British Settlers and the Land

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To sharpen the focus and prune the materials for this short paper, I will plant my feet fairly firmly in the New Zealand countryside of the 1880s, and from there look backwards and forwards in time, and across the oceans to the British, and more especially the English, homeland.[1] For England provided the largest immigrant contingent, and the most potent shaping model for country life. I will ignore the nineteenth century's interminable theorising about the economic and political significance of land, and pay little attention to the twentieth century obsession with social class. Rather, I will concentrate on the potent practical ideas that actually shaped the settler countryside and community. These were the ideas of the New Zealand landed interest, for I believe that the eighteenth century way of analysing society into vertical divisions by source of livelihood, is more useful for handling rural Victorian New Zealand than is a horizontal division by class. Once organised settlement began, the landed interest quickly elbowed aside the earlier missionary, whaling and timber interests and gained a dominance in New Zealand life which it held until well into the twentieth century.

For labelling the groupings within this landed interest, the old world offers us a superfluity of often ambiguous terms: peasant, yeoman, gentleman, squire, farmer, crofter, laird, grazier, and so on. The Australians have added others, such as squatter, cockatoo, pastoralist, runholder, and station hand. To my mind, our colonial landed interest falls into five main groups, each needing an appropriate label. The terms 'gentry' for the holders of the big sheep stations[2] and 'yeomen' for the holders of family farms,[3] have been steadily gaining in acceptance. My third group is the cottagers and petty landholders who supplemented wage labour with some subsistence husbandry. Well in tune with the yeoman ideal, they streamed steadily into yeoman farming. I call them peasant labourers or, if they had a craft, peasant tradesmen.[4] My fourth group is the rural service proprietors — carriers, contractors, millers, brewers, innkeepers, storekeepers, blacksmiths and such like, all giving support to farming. They, too, moved readily into yeoman farming. Finally there were station hands and farm hands, working for wages without aspiring to own home or land.[5] Our account will be enlivened with a few examples from these groups.

Settler New Zealand's foundation stock left the old world over the four decades from 1840 to 1880, years which saw the dawn, full flourishing, and demise of the golden age of English agriculture. Or, adopting a wider perspective, New Zealand's pioneer English settlers came from the region experiencing the most remarkable triumphs of a great agricultural revolution which, from the mid-eighteenth century, reshaped agrarian

life over most of Europe. In broad, simple outline, what had happened was the development in mid-eighteenth century Europe of an unforeseen acceleration in population growth which past experience suggested must end in disastrous famine. But European agriculture, responding with widespread reorganisation and innovation, achieved a striking increase in output and successfully fed the expanding population even better than it had their forebears. In human terms, this 'modernisation' of agriculture meant the destruction of many customary communal rights to make way for a more responsive, business-like approach. In production terms, it meant more land under the plough, with a sharp rise in the output of grain. In England it gave rise to 'high farming'. In this, the most important innovation was not new technology, but improved pasture plants and more flexible rotations of crops. This enabled heavier stocking of the land and production of more manure, which in turn enriched the soil and enabled farmers to abandon the wasteful old practice of leaving land fallow.

The outstanding success of the agricultural revolution in England owed much to a unique social arrangement of the industry into a three-tiered system of landlord, farmer, and landless labourer. The landlord-tenant farmer arrangement was not, of course, unique either to England or to Britain. But in England a landlord-tenant relationship developed that was so unique that contemporaries called it 'the English system'.[6] In brief, English landlords accepted important responsibilities in return for their rents. They fostered improved methods by reorganising the size and layout of their farms, and investing heavily in upgrading both land and buildings. Over the golden age they poured millions of pounds into field drainage, using the new machine-made drainage tiles. Meanwhile the tenant farmers did their part by investing in improved livestock and farm equipment. They learnt of improved practices, better breeds of plants and livestock, and of advances in farm implements and machinery, from a flourishing rural press, a growing range of agricultural societies, or simply by being able to afford more time together at market-day dinners. As late as 1868, despite the rapid growth of an increasingly urbanised and industrialised population, 80 per cent of the United Kingdom's food consumption was home-grown.[7] This was achieved with a relatively moderate use of labour. The 1831 census showed only five farm labouring families to every two families occupying land.[8] The number of farm labourers peaked in mid-century and declined steadily thereafter. The number of farms and farmers was almost constant. In summary, rural society in England and Wales during the golden age consisted of about 3000 larger landowners, about 250,000 farmers and graziers, and roughly, 1,000,000 farm labourers.

