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Editor's Comment

The second issue for the year features a number of articles and reviews of topical interest. David Calderwood examines the history of A Rocha, a Christian environmental organisation, and explores the historical roots of Christian attitudes to the environment, and focuses on A Rocha in New Zealand. Petra Jane Edmunds zooms in on Memorial Park, Hamilton, to provide a case-study of the city beautiful movement in New Zealand in the early twentieth century. Julian Kuzma reviews *Wetlands of New Zealand: A Bitter-Sweet Story* by Janet Hunt, the Montana New Zealand Book Awards winner: Environment category. Finally, John P. Adam discusses the recently-held symposium on Sir James Hector (1834-1907).

VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS: HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF A ROCHA

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Sometime in 1993 Luis, an orchardist in the Algarve, stomped up to the environmental centre, cursing in Portuguese. When the director emerged, Luis said to him, 'Senõr Peter, I know you love warblers but I want to shoot them all! They are eating my lettuces! My family needs them to live off.' After Peter Harris had calmed Luis down, he asked for three weeks to solve the problem. As Harris himself put it, he 'sent down some poor student to look into it'. At the end of this period the 'poor' student had uncovered two important facts. First, Luis altered his normal pattern of cultivation. Seeking to maximise his land use, he had planted his lettuces among the fruit trees. Second, since warblers did not fly more than eight metres from the trees for fear of sparrowhawks, Peter explained to Luis that if he planted his lettuces further than this from the trees, the warblers would not eat them and he need not shoot them.¹

At the time Peter Harris was running an environmental project in the Alvor estuary in Portugal's Algarve called A Rocha² that has since mushroomed into a significant international organisation with projects in eighteen countries. Despite being a member of recognised international environmental groups,³ A Rocha is not well known. Part of the reason is that A Rocha is a Christian organisation. Christian organisations have not generally been involved in conservation efforts and were slow to respond to the growing environmental crisis, so a fully Christian conservation group was unusual. Moreover, during the twentieth century the evolving conviction that faith and science do not mix was accepted by Christian and non-Christian alike. Yet here was a Christian

¹ Peter Harris, 'Creation and Community', in *Creation and Gospel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001), Disc 4, Track 4.

² *A Rocha* is Portuguese for *the Rock*.

³ World Conservation Union and Conservation International. A Rocha also has links to European Union environmental policy making.

group willingly using scientific method to solve ecological problems. Also Luis held the belief that his needs and those of the environment were incompatible, which arises from an historical interpretation of Christianity that is still pervasive in wider thinking. This has two main roots, first that the environment is there to be dominated and used by people and, second, in an anthropocentric view of God held by many Christians.

In this essay I examine these attitudes in the context of Anglican and evangelical Christian views of the environment during the last forty to fifty years, focussing on how they have changed and found expression in A Rocha. I start with an historical challenge to accepted Christian attitudes.

The Lynn White Challenge, 'Poor' Christianity and Green Pantheism

In 1967, the historian Lynn White, Junior, wrote an article in *Science* magazine claiming that Christianity was responsible for the current ecological crisis because it gave humanity dominion over nature. According to White, people were made in the image of God and therefore not part of nature. By divorcing humanity from nature, White argued that Christians had desecralised nature and opened the door to unlimited exploitation resulting in environmental degradation. White's solution was either to form a new religion or rethink the old.⁴

He wrote his article during the counterculture movement that challenged the status quo in the West in the 1960s. Amongst a reaction to an economic 'rat race' lifestyle, calls for social justice, black and women's rights, protests against nuclear war and concerns about pollution and wider ecological damage there was also an engagement with religions from the East as an alternative to 'sterile' Christianity.⁵ From this type of thinking came the Green movement.

⁴ Lynn White, Junior, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science*, 155, (March 10, 1967), pp. 1203-07.

⁵ A book that covers the counterculture from a Christian point of view is Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973).

Most Greens argue that as we are not separate from nature we therefore must live sustainably as part of nature and in accord with its principles. As an antidote to desacralised nature, there has re-emerged a type of pantheism⁶ akin to scientist James Lovelock's view that the planet's ecosystems and all living creatures in them should be regarded as an interdependent superorganism, a view the Greens share.⁷ This kind of pantheism has found ground among Liberal Christians.⁸

Frances A. Schaeffer, a Swiss philosopher and evangelical theologian, analysed and critiqued White's article in his 1970 book, *Pollution and the Death of Man*. He rejected both Green pantheism and a 'poor' Christianity thesis as inadequate answers.⁹ He argued that Western cultural views towards nature, although rooted in a form of Christian tradition, did not go as far as acknowledging the sovereignty of the God that had replaced the gods of nature. Humanity, having accepted that dominion was theirs by right, attempted to rule nature autonomously without any reference to God. This is what Schaeffer means by a 'poor' Christianity. To him, the religious aspect of Christianity had been rejected, leaving only a secular shell. A rethink of Christian attitudes to the environment may have been necessary but Schaeffer insisted that what was needed first was a return to Biblical Christianity, which included environmental care and respect.¹⁰ Nature should be held sacred because God made it.

⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p.79.

⁷ These views are explained in his book *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁸ New Zealand theologian, Lloyd Geering, thinks that we need to worship our planet in order to save it. Lloyd Geering, *The Greening of Christianity* (Wellington: St. Andrews Trust, 2005), p. 34. However, he seems to accept the scientific view that earth is non-living. Geering, p. 35.

⁹ Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, p. 28.

Faith, Science and the Christian Recovery Narrative

Natural science had germinated and flourished in the Christian West.¹¹ Western science began as an exploration of God's universe but eventually came to explain nature without reference to God at all. The popular idea that developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was that scientists saw everything from a purely naturalistic and largely deterministic viewpoint. God existed only in the realm of faith. Science and faith operated in two completely separate areas, having no communication except to argue with each other from time to time over relevance and origins.

