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FREETHOUGHT IN THE MANAWATU AND WANGANUI IN THE 1880s

a research exercise presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) at Massey University.

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INTRODUCTION

Freethought was an affront to the dominant belief of New Zealand settler society. It challenged the hegemony of Christianity and claimed to explain reality in another way.

In this research exercise I have studied an area of New Zealand, the Manawatu and Wanganui, during the 'Golden Years' of international Freethought. It has been used as a window for the ideas and activities that was Freethought in Nineteenth-century settler society.

I have attempted to briefly explain the development of Freethought in Britain before turning to the place of Freethought in late nineteenth century New Zealand. The early triumphs and disappointments are registered there before I turn to discuss the Manawatu and Wanganui more specifically.

In the second chapter the origins of Freethought associations in the Wanganui and Manawatu are investigated. The possible reasons why associations were established in the areas they were is identified before the life of the associations are focussed on. In this instance the paper centres on the ways Freethought was disseminated, the types of activities its members took part in and the names of prominent individuals are looked at. The chapter also focusses upon statistical information to try and unravel the mystery of the discrepancy between official records of Freethought membership and those claimed by the associations themselves.

Chapter Three looks at the ideas that made up Freethought. This includes attempting to see Freethought in the context of liberal thought. It also includes the types of ideas these Freethinkers in the Manawatu and Wanganui were likely to be dealing with, that is the people who were their intellectual stimulants. The ideas which Freethinkers endorsed will also be described. Values-debates with Christians will also be described to see where these opposing groups stood. Differences of opinion within and outside the group will be looked at.

Chapter Four deals with the decline of Freethought associations in the Manawatu and Wanganui. The various reasons Freethought declined in this area is explored. This will include anything from the attitudes of Christians toward Freethought to the loss of charismatic leaders. The 'Golden Age' of Freethought occurred in New Zealand in such a short time that one wonders whether the sun had time to rise on the idea. The importance of its reliance on other countries for its stimulation will also be explored as a possible reason for its early decline. Perhaps it did not fit the social milieu that was New Zealand settler society?. Finally I will briefly explain what happened to Freethought following the 1880s.

I hope you find this research an interesting insight into the world of a group that has not received very much attention in the past. What the emergence of Freethought in this country shows is the vitality of settler society. Many were prepared to discuss ideas and debate them. There was more to settler life than the pursuit of material gratification. Even the smallest of towns was by no means an intellectual back-water. Infact, the vitality of these settlements contained is not evident today in a society that is supposedly open to many more ideas and theories.

CHAPTER ONE-EVOLUTION OF AN IDEA

Freethought was a challenge to an aspect of the dominant ideology of settler society. It was a threat to the Church's control of spiritual matters and thus their legitimacy. In this chapter I will examine the ideas that were freethought tracing its intellectual roots in Britain. I will then turn to look briefly at the history of Freethought in New Zealand prior to the 1880s. Freethought as it existed in late Nineteenth century New Zealand will then be defined before embarking upon an examination of the movement in Wanganui and the Manawatu.

Modern Freethought has its roots in the Enlightenment, although Tribe contends that its '...beginning is lost in the thickets of prehistory...'¹; which was promulgated by periodicals publishing lists of Freethinkers that included the likes of Plato and Bruno who had rejected the 'natural religion' of their time². The Enlightenment brought together many ideas that had existed in society in earlier periods and synthesised them. Freethought owes its modern constructs to ideas such as anti-clericalism and a belief that science, nature and reason could usher in a society that was based on rationality and devoid of superstition; Christianity would have no place³.

Paine has been linked centrally to these ideas attacking the authority of the Bible and the evils of 'king-craft' and 'Priest-craft' in polemics like The Age of Reason. Paine's ideas were not original, in fact he used the arguments of English Deists of the seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, but they found an audience in the working-class radicals like Carlile who were able to incorporate them into other anti-establishment views⁴.

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1D. Tribe, 100 Years of Freethought, (London, 1967), p.7.

2 see Freethought Review, 1:10, p.1 for example.

3S. Budd, Varieties of Unbelief, (London, 1977), p.10.

4 E. Royle, Victorian Infidels, (Manchester, 1974) p.28, p.33.

G. Stein, Freethought in the UK and Commonwealth: A Descriptive Bibliography, (Westport, Conn., 1981), pp. 3-13, pp. 22-26.

Carlile kept the legacy of Paine alive, along with people like Richard Taylor, embarking upon 'infidel missions' to the working people of England⁵. This tradition of irreligion was one of the strands of working-class radicalism that continued throughout the nineteenth-century.

The influence of Owenite socialism was also evident in this period following the Napoleonic wars. The ideas of self-reliance and mutual-improvement was popularised in this movement as evidenced by the co-operative movement established by Owen. The working-class movement became '...permeated by Owen's ideas on economics, trade-unions, co-operation, rational religion and communist communities...'.⁶ However, the failure of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union in 1834 caused a separation in the Owenite movement. One group followed Owen's focus on moral and religious issues, while other former Owenites sought change through political action as the so-called 'moral-force' Chartists.⁷

Those that stayed with Owenism had to attempt to build up the movement and co-operation movement. However, as Royle notes, they had to try and synthesise the tensions in the socialist movement '...between the democratic radicalism of the Paine-Carlile tradition and the capitalist paternalism of Robert Owen...'.⁸ Out of this tension the British Freethought movement grew.⁹

Persecution against Owenite socialists during the late 1830s occurred due to the movement being identified solely with infidelity and people like Charles Southwell were imprisoned on blasphemy charges. Debates with Christians also occurred during this period¹⁰. The imprisonment of Co-operative missionary George Jacob Holyoake for blasphemy caused the missionary to take steps to protect the

.....
5 Royle, pp.24-26.

6 Budd, p.24.

7 Budd, p.25.

8 Royle, Victorian Infidels, p.101.

9 *ibid*.

10 *Ibid*, p.62

non-religious from persecution. The establishment of the Anti-Persecution Union in 1842 helped the movement in this aim¹¹. However, the Owenite movement continued to decline. Holyoake's attempts to revive it included the establishment of a paper, The Reasoner, which included themes such as co-operatism and infidelity, which was the one national organ of Owenite Socialism and he also developed the 'Society of Theological utilitarians' which '...doubted dogma, but believed in humanity and followed the rule of Bentham, which minimised religion and maximised morals'.¹²

By the end of the 1840s, Owenism was doomed, but Holyoake as one of the major leaders was able to rethink the position of radicalism and develop what he called Secularism from the '...atheistic elements of the Paine-Carlile tradition with the elements of the Owenite tradition...'.¹³

Secularism was seen by Holyoake as a way to introduce the rational religion of Owenism to replace that of Christianity; it would thus allow the improvement of humanity. What Holyoake did was to strip 'ethical reformism' of Owenism from its 'radical socialism and combine it with the '...widely held programme of anti-clerical ultra-radicalism'.¹⁴ Thus, the new movement would appeal to many working-class radicals who had seen the futility of political action in the Chartist movement and moved back toward moral crusades. The improvement of the individual would lead to the betterment of society.

Holyoake began to attempt to establish a national body of organised Freethought. However he was unsuccessful throughout the 1850s and 1860s. This was partly due to the continued development of what secularism was and what it should be involved with and the fact that Holyoake was not a charismatic leader that could unite a network of Freethought. This was left to the figure of Charles Bradlaugh.

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11 *ibid.*, p.82.

12 *ibid.*, p.94.

13 *ibid.*, p.101.