From this simple overview let us now abstract some basic facts of particular consequence for the colonial countryside. One is that all levels of English rural society were steadily shedding population. The aristocracy and gentry could only maintain their predominant place through

the well-established practice of primogeniture, in which the family estate was handed on intact to successive eldest sons. Down the years a growing number of younger sons had to seek their fortunes elsewhere. With the number of farms held almost constant (another consequence of the English landlord-tenant system), there was a similar outflow of farmers' sons who could not be placed in the English countryside. Farm labourers, of course, provided by far the largest contingent of those moving out. Another group of considerable proportions was made up of village craftsmen and tradesmen forced out by the competition from the new urban mills and factories. While farms flourished in the golden age, more and more rural watermills and windmills fell idle and began to rot away. The workshops of village tailors, bootmakers, wheelwrights, coopers, implement makers and other craftsmen were heavily thinned out, and cottage industries such as spinning, weaving, lacemaking and straw-plaiting were fading one after another into oblivion. From these outflows, and similar movements in Scotland, Ireland and Europe, came the shapers of the countryside of colonial New Zealand. Yeoman New Zealand was largely created by immigrant village craftsmen and farm labourers. The craftsmen were particularly prominent in the earlier decades; the farm labourers only moved reluctantly until stirred by their great Revolt of the Field of the 1870s. Most British farmers who emigrated went to North America. A few contributed to yeoman New Zealand, others to the sheep farming gentry, where they augmented the inflow of younger sons from the homeland gentry.

The differing attitudes of these immigrant settlers to the economic and social arrangements of their old-world past were to have important consequences for the shaping of the new colonial rural world. The homeland countryside, particularly in England, had been managed by a well-established county hierarchy, in which deference was the response to the habit of command. The landlords maintained a hegemony over the rural electorates; the local bench was mainly in their hands, and the established church was largely aligned with their interests. A few settlers hoped to be at the top of a new gentry world, but most worked for a genuine rural democracy, though not without some sense of loss and an occasional hankering for the comfortable father figure of a squire.

Despite the fact that 85 per cent to 90 per cent of English farmland was occupied on the landlord-tenant system, the persistence of a strong sentiment for freehold family farms helps to explain colonial developments. As late as 1800 small owner-cultivators had held about a fifth of England's cultivated land[9] and this, together with the fact that so many cottagers had held various common rights in the land until recent times, had given rise to a myth of a happy 'Merrie England' of days gone by, a lost world of yeoman comfort in which the land was fairly shared. A reshaping of England along yeoman lines was a subsidiary theme in the Revolt of the Field. It led the strong independent Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union to set up a Land and Cottage Fund in 1875 and, in the

same year, gave rise to a breakaway from Arch's National Agricultural Labourers' Union, whose principal aims were the provision of allotments and small holdings.

What was the ideal farm that all these folk had in mind — whether they were aristocrats owning whole countrysides, or impoverished labourers yearning for a new rural order? All the evidence points to a dominant ideal of mixed farming, with wheat as the prestige crop, a good range of livestock run as an ancillary to the arable, and an orchard as a much-desired subsidiary feature. In retrospect, agrarian historians consider much of the nineteenth century English high farming to have been a strategic miscalculation, a misdirection of resources. By mid-century, discerning thinkers, such as James Caird, already foresaw the coming flood of grain from prairies and steppes and advised 'down corn, up horn'. But the farmers fought a stubborn and prolonged retreat from arable farming until well towards the end of the century. They were entangled in their own high farming propaganda. So too, as we shall shortly see, were some of the New Zealand settlers.

Let me give an example. To forcefully remind ourselves that for Englishmen the countryside was a playground as well as a workplace, we follow a good old English hunt meeting of August 1890:

At 3.40 on Saturday 'Dick' Roake, the well known ... huntsman, with his coat of bottle green and his boot tops of mahogany, blew a merry fan-fare on his horn, quickly answered by a deep baying of his noisy pack of hounds, a crack of his whip; another blast upon his horn — 'ware away there' — and away dashed the hounds from their kennel, quickly followed by 'boot and saddle', as a score of huntsmen with a couple or so of well-mounted ladies, cantered across the first [field]. At first the hounds scattered far and wide, but the scent which lay exceedingly keen on those damp lowland meadows was quickly picked up. Then a toot on the horn meant really hard work, and away went with a rush the whole field. At the same time the multitude on the road raised high clouds of dust in their wild anxiety to be in at the kill. The train which stood for some time opposite Mr Earp's started at the same time as the hunt, the engineers very creditably kept pace with the bulk of the horsemen the whole distance, so that the spectators in the train had all the novelty of actually following the hounds from the start to finish, the course conveniently lying along the railway line[10] ...

I must apologise if I have misled you into presuming that this hunt is charging across the English countryside. In actual fact, it took place between Tawa and Porirua, in one of the regular meets between the Rangitikei and Wellington hunt clubs. 'Dick' Roake, who led the hunt, had brought his party down by train from Feilding.[11] An intrusion of crude colonial democracy into the hunt becomes apparent as the account proceeds:

Beyond the actual members of the hunt and their friends numerous outsiders joined the sport, and many of these people imagined that hard and reckless riding was the order of the day. The result was that these rough horsemen, reckless of

the consequences rushed at each jump helter-skelter sometimes cannoning against other riders.