The historical reality was far more complex. Many serious scientists operated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with a strong Christian faith. New Zealand historians James Beattie and John Stenhouse argue that these centuries were never completely secularised.¹² Furthermore, dominion theology was a religious impetus to tame and make nature useful and became a strong historical narrative. Carolyn Merchant, an American feminist historian, has described it as an ascensionist Christian recovery narrative. In her article, 'Reinventing Eden', she charts how this recovery narrative informed Western society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³ Nature was seen as a fall from Eden.

¹¹ Schaeffer's view was that it could only do so in such a context. Early scientists were also Christians and believed that a God of order had created the natural world, therefore it, too, had order. So it was worthwhile to find out how it worked. See Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), pp. 30-32.

¹² James Beattie and John Stenhouse, 'God and the Natural World in Nineteenth-century New Zealand', in *Christianity, Modernity and Culture*, edited by John Stenhouse and assisted by G.A. Wood (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), pp 180-183. They argue that this is especially true in New Zealand, which has never been as totally secular as the popular view implies.

¹³ She focuses particularly on US expansionism in the North American continent. This section is a summary of her ideas. See Carolyn Merchant, 'Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative', in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing*

Modern man recreated the garden by applying the Christian idea of domination with modern technological science, capitalism and labour. The Garden of Eden was restored by cultivating the world to provide for people.¹⁴

This view has permeated widely into Western culture to justify 'taming' nature. Thus civilisation is set against the wildness of the natural world, meshing with the nineteenth century idea of progress. The most important implication of this recovery narrative was that humans had the right to use natural resources, to scientifically cultivate and 'improve' nature solely for their benefit. In the twentieth century, technology has accelerated this process. It is deeply ingrained in capitalist societies where continuous economic growth is the modern sign of progress, sustainable or otherwise. So the narratives of dominion and progress continue as the basis of modern economies, to produce a better standard of living for all. Therefore, conservative Christians prefer this to the 'New Age' pantheism of the Greens and other environmentalist movements that challenge it. However, the Greens believed that only a different kind of thinking than that which drove most of modern society could bring about necessary environmental change.¹⁵

Nature, edited by William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1996), pp.132-59.

¹⁴ There was a distinction between cultivation and wilderness, the latter often defined as beautiful and inspiring but useless for cultivation.

¹⁵ In New Zealand, the Greens adopted a liberal framework of values from the outset, including social justice, women's rights and gay rights alongside strong ecological concerns. Initially they called themselves the Values party and, in 1972, was the first Green party in the world. See Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p.299 (footnote 37). Because these values were antithetical to evangelical Christian views, they provoked opposition and also divided Anglican opinion. This situation has continued to the present. Therefore conservative 'Christian' parties in New Zealand have been implacably opposed to the Greens. Dialogue between them on environmental issues has not been possible. For an overview of the Greens in New Zealand, see,

Environmentalist narrative sees the recovery story as false: We have actually moved from Eden to a degraded desert. Advances in science and technology only accelerated decline in nature. I suggest, then, that White was actually critiquing Schaeffer's 'poor' Christianity, a perspective that was adapted by Western culture to justify its progress after it had moved away from its Christian basis. He was not, in other words, critiquing Christianity itself. It has not helped that many Christians have been uncritical of this form of restoration narrative. Nevertheless, it has been an inadequate view of the relationship between humans and the rest of nature from a truly Christian stance.

Christian Attitudes to the Environment

Sean McDonagh, sociologist and theologian, points out that environmental degradation occurred well before the Biblical era and by cultures outside Christianity. He goes on to say that White overstates his case by claiming that his view – Christian orthodoxy without qualification – ignored the other strands of Biblical thought, particularly those referring to the stewardship role of Christians in caring for the environment.¹⁶

Flawed or not, there was enough truth in White's position to act as a clarion call for Christians to reconsider the environment in a more balanced way. Many books on Christianity and the environment refer to White's article as a starting point for taking nature seriously in Christian theology and ecological action.¹⁷ This was not universal and it was not widely taken up,

Tim Bale and John Wilson, 'The Greens', in *New Zealand Government and Politics (fourth edition)*, edited by Raymond Miller, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 392-402.

¹⁶ Sean McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1987), pp. 137, 138.

¹⁷ See for example, Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, pp. 10, 11; Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, ed., *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 51; Brennan R. Hill, *Christian Faith and the Environment* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), pp. 2, 3, 40, 269; R. J. Berry, ed., *The Care of Creation* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press,

except by a few like Francis Schaeffer, due to an anthropocentric view of God.

There are four broad ways anthropocentrism shapes Christian attitudes to the environment. I have already covered the first, dominion theology. The second is that spirituality is more important than the physical world. This view dates back to the beginnings of Christianity but originates in Greek philosophy where the spiritual is regarded as good and matter evil. Although it was condemned as heresy in the fourth century at the Council of Nicea in Italy, this idea remained in Christian thinking. Its modern expression is that God is only interested in people.¹⁸

The third, the apocalyptic, holds that ultimate redemption of the earth only occurs through its being destroyed and recreated by God.¹⁹ It is at its most destructive when wedded to dominion theology which then encourages Christians to plunder natural resources in the belief that it hastens this process. The last

2000), p.26; Carolyn M. King, *Habitat of Grace: Biology, Christianity and the Global Environmental Crisis* (Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 2002), pp. 129, 130, 148, 155, 156; C. G. Bloore, ed., *Christians, the Environment and Justice* (Dunedin: Social Justice Workgroup, Knox Church Dunedin, 2003), p.29; Geering, pp. 17, 18. White's article is reprinted in full in Berry and Schaeffer. It would probably take less space to list the books that do not refer to White's article.

¹⁸ This idea was planted it widely in evangelical churches in the nineteenth century by the prominent American evangelist D. L. Moody who believed that the world was a wrecked ship destined for ruin. See M. Laird Simons, 'Dwight Lyman Moody' (third to last paragraph) n.d., <<http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biomoodys>> [accessed June 11, 2008].