14 E. Royle, Radicals, Secularists and Republicans, (Manchester, 1990, p. 3).

Bradlaugh was able to develop a national organisation of Freethought with the advent of the National Secular Society in 1866. He had been involved in the secularist movement from the beginning but took control of the movement in the late 1860s after a dispute with Holyoake over the best way to run the secular movement. He advocated the militant style of criticising religion from within and was different to Holyoake's more moderate stance which saw that in order for Secularism to gain a greater audience, and supporters in the middle-class, a more respectable line should be pursued¹⁵. The two men continued to differ over this very idea of methods. However, Secularism benefitted from his leadership and the movement continued to grow. It was given a further boost in the 1880s with the election of Bradlaugh to Parliament in 1881. He refused on entering the Commons to take an oath and, instead chose to affirm as Quakers had been allowed to do. This caused him to be barred from Parliament and his seat was opened for election once more. He won again once again and so began almost a years of Bradlaugh contesting the right to the seat he had democratically won¹⁶. Bradlaugh's plight was heard of the distant British colonies and such publicity, no doubt, helped a burgeoning Freethought movement in New Zealand.

New Zealand in the Wilderness-Freethought prior to the 1880s

Freethought in theory would have come as part of the cultural baggage of Settlers to New Zealand. However, there are no reports of attempts to organise until the 1850s when A. Campbell attempted to form a secular society in 1855 with rules based on those of the London Secular Society.¹⁷ At the same time Charles Southwell, the Owenite and Freethought lecturer, had emigrated to New Zealand and was living in Auckland having arrived there with the Foley's Dramatic Company.¹⁸ He was involved with his own paper The Auckland

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 15 See Budd, pp. 35-52.

16 For a life of Bradlaugh see D. Tribe, President Charles Bradlaugh MP, (London, 1967).

17 Royle, Victorian Infidels, p. 172.
 Stein, p. 123.

18 H.H. Pearce, 'Charles Southwell in Australia and New Zealand, New Rationalist, Aug. 1957, p. 9.

P. J. Lineham, 'Freethinkers in New Zealand', NZJH, (1985), p. 64.

Examiner, which did explore clerical controversies, but was more concerned with political climate of Auckland. When approached to become involved with the local secularist society, he declined on several occasions¹⁹. He died in 1860 in Auckland and there were allegations from Holyoake and other Freethinkers in Britain that he had ended his days as a Christian.²⁰ In fact, the notion of a death-bed confession was one common to many prominent Freethinkers, and A.Campbell assured New Zealand Freethinkers that Southwell had ended his days as a Freethinker.²¹ The Auckland Secular Society paid for his grave stone, and continued to struggle to establish a permanent Freethought organisation in the settlement.²²

It was, in fact, in the deep-south where Freethought eventually established itself with the emergence of a group in the Presbyterian settlement of Dunedin. A wealthy and mature settlement like Dunedin, with an established church, seemed fertile ground for a movement that was sure to attract the intellectual avante garde. However, it was not until the early 1870s that this occurred. H.H.Pearce claims that the Echo reported the existence of the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Association in 1870 which was described as having been graced by liberal theological lecturers which caused the clergy of the town to ~~denounce~~ term it heretical and denounce it as "...having reached the "lowest depths of Atheism" ²³. In that same year, a Spiritualist was invited to address the association. This was regarded as the first Freethought lecture in that settlement. However, the organisation soon folded and was replaced, in 1876, by a Spiritual Investigation Society. This group also included some non-Spiritualist Freethinkers.²⁴ The organisation also folded and was replaced by the Eclectic Society which was formed due to the lecture there by the Australian Spiritualist Charles Bright.²⁵

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19 Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand', p.64.

20 H.H.Pearce, 'Charles Southwell', Sep. 1957, pp.8-10.

21 *ibid.*, p.9.

22 Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand', p.64.

23 H.H.Pearce, 'Early Dunedin Freethought', The Truthseeker, Dec.-Jan. 1938-39, p.12.

24 *ibid.*

25 Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', p.65.

About that same time the organisation changed its name to the Dunedin Freethought Association²⁶.

Freethought had finally found a place to be established in New Zealand. This was especially true due to the efforts of the President of the association, Robert Stout, who began to publish his paper the Echo again in 1880. This amongst other things was a vehicle for Freethought. A crusade began for the dissemination of the ideas of Freethought.

By the beginning of the 1880s, Freethought associations were spreading throughout the colony. Freethought had arrived in the colony and looked like it was to be a force to be reckoned with. Although centres like Auckland continued to have problems retaining a permanent Freethought organisation.²⁷ Associations were formed in the Wanganui and Manawatu throughout the early 1880s. Wanganui received its association in July 1883. The Woodville Freethought Association was formed in February 1884 and associations were formed in Palmerston North and Feilding in 1885. Palmerston North had an association in 1884, but this does not seem to have lasted, but a more permanent organisation was formed in 1885.²⁸

DEFINING FREETHOUGHT

Before one goes onto examine the life of Freethought associations in late nineteenth-century New Zealand, a definition of what Freethought was will prove useful.

Freethought in its broadest sense is thought that is free of religious dogma. Freethinkers usually believed that religion had done great harm in the world and that society could be improved if it was done away with. Therefore it was a movement in opposition to organised religion. In this case the organised religion was

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26 On the history of early Dunedin Freethought see H.H.Pearce, 'Early Dunedin Freethought', The Truthseeker, Dec. 1938-Oct. 1941.

27 See Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', p.67.

28 See Freethought Review, 1:1-2:22, Oct. 1883-Sep. 1885.

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Christianity. Along with this opposition to organised religion went the idea that there should be freedom of religion which '...[included] their personal right to have their freedom from religion for themselves'.²⁹

However, this very broad definition does not define Freethought in Nineteenth-century New Zealand thoroughly enough. Some groups in New Zealand, such as those in Auckland and Wellington were Rationalist or Secularist groups throughout the 1880s. However, other groups were far more eclectic. Wanganui seems to have comprised only materialist Freethinkers, but other groups such as Woodville did, at some stages, contain both spiritualist and materialist Freethinkers. Stout commented that the membership of the Dunedin Freethought Association contained '...Theists, Agnostics, Unitarians, Atheists, Pantheists, Spiritualists in [their] ranks'.³⁰ The Palmerston North Psychological Society was entirely Spiritualist.

Therefore, freethought associations, in theory, contained everybody but 'orthodox' Christians in their ranks. It would seem that many Freethought associations were interested in spiritual enquiry and experimentation given the types of individuals that were involved. Many still expressed an interest in the numinous. Therefore, more specifically nineteenth-century Freethought was an idea that was in opposition to the beliefs of Orthodox Christianity. They believed in the advantages of heterodoxy instead.

In the next chapter the ideas of Freethought will be seen in action as the reader witnesses the formation of Freethought associations in the Manawatu and Wanganui. Along with descriptions of the evolution of these associations, some idea of the character of the communities in which Freethought developed will be passed on. Certain social conditions within these settlements may have made Freethought more acceptable than in other communities.

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29 Stein, p. vi.

30 ER, 1:5, 1 Feb. 1884, p. 7.

CHAPTER TWO- PROPHETS IN THE WILDERNESS: THE FORMATION OF
FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATIONS

Freethought associations were established in the communities studied for a number of reasons. I will examine the reasons for the establishment of these organisations in this chapter. The various ways their message was disseminated will also be examined as will the activities of these freethought associations. Attitudes toward the establishment of these organisations will also be investigated.