New Zealand's nineteenth century sheep-farming gentry publicised themselves very adequately in their heyday and historians have looked after them well ever since. Let us therefore take as read their rapid occupation of the open country, their rise as a 'mushroom aristocracy' as the wealth from wool poured in, their building of the big houses and establishing of a gentry-style use of the countryside. Stevan Eldred-Grigg has now summed it all up in his valuable *A Southern Gentry*. My purpose here is to put them into a somewhat different perspective.

John Scott Caverhill has been described by W.J. Gardner, the Amuri county's chosen historian, as 'the pride of pioneer squatters', 'the first Amuri squatter', and 'the greatest pioneer and rolling stone of them all'.[12] He held the stations of Cheviot Hills, Hawkswood and Highfield in turn, and was dubbed by contemporaries the 'Squire of Waiau'.[13] At the height of his opulence at Hawkswood, he employed nine gardeners. Shortly after moving to Highfield in the early 1870s, he began building a fine new homestead there. Suddenly in 1877 he sold up for about £64,000, coming out with £30,000 in hard cash. My concern is with this career move. What was he up to? Was this a move like that of his former neighbour George Duppa some years earlier — a shift back to the homeland to join the old world gentry, using wealth from colonial wool to buy into the squirearchy and by a campaign of 'honorific waste' establish a little regime of power and social deference? (Duppa's mausoleum in Hollingbourne parish church, Kent, is a permanent memorial to the success of his campaign.) Or was Caverhill merely moving to easier country, nearer to the gentry capital of Christchurch, with an eye on one of the city mansions then so popular with his class? In fact, he took neither of these courses, but instead moved to Taranaki, and bought or leased large stretches of its better land. He amazed the local settlers, first by railing in thousands of sheep (3000 from Rangitikei in 1880, 6000 from Hawke's Bay in 1881),[14] and next by putting large areas in South Taranaki to the plough. By 1883 he had nearly 1000 acres near Hawera in wheat.[15] The significance of this Caverhill migration is surely that he had never felt that his Amuri sheep runs were real farms. At heart, like so many of his contemporaries, he was a devotee of 'high farming'. His move to Taranaki was motivated by a desire to get down to the genuine business of proper farming, with arable at the centre of the scheme of husbandry.

My main adjustments to Eldred-Grigg's treatment of the sheep-farming gentry are firstly to draw more attention to the inherent 'brittleness' of the whole gentry project, and secondly to place more stress on the importance, in the longer perspectives of history, of their role as midwives of the rising yeoman ideal. There were several underlying factors contributing to the brittleness of the gentry's position. The most

important was their failure to adopt the principle of primogeniture, which the English had accepted as crucial to the endurance of a gentry class. Our gentry, drawn mainly from an English middle class which repudiated primogeniture,[16] or from English gentry younger sons, opted almost universally for partible inheritance. In New Zealand this was the death knell for their chances of surviving the first generation as a sheep-farming aristocracy. The need to multiply places for the second generation must have been one strong motive behind the diversifying into grain in the bonanza wheat period beginning in the 1870s. Of course there were other factors — the fall in wool prices, the growing supply of farm labour, the unsatisfied demand for grain across the Tasman. The predilection for high farming will also have been significant. It helps one to make better sense of many careers besides that of Caverhill — well-known ones like those of John Grigg of Longbeach and Sir James Wilson of Bulls (both of whom shared the enthusiasm for field drainage that was a characteristic of much contemporary English high farming), as well as of hundreds of little-known careers recorded in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* and elsewhere.

An equivocal commitment to sheep-station farming was paralleled by an equivocal commitment to New Zealand, which led a minority to move back to rural Britain, and many others to spend years of their lives on visits 'home'.[17] Clearly sheep-station life did not provide a fully satisfactory 'gentry' experience. The thinness of settlement meant not only a lack of cultural and social amenities, but also a pretty thin 'court' of deferential commoners. There was some toying with the idea of a New Zealand tenant farmer class, but there was little prospect of this when freehold land was so readily available. The other option, soon widely adopted, was to sell off part of the estate as yeoman farms. This gave a more developed economic and social world, and an expanded supply of labour, facilitating the shift to high farming. But it did not do much for a *deferential model* of society. A portent of the way rural deferential society was to be swept away by the march of democracy was provided by the 1881 general election, the first conducted on the principle of universal manhood suffrage. To the widely expressed surprise of onlookers two veteran North Island politicians, both well established squires standing for their home districts, went down before two political upstarts, both rural businessmen appealing to the yeoman and peasant labourer vote. The defeated candidates were J.D. Ormond, standing for Waipawa, and William Fox standing for Rangitikei. Both had played a major part in fostering the small-holder settlements that plumped for their opponents.[18]

Yeoman-scale farms, established by missionaries and bay whalers, had preceded the sheep stations by several decades. But it was the sheep-farming gentry who helped bring about the eventual triumph of the yeoman farm over the greater part of New Zealand. The yeoman districts which quickly developed around the little capitals of the Wakefield settle-

ments — Wellington, New Plymouth, Nelson, Wanganui, Christchurch, Dunedin — would have languished if they had not been nourished directly and indirectly by the wealth from wool; New Plymouth, having no adjacent squatter district, did in fact languish for several decades. At various times, these and other yeoman settlements found useful markets for their produce on the gold diggings of Australia and New Zealand, and in sawmilling and public works camps. But right through Victorian times it was the sheep-station gentry who were their main support. Food flowed from the yeomen farmers to the labourers who shepherded, drove, dipped, fenced and mustered the flocks, and sustained the muscle that shore, baled, carted and shipped the wool. Wages, too, flowed to the yeoman districts, especially in the shearing season.