¹⁹ The apocalyptic view was a response to the nuclear threat and ecological problems by a segment of evangelical Christianity. The most well known proponent of this among Christians was Hal Lindsay. In his book *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), he explains that his ideas are influenced by J. N. Darby, an early Plymouth Brethren leader. Darby's ideas arise from a Western linear process imposed on the New Testament book of Revelation.

attitude, the providential, acknowledges the problem of environmental degradation but argues that God would look after us anyway and intervene to sort out the mess.

Accepted uncritically, these anthropocentric²⁰ attitudes lead to inaction or indifference towards the environment. If the natural world does not matter or is to be destroyed, so the argument goes, it is futile to care for it. Anthropocentrism makes it a struggle between human needs and aspirations and the natural world. At best, the natural world is only cared for as a secondary consideration. This explains why most Christian groups have been slow to be involved in environmental action.

A Rocha: foundation

The founder of A Rocha, Peter Harris, felt the pressure of the predominant anthropocentric view. Wondering how his passion for bird watching could possibly find a place in his duties as an Anglican vicar, he finally decided that pastoral²¹ work should prevail. However, immersing himself in pastoral work on England's Merseyside in 1980 only deepened his feelings towards wildlife and its protection. 'God did not seem to be entirely lining up on the expected side of the conflict'.²²

Richard Storey, who later became involved in A Rocha's second project in Lebanon and subsequently set up A Rocha in New Zealand, described his experience of anthropocentrism in an Auckland University Christian cell group in the early 1990s. 'Although they were wonderful Christians...and I had a huge respect for them, they felt that God was only interested in people

²⁰ I use anthropocentric as opposed to ecocentric or theocentric. Michael S. Northcott uses the term humanocentric. See Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 124-141.

²¹ There is some irony that a term currently used to describe Christian work among people should have had its origin in nature.

²² Peter Harris, *Under the Bright Wings* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), pp. 1-3.

and had no particular love for creation. I really struggled with that'.²³ He soon discovered that not everyone held this view.

The wider group this cell was part of encouraged us to think Christianly about our studies. So I read a couple of books about the environment and Christianity which made it clear that the Bible does talk about the value of creation...and that gave me a lot of hope.²⁴

Storey was one of many Christians who were developing a love for science and the environment during the 1980s and 1990s. Christian churches and denominations were also becoming involved.

Wider Church Responses

The biggest church response was the Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) programme inaugurated in 1983 at the sixth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver. In January 1990, eminent scientists issued an 'Open Letter to the Religious Community' that stated that global environmental problems were 'of such magnitude' that 'a perspective must be recognised...as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension'.²⁵ Sections of the scientific community recognised that Christian faith had a part to play.

In March 1990, the meeting of JPIC in Korea decided to resolve the dominion over nature issue by 'dethron[ing] humanity from its unique role as "the image of God"'.²⁶ This was unacceptable to evangelicals. The AuSable Institute for Environmental Studies had earlier been established in 1979 in Northern Michigan as a centre for Christian environmental

²³ Richard Storey, interviewed by David Calderwood, Hamilton, April 12, 2008.

²⁴ Storey, interview, April 12, 2008.

²⁵ Berry, pp. 28,29,187.

²⁶ Berry, p. 15.

education.²⁷ They were central in forming the Evangelical Environment Network in 1992 which produced *An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* (1994) to assert that the earth belongs to God and Christians are stewards responsible to the Creator for their treatment of the environment. Several hundred church leaders around the world endorsed it as a counter to the JPIC position and to demonstrate the concern of many evangelical Christians.²⁸

Peter Harris, while endorsing its aims in 2000, added that this work could simply represent another delayed Christian response to environmental concerns. The true declaration to indifferent evangelicals and anyone else, he maintained, was in environmental action although that often met with incomprehension or opposition.²⁹ He observed that along with Christians passionate about the environment were those who hated 'tree huggers' and were as likely to shoot as to save the next endangered spotted owl they saw. Often they attended the same church.³⁰ Loren Wilkinson, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Philosophy at Regent College, who has been associated with AuSable since the 1980s and A Rocha for more than a decade, wrote his own book on Christians and environmental care in 1982, *Earthkeeping*. He was criticised for adopting nature worship from the New Age movement and therefore branded un-Christian.³¹

Richard Storey met with similar incomprehension. He wryly noted that persuading Christians to support him to save wetlands in Lebanon as a legitimate Christian activity was only

²⁷ They also opened other centres in North America, India and Kenya and have run symposia on environmental issues since the mid-1980s. Berry, p.189. Granberg-Michaelson, p.6. Regent College in Vancouver have done the same in conjunction with Christian environmental groups including A Rocha. Recent examples are *Creation and Gospel* (2001) and *Creation Groaning* (2003).

²⁸ Berry, pp. 15, 17. The full text of the Declaration is on pp. 18-22.

²⁹ Berry, pp. 132, 133.

³⁰ Harris, *Creation and Gospel*, Disc 4, Track 4.

³¹ Loren Wilkinson, 'New Age, New Consciousness, and the New Creation', in Granberg-Michaelson, pp. 26,27.

slightly easier than convincing his family that working in an area with civil wars and regular armed incursions from Israel and Syria was a sensible thing to do.³²

Renewed Christian emphasis on the environment filtered through to the wider Anglican Church. For example, Lambeth XII, the international conference of Anglican bishops that meets every ten years, urged the faithful in 1988 that stewardship of God's earth is a necessary part of Christian discipleship. In 1990, the Anglican Consultative Council defined mission in the following terms: 'to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom...teach, baptise and nurture new believers...respond to human need by loving service...transform the unjust structures of society' and added 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'. Lambeth XIII produced an eco-theology prefaced with 'an urgent need for the Church to reflect on Scripture and Christian tradition in the light of the ecological crisis...to bring their faith into an effective engagement... [B]iblical insights...provide a firm foundation for a contemporary ecological theology'.³³ The liturgical calendar includes at least one sermon on creation care and churches are encouraged to form creation care groups with a practical focus. Such groups have formed in New Zealand Anglican parishes in the last five years.³⁴

The A Rocha Story

A Rocha did not come about as a response to the attitudinal changes amongst evangelical and Anglican Christians. The movement evolved first, with the education of other Christians coming later. Peter Harris found that deliberately living in urban Merseyside did not provide insulation against nature. Birds used this area as a migratory point and there remained a tension between his bird watching activities and parish duties. Yet he and his wife, Miranda, still wanted to centre their life in pastoral care. When an opportunity in Kenya fell through, Peter turned instead to the possibility of an environmental project in Portugal. He was

³² Storey, interview, April 12, 2008.