Freethought associations were formed in the area studied between 1883 and 1885. The reasons for the establishment of these groups varied from community to community depending on the situation in that settlement. However E.Royle, an authority on Freethought in Britain, has linked the popularity of Freethought in the late 1870s, as with the earlier period of expansion of the movement in Britain, with a '...growing tide of popular Liberalism...' when the 'climate of opinion' was favourable to the ideas of the Freethought movement.¹

The presence of Revivalism within settler society can also not be ignored as a stimulus for added interest in the discussion on the place of Christianity in settler society. The influence of the Moody and Sankey revivals were felt in the Wanganui and Manawatu in the form of 'undenominational' Christians like Gordon Forlong who lived in Bulls and visited areas like Wanganui.² The Salvation Army was also making its presence felt in the colony from the late 1870s, but

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1 Royle, Radicals, Secularists and Republicans, p.19.

2 Arnold, p.224 & pp.633-640.

H.R.Jackson, Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand, 1860-1930, (Wellington, 1987), pp.48-76.

Jackson shows that revivalism occurred within the 'mainstream' Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church, as well, in the late nineteenth-century.

See the Wanganui Chronicle, July 15 1883 for an example of the number of revivalists visiting that town in this period.

was not present in the Wanganui and Wanganui until the early 1880s.³ Its crusade to save the souls of the working-class was sure to strike a chord of anxiety among those who hoped the less well-endowed were throwing off superstition and moving toward the rational religion of science that would allow them to improve themselves.

FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATIONS ESTABLISHED

I will examine the formation of Freethought associations in the Manawatu and Wanganui seperately. Although, these groups shared similar objectives and values, their births were unique.

The Wanganui Freethought Association was formed on 15 July 1883.⁴ The importance of Freethinkers already existing within Wanganui and other communities where Freethought organisations formed was, I would argue, an important prerequisite for the formation of associations. The likes of Ballance, A.D. Willis and Robert Pharazyn were 'convinced' Freethinkers who took Stout's lead in Dunedin to form an association of their own in Wanganui. Perhaps, local pride also had a part in establishing a group there, because members of Wanganui would wished to keep up with the cultural life of Dunedin. However, Wanganui had shown evidence of an interest in examining spiritual matters with its Literary Society where such topics as phrenology were discussed.⁵ So a community of discourse was established in that town where ideas such as Freethought could be discussed and investigated. The contact between people like Stout and Ballance in Wellington was also a stimulus for a group to be formed.

The founders of the Freethought association in Wanganui were very optimistic as to the reason for their group's existence as this quotation from the Freethought Review shows:

'Principally through the courage and energy of friends in Dunedin, the Freethought movement has spread or is spreading to every town of importance in the colony. The ice having

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3 See for example Wanganui Chronicle, 15 July 1883.

4 FR, 1:1, Oct. 1, 1883, p. 5.

5 McIvor, p. 20.

been broken in the South, Freethinkers have been emboldened to unite and assert their opinions without fear of persecution.

The movement is but in its infancy: it is destined to become a great power for good...'.⁶

From comments made by the editor of the Freethought Review, it seems that the Wanganui Freethought Association membership was Materialist, but Spiritualists were welcome as evidenced by Mrs M. Moore speaking at their Sunday meeting⁷.

The establishment of Freethought associations in the other communities in my study is remarkable given the infancy of those settlements.

The Woodville settlement having been settled by a majority of United Free Methodist managed to form a Freethought association in February 1884⁸. A meeting was called on February 25 in the local schoolroom and officers were elected for the Woodville Freethought Association⁹. Apart from this being a reaction to the hegemony of Free Methodism in this settlement, Arnold has said that the bush experience '...gave rise to potent psychological and sociological forces which found expression in sectarian religion'¹⁰. Freethought did act like an anti-denomination at times and this may have been an instance of it providing an alternative for those discouraged by the message of Methodism.

Palmerston North was another Great Bush settlement which established Freethought organisations on and off from 1883 and 1885. They seemed reasonably successful in 1885 when a more permanent organisation was established. This followed the end of reported groups in 1883 and 1884¹¹. The Palmerston North Psychological Society had reported optimistically, to the Freethought Review in August 1884 that it

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6 FR, 1:1, Oct. 1 1883, p. 9.

7 FR, 1:1, Jan. 1884, p. 7.

8 FR, 1:6, March 1884, p. 5.

9 FR, 1:6, March 1884, p. 5.

10 Arnold, p. 635.

11 see FR, 1:3, Dec. 1883, p. 5.

FR, 1:11, Aug. 1884, p. 6.

FR, 2:22, July 1885, p. 8.

was '...supplying a want long felt need in Palmerston, which Spiritualism is steadily progressing.'¹² However, the society failed to continue and it was not until July 1885 that there was a report from Palmerston North telling of the formation of the Palmerston North Lyceum and Literary Institute¹³. For some reason enthusiasm was difficult to maintain in that locality.

The earlier manifestation of a Freethought association in Palmerston North was entirely Spiritualist with meetings comprising 'invocation' while in trances.¹⁴ By 1885 the Lyceum and Literary Institute was stating that their objectives included a platform of '...the widest liberality'.¹⁵ This association seems slightly different to either Wanganui or Woodville, however, like Woodville it probably owed its existence to the example of Wanganui, but not all of its ideas.

The origins of a Freethought association in Feilding owes much to incidents in the town. The funeral of a prominent citizen, and reethinker, W.E. Chamberlain, caused consternation among some Christians due to the address given by T.R. Walton, from Palmerston North, at his grave. The address was published in the Feilding Star and the reactions to it were scathing due to the fact that it used the language of a Spiritualist.¹⁶ On the heels of this incident came incidents like individuals in Feilding refusing to take an oath on the Bible and the arrival of W.A. Ellis, President of the New Zealand Psychological Association, which made many in the community enquire into Freethought.¹⁷ Following a number of lectures that Ellis gave in the settlement, the lecturer on the closing of his last speech, at the Foresters' Hall, recommended that a society be

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12 ER, 1:11, Aug. 1884, p. 6.

13 ER, 2:22, July 1885, p. 8.

14 ER, 1:11, Aug. 1884, p. 6.

15 ER, 2:22, July 1 1885, p. 8.

16 Feilding Star, Feb. 3-Feb 14 1885.

ER, 2:18, March 1885, pp. 7-8.

17 Feilding Star, Feb. 17 1885.

ER, 2:19, April 1885, pp. 6-7.

ER, 2:20, May 1885, p. 7.

formed '...for the purpose of investigating and discussing spiritualistic, religious, moral and social subjects generally...'.¹⁸ Those that stayed after the meeting voted to start such an association and soon afterwards the Feilding Lyceum and Liberal Institute was formed.

This organisation seems very like the one established in Palmerston North and there are many connections. Though this series of events lead to the establishment of a Freethought association I would argue that the stimulus was already there as there were a number of Freethinkers in that community before the association was formed.

The next question to be approached is that having established Freethought associations, how were they sustained?

ANATOMY OF FREETHOUGHT

There were a number of reasons given by prominent Freethinkers for the necessity to organise and in the Freethought Review, for example, the point was stressed time and again. Robert Stout in an article entitled 'Why Have Freethought Associations?' articulated the reasons for organisation with such arguments that they allowed people to voice their opinions and defend their rights to speak out without fear of persecution, and more importantly, they procured liberty and helped fight for the continued separation of Church and State in New Zealand.¹⁹ Now that the importance of organisation had been established the problem of how to organise Freethought associations had to be decided.

From reading the various reports presented in the Freethought Review and Rationalist, it would appear that Freethought associations organised like many other societies of the time, perhaps along the lines of friendly societies. Many Freethinkers belonged to these. The problem of how best to organise must have caused some concern, because the Freethought Review published a model constitution to

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 18 Feilding Star, March 31 1885.
 19 FR.1:10, July 1884, pp.9-10.

help newly-formed associations have some idea of how best to organise. Some associations did adopt this constitution, Feilding being an example²⁰. The associations were generally stratified with a president, vice-president, secretary and other office-holders as was needed.