But the gentry did far more than just help establish a symbiotic relationship between their grazing country and the yeoman settlements. They also played the major part in creating the infrastructure for rural New Zealand. They explored the interior, developed the first network of routeways, founded townships, schools, churches, racecourses and cricket clubs. They largely manned local and national politics, until democracy was strong enough to produce more popular leaders. The gentry yearning for high farming and searching for alternatives to wool, also benefited yeoman farming in many ways. For the gentry played the major role in establishing Agricultural and Pastoral shows, in acclimatising livestock and crop varieties, in introducing and adapting new farm implements and machinery, and above all in introducing refrigeration and nurturing it through its difficult pioneer years. The gentry provided many things which Victorian yeoman New Zealand had neither the means nor the vision to do for itself. But finally, except in the inhospitable high country, the gentry brought about their own demise by restructuring their runs into yeoman farms.

Let us now briefly glance at some examples of New Zealand yeomen who flourished in the 1880s. How the English farm labourer Joseph Johnson was transformed into a New Zealand yeoman farmer I have described in *The Farthest Promised Land.*[19] He was a 37-year-old Warwickshire shepherd when he decided to emigrate with his wife Louisa and their two children in 1873. Settling first on the shores of Otago Harbour, he built up his capital and gained colonial experience by means of his shepherd and shearing skills, while Louisa did her part with earnings from dress-making. After a few years the family moved to become station hands at Kakaramea, a South Taranaki squatter district. As a married couple, cooking and shepherding, their wages would have been considerable and their living costs low. About 1881 they moved to a bush property that they had bought at Ngaere and worked through all the stages of turning a bush block into a prosperous dairy farm. Family tradition depicts home life on this pioneer farm as happy and fulfilling.

For a yeoman district which was much more fully developed in the 1880s, we turn to the Rangitikei. In the summer of 1880–81, J.J. Palmer,

an itinerant journalist who specialised in 'Rural Ride' reports on farming districts, provided a series of 'Chats with the Farmers' for John Ballance's Wanganui weekly *The Yeoman*. After visiting a number of Rangitikei yeomen he came to the conclusion that

> Perhaps the happiest man in the world is the master of an unassuming little New Zealand farm, large enough to provide all the requirements of life with work, but none of the ostentation of the next step-up in life, with a comfortable home and nice quiet clean sitting rooms, the kitchen as in farm houses of old, being the principal living room in the house. The mistress doing all her housework, including the milking and dairying, and the master with his boys doing all the work of the farm, with a day now and then in the orchard and garden, always surrounded by his pets amongst the live stock, always too busy to be dull, but always quiet and free from the cares of the world, his grand festivals being the haymaking, the fruit gathering, the sheep shearing, and the harvest, add a visit received from a neighbour . . . or a visit paid once in a fortnight . . . to the nearest little town.[20]

Surprisingly, the scholarly literature has largely ignored such contemporary evidence of achievement and personal fulfilment, and instead has depicted these yeomen as 'anonymous' people living petty, primitive lives. Very little is said about yeomen farming before the days of refrigeration, dairy factories and assured export markets. Overall, there has been a failure in sympathetic understanding.[21]

Taking our stand again firmly in the 1880s, what can we say about this yeoman world? One outstanding feature is that it is a rapidly growing world, with thousands of new recruits pressing into it. This is the result of the strong drive of a deep rural myth, facilitated by official policy for political, economic and social reasons. Quite a clear 'farming ladder' has been created, whereby the initially landless labourer can work his way up to become the freeholder of a substantial mixed farm. And the farms being created are indeed mixed, often producing dairy products, meat, wool, grain, fruit, potatoes, and even honey from the one property.[22] Some, by their location, are of necessity mainly subsistence, but most contribute in some way towards making the 600,000-odd New Zealanders of this time among the best fed in the world. A little of their produce is also going across the Tasman, or even further afield. It is no mean achievement, even if the yeomen have as yet failed to make a major contribution to foreign exchange earnings. Their large-scale move into export dairying is still a decade or so away. From our 1880s viewpoint, let us look first at the make-up of this yeoman class, then at the rural myth which motivated them, and finally at the kinds of farms they were shaping.