³³ Berry, pp. 30,188,189.

³⁴ West Hamilton Anglican parish is one example.

surprised when his wife supported him enthusiastically and agreed to take their young family there without any clear idea how it would work in practice.

So, in September 1983, they moved to the Portuguese Algarve and A Rocha was set up as a trust. The Harris family moved from one temporary accommodation to another, simultaneously learned the language, adjusted to the culture and studied the local environment with the ultimate aim of establishing a centre. It took two years to find *Cruzinha*³⁵ on a small hill leading down to the shore of the Alvor estuary. This was set up as a centre for field studies, eventually attracting many Christian and other students seeking to apply their scientific knowledge in a practical way. A Rocha's ethos was to understand the Alvor environment first, then to educate its human inhabitants in ways to preserve it without depriving them of their living. The ultimate goal was government protection but A Rocha realised that those natural habitats could quickly disappear through pollution or by developers wanting to exploit them.³⁶

Visitors to *Cruzinha* often wanted to know how to initiate similar projects in their own countries. So Peter and Miranda became A Rocha international co-ordinators in 1995, travelling the world to visit Christians wanting to start one. By 2000 there were projects in seven countries. The Kenya project was established in 1998 after four years of relational work to preserve the last forty kilometres of coastal forest, which supported many fragile habitats.³⁷ However, with locals needing to sell the wood to pay for their children's education, a tension developed between preserving nature and meeting people's needs. The solution was the forest itself. Local people could make money from conducting eco-tours rather than chopping down the trees. A long-term study centre was finally established in 2004 once the forest had gained official preservation.³⁸

³⁵ Portuguese for 'little cross'.

³⁶ This section is a summary of the A Rocha story in Portugal from Harris, *Under the Bright Wings*.

³⁷ The forest had once stretched from Somalia to Mozambique.

³⁸ Peter Harris, *Kingfisher's Fire* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2008), pp. 65-71.

In 2001, A Rocha's first urban project started in the Southall suburb of London in ninety acres of polluted land that had largely been used as a rubbish dump. Despite this it had a thriving ecosystem including many varieties of plants, several species of butterfly and a rare frog. Controversy arose as the restoration project went beyond merely cleaning up to sculpting the landscape to make it aesthetically pleasing. Again, this involved establishing a balance between the need for Southall residents to have a natural park to lift their spirits in the midst of the concrete wasteland they lived in and the needs of the natural ecosystem.³⁹

Another project has emerged in the Lebanon. When Richard Storey visited there in 2002, he did not realise it was an A Rocha project as he had never heard of the schemes. His desire to be involved in a practical ecological project drew him. He was impressed with the importance of saving the Aammiq wetland in the Bekaa valley, as it is an important resting point for migratory birds travelling thousands of kilometres from Africa, Asia and Europe. In 2004 he brought back the A Rocha vision to New Zealand.⁴⁰

Most A Rocha groups started with a particular project and built the organisation around it. Storey began with a discussion group for Waikato Christians interested in science and in making an environmental difference. These debates began in 2006, exploring what it meant to have an eco-theology. So the organisation developed before any environmental project. A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand was launched only in 2008, the eighteenth country in which A Rocha operates.⁴¹ Its aim is to work with other conservation groups on agreed tasks including scientific data sharing plus the education of Christian groups and churches about the importance of creation care and eco-theology. Ultimately this may lead to dialogue and possible co-operation with the New Zealand Greens, but without political agendas.

³⁹ For the full story, see Dave and Anne Bookless, *Planetwise* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ Storey, interview, April 12, 2008.

⁴¹ A Rocha Switzerland, the nineteenth organisation, is currently being established.

Conclusion

A Rocha fits Carolyn Merchant's idea of a Christian recovery narrative although its philosophy is not one of dominion. Its members agree with environmentalist observations that cultivation and domination to improve nature has not restored Eden. A Rocha rejects an anthropocentric view of God: the group acknowledges that nature is not there solely for humans but nor does it require a choice between human needs and environmental ones. As their work has shown, cultivation and civilisation can be in balance with the needs of nature. This and the ethos of understanding, preserving, protecting and working with nature has informed A Rocha throughout its history. But it is held lightly. Ecosystems that have been studied and laboured on at length may be wiped out by pollution, accident or greed at any time. So there is a healthy realism to their approach. 'Recovery of a lost Eden is not A Rocha's goal. Instead it is preserving and restoring the one rapidly disappearing now by using science hand in hand with Christian faith. Furthermore, for A Rocha, the environment is being resacralised for Christians, as Lynn White hoped, not through a new religion but by rediscovering the Christian truth that nature deserves to be respected and cared for because God made it. Humans are stewards, not owners. Many Christians have accepted the stewardship theology but there is still a huge number who remain unconvinced and continue to hold the old attitudes. Due to the influence of A Rocha and other Christian environmental groups many more hold the new attitudes than thirty, forty or fifty years ago. As Peter Harris, founder of A Rocha observed, the Christian church is the largest non-Governmental organisation in the world.⁴² As the eco-theologies developed since the 1970s continue to be adopted by increasing numbers of Christians, the potential for worthwhile environmental change in the future brings great hope.

⁴² Peter Harris, keynote speech on May 31, 2008 at the A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand conference, Raglan, New Zealand.

IMPROVING ON NATURE? A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE HAMILTON BEAUTIFICATION SOCIETY.