To avoid the word 'church' to name the place where Freethinkers met on Sundays, they adopted the Spiritualist word 'lyceum' to avoid the connection with Christianity; surprisingly the New Zealand Freethinkers did not use the austere term 'Hall of Science' that the National Secular Society had used in Britain or 'Secular Hall' used by the Australasian Secular Association.²¹ Instead, a far less offensive term was used. Along with the Lyceum usually went a Lyceum Sunday School which possessed all the trappings of a Christian Sunday School, except that the Christian aspect was removed, but singing and instruction on Freethought were pursued in a way similar to the Christian Sunday schools. Such statements as the following were read to the children:

'The Freethinker in a word possesses an ideal, pure, lofty, and unselfish, attracting the best and appealing to all-devotion to the ever real and present cause of humanity.'²²

So there was, not surprisingly, some differences of opinion as to whether these Lyceum Sunday Schools were in fact necessary. Archibald Campbell, President of the Auckland Rationalist Association, felt that these schools were unnecessary, because there was a free, secular State education system in existence and all these Sunday schools did was to help create sectarianism.²³ The debate really fed into a more fundamental issue over whether Freethought associations should act like churches or not. Given that many Freethinkers in New Zealand were Theists and Spiritualists the element of the supernatural in these associations could not be easily dismissed.

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20 FR, 2:21, June 1 1885, p. 5.

21 F.B. Smith, 'Joseph Symes and the Australasian Secular Association', Labour History, 5, May, 1964, p. 27.

22 FR, 1:8, May 1 1884, p. 10.

23 FR, 2:22, July 1 1885, p. 11.

From this brief description of the structure of Freethought associations, it can be seen that they reflected the time and the society that they were a part of.

The Freethought situation in the colony lacked a national network which Britain had, but the formation of the New Zealand Freethought Federal Union on 10 March 1884 gave some scope for such a national structure, however, the Federal Union never met again. A national organisation could have helped fledgling groups become established.²⁴ Instead, the local associations had to rely upon the zeal of their own members which meant that the associations were only as good as their supporters.

'Like all voluntary societies, the branches were dependent upon accidents of personality and the enthusiasm of the few'.²⁵ All the Freethought associations established in the Manawatu and Wanganui, like other parts of the country, relied upon prominent individuals to continue the life of the association. I will deal with a number of these individuals in each locality to give you an idea of their importance to the local association.

The Wanganui Freethought Association had several prominent individuals within its ranks. The most notable being John Ballance, but other people that made extensive contributions to Freethought in Wanganui, and throughout the colony, were A.D. Willis, R. Pharazyn and J.J. Buckrell. Each of these men will be dealt with separately as will a Mrs M. Moore who made a significant contribution as one of the only prominent women in the New Zealand Freethought movement.

Ballance's connection with Freethought is as significant as that of Stout's, because as politicians they helped give it a profile that it may never have enjoyed. Ballance had been involved in the cultural life of Wanganui for many years. He was involved in the establishment of the Wanganui Public Library and the Literary Society where he spoke on phrenology, extension of the franchise and

24 *FR*, 1:7, April 11 1884, pp. 6-7.

25 Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans*, p. 149.

other topics of a wide ranging nature.²⁶ Given that he was editor of The Evening Herald in the town this not surprising. He had gained notoriety during his years in Wanganui with his imprisonment in 1868 for refusing call up to the militia, and his agitation for seperatism for Wanganui. Such acts put him in the public eye.²⁷ Ballance was also an instigator in forming the Wanganui Small Farmers' Association and the Weekly Herald, which later became the Yeoman, in which he championed the 'Yeoman Ideal' against the large landowner.²⁸ He was also involved in the Oddfellow's Society which was restricted to the Wanganui area and Dunedin and modelled on an English friendly society, the Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows. It provided for sickness relief, life insurance, widow and child relief and so on representing those aspiring to the ranks of the middle-class.

'[It] epitomised Ballance's belief in self-help and self-reliance for it showed that, by organising, working men could provide for their own material wants and, through education raise their position in society'.²⁹

The Oddfellow's built a building for their meetings and provided a reading room, in 1874, the complex being called 'The Institute', to be used free of charge.³⁰

Ballance was elected to the House of Representatives from 1875 and was a member of the Grey Ministry (1877-1879) as Minister of Education and Commissioner of Customs and the Stout-Vogel Ministry (1884-1887) as Minister of Land, Native Affairs and Defence. It was during his time in Wellington that Ballance met Stout and they became good friends and it was probably Stout who helped Ballance consider the idea of establishing a Freethought association in Wanganui which is what happened in 1883 during the time Ballance was not in the House.³¹

26 McIvor, p. 20.

27 McIvor, p. 25, pp. 28-29.

28 see Arnold, pp. 351-355.

McIvor, p. 99-100.

29 McIvor, p. 45.

30 McIvor, p. 45.

Veitch, p. 82.

31 For an account of Ballance's life see McIvor's book.

Ballance was the first President of the Wanganui Freethought Association and Vice-President of the New Zealand Freethought Federal Union and no doubt his contacts within Wanganui helped the establishment of an association in that town very quickly. Though he was involved in the Freethought association from its inception, his recall to Parliament in 1884 meant his commitment to Freethought was stifled, as had been the case with Stout and Bradlaugh. He was, however, involved in establishing the Freethought Review in October 1883 which eventually became the sole Freethought periodical in the colony for nearly two years when Stout's Echo was abandoned in the November of 1883.³² So his contribution was significant, but, his departure to Wellington, forced other individuals to take control.

Archibald Dudington Willis was the Vice-President of the Wanganui Freethought Association. He was also Ballance's partner in the Evening Herald from 1867-1875 when he then moved onto establish a printing and bookselling business.³³ It was his printing press that was used to compile the Freethought Review, no doubt, in his spare time to set out the paper and edit it. He probably wrote many of the editorials also. Willis had also been a member of the Literary Society and was involved in the civic affairs of the town serving in the borough council, harbour board and school committee³⁴. He was to later be a M.H.R. taking over Ballance's seat when he died in 1893 and gained notoriety for his 'Willis Blot' which meant both sides could avoid industrial conciliation and go straight to Arbitration Court.

Robert Pharazyn contributed regularly to the Freethought Review on such topics as 'Materialism' and philosophical articles on the questioning of the supernatural. He also made a correspondence with J.S.Mill which was published in the Freethought Review and the National Reformer, though the letter was nearly twenty years old³⁵.

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32 FR, 1:3, Dec. 1 1883, p. 3.

33 Cyclopedia of New Zealand, 1, pp. 1434-1435.
McIvor, p. 21 & p. 59.

34 Cyclopedia of New Zealand, 1, p. 1435.

35 FR, 1:10, July 1 1884, p. 10.

FR, 2:16, Jan. 1 1885, p. 10, pp. 12-13.

He was the honorary-secretary of the Freethought association in Wanganui, a former mayor of Wanganui a member of Parliament and a member of the Legislative Council from 1885.³⁶ He added much intellectualism to Freethought in Wanganui and the colony.

J.J.Buckrell was the secretary of the Wanganui Freethought Association and corresponded with the Freethought Review reporting on the activities of the local association. He like Ballance was a member of the Odd Fellows Society and a Noble Grand Master like him, so he shared similar values to Willis and Ballance who had founded the Freethought Association³⁷. He resigned as secretary in January 1885.³⁸

Mrs M.Moore, although not a member of the Wanganui Freethought Association, because she was a Spiritualist, did speak to that association and is reported to have been a prominent Freethought lecturer speaking in other localities like Palmerston North³⁹.

