

A GLANCE AT THE RANSTEAD PAPERS

The *Note on Manuscript Accessions* in the Nov. 1967 issue of the *Turnbull Library Record* listed the Ranstead papers but was, of course, unable to do justice to their quality and variety. They chronicle, and comment on, many significant incidents and influences both in England and in New Zealand in the years around the turn of the century, and they cover material ranging from history to agricultural science, from the theory of education to extra-sensory perception, from literature to philosophy. One cannot hope to touch on all or even most aspects of these papers in one article, but it is proposed here to look at that portion of them which links England with New Zealand, and to give publication to letters expressing thoughts about New Zealand or the implications of emigrating.

When William Ranstead visited New Zealand in 1899 he was so impressed with this country's conditions and prospects that he decided to return to England for long enough only to wind up his affairs and collect his family, and then to come out again to settle. While still here on his visit he wrote a series of articles about New Zealand for the socialist *Clarion* newspaper in England. These, while scrupulously truthful, were invested with such potent enthusiasm (e.g. the old-age pension in NZ – £18 p.a. – by being less than half what an old person could live on, is really an incentive to saving and will not destroy thrifty habits¹) that its infectiousness was inevitable. 'I've not knowingly written one word of exaggeration. I'm in love with New Zealand.'² This upright, likeable, intelligent person in love with a far-off Utopia caused a swelling stir among those of the British working class who were still capable of hope. Letters began to pour in to Ranstead at the *Clarion* – touching, ingenuous letters, treating him without question as an oracle.

'Having taken the *Clarion* in for a considerable time and read all your articles, after much thought I came to the conclusion that this was my chance, putting entire trust and faith in you and in the paper you write for.'

'Having read your article in the *Clarion*, I must say that I was pleased to learn there was such a place in the world as you pictured . . . I feel that anything you say will be truthful, the reason why I have confidence in you though I have never seen you is because you are a Socialist and a *Clarionette* I being one for many years . . . I hope you will understand that I do not wish to emigrate to seek a fortune, but rather to get to a place where I could be happy and be able to appreciate the beauties of nature which you have so ably set forth in your article, and where it will be possible for my four children to grow to full manhood and beauty instead of having to be thrust in these sweating and immoral miserable cotton mills of Lancashire. I am prepared to work with pick and spade if it will only enable me to keep my wife and bairns in respectability in that beautiful land of good laws and no poverty.'