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The archives of the Hamilton Beautifying Society, some three boxes in the Hamilton City Council archives, contain every conceivable piece of correspondence from the Society's three decades of activity: lively discussion over whether to charge citizens admission to the town's riverbank to watch an annual rowing regatta; public debate over the archaic neck-to-knee bathing suit requirement at Hamilton Lake; newspaper reports of the untimely death of a wallaby at Parana Park, with a request from the Society that visitors not feed the remaining wallaby sweets. Yet among the reams of fortnightly reports from the caretakers of Memorial Park to the society secretary, the ledgers and the comprehensive file of newspaper clippings, the archive is silent on what motivated some of Hamilton's most prominent citizens to attempt to comprehensively change their environment in the way they did.

In 1912, Hamilton bookseller William Paul led a group of prominent citizens to form the Hamilton Beautifying Society with the intention of 'forming into parks, planting with shrubs or improving or beautifying in any way' the lands held by the society and the borough, and to acquire land in order to promote further beautification.¹ With help from the borough council and the domain board, the society planted trees on residential roadsides, established flowerbeds by the railway stations and civic buildings, and cultivated public gardens and recreation facilities at Hamilton Lake and on the banks of the Waikato River. The Soldiers' Memorial Park and the adjacent Parana Park most clearly show the Hamilton Beautifying Society's influence. Paul lobbied the borough council and national government to allow Memorial Park to be established on what had once been a public dumping-ground

¹ Hamilton Beautifying Society, 'Rules of the Hamilton Beautifying Society (Incorporated) Dated 1930', MSC55, Hamilton City Council Archives, Hamilton.

on the Waikato River's eastern bank.² The society removed bracken, blackberry and household rubbish from the area once known as Kowhai Bank, covering the bank with hundreds of native plants. Parana Park was commended as one of the city's 'ideal spot[s] for public recreation', and the *Waikato Times* praised Memorial Park's 'trim lawns' framed by blooming sweet-williams and dahlias and the 'unostentatious but essential maintenance' of Parana Park.³

According to the letterhead used by the society, the Society 'endeavour[ed] to provide for the gratification of the aesthetic feelings of the residents of Hamilton and the strangers within its gate'.⁴ Press cuttings from the Society's archives suggest this goal was achieved: *New Zealand Sporting and Dramatic Magazine* described Hamilton as 'undeniably one of the most picturesque towns in the Dominion,' where 'natural bush flourishes in green vigour beside modern gardens radiant in exotic flowers'.⁵ A visitor wrote to the *Waikato Times* that he had 'never seen anything more picturesque and peaceful' than the city's riverbanks.⁶ Memorial Park caretaker W. A. Wallis explained in his report of 31 March 1925 that he was busy 'endeavouring to make the park as attractive as possible in every way I can'.⁷ Wallis' other reports show that making the park attractive involved an extreme makeover: filling in part of the creek which flowed through the park, to make a pond for ducks and swans; ripping out and

² The Town Clerk informed the secretary of the society, in a letter dated 15 July 1920, that the War Legislation Act 1917 required permission from the Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs for a war memorial to be built. MSC55.

³ 'Annual Report of the Hamilton Beautifying Society' 1936, MSC 55; *Waikato Times*, 27 December 1938, newspaper clippings album, MSC55.

⁴ Hamilton Beautifying Society letterhead, sadly unused and undated, MSC55.

⁵ *New Zealand Sporting and Dramatic*, 23 May 1935, newspaper clipping album, MSC55.

⁶ *Waikato Times*, 13 January 1937, newspaper clipping album, MSC55.

⁷ W.A. Wallis, report to the Hamilton Beautifying Society, 31 March 1925, MSC55.

burning pampas grass, bamboo and other undesirable flora; as well as maintaining the flowerbeds and lawns of the park. Every trace of the original landscape was removed, replaced with neat paths and flowerbeds, framed by an artificially-created wilderness of native trees.

This article argues that the concepts of 'improvement' and 'beautification' had developed morally-charged meanings in the early twentieth century, and that the goals of the Hamilton Beautifying Society can be understood as part of a progressive social trend, which prized 'wilderness' and 'undeveloped' natural landscapes as both aesthetically appealing and morally improving. 'Improving or beautifying' the landscape seems a straightforward goal, but the meanings of such terms as 'improved', 'beautiful' or 'natural' are not inherent or fixed: they are constructed within a community of shared understanding. These terms are given meaning and moral significance by a Western intellectual tradition which defines nature and wilderness in opposition to urban development and civilisation.⁸ Indeed, official definitions of the terms show this assumed dichotomy. The United States' Wilderness Act 1964, for instance, defined wilderness as 'an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain'.⁹ Organisations which seek to beautify or improve their environment, therefore, do so with a specific understanding of what these terms mean. Few histories have been produced about the beautifying societies which flourished in early-twentieth-century New Zealand towns, and those histories that do exist have been largely uncritical about their intellectual and aesthetic influences, and the values which motivated them. To understand what motivated the members of the Hamilton Beautifying Society and the people of Hamilton, it is necessary to place the society within the progressive movement of scenery preservation and social reform active in the first decades of the twentieth century.

⁸ See in James D. Proctor, 'The Social Construction of Nature: Relativist Accusations, Pragmatist and Critical Realist Responses', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* vol. 88 no. 3 (Sept. 1998), pp. 352-376 for a thorough critical overview of the topic.

⁹ Proctor, p. 355.