The blunt historical facts insist that the New Zealand yeoman class was growing mainly by the upward mobility of labourers and artisans. They, and the colonial peasant labourers from whom they recruited, were indeed the only continuously growing rural groups in either the homeland or the colony. As we have seen, the number of English landowners

and farmers was practically static in the nineteenth century, and farm labourer numbers were declining from mid-century. The growth of New Zealand's colonial gentry was soon halted by the limited amount of grazing land available for their runs. But the yeomen went on multiplying well into the twentieth century, through the breaking up of the sheep stations and the colonising of vast stretches of forest land, particularly in the North Island. The statistics tell the story. Between 1881 and 1891 the number of farm holdings grew by over 13,500, representing an increase of nearly 43 percent. Between 1891 and 1901 a further increase of 38½ percent added another 17½ thousand holdings. Over these twenty years the ratio of holdings to population had markedly increased, from 65.1 per thousand population to 81.5 per thousand.[23] Statistics on size of holdings and on occupations show the growth to have been mainly in family farms. As all the evidence points to a quite limited migration of Old World farmers to New Zealand, much of the recruitment to maintain this striking growth, while also replacing the attrition from death and retirement, must have come from labouring stock. To understand what was happening we must examine the strong rural myth which impelled this recruitment, the farming ladder and associated official policy which facilitated it, and the characteristics and qualities of farm and community life in yeoman districts.

The best treatment of the old world origins and New Zealand development of the yeoman myth of a rural arcadia is Miles Fairburn's article 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier'.[24] The 'Promised Land' section of my *The Farthest Promised Land* provides copious illustrations of the way people lived out the myth in the 1880s. With its deep roots in both the British and the European past, the Arcadian vision possessed a strong moral and economic appeal, which found expression in such terms as 'honest toil', 'family life', 'taming the wilderness', 'sturdy independence', 'fruit of the soil'. Let us bring all this down to the more mundane realities of the colony in the 1880s, and ask ourselves what it was that many even among the already well-housed and well-fed townsmen were searching for when they launched into yeoman careers. Essentially they were after a prestige and a way of life which had been given a lasting aura by the English gentry. It was the owning of freehold acres and hence styling oneself 'esquire';[25] it was being seen in possession of fine saddle and harness horses; it was having grounds about one's house, perhaps not just a garden, but also a drive, and the beginnings of a park; it was joining in prestigious country sports and recreations — hunting, shooting, fishing, horse-racing; it was the chance to be a person of consequence in local community affairs; it was being a man of property, able to launch one's children on a similar career, and provide comfortably for one's old age. In broad terms, it was the way of life to which so many English tenant farmers had successfully aspired over the golden age, but with the added bonus of the sturdy independence of the freehold.

As things worked out in Victorian New Zealand, there was at most

times a fairly obvious ladder up which the initially landless could climb to ownership of substantial yeomen farms. Holdings came on the market for cash, deferred payments or lease, in all sizes from township sections to broad acres, in all stages of development from virgin forest to mature farms, and in a wide range of locations from city to backblocks. Hence there was quite a variety of lower rungs for the man of small means to choose from to make his start. Official policy moved to enhance the ladder structure for a number of compelling reasons. In the 1870s the multiplication of small settlers was seen as an important part of the answer to the 'Native difficulty'. Governments of the 1880s turned to land settlement as an answer to the social problems of unemployment, while the fuller development of broad democratic ideals was a prominent feature of the Liberals' land policies of the 1890s. Small settlers of the 1880s were making their way under a land system which owed a good deal to sympathetic minds such as those of William Rolleston, Harry Atkinson and John Ballance. I do not think sufficient note has been taken of the ladder element in their thinking about land. Let us glance briefly at Ballance's views and policies over the years. Typical of his writings on small farming in his early days as a New Zealand newspaper editor is an item of March 1871.[26] Here he maintains that it is a sound rule 'that small farming should be the rule and not the exception — that for every farm of 1000 acres there should at least be five of 100 acres each, and so on in like proportion and gradation'. He points to Belgium and the south of France where whole families live comfortably on five acres. As Minister of Lands in the Stout-Vogel government of 1884–87, Ballance was able to put his ideas pretty fully into practice, with a variety of holdings from village homestead farmlets of a few acres to small grazing runs of several hundred acres. I believe that the opportunity for each settler to climb the rungs to his appropriate place was an implicit element of this programme.[27] Some failed, of course, but the approach was justified by a reasonable number of successes. Following a visit in 1887 to the North Wairarapa bush districts, a contributor to the *New Zealand Herald* dubbed John Ballance, 'the patron saint of the special settler', and described one of his newly established yeomen thus:

> ... he is given 50 acres of tolerably good land ...
> A road and a railway lie at his feet. All the wood he wants he can have for the cutting, and his food for the catching. Does he want flesh, there are rabbits — plentiful enough to feed and fatten the pigs on. Does he want fowl, there is the pigeon looking down the chimney. Does he want fish, he can grope the creek, and catch 10 lbs weight of the finest trout in the world. His vegetables are in the garden ... if he can't collar a cow, he can beg, borrow, or steal a goat ... For his labor there is on each side of him a wool and grain harvest to be gathered, sawmills abound, and there is bush falling or an odd job on the railway to be got; and, if he can't provide all the other necessaries he wants — and a flock of sheep into the bargain — from these sources, why, he's a failure.[28]

The contributor concluded his account with an imaginary scene in the after world. The shadow of Oliver Goldsmith, the eighteenth century poet who mourned the passing of the English peasantry in 'The Deserted Village', meets that of John Ballance, claps him on the back, and declares, 'Well done, old fellow, you have created the finest proprietary in the world'.

