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BOOKS

PIONEERS! OH PIONEERS!

NEW ZEALAND NOTABLES: Henry Williams, Te Whiti, Johnny Jones: By R. M. Burdon. (The Caxton Press: 6/6, boards 7/6).

(Reviewed by D. O. W. HALL)

THE year 1940, a surprising enough Centennial under the shadow of war, brought to birth, with other prodigies, a remarkably good *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. It had all the qualities that such a work should have—dignity, responsibility, accuracy, and a full bibliography of sources. Anyone who has worked in the same field will realise its value and marvel that it is due, unlike similar works in other countries, to the industry, almost wholly, of one man, Dr. G. H. Scholefield. There was only one thing such an official work could not undertake—the critical evaluation of character. Now the year 1941 sees the birth of another prodigy—though it is a horse of quite a different colour—the first biography of New Zealanders by a New Zealander, a biography, that is, in the larger sense, an assessment not only of deeds and dates, but of the soul within, an account that can exploit the dramatic possibilities of a career and a man.

Here I hand it to Mr. Burdon: he delivers the goods. He has the historic sense—the ability to grasp imaginatively the same facts that confronted his sub-

jects. R. M. Burdon "fit audience found, though few" for his first book, *High Country*: the only regret of his readers was that it was so short. That account of back-country sheep farming contained more first-hand material than *New Zealand Notables*, his first essays in biography, but the new book marks a very considerable advance in literary power, and derives its value as much from the author's skill as from the great interest of the lives of three astonishing men.

A Lytton Strachey, or still more probably one of his imitators, might have guyyed Henry Williams. Mr. Burdon has resisted this temptation. The cynic would say that Williams did not need



ABOVE: In 1866 "Otago Punch" published this portrait of Johnny Jones, a prominent whaler who founded several stations on the coast of Otago from 1835 onwards. He later became an extensive landowner.



LEFT: Signing the Treaty of Waitangi. In this bas-relief on the memorial to Queen Victoria in Kent Terrace, Wellington, Captain Hobson and the Rev. Henry Williams, who acted as interpreter, can be easily identified. These illustrations and the one on the opposite page are from "Making New Zealand"



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guying, and certainly his life contains all the fascination of strongly marked, self-contradictory traits. Williams had character; his intellect did not always quite catch up with it. The Maori phrase *tangata riri* (the angry man) summed up one side of his nature; but we have to set beside that the cause in whose name he showed his teeth and the courage and toughness needed to live among warring savages at the uttermost end of the earth. One can only concur in Burdon's judgment that he was essentially a man of action; by good fortune he was placed in circumstances that called for action, heroic action, and showed himself of a stature to grapple with a gigantic task.

I think that Burdon has taken a little too much on trust the Protestant account of inter-denominational rivalry among the early missionaries. The contemporary evidence brings out very forcibly the intellectual vigour of Bishop Pompallier, and the accounts of controversy given in Carleton's straightforward, but partisan *Life of Henry Williams* make exceedingly uncomfortable reading. There can be no doubt, however, of the justice of his view of Williams's part in Heke's

War, and he does justice too, to Williams in the land claims dispute—one of the few contexts, incidentally, which make missionary celibacy seem a desirable thing.

Te Whiti's Passive Resistance

Burdon is nothing if not versatile, and Te Whiti was a very good pick for an outstanding Maori worthy in those depressing years when Maori culture was under the fire of the white man's civilisation. Te Whiti was an extraordinary blend of mysticism and practical sagacity. He recognised that the settlers would always be too strong for his people; he countered their encroachment by passive means—an amazing achievement when we remember the warlike traditions of the Maori people. There can be no doubt of the moral victory won at Parihaka by the non-belligerent tribesmen over the armed forces that came to take their land and leader from them.

"Uncut Diamond"

Johnny Jones, one of the most enterprising commercial minds that have ever adorned New Zealand, was a far larger
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