Beautifying Societies

Beautifying Societies emerged in New Zealand towns as part of a wider intellectual and aesthetic movement which celebrated the 'natural' world as an antidote to urban development. The first urban beautifying society in New Zealand, the Dunedin Amenities Society formed in 1887, charged itself with planting trees on city reserves and conserving the natural environment as the 'means of healthy and elevating recreation for its inhabitants'.¹⁰ Christchurch Beautifying Association formed in 1897 to 'plant and otherwise beautify the uncultivated public places in the city'.¹¹ One of its first tasks was to transform Mill Island on the Avon River into 'a piece of old primeval forest'.¹² Other towns followed Christchurch's lead, and by the middle of the twentieth century these sentiments were echoed by beautifying societies in almost every major urban centre in New Zealand. Wellington Beautifying Society sought 'the further improvement of public parks, gardens, beaches, play-grounds, open spaces and streets' and 'the removal or improvement of buildings...which disfigure the landscape'.¹³ For city-dwellers in the increasingly urbanised colony, nature held romantic associations of purity and innocence. Environmentalist Sir Charles A. Fleming notes that nineteenth-century settlers 'could not afford to cultivate the romantic image of the wilderness'. For these settlers, to speak of 'improving' or

¹⁰ Report of the AGM of Dunedin Amenities Society, 1915, cited in Caroline Miller, 'Did the City Beautiful Movement Exist in New Zealand? A Preliminary Conclusion' in Michael Roche and Caroline Miller, eds., *Past Matters: Proceedings of the 8th Australasian Urban History/Planning History Conference* (Palmerston North: Massey University, 2007), p. 325.

¹¹ Thelma Strongman, *City Beautiful: The First 100 Years of the Christchurch Beautifying Association* (Christchurch: Christchurch Beautifying Association, 1999), p. 2.

¹² Strongman, p. 7.

¹³ Wellington Beautifying Society, *Wellington Beautifying Society: Its Aims and Objects* (Wellington: Wellington Beautifying Society, 1939), p. 21.

'cultivating' the land meant felling trees, erecting buildings, making it useful for agriculture or industry. 'Improved land' was tamed, surveyed, developed. The beautifying societies' use of the term suggests the opposite: beautifying societies sought to improve land by returning it to a romanticised image of nature, creating overgrown landscapes of native plants, seemingly untouched by human hands.

Urban beautification societies mirror a 'conservation ethic' which emerged in the cities of late-nineteenth century New Zealand, part of a wider spirit of progressive reform in New Zealand society. The 1890-1911 Liberal government introduced old-age pensions and compulsory arbitration for industrial disputes, to protect the most vulnerable members of the dominion.¹⁴ And such concerns were not limited to people: in 1903, the government enacted the Scenery Preservation Act. The Act's aims were pragmatic as well as romantic; preserving areas of forest ensured future supplies of native timber and prevented soil erosion, which benefited agriculture.¹⁵ The conservation ethic emerged, according to Fleming, as a result of increasing urbanisation which created a romantic and nostalgic view of nature; changing recreation patterns; and an emerging national identity separate from Britain, which celebrated images of the unique New Zealand landscape.¹⁶ The new scenic reserves were established along main roads and rail travel routes, making them accessible to city-dwellers nostalgic for 'rural tranquility and beauty'.¹⁷ The choice of the term 'scenery preservation' is revealing: it suggests that natural environments should be protected because they were pleasant to look at, beautiful,

¹⁴ Peter J. Coleman, 'The Spirit of New Zealand Liberalism in Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Modern History* vol. 30 no. 3 (Sept. 1958), pp. 227-235.

¹⁵ Sir Charles A. Fleming, 'The History and Future of the Conservation Ethic' in the *Proceedings of the Silver Jubilee Conference of the National Parks Authority of New Zealand*, Lincoln College, 5-8 July 1978, p. 59.

¹⁶ Fleming, pp. 62-63.

¹⁷ Tony Nightingale and Paul Dingwall, *Our Picturesque Heritage: 100 Years of Scenery Preservation in New Zealand* (Wellington: Department of Conservation, 2003), p. 7.

picturesque. The report of the Department of Lands to the government in 1910 described the benefits of preserving 'lands along high ridges, wooded slopes and gullies...waterfalls, thermal springs...for aesthetic but also for economic reasons'.¹⁸ A later report stressed the importance of 'securing...the few remaining beauty spots of the Dominion, if for nothing else than preserving for the generations who follow a few examples of the primeval scenery that existed in the country at the advent of European occupation'.¹⁹ In a lecture on scenery preservation to the Christchurch Beautifying Association in 1911, Association founder Samuel Hurst Seager called for urban developments which 'harmonise with their natural surroundings', and stressed scenery preservation should be complemented by aesthetically-pleasing improvements: '[W]e must demand,' he declared, 'that our natural scenery be preserved, and that all isolated buildings...erected in such a way that they will not mar the beauty of the scene'.²⁰

The Hamilton Beautifying Society, too, sought to conserve what little 'wilderness' remained within the town. Society members led the campaign to preserve Claudelands Bush, the last remaining stand of kahikatea that had covered much of the town before human settlement.²¹ But most of the Society's work was not concerned with preserving the natural environment, so much as *creating* environments which gratified the same aesthetic sensibilities as these natural landscapes. At Kowhai Bank and Parana Park, traces of human settlement were steadily erased from the landscape. The town clerk sent a letter to the park caretaker in 1921, requesting that he move the cow which he had

¹⁸ Report on Scenery Preservation for the Year 1909-10, *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1910, C-6, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹ Report on Scenery Preservation for the Year 1914-15, *AJHR*, 1915, C-6, p. 1.

²⁰ S. Hurst Seager, *Our Beautiful World: Man's Work in the Making and Marring of it, a Lecture Delivered to the Christchurch Beautifying Association* (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1911), pp. 6, 27.

²¹ Peter Gibbons, *Astride the River* (Hamilton: Hamilton City Council, 1977), p. 213.

allowed to graze in the park.²² The Society removed existing vegetation, some predating European settlement and some more recent, and planted hundreds of native trees at Kowhai Bank in August 1923. In 1935, park staff removed virtually all non-native trees from the river bank, and the following year grubbed out the 'unsightly willows' lining the creek and replaced them with some 400 natives.²³ The foreman reported that two of his assistants had ventured into the bush for the 'collection of native and exotic trees for future planting'.²⁴ As well as the ducks and swans, 'wild' animals including an opossum and a pair of wallabies were introduced to Parana Park in the 1930s, to complete the illusion of a prehistoric Eden in the growing borough.²⁵

The importance of beautiful natural landscapes was not only aesthetic, but also moral. A 'back to nature' movement flourished amongst social reformists in late-nineteenth century Europe, reviving romantic notions of the morally-improving qualities of wilderness. Just as Wordsworth famously recalled the 'beauteous forms' of Tintern Abbey to restore his moral being 'mid the din of towns and cities', late-Victorian social reformers celebrated wild nature as an antidote to the deleterious effects of the city's crowded slums.²⁶ Reformers in Britain decried the 'ugly destructive unmanageable world' created by modern industrial society, which kept 'quite fifty per cent of our population living in sub-human conditions...near or under the poverty line'.²⁷ New Zealand newspapers similarly equated cities with poverty, crime, misery and moral decay. Crowded into cities by increasing land

²² Letter from Town Clerk to Foreman of the Hamilton Beautifying Society, 17 August 1921, MSC55.