Woodville also had its share of prominent Freethinkers. We are told that at the inaugural meeting of the Woodville Freethought Association, the following were elected to office:

E.A.Haggen(President), C.A.Bevan(Vice-President and Secretary), T.Hyde(Vice-President), T.F.Fountaine(Treasurer) and E.Hutchins(the sixth member of the committee).⁴⁰ Of these individuals, little is known of some, much of others.

E.A.Haggen was the editor of the Woodville Examiner and one who was involved heavily in the political and social life of the settlement, as Ballance was in Wanganui. He was a member of the local road board, mayor of Woodville in 1895, 'instigator' of the Woodville Settlers' Association and a representative on the Seventy-Mile Bush Settlers' Association⁴¹. He was heavily involved in the association lecturing regularly

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36 McIvor, p.116.

37 Cyclopedia of New Zealand, 1, p.1417.

38 FR, 2:17, Feb. 1 1885, p. 7.

39 FR, 1:6, March 1 1884, p. 6.

The Rationalist, Sep. 27 1885.

40 FR, 1:6, March 1 1884, p. 5.

41 R.Shaffer, 'Woodville Genesis Of A Bush Frontier Community, 1874-1887', M.A.Thesis, Massey University, 1974, p.48.

Some of the other executive members of the association were also prominent members in the life of the town-ship. T.F. Fountaine opened the first store in Woodville and is classed along with Hagger by Shaffer as one of the oligarchy in that town involved in everything.⁴² T.Hyde was a member of the Victoria Domain Board and an officer in the National Assembly of the New Zealand Knights of Labour.⁴³ The Vice-President and Secretary of the Woodville Freethought Association, Chas.A.Bevan, was the photographer in the settlement.⁴⁴

The figure of T.R.Walton looms large in the lives of Freethought in Palmerston North and Feilding where he lectured and was involved. Based in Palmerston North, he was a clerk by the week and a lecturer in his weekends exploring such topics as 'Electrical Psychology' and 'Jesus and the Gospels'.⁴⁵ He added much to the the intellectual endeavour of both settlements.

Other involved members included shop-keeper T.Hall, T.King and Miss M.Walton.⁴⁶

The Feilding Liberal Society and Literary Institute relied heavily on the efforts of T.R.Walton and other local members like C.Sexton.⁴⁷

Now that the structure and prominent individuals have been examined, I will now turn to discuss the types of activities Freethought associations undertook.

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Woodville: 1875-1975, p.69.

42 Shaffer, p.43

43 Cyclopedia of New Zealand, 6, p.1171.

Woodville: 1875-1975, p.138.

44 Woodville: 1875-1975, p.43.

45 FR, 2:22, July 1 1885, p.8.

Jones' Wanganui Almanac, 1884, p.100.

The Rationalist, 1:17, Oct. 18 1885, p.4.

46 FR, 2:23, Aug. 1 1885, p.5.

The Rationalist, 1:17, Oct. 18 1885, p.4.

47 see FR, 2:20, May 1 1885, p.7 for example of lecture by Walton

FR, 2:23, Aug. 1 1885, p.6. CHECK

Apart from the usual dose of lectures and readings at their Sunday meetings, Freethinkers also partook in a number of social activities which show these organisations playing their part in an idea of community.

The usual form of entertainment, apart from the intellectual stimulation, was in the form of musical recitals. For example, the Wanganui Freethought Association had a band at all their Sunday meetings of which the Secretary concluded that the '...musical part of our programme had never been excelled in New Zealand'.⁴⁸ Other Freethought Associations like Palmerston North also had musical intervals in their programmes.⁴⁹ This social activity indicative of the Churches, where all Freethinkers had had contact, did at times prove difficult to the more convinced Freethinkers when the relief from the lectures threatened to overrun them. For example, the correspondent from the Woodville Freethought Association complained that the members wanted music and singing rather than theological enquiry.⁵⁰ The danger was that the association could be seen as just a social club and its real reasons for organising could be ignored. Nevertheless Freethinkers did admit that it was the music that often attracted the crowds.

Other activities that Freethought associations partook in were very similar to the Sunday excursions of the Churches. For example, the Freethinkers in Woodville visited Pahiatua on one such Sunday where E.A.Haggen delivered a lecture to the local populace and '...one wicked man took his camera, and obtained a group to celebrate the inauguration of Freethought in the pahiatua district'.⁵¹ The Wanganui Freethought Association took advantage of the natural features around them and took a steamer down the Wanganui River.⁵² As Royle has said: 'The public face of Secularists could seem very humourless but they knew how to enjoy themselves in the family atmosphere of their own communities'.⁵³

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48 FR, 1:6, March 1 1884, p. 6.

49 See The Rationalist, 1:17, Oct. 18 1885, p. 4 for an example.

50 FR, 1:12, Sep. 1 1884, p. 5.

51 FR, 1:8, May 1 1884, p. 6.

52 FR, 2:18, March 1 1885, p. 7.

53 Royle, Radicals, Secularists and Republicans, p. 140.

The internal life of local Freethought associations has been investigated, but the way that information was disseminated between Freethought associations and the wider community needs to be examined.

The primary way the ideas of Freethought were transmitted was through lectures delivered at regular Sunday meetings. Unlike Britain, there was no national network for Freethought lecturers and smaller centres very seldom received outside lecturers. Joseph Evison, or 'Ivo' as he was known, lectured once in Wanganui, but this was a unique event.⁵⁴ The usual situation was for local Freethinkers to prepare addresses. Some individuals like T.R. Walton seemed to be almost lecturing weekly on different topics or the same subject in Palmerston North one week and Feilding the next. Occasionally ministers of religion would lecture at the Freethought meetings with an ensuing debate occurring afterwards. I will cover these debates in the next chapter. Lectures did occasionally gain new membership, and when they did it was documented.⁵⁵

Another way of spreading information was the printed media. In the case of New Zealand three Freethought periodicals existed at different times throughout the early 1880s. Robert Stout recommenced his paper the Echo in 1880 and it ran until 1883 when the Freethought Review in Wanganui took over duties in October of that year running for nearly two years. The centre of information then shifted to Auckland when 'Ivo's' Rationalist, begun in mid-1885, became the sole Freethought periodical when the Freethought Review ceased to exist. All papers tended to mix local situations with a number of philosophical issues and occasionally report on the political state of the nation, especially when it concerned legislation which could have threatened the freedom of Freethinkers in the colony. Freethinkers were introduced to the ideas of people like Henry George, Spencer and Comte and many arguments disputing the ideas of orthodox Christianity. All papers carried reports of

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54 FR, 1:2, Nov. 1 1883, p. 5.

55 See The Rationalist, 2:18, June 10 1886, p. 1 for an example of this.

Freethought associations, but it was the Freethought Review that consistently filed reports sent to them by local associations and the one that seemed less parochial. Through these papers discussions could be vented and Freethinkers throughout the country could keep tabs on the progress of Freethought and the new associations that opened.

Contact between Freethought associations was another way of spreading information and a source of strength for smaller associations. Palmerston North and Feilding seemed to be closely tied especially through the efforts of T.R.Walton. The attempt to create a national Freethought association in 1884 failed, but no doubt the conference did create some source of unity for those associations in smaller centres. The petition established by the Council of the Freethought Federal Union to Parliament to repeal the so-called 'Blasphemy Laws' showed Freethinkers working together to uphold rights they had gained.⁵⁶ It had made people aware of the situation and probably helped those Freethinkers in smaller centres feel they could enact change.

