctive world view.¹² Put simply, he argues that as English society became more industrialised in the nineteenth century, the opportunities for professionals expanded. As the number of their possible employers grew, they became freer to profess their own opinions, and less inclined to adjust such social ideals as they individually possessed to suit the values of the landed aristocracy, whose interests they served and from whom they derived their income. Faced with rapid industrial growth, and what many of them saw as incipient disorder and squalor, middle-class professionals, Perkin argues, appropriated the gentlemanly aristocratic ideal in a way that often combined a paternalistic sense of social responsibility with claims to provide the expertise that would enable progress and lay the basis for a better and more efficient society. He demonstrates how, in the twentieth century, these ideas, developed and extended by the middle-class professional experts, fed into and influenced the shaping of the British welfare state.

Perkin's argument has significance for the exploration of the middle-class professional family. He depicts a group ideology that emerges at the precise point at which individuals and young married couples from within this group increasingly migrate to British settler societies now moving beyond the pioneering stage of development. By exploring more closely the thinking that prompted migration, it is possible to explore particular ways in which the professional ideal identified by Perkin is beginning to take shape amongst the emergent young professionals of mid-Victorian Britain. The case studies presented here deal with a generation of middle-class professionals struggling to put together a world view at a time when science was coming to be seen as the key to the future and religious beliefs were increasingly being challenged. Their individual responses to this ferment took a variety of forms, but common to them all is a sense of experimentation, of testing how individuals and their collective expression in the family could

12 Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, passim, especially pp. 116–70, 359–404.

contribute usefully to 'the better society'. Each displays, explicitly or implicitly, acceptance of a notion of individual social responsibility as the basis for a more collective response to perceived social ills.

Put simply, the Australasian environment offered more scope for the incipient professional ideal to take root. Perkin perhaps unwittingly demonstrates this point by observing that, in the early twentieth century, New Zealand Agent-General William Pember Reeves was an active participant in the intellectual discussions that influenced the shape of the early British welfare state.¹³ Reeves, a colonial-born, professionally trained lawyer, had been an architect of New Zealand's state experiments of the 1890s and the historian of Australasia's precocious burst of collectivism. His role in the network of middle-class professional families that developed between the migrant professional newcomers and the home-grown species demonstrates the process of adoption and adaptation by which the professional ideal developed an Australasian form.

The case studies are presented in two chapters. They are drawn from three professions: the law, academia and the Church. The first brings together the Wildings and the Massons, two young couples for whom marriage and migration are linked and wedded to a set of clearly articulated idealistic expectations. The second groups together Henry Higgins, Alexander Leeper and John Macmillan Brown, individuals for whom marriage came after migration, whose articulation of the professional ideal is less explicit, and for whom the struggle to reconcile the apparently competing claims of religion and science was a painful one. In all cases migration to Australia or New Zealand was the prelude to fuller endorsement of the professional ideal.

13 Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, p. 159; Keith Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965.

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