²³ Annual Reports of the Hamilton Beautifying Society, 1936 and 1942, MSC55.

²⁴ Foreman's Report to the Hamilton Beautifying Society, 22 July 1936, MSC55

²⁵ Foreman's Report to the Hamilton Beautifying Society, 16 September 1936, MSC55.

²⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798'

²⁷ Dugald Macfayden, 'Sociological Effects of Garden Cities', *Social Forces* vol. 14. no. 2 (Dec. 1935), p. 250.

monopolies, the *New Zealand Herald* warned that settlers coming to the colony would swell 'the ranks of poverty and crime' in the urban centres.²⁸ Pollution from smoky factories and crowded settlements were also a threat to public health. As early as the 1880s, urban tree planting was promoted as a way to 'purify' unsanitary city air for the good of public health.²⁹ The romantic reformers turned to nature both to improve society's physical and moral health. In 1898, Ebenezer Howard published his manifesto on the Garden City, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Howard proposed an alternative to the physically and morally unhealthy urban slums in the form of deliberately-planned cities with designated green space for recreation and vast, undeveloped town belts.³⁰ Supporters of Garden Cities spoke scientifically of the physical, mental and moral benefits brought about by 'factories set in fields and gardens, houses with plenty of air, room and sunshine, abundant playing fields...[and] sufficient human and natural interest in the environment'.³¹ The link was clear: by improving the quality of the city through gardens and green belts, social reformers could improve the quality of its residents.

Unlike Wellington and Dunedin, Hamilton had no town belt in its design. But it was divided by the Waikato River, and its banks became the focus of the Hamilton Beautifying Society's efforts. The first major work of the Society, Memorial Park was a monument to national and regional identity: its imposing cenotaph honoured the Hamilton men who had fought in the Great War, while oaks and plane trees were marked with plaques bearing the names of fallen soldiers. When wealthy resident George Parr donated his riverside property to the borough for a children's park, Society president William Paul expressed the wish that 'we should endeavour to establish at Parana Park a Children's Model Playground...where mothers can take care of their

²⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 5 June 1871, cited in Coleman, p. 231.

²⁹ James Beattie, 'Colonial Geographies of Settlement: Vegetation, Towns, Disease and Well-being in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1830s-1930s', draft manuscript, forthcoming in *Environment and History* (November 2008).

³⁰ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), pp. 54-55.

³¹ Macfayden, p. 252.

children...under ideal conditions, and at the same time be able to benefit from the beauty of their surroundings'.³² Paul's wish was granted: in 1936, a paddling pool and playground were built in the park 'for the benefit of the children'.³³ The park proved a popular picnic spot for families and local schools. Its caretaker, W. A. Wallis, complained in one of his fortnightly reports about boisterous children damaging his carefully laid-out gardens, and asked that the society ban future school groups from picnicking at the park. Certain types of recreation were proscribed in the society's parks: the solemn soldiers' memorial park and the neighbouring wilderness were sites for quiet reflection, not boisterous activity. S. Hurst Seager suggested that '[t]he pleasure which we derive from all natural scenery depends...upon rousing certain trains of meditation in the mind', a meditation to be achieved by quiet contemplation.³⁴ Editorials and letters to the local paper reflect this mode of appreciation, praising the beauty of the 'slopes and flats of well-kept grass', the 'picturesque and peaceful' landscape.³⁵ Human activity is almost absent in picture postcards of the riverbank and parks. In one, the tree-lined banks and meandering path frame a distant view of a train on the railway bridge. Another shows a boat peeking out between overgrown trees, while a view of Memorial Park almost loses the cenotaph behind a forest of trees and shrubs.³⁶

³² Hamilton Beautifying Society, twenty-ninth Annual Report (undated), MSC55.

³³ Report of the Hamilton Beautifying Society for the year 1932-33, MSC55.

³⁴ Seager, p. 1.

³⁵ 'Beautifying a River', *New Zealand Sporting and Dramatic*, 23 May 1935, Newspaper clippings album, MSC55.

³⁶ 'Waikato River Hamilton N.Z. F.G.R. 5994' (n.d.), 'On the Banks of the Waikato River Hamilton N.Z. F.G.R. 5996' (n.d.), 'Soldiers Park, Hamilton, NZ' (n.d.), John Elsbury's NZ Postcards Page, <<http://www.nzpostcard.co.nz/html/hamiltonf.htm>> [accessed 7 April 2008]

Conclusion

Memorial and Parana Parks were by far the biggest responsibility of the Hamilton Beautification Society.³⁷ The Society realised its vision to improve and beautify the borough on these two very different parks on the Waikato River's eastern bank. The site was cleared and vigorously rebuilt to create the solemn, sculpted Memorial Park, as a monument to national identity. The sprawling Sylvania of Parana Park was similarly sculpted for such purposes. The parks were created to conform to romantic ideals of natural beauty, unspoilt by human intervention, and to provide morally improving antidotes to the social ills of urban living. To improve and to beautify, for the Hamilton Beautifying Society and a public increasingly concerned with scenery preservation, meant to create an imaginary state of nature to be enjoyed with suitable solemnity. Visitors to the parks, both local to Hamilton and 'strangers within its gates', responded in a way which suggests they understood the Society's goal of 'improving or beautifying' the city. Commercial photographs of the parks show only hints of human existence. Newspaper editorials and letters praised the picturesque scenery and natural beauty of both sites, and admired the restorative power of this oasis of wilderness. By the 1940s, the romantic vision of William Paul and the Hamilton Beautifying Society had gained popular acceptance. After the national centenary celebrations in 1940, the Society passed its responsibilities to the borough council. One of the last acts of the Society was a particularly Wordsworthian gesture: it memorialised longstanding Society member Dr Hugh Douglas by planting a host of daffodils at Hamilton Lake.³⁸ Its work to 'improve and beautify' the city's green space is still evident today: a dense wilderness of native trees still lines the riverbank at Memorial Park and tree-ferns still flank the meandering stream through Parana Park.