Information was also disseminated through individuals donating Freethought material to their local association so a library could be established. One 'Blue Pencil' is mentioned by a number of Freethought associations in smaller centres as somebody who took it upon themselves to divulge information.⁵⁷ With libraries established members could then borrow books and pass them onto friends or acquaintances and perhaps gain more 'converts' to Freethought. Probably the way most came to Freethought was through reading tracts by the likes of Paine and Ingersoll.

The numbers of Freethinkers involved in these associations needs to be commented on, because there is a large discrepancy between the numbers claimed by the Freethought associations and what appears in the census. The census claims that there were 3925 calling themselves freethinkers in 1886, previous Censuses did not carry the

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56 FR, 1:10, July 1 1884, p.7.

57 See FR, 2:21, June 1 1885, p.5 for an example of his work.

category. This means that of the settler population of 578 492, only .6784 percent called themselves Freethinkers.⁵⁸ If the investigation is taken further and we compare the figures from areas like Palmerston North and Wanganui, we find some difference. In the Wanganui county 1.070 percent of the population described themselves as Freethinkers. The figure for the Manawatu county is .43 percent which is below the national average.⁵⁹ However, the numbers one is talking about are very very small. A lot smaller than those that the various Freethought associations claimed. For example, the Wanganui Freethought Association claimed it had a membership of eighty four in 1884 and that it hoped it would soon reach one hundred.⁶⁰ Either the correspondent was exaggerating the numbers, or many Freethinkers chose to call themselves other things in the census. Another explanation might be that many of those counted as members were only casual investigators who happened to at a meeting when numbers were counted.

Before moving onto the next chapter, it would prove useful to explore attitudes toward Freethought in the Manawatu and Wanganui and elsewhere in New Zealand in the 1880s. New Zealand Freethinkers never experienced the type of repression that occurred in Britain and even in Australia. The country was much more fluid. The fact that people like Stout and Ballance could be such successful politicians at a time when Bradlaugh was struggling is testimony to this. As the editor of the Freethought Review said of Stout's and Ballance's election victories in 1884:

'It need hardly be said that in each case the majority was principally made up of the voters of Churches who refused to have their religion dragged through the mire in a political contest'.⁶¹

This was the live and let live mentality of colonial New Zealand. This is even shown in the attitudes shown by the Churches. Often, as in the case of Wanganui, there would be a reaction by the various Churches, but then after some time the sermons and lectures against

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58 NZ Census, 1896, p.104.

59 *ibid.*, p.111.

60 FR, 1:11, Aug. 1884, p.6.

61 FR, 1:11, Aug. 1 1884, p.4.

Freethought would stop and the freethinkers would complain about the fact that there was no body prepared to debate with them. Most of the Churches had learnt to simply ignore them. This tolerance was noticed by Freethinkers and seen as further advancement of liberal thought. I will further explain the attitude of Christians toward Freethought in following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE: THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD OF FREETHINKERS

In this chapter I will move to examine the ideas of Freethinkers in New Zealand. Such areas as the values of Freethinkers, their place in liberal thought and their intellectual stimulants will be investigated. The debates with those that disagreed with their approach to life will also be explored as will the divisions that occurred within nineteenth-century New Zealand Freethought. There will be some comparative analysis with that of Britain and Australia as it seems applicable.

Ted Royle has characterised the Secularist movement in Britain as part of the '...radical wing of the Liberal party...'.¹ In New Zealand, at this time there was no Liberal party as such, but the likes of Stout and Ballance described themselves as Liberals who were engaged in battle with the Conservatives. Their aims fell in with much of Liberal thought at the time with their calls for non-intervention in the intellectual life of the individual, which included the right to freedom of religion, the separation of Church and State, and such ideas as secular education.

The New Zealand Freethought Federal Unions constitution concerned itself with defence of individual liberty and a defence of legislation which had already been passed which defended individual liberty, because they were aware that gains made at one time could be taken away at other times. Freethinkers were aware to continue to make sure no blasphemy laws or sectarian laws were instilled into New Zealand.² For example, there was concern expressed from Freethinkers about the fact that churches paid no property tax yet they were allowed representation at select committees discussing such things as education.³ Such special treatment implied that Christianity was the State religion in the view of Freethinkers.

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1 Royle, Radicals, p. 218.

2 FR, 1:7, April 1884, pp. 6-7.

3 FR, 1:3, Dec 1883, p. 8.

Similar arguments were voiced by Stout when he expressed doubts about the new Criminal Code Bill which had been introduced into the House of Representatives in 1884. The bill also contained sections on 'crimes against religion'. Stout argued that in order for there to be a law advocating such crimes, then there must be a State religion, because only then could there be such laws passed, because the crimes would also be against the State.⁴ As far as Freethinkers were concerned, the State's only function was to '...promote the highest social and the highest individual life...', it should not be interfering with religious freedom and individual liberty, '...than was absolutely necessary to maintain good order and peace...', otherwise it should be deemed 'tyrannical'.⁵

Thus Freethinkers approved of the right to both defend their own individual freedoms as well as others. In New Zealand, unlike Britain, many of these aims had been achieved, or they had simply not existed at all during the colony's formation. Instead, it seems, that Freethinkers in the 1880s were of the belief that progress was occurring, but that they as vanguards of this, should make sure that the momentum was not halted. The evolution of human society, should as they saw it, continue on a upward continuum.

Therefore, although Freethought in New Zealand, differed from its counterpart in Britain, the ideas that it espoused seem to be very similar to those in the 'Mother Country'. Much of its stimulation came from Freethinkers in that vicinity of the world, so similar concerns would be echoed in New Zealand. It is possible to see New Zealand Freethought in the context of liberal thought. As Lineham has said, 'Freethought appealed to its followers as a form of political radicalism'.⁶ People like Ballance and Pharazyn were part of their communities intellectual avante garde, individuals who had a particular vision of the way New Zealand should develop which included the values of Freethought.

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 4 ER, 1:8, May 1884, pp. 3-4.

5 ER, 1:8, May 1884, p. 3.

6 Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand', p. 69.

People like Ballance and Stout, who were interested in creating a society of equality of opportunity, were interested in notions of land nationalisation, and therefore became interested in the ideas of Henry George and formed the Land Nationalisation Society in the early part of the 1880s⁷. Ballance, in fact wrote an article on land nationalisation for the Echo in 1882. In this he quoted George favourably and outlined his ideal society:

'...let us suppose we now have only nationalised land. The phenomenon presented in this case would be on the one hand a body of cultivators paying rent to the State ; and on the other a greater body living by wages...'⁸

However, not all Freethinkers were in favour of the ideas of Henry George. Within the pages of the Freethought Review opinions for and against George's ideas were voiced. One correspondent regretted that the paper had sunk to calling George a 'fanatic' and 'George the Fifth' in order to show their opposition to his ideas. The editor of the paper, probably A.D. Willis, the vice-president of the Wanganui Freethought Association, continued to uphold the notion of private property and used Spencer's argument that although nationalisation of land of desirable, '...it can only be realizable in the distant future when the social organism has adapted to new conditions of existence'.⁹

Clearly Freethinkers were not a completely united bloc, after all, they were opposed to creeds and were in theory politically neutral; though they did encourage voting for Liberal candidates although a Freethought bloc vote was discouraged unless individual thought and freedom was threatened.¹⁰ However, issues they were united on included secular education, freedom of religion, separation of Church

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7 SEE MCIVOR

8 Echo, 2:110/5:331, April 1882, p. 2.

9 FR, 2:22, July 1885, p. 12

FR, 2:23, Aug. 1885, pp2-3.