This great advance of the yeomen across the New Zealand countryside has come in for much criticism, directed mainly at the quality of its recruits and the number who failed, at the wisdom of particular settlement schemes, and at the general outlook of those who succeeded. I think much of this criticism is misconceived. No one could foretell which recruits would succeed, so the wise plan was to let them find out for themselves. Criticism of the number of townsmen involved ignores the fact that many nineteenth century townsmen possessed 'rural' skills — even London of the mid-1860s housed 24,000 milch cows,[29] and goodness knows how many horses. In our colonial towns, peasant labourers with orchards, kitchen gardens, hen runs about their cottages, and often with cows and horses grazing not far away, were by no means to be despised as potential pioneer yeoman settlers. Many who migrated in the 1880s from Christchurch to the Taranaki bush, from Wanganui to the Upper Oroua, or from Wellington to the backblocks of northern Wairarapa, were to prove unqualified successes. How many, no one has yet worked out. What vitiates most existing comment is that it looks at the settlement, not at the man. If a man quits a holding after a year or two in a new settlement it does not indicate that he is a failed yeoman — only a full study of his career can prove that. I think it is likely that a careful study of the careers of our farmers in the 1880s would show that beginning the breaking-in of a bush section and then moving on was in many cases a wise strategy that served both the seller's and the buyer's yeoman plans.

There were, of course, yeomen aspirants who failed to achieve their ambitions, and settlements that never fulfilled the objects of their planners. But I believe it is misguided to build up a gloomy picture by a selective 'worst case' approach. The clear verdict of history is that in most cases a successful yeoman community emerged within a decade or two, and prospered until the present day. I therefore take my stand quite firmly for an optimistic, 'success story' interpretation of the colonists' handling of the New Zealand countryside. Yet I must confess that there is something quite surprising about the success of yeoman New Zealand. For in England the nineteenth century yeoman has not been highly regarded. When compared with the tenant farmer he was given a bad name by contemporaries who believed that 'with his ignorance, traditional outlook and lack of capital' he was 'always a bad farmer'.[30] The reasons why things worked out differently in New Zealand need a more thorough probing than is possible here. It may owe something to our not drawing too heavily on experienced British farmers; our village craftsmen and

farm labourer immigrants came to the task with less to unlearn, and so were probably more adaptable to new soils, climates and conditions. Also, the labourers' wives were accustomed to toil and austerity, whereas many English farmers' wives had become accustomed to luxury and ease over the golden age. Colonial farming must have benefited from the good mix of homeland origins, which provided a rich repertoire of ideas and techniques to draw from. The benefits which the English drew from the improving landlord/innovative tenant relationship seem to have been mediated by a variety of different relationships in the colony. We have already seen that the gentry served as midwives in the rise of the yeomen. In New Zealand bush districts a similar place was often filled by colonial pseudo-squires, of whom Colonel Robert Trimble of Inglewood is a good example.[31] But there were also other important providers of agricultural leadership, several of which we can also illustrate from the Inglewood district. The Crown Land ranger often became a friend and mentor of the settlers, as well as ensuring they fulfilled their land legislation requirements. Such a man was G.F. Robinson who watched over the Inglewood settlement from its foundation and seventeen years later was described as 'a gentleman having a thorough knowledge of our back country'.[32] The stock and station agent was another leader of rural New Zealand, an important source of farming advice and information, and an introducer of agricultural innovations. Newton King, who held his first Inglewood stock sales in 1881, was certainly such a man. On his death in 1927 he was described as 'the "man of the hour" in the early 'eighties in Taranaki', because 'above all others he appreciated what assistance, great and small, would mean to the farmers'.[33] Mentors who appeared a little later in Inglewood and many other districts were the dairy factory managers and the advisers, especially those in dairying, of the infant Department of Agriculture. Agricultural journalism and A and P shows were other sources of information and stimulation. In Inglewood in the 1880s there were also the regular meetings of the Moa Farmers Club.[34]

Let us glance briefly at the quality of community life in this colonial yeoman countryside. It was a friendly world with a gregarious flavour. Most settlers thought nothing of walking[35] or riding[36] long distances to get together. Much conviviality was built into the occasions of agricultural life and rural development — government land sales, stock sales, clearing sales, ploughing matches, agricultural and horticultural shows, working bees, market days, and opening of local amenities. Family weddings, funerals and housewarmings were almost invariably community occasions. Preceding settlement, and often continuing alongside it, was the mateship of the work gang — shearing, road and railway building, bushfelling, sawmilling, harvesting. While there was often a good deal of population turnover, a new arrival was seldom a complete stranger. He could expect to find mates from his homeland, from shipboard life, from the work gangs, or from time spent at church, pub, sportsground and the like. Once settled, he was soon caught up in self-help

community entertainment. 'What are the amusements?' writes Arthur Clayden, early in the 1880s. 'Many and varied. Colonists believe in play'.[37] The records tell of Penny Readings, debates, dances, mock parliaments, amateur dramatics, hunting and shooting parties, concerts, mutual improvement societies, school, church, temperance and family picnics, revivalist camp meetings, and even, for some country folk, railway and steamer excursions. From outside came travelling amusements: circuses, magic lantern shows, lecturers, dramatists, conjurers, and so on.[38]