³⁷ Gibbons, *Astride The River*, p. 213.

³⁸ Gibbons, *Astride The River*, p. 214.

BOOK REVIEW

Janet Hunt, *Wetlands of New Zealand: A Bitter-Sweet Story* (Auckland: Random House, 2007), ISBN: 978-1-86941-904-2 (hbk).

Julian Kuzma

From coast to mountain tops, huge areas of New Zealand once were wetlands. Now only vestiges remain, fragmented and greatly reduced in extent and quality. In vividly descriptive language, Janet Hunt tells how the wetlands were formed, about their insect, plant and animal inhabitants, and their current state.

Wetlands of New Zealand is a comprehensive case-study examination of many of New Zealand's wetlands. Chapter one identifies the surprisingly many types of wetlands. The second chapter is centred entirely on peat – despite its unassuming character, peat comprises a significant component of many wetlands and helps maintain global environmental balances. Coastal wetlands are the focus of the next two chapters, overviewing the many and varied sea-level wetlands and looking at the role they play in the lives of shore and wading birds, including globe-travelling migrant birds. Chapter five moves inland to examine the delicate ecology of high altitude wetlands. Chapter six follows Otago's Taieri river 380 kilometres 'from tops to tide' as a case study of the river's role in catchment, connector and feeder of wetland areas. Chapter seven identifies wetlands in extreme areas that may be surprising: geothermal and underground wetlands and the unique wetlands of the Antarctic. The final chapter focuses on people in wetlands, urban wetlands and wetland conservation.

Janet Hunt's text is complemented by beautiful photographs of the wetlands and their inhabitants. *Wetlands of New Zealand* will engage environmental experts and those with no knowledge of wetlands alike – bringing these overlooked ecologies to attention and exposing them as places of fascination, beauty and environmental importance. The book is an important historic account, ecological study and celebration of these special landscapes. *Wetlands of New Zealand* is a deserving winner of the 2008 Montana medal for non-fiction and Environment category.

CONFERENCE REVIEW

James Hector Colonial Man of Science (1834-1907) Symposium, 8 November 2007, Te Papa Tongarewa / The Museum of New Zealand, Wellington

John P. Adam,
UNITEC

This one day symposium was held at the Soundings Theatre of Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, on the 8th of November 2007. The Seminar was jointly sponsored by GNS Science, Te Papa and the Royal Society of New Zealand. About 100 people attended to hear fourteen speakers present a diverse range of explorations of the personal and professional life and times of Sir James Hector (1834-1907) some 100 years since his death. Other commemorative events were held in Wellington during the same week, including a Hector family reunion.

The Symposium was opened by the Acting High Commissioner for Canada (the Commissioner was out of town with a New Zealand Trade Delegation to Canada). A video was shown of Kicking Horse Pass, named in honour of the young scientist and explorer, James Hector, a team member of the Palliser Expedition, The British North American Exploring Expedition that surveyed western Canada, 1857-60. The video was forwarded by the Mayor of Golden whose town is located near Kicking Horse Pass. The film included historic footage from a train traversing the series of tunnels and steep ravens of the area and a contemporary "fly by" along the gorge which is now a very dense network of highways and railways but which is marked by a stone monument where the incident with his horse that kicked Hector leaving his fellow expedition presuming he was dead and proceeding to bury him alive. A special stone was also gifted to New Zealand by the Canadian Government and is on display in the Hector Library at Te Papa Museum.

Speakers in the two morning sessions were the organiser of Symposium, Simon Nathan, along with Peter Hector, Tony Hocken, Ian Speden, Conal McCarthy and Francis Reid who together ranged over Hector's early career as scientist, explorer, naturalist, museum administrator and father.

Dr Tony Hocken, a retired medical doctor, who has just completed his Ph.D. at Otago University on James Hector's Otago Expeditions made during 1862-1864, argued that he could read Hector's handwriting because he was familiar with the Medical "shorthand" Hector had used throughout his life that has driven most scholars to despair.

The two afternoon sessions included the following speakers: Tim Beaglehole, Jock Phillips, George Gibbs, Ewan Fordyce, Winsome Shepherd and Walter Cook, John Adam and Chris Hector.

A panel discussion concluded the symposium and made three significant points. First, the panel argued that Hector related to all peoples, regardless of class or creed, and was a good delegator. Second, it concluded that Hector in fact got much of his science right and is much more underrated in New Zealand as compared to Canada. Third, the panel members discussed a regular yearly remembrance for Wellington and commented that Otago appears not to have celebrated Hector's scientific contributions to their Province or the country.

Finally, to close off the celebrations, a public reserve that stood on the site where Hector and his wife lived for much of their lives was opened on the Saturday following the Symposium

Symposium proceedings are currently being edited and will be available from Simon Nathan. In this one will also be able to read one of Hector's official expeditions made in 1863 and published in *The Otago Provincial Government Gazette* the same year [pp.438-468]. This report was the basis of his first New Zealand paper, 'Geological Expedition to the West Coast of Otago', published in the *Journal of the Geological Society of London* in 1863. Finally a Calgary based Canadian historian, Ernie Lakusta, last year published a biography of Sir James Hector, called *The Intrepid Explorer: James Hector's Explorations in the Canadian Rockies*, that 'tells the story of the famous Palliser Expedition'.