10 FR, 1:11, Aug 1884, p.

FR, 1:12, Sept 1884, p.

and State and so on. They firmly believed that the victory of science over religion would create a better society, one rid of the tyranny of superstition.

They were also prepared to explore various ideas which at the time were radical as shown by a couple of articles that appeared in the Freethought Review which were advocating Hare's system of Proportional Representation.¹¹ In these articles the writer, 'K', is concerned that only the majority is represented in the HRH and that other classes in New Zealand received no representation. The writer also is against district representatives, because this causes disputes between MPs over support for their own constituencies rather than representatives being united for the betterment of society. Under Hare's system electors would be able to vote for anyone, no matter which constituency they stood for, and once that MPs quota had been filled other candidates could be voted for. The minority would also be represented.

Other ideas which freethinkers explored included anti-vivisection, anti-vaccination, the possible confederation of Australia and New Zealand and the extension of women's rights.¹² There there is a certain element of utilitarianism in their ideas such as mutual improvement that may have pleased Samuel Smiles or Bentham. For example, the Freethought Review used the opening of the Christchurch Workingman's club in 1883 to voice its approval of "...the general awakening" to intellectual life and mental activity of the industrial classes'. The writer emphasised 'earnestness and self-reliance,' as important and attributed the improvement of the working-class to education and the freepress, those bastions of self-improvement, and ended with an evolutionary statement:

'It is a long way from a club of working men in the later end of the nineteenth century to our primordial ancestors of the caves and gravel-drift periods'.¹³

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11 FR, 2:14, Nov. 1, 1884, pp8-10.

FR, 2:15, Dec 1 1884, pp8-10.

12 See FR, 1:4, Jan 1 1884, p2 for example.

13 FR, 1:3, Dec. 1 1883, pp.6-7.

The individualistic tone of such observations is also evident.

Freethinkers were prepared to discuss a number of ideas and explore them which showed that to them the associations were as much a place for intellectual stimulation as they were organisations to represent the non-religious element of New Zealand society.

However, their main role was to represent a view that differed from the dominant view that was expoused in colonial society, that of the churches. Freethinkers believed that the progress of humanity could only occur if all religious superstition was done away with.

Science and reason should be used as benchmarks by which all ideas could be tested. Therefore, they might not say they totally disagreed with the ideas of the churches, but that if people were to believe there was a supernatural element in the world, then it should be proved by science and reason. Many Freethinkers saw evolution as incompatible with Christianity. Their disagreements with Christianity were many and some of these were along moral lines. In an article in the Freethought Review the writer outlined several reasons why Freethinkers begged to differ with Christians; this included the impractical teachings of the New Testament, the bloody record of the 'Christan era', the trinity, and the disunity of the churches.¹⁴ Many Freethinkers used the 'thorough Atheism' of Bradlaugh to disagree with Christianity. That is they criticised the religion from within using the Bible to refute the dogmas of Christianity.¹⁵ To illustrate this the topics of Freethought lectures in Palmerston North and Wanganui included such topics as 'the Authenticity of the Gospels', 'Facts Concerning Jesus and the Gospels' and other like-minded topics¹⁶. However, not all Freethinkers were opposed to notions of the supernatural. As spiritualists or pantheists they believed in a spiritual realm, but not one that was expoused in the churches of the colonies. Theirs

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14 FR, 1:4, Jan. 1 1884, p4.

15 D. Berman, A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell, (London, 1988), pp. 218-221.

16 FR, 1:1, Oct. 1 1883, p. 5.

Manawatu Evening Standard, June 3 1885.

was of a different world, and they could at times seek justification for it in the Bible.

However, debates did occur with Christians. These tended to be with the more fundamentalist type of Christian, who tended to see the Bible as divinely inspired and so were bound to differ with Freethinkers who saw this book as immoral and a source of the non-progress of humanity. For example there was debate in the House of Representatives between the likes of Stout and MPs such as W.D. Stewart and Turnbull, MP for Tamaru over the introduction of a Bible-in-Schools Bill. Turnbull argued that the Bible was the proper basis for society and anyone that opposed it was not a Liberal. Stout rejoined with the arguments that such legislation would acknowledge that the State was a Christian State, and with Bible-in-Schools a Protestant State. There would be a danger of introducing sectarian education with those Freethinking and Catholic teachers being forced to teach what they opposed.¹⁷

Much of the Freethought arguments came from Freethinkers in Britain and the United States where the great centres of the movement were based. People such as Bradlaugh, Holyoake, A. Besant and Ingersoll were the obvious people. Many Freethinkers claimed to have been 'converted' to the cause through reading Paine, Bradlaugh or Ingersoll. Other stimulants included Comte and Spencer.

Comte's arguments about the three stages of evolution of society would have appealed to Freethinkers who put their faith in the evolution of society. Pharazyn lectured on 'Comte and the Positive Philosopher in Wanganui'.¹⁸ The Freethought Review spoke favourably on this Law of Three Stages which allowed for humanity to move through the stages of the 'theological, supernatural and positive'. Comte mapped the stages of cultural development with the form of society.¹⁹ As far as the writer was concerned the supernatural was

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17 NZPD, 3, 1885, pp. 8-12.

18 ER, 2:20, May 1885, p. 7.

19 A. Comte, 'Introduction', A. Stanislaw (Ed. and Introduction), The Essential Comte, (London, 1974), pp. 11-12.

ER, 1:3, Dec. 1 1883, p. 15.

becoming less and less important as science began take over. To many of these Freethinkers, science had become the new religion; as Robert Pharaazyn said:

'...science, moralised by a devotion to humanity, though it may compel us to abandon many cherished illusions, will relieve us from many needless fears, and will furnish a far firmer basis for morality than can be obtained by appealing to "survivals" of philosophy which has fulfilled its mission'.²⁰

Therefore many were like Comte's positivists believing in the '...supremacy of science over all...'.²¹ This belief in the possibilities of science is echoed in the pages of the Echo, Freethought Review and Rationalist when all sorts of scientific discoveries were mentioned at random. The Freethought Review even contained a separate section of 'Science Notes' which listed all sorts of unrelated discoveries together. It was as if the mere fact of this scientific knowledge would be enough to herald a new age of humanity.

Naturally such notions would bring them into conflict with many Christians. Debates or lectures delivered by Freethinkers and Christians tended to be along the lines of a few topics, usually concerned with theological debates or the compatibility of science and religion. To Freethinkers, those Christians who acted as apologists and attempted to see the synthesis of science and religion were, infact hypocritical. For example the Reverend Fithchett saw the evolution of God from a tribal deity in the Old Testament to the universal god in the New Testament; such notions of an evolving God would have been seen as novel and outside the usual 'orthodox' arguments Freethinkers would have been used to.

However, differences of opinion also existed within the Freethought movement itself. This was primarily between spiritualist Freethinkers and non-spiritualist or materialist Freethinkers. Some

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20 FR, 1:6, March 1 1884, p. 9.