My last example of writing from the time has been chosen for the light it throws on yeoman family life. From the hundreds of letters which rural children wrote to Uncle Ned of the *New Zealand Farmer* in the 1880s and 1890s I have chosen one short extract from the issue of July 1891. Mary Morgan writes from the Forty Mile Bush:

> Father has a section in the Wellington Special Settlement, No. 2. We have been here about a year. My father and brothers have cleared a lot of the land, and now we have a large garden. We have a very good crop of potatoes and vegetables, and we have a nice flower garden. Our chrysanthemums are now in bloom; we have many different sorts and they are all named. The Empress of India is very lovely. It is a creamy white: and we have a white pansy, and it is called the Elephant, because it is so large. We have three horses, and as we are two miles from the road, the horses have to pack everything on their back, and they have a river to cross. Father has taken THE FARMER since it was first published, and Father has them bound. We are seven miles from Eketahuna, where all our letters are sent. My brothers ride out once or twice a week; I would like to go too, but the track is too bad for me to go. We have fifteen milking cows and a lot of young ones, and I have some pigeons and paroquets and other pets.

This short extract illustrates the interlocking complexity of the regime on a semi-subsistence bush farm: land clearance, kitchen garden, flower garden, milking herd and dairy, pet birds, pack-horse communications. Even in its first year, this pioneer bush clearing seems to be catering fairly effectively for most of the family's economic, aesthetic and social needs. Mary's father, Richard George Morgan, appears in the electoral rolls of the 1880s as a gardener resident in Mitchelltown, a Wellington cottagers' suburb in a rugged gully above the upper reaches of the Aro Stream.[39] An important part of the preparation which he and his family have made for their Forty Mile Bush venture has been the thorough study of nearly a decade of issues of the *Farmer*.

Other *Farmer* letters, coming from children in all parts of yeoman New Zealand, have left me with the abiding impression of family life built around a deep and often versatile involvement in a cluster of practical projects: the development of the family, the home, the kitchen garden, flower garden, orchard, poultry yard, dairy, hives, crops, flocks and herds. These projects are broken down to give each family member the feel of sharing in the ownership, work and management, while yet drawing support from the rest of the team. There is both sharing and friendly rivalry with neighbouring families. Much of the work is fun, but

the family also has plenty of fun which is not work. Overall, it is a picture of satisfying lives — admittedly mainly the cream of yeoman New Zealand.

But this was a world which was soon to begin shedding much of its interest, colour and variety. Over broad countrysides the varied field husbandry was to give way to a boring monoculture tied to refrigerated exports. And a commercial flood of cartoned, packaged, tinned and frozen foods was to steadily subvert its orchards, gardens and farmyards. I count it as my personal good fortune that in my youth I was able to browse over several of the abandoned orchards, and feast on a wide variety of apples, pears, nuts and stone fruit, with names mostly long forgotten. Perhaps such experiences have given a little prejudice to my final judgment, which is that the yeoman victory in the New Zealand Victorian countryside was justified by its fruits.

Notes

1. The literature on the British nineteenth century countryside and agriculture is voluminous. Most of the points made in this brief survey can be found more fully discussed in J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750–1880* London, 1966; Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances* London, 1982, chapter 1; *The Victorian Countryside* ed. G.E. Mingay, 2 vols, London 1981
2. As in: Stevan Eldred-Grigg 'Whatever Happened to the Gentry?' *New Zealand Journal of History* 11, 1, April 1977, pp. 3–27 (see esp. footnote 5, p. 21); Anthony Ward, 'The New Zealand Gentry 1890–1910: Twilight or Indian Summer?', *Australian Economic History Review* 19, 2, September 1979, pp. 169–75
3. For examples see D.B. Waterson, 'The Matamata Estate, 1904–1959: Land Transformation and Subdivision in the Waikato', *New Zealand Journal of History* 3, 1, April 1969, pp. 49, 51; Rollo Arnold, 'The Opening of the Great Bush', unpublished PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1971, chapter 9 'The Yeoman Ideal and the Bush'; Miles Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier', *New Zealand Journal of History* 9, 1, April 1975, pp. 7–8
4. For a discussion of the English background of this term see J.V. Beckett, 'The Peasant in England: A Case of Terminological Confusion?', *Agricultural History Review* 32, 2, 1984, pp. 113–123. esp. p. 123
5. For this group see John Martin, 'Whither the Rural Working Class?', *New Zealand Journal of History* 17, 1, April 1983, pp. 21–42
6. Chambers and Mingay, *Agricultural Revolution* p. 200
7. ibid. p. 208
8. ibid. p. 133
9. G.E. Mingay, 'The Agricultural Revolution in English History: A Reconsideration' *Agricultural History* 26, 1963, p. 127
10. *Rangitikei Advocate* 26 August 1890
11. ibid. 27 August 1890
12. W.J. Gardner *The Amuri, A County History* Culverden, 2nd ed., 1983, pp. 18, 28–9, 78–9. My summary of Caverhill's Amuri career is based on pp. 78–9, 178–86
13. *The Journal of Henry Sewell 1853–7* vol. 1 ed. W.D. McIntyre, Christchurch, 1980, p. 421, footnote 2
14. *Weekly Herald* (Wanganui), 1 May 1880, p. 11; *Yeoman* (Wanganui), 9, April, 1881, p. 11
15. *Auckland Weekly News* 4 August 1883, 'Trip to the West Coast, No. VIII'. For the following season see *Hawera Star* 29 January 1884 'one of the best and evenest crops of wheat in the district'.
16. F.M.L. Thompson *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* London, 1963, p. 69

