Fitz: The Colonial Adventures of James Edward FitzGerald
by Jenifer Roberts.
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Reviewed by Jim McAloon

James Edward FitzGerald is half-forgotten now, although he is commemorated in one of the four avenues which are the boundaries of Christchurch's inner city. Of Anglo-Irish descent, he was born in Bath to a gentry family. He found something of a niche, around the age of 30, with J R Godley and the Canterbury Association, which hoped to establish an Anglican settlement in New Zealand, along the general principles espoused by Wakefield. He was the Canterbury province's first Superintendent, an emigration agent, a member of parliament, founder of the Press, and as comptroller and auditor-general lived many more years in Wellington than he did anywhere else.

This biography is a thorough chronology of FitzGerald's life. The family background is lucidly discussed and the author gives a good account of a rather dissipated and directionless young man. He was a younger son with pretensions, but faced downward mobility, a dimension which explains the appeal of Godley's Anglican fantasy. After narrowly missing the equivalent of a first class degree in mathematics at Cambridge, FitzGerald found what was almost a sinecure in the British Museum, but, as we infer, had he had more application and not been afflicted with – as the author believes – bipolar disorder, he could have been a halfway decent scientist or curator.

By virtue of his Irish connections, FitzGerald was well aware of the Famine, and to his credit he advocated, fruitlessly, for a far more active approach to relief for the Irish than was ever contemplated by the Whigs. He came to view emigration as a way of reducing 'surplus' population (I am bound to note that the population was only surplus if the existing social order was a given) and became quite a lobbyist for a planned Irish settlement on Vancouver Island. This came to nothing, and although FitzGerald's ideas are summarised, I would have liked to know more about the sources for these ideas.

Godley, a few years older, was a relation by marriage; he read and approved of his kinsman's pamphlets on colonisation and they apparently influenced the Canterbury plan. In the Canterbury Association, FitzGerald had found both a cause and the prospect of fortune (importantly, as he noted, there was less social stigma attached to actually working in the colonies). Shortly before leaving England, FitzGerald married the 18 year old Frances Draper. In Roberts's account, FitzGerald frequently treated Fanny with considerable insensitivity, neglecting her emotionally and failing to appreciate the rigours of colonial life with 13 children. Fanny, however, remained devoted.

FitzGerald was determined to play a leading role in the new settlement, from the moment he carefully manufactured the story that he was the first of the so-called Pilgrims to leap ashore. For two years FitzGerald filled a number of official roles, particularly immigration agent, responsible for the welfare of new arrivals. Early in the 1850s, FitzGerald realised that sheepfarming was a more certain proposition than agriculture (it's a bit condescending to describe sheep as 'a new obsession' (104)). This part of the book might have benefitted from acquaintance with some of the literature on southern pastoralism, from Leo Acland to Robert Peden. Of course it took some money to start, and FitzGerald had problems raising the necessary funds. Eventually he took a run on land that is now the township of Lincoln. Politics

was engaging him more, however, and he was Godley's lieutenant and chosen candidate for Superintendent. The relationship between the two men might have been explored in a little more depth. Similarly, the discussion of FitzGerald's single term as Superintendent is a little light on what he actually achieved. FitzGerald appears to have been a hyperactive superintendent who could be obsessed by the minutiae of office, although his administration did build a road over the hills from Lyttelton to Christchurch (a route which is still character-building on a bicycle). The discussion of the first Parliament is more satisfactory, and FitzGerald was an immediate advocate of responsible government. Robert Wynyard, acting in place of a Governor, tacked back and forth and responsible government was only established in 1856.

After a spell in England as provincial emigration agent, FitzGerald returned to Canterbury and devoted himself to farming and to *The Press*, established in 1861 to oppose the expansionist plans of FitzGerald's successor as Superintendent, William Moorhouse. Having returned to parliament in 1862, FitzGerald's views on Māori had changed. Initially an unquestioning advocate of the colonising agenda, he opposed both the Taranaki and Waikato wars. He advocated Māori representation in parliament, and although some of his perspectives may have been eccentric, he was on the right side of history in denouncing the systematic breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. His editorial on Ōrākau deserves quoting (237). FitzGerald was, in fact, briefly Native Minister in 1865 and I should have liked more detailed discussion of the agenda which he laid out on assuming office. At his best on these questions FitzGerald displayed a conscience rare among colonial legislators, but his mercurial nature meant that he was, to quote a modern Māori parliamentarian, 'all steam and no hāngi'.[1]

Nor was FitzGerald a success in business. He was not, as is made clear, a particularly successful or competent farmer. At *The Press*, he went heavily into debt, expanding the paper in anticipation of a gold boom. West Coast gold, however, went out over the rivers, not over the Alps, and Christchurch did not rival Dunedin as a gold town. Accordingly, in 1867 FitzGerald resigned from parliament, left *The Press* to his creditors and left Christchurch for Wellington, where he had been appointed as comptroller general (and later auditor general). The author does not dwell on the irony of this, given the state of his own finances, but he filled the role competently and with integrity. He and Fanny passed the remainder of their lives in Wellington, and in this part of the book there is some space given to her travails. Like many women of the first colonising generation, Fanny bore numerous children and like many colonial parents James and Fanny buried more than one of them. FitzGerald's insenitivity to his wife's often arduous life is not exculpated, although the author rather forgets that many women, similarly burdened, did not have the resources to employ the servants which FitzGerald thought Fanny could do without.

Some may have wished in this book for a fuller discussion of context, particularly in provincial and colonial politics. Within the task she has set herself, the author has achieved a comprehensive narrative of FitzGerald's life (with some nice illustrations), and she quotes some contemporary observations which deserve to be remembered, like FitzGerald on Wakefield: 'no man, or body of men, has ever been connected with him in public life without being thoroughly damaged in reputation, in personal character, and even in pocket' (143).

[1] Michael Fox, 'Kelvin Davis blasts Mana Party', http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/10527144/Kelvin-Davis-blasts-Mana-Party