17. Stevan Eldred-Grigg *A Southern Gentry: New Zealanders Who Inherited the Earth* Wellington, 1980, pp. 104–5
18. See Arnold, 'Opening of the Great Bush', pp. 693–8, for a fuller account.
19. Rollo Arnold *The Farthest Promised Land* Wellington, 1981, pp. 52, 60, 321–2
20. *Yeoman* (Wanganui), 22 January 1881, p. 7
21. Arnold 'Opening of the Great Bush', p. 13, gives references for the 'anonymous' treatment. For condescending and unsympathetic comments see Waterson, 'The Matamata Estate' pp. 49–51; Eldred-Grigg *Southern Gentry* pp. 54, 109, 123, 135. Some critics denigrate rapid changes in land ownership, without seeking an understanding of how these related to yeoman careers (e.g. S.H. Franklin, 'The Village and the Bush' *Pacific Viewpoint* 1, 2, 1960, pp. 167–9; A.G. Bagnall, *Wairarapa: An Historical Excursion* Masterton, 1976, pp. 267–301 *passim*). More useful comments appear in the growing literature on nineteenth century social mobility (see Claire Toynbee, 'Class and Social Structure in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand' *New Zealand Journal of History* 13, 1, April 1979, pp. 65–82, which surveys the literature). For the beginnings of a more sympathetic treatment see the contributions by Olssen and Brooking to *The Oxford History of New Zealand*. My own treatments (e.g. in 'Opening of the Great Bush', chapters 8, 9, & 10; *Farthest Promised Land* parts III & IV) have perhaps a bias towards sympathy and optimism.
22. Edward Wakefield, *New Zealand after Fifty Years* London, 1889, pp. 136–8 for a good description.
23. J.D. Gould, 'The Twilight of the Estates, 1891 to 1910', *Australian Economic History Review* 10, 1, March 1970, p. 2
24. Miles Fairburn, 'The Rural Myth and the New Urban Frontier, *New Zealand Journal of History* 9, 1, April 1975, esp. pp. 6–8
25. For the appearance of this pretension in the Marton district see *Yeoman* (Wanganui) 2 June 1882, p. 12
26. *Weekly Herald* (Wanganui), 18 March 1871, p. 4
27. The creating of a farming ladder is given explicit official expression in the administration of the Cheviot estate. See J.M. Powell. 'White Collars and Moleskin Trousers: Politicians, Administrators and Settlers on the Cheviot Estate, 1893–1914', *New Zealand Geographer*, 27, 2, October 1971, pp. 151–174, esp. pp. 170–1
28. Reprinted in *Yeoman* (Wanganui), 29 July, 1887, p. 4
29. *Victorian Countryside* ed. Mingay, Vol. 1, p. 22
30. Chambers and Mingay, *Agricultural Revolution* p. 57
31. Arnold, 'Opening of the Great Bush' pp. 320–22
32. *New Zealand Country Journal* 15, 4, July 1891, p. 328
33. *Taranaki Daily News* 28 July, 1927
34. Arnold, 'Opening of the Great Bush', pp. 668–9
35. For the English background of this see *Victorian Countryside* ed. Mingay, p. 32
36. For an 1886 informal horseback get-together, drawing on a considerable district of South Taranaki, and unhindered by the muddy roads of winter, see *Hawera Star*, 27 October 1885, p. 2
37. Arthur Clayden, *A Popular Handbook to New Zealand* 2nd ed. London, 1886, p. 214
38. I cannot accept the revisionism attempted in Miles Fairburn's 'Local Community or Atomized Society?' *New Zealand Journal of History* 16, 2, October 1982, pp. 146–167. His argument bristles with special pleading and he has built his atomic conclusions into the premises of this method of approach. The clock loses its tick when you strip it down, as he does, to scrutinise its separate parts.
39. See electoral rolls for Wellington South, 1884, 1887; Masterton 1890 (Supplementary No. 2), 1893.