21 The Essential Comte, p. 9.

Freethought organisations such as the groups in Wellington and Auckland made themselves completely materialist by choosing names such as the Auckland Rationalist Association and the Wellington Secularist Society. However, other groups had allowed any one to join the association if their ideas ran counter to the 'orthodox' Christian view. This was due principally to the small numbers of people in these communities that were likely to join such organisations. However, it seems that the organisation in Palmerston North was completely spiritualist. As L.Barrow, a writer on British Spiritualism, has shown that many spiritualists saw themselves as allied with secularists against Christianity, but that secularists did not recognise this alliance, because they saw spiritualism as a threat to their membership and very existence, and that people like Bradlaugh would have never allowed such an alliance to develop fully, but even Bradlaugh's Hall of Science had an '...unstated number of "members...who [were] believers in spiritualism'. However, this was never officially recognised.²² There are similar examples of spiritualist groups in New Zealand believing they were part of an alliance against Orthodoxy. For example, the Palmerston North Psychological Society saw its activities as aiding the progress of humanity as expressed by their correspondent 'Light! More Light!'.²³

In New Zealand, however the fact that spiritualists were involved in the Freethought movement was officially recognised, and with this recognition came some problems. The value of Spiritualism was debated at local and national level among Freethinkers, and its legitimacy was under scrutiny. One statement linked the possible value of spiritualism in a variety of ways to the Freethought movement:

'Spiritualism is either true or false. If true, it must directly displace Christianity. If false, it is a strong logical argument against Christianity put in a most practical

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 22 L.Barrow,Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebians, 1850-1910, (London, 1986), pp.105-108.

23 FR, 1:11, Aug.1 1884, p.6.

FR, 2:22, July1 1885, p.5.

form, for it is obvious that if millions of intellectual persons have in our own day been the victims of delusion, there is no reason whatever for assuming Christian belief is not the result of similar delusion'.²⁴

Many Freethinkers had to tread carefully over their comments about Spiritualism, or they might offend a large sector of the movement. This is shown by the comments made in Wanganui where Mrs M. Moore, a spiritualist was allowed to lecture at the Wanganui Freethought Association, which seems to have been completely materialist. The correspondent to the Freethought Review spoke very cordially of her address, but was not prepared to commit himself to make any critical observations.²⁵

However, this did not mean that non-spiritualist were not some times accused by Spiritualists of creating disunity. The Harbinger of Light, an Australian Freethought and Spiritualist periodical, accused the Freethought Review of not being sympathetic to the Spiritualist cause and, instead, claiming that Spiritualists believed in things they could not see. The journal went on to say that '...Spiritualists find an intelligence, a mind, manifesting itself in a hundred different ways at their circles, which is not the mind or intelligence of any one of the persons forming the "circle"'.²⁶ Materialists and Spiritualists had to beg to differ and somehow continue to be unified in their battle against Christianity. However, these differing beliefs did provide a lot of tension. As materialists recognised, the belief of some Spiritualists in ideas such as evil spirits did, in fact, mean that they must admit the ideas of Christians.

An example of the tension between spiritualist and materialist Freethinkers is shown in the community of Woodville. In that settlement many people began to become interested in the ideas of Spiritualism and hold circles there. The Woodville Freethought Association was entirely Materialist at this time, but many of its members were becoming involved in Spiritualism, its existence was

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24 FR, 1:5, Feb. 1 1884, p. 1.

25 FR, 1:6, March 1 1884, p. 6.

26 FR, 2:16, Jan. 1 1885, p. 3.

threatened. Such circumstances are reminiscent of what was occurring, and what had occurred, in British Secularism where many of those prominently involved in the Secularist movement moved to Spiritualism. People such as Annie Besant went full circle having come from a Christian background, they drifted toward Secularism before becoming Spiritualists or in Besant's case, Theosophy a '...semi-spiritualist cult...'.²⁷ Therefore, there were some debates, in Woodville held between Hugo, a physiognomist and Dinsdale a Spiritualist; Hugo opposed the idea of the supernatural while Dinsdale supported it.²⁸

The end result was that the association was reorganised to allow Spiritualists to join. Dinsdale, the recognised leader of Spiritualism in Woodville, was elected treasurer and Vice-president of the association.²⁹ However, the power struggle did leave some bitterness as shown by the comments made by the association's, E.Hutchins, correspondent on an address by Dinsdale called 'A Death-blow to the Old Theology':

'The address, was given in splendid style, but grand language was, in my opinion, almost its sole merit, as the course of this so-called Spiritualism is evidently as little understood by spiritualists as those who know little or nothing of the phenomena'.³⁰

Therefore the evidence of conflict was there. Such internal tensions meant that these organisations lost some of their effectiveness.

However, conflict was not just reserved to differences over spiritualism. Freethought associations differed over the best way in which they should conduct themselves. An example of this was between between the papers The Rationalist and the Freethought Review which differed over the type of approach Freethinkers should take against their opponents. The Freethought Review condemned The Rationalist of '...want of tone and lamentable tendency to

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27 Barrow, p.107.

28 FR, 1:12, Sep. 1 1884, p.5.

FR, 2:15, Dec. 1 1884, p.7.

29 FR, 2:15, Dec. 1 1884, p.7.

30 FR, 2:18, March 1 1885, p.6.

vulgarity' which upset editor of The Rationalist 'Ivo'. He responded by arguing that his paper had the odd joke in it, and this was useful, because it helped sell the paper and thus advance the cause of Freethought in the colony. His paper also contained some parochial arguments satirising Wanganui's place as 'the hub of the universe' to illustrate his point about the value of comedy in a paper; the editor of the Freethought Review should remember the small size of Wanganui and his own inexperience as a propagandist³¹

Such disputes are in the same context as the debates that went on between Bradlaugh and G.J.Holyoake as to the best course that the Freethought movement should be going. Holyoake was of the opinion that secularists should attempt to be 'respectable' in order to gain the upper-hand in debates with Christians, because they would seem the reasonable ones. Bradlaugh, on the other hand, advocated militancy. Secularism could only hope to defeat superstition if it was forceful.

Therefore, the ideas of Freethinkers in the Manawatu were many and diverse. Some of these did cause tension as I have illustrated. I am aware that many remarks about Freethought were very general, but that was designed to give one an appreciation of the number of ideas that existed. In the final chapter, I move to attempt to explain why Freethought declined as such a fast rate.

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31 FR, 2:22, July 1 1885, p

The Rationalist, 1:4, July 15 1885, p.1.

SUN GOES DOWN ON THE 'FALSE DAWN'

In the late 1880s many Freethought associations ceased to exist, the fervour that existed only a few years before had disappeared. In this chapter I will attempt to explain why Freethought associations in the Manawatu and Wanganui stopped operating in the late 1880s. I will explore this in the context of the social composition of Freethought to perhaps explain the organisations' demise. The 'live and let live' mentality of settler society may also explain the early folding of groups. Other reasons will include the loss of charismatic leaders and the attractiveness of newer ideas.

According to studies done by Royle and Budd of *Secularism in Britain*, it would seem that the movement in that country comprised membership from the working-class and lower middle-class. However, there was some discrepancy between Royle's and Budd's findings. Budd surveyed biographical and obituarial source. Of the 382 members surveyed, she classed most from the 'semi-skilled' or unskilled' sectors of society.¹ Royle's survey shows that there was a greater autodidactic element in the secularist movement.² There also tended to be some wealthier members in some of the other associations.

Of those Freethinkers that were mentioned in accounts of association activity in the Manawatu and Wanganui, a slightly different picture can be evident. In some instances the evidence supports Budd, in other, the findings of Royle.

In Wanganui, those members that are mentioned tend to be from the ranks of the petit-bourgeoisie of their community. People such as Willis and Buckerell were businessmen who had become prominent members of their town through their own entrepreneurial efforts.³

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1 S. Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief*, (London, 1977), pp 94-96.

E. Royle, *Radicals, Secularist and Republicans*, (Manchester, 1980), p127.

2 Royle, p. 127.

3 *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 1, p. 1417-pp. 1434-1436.

These autodidacts were involved in other organisations that endorsed their mutual-improvement philosophy such as The Oddfellows Society. They were of the mind that through ones own efforts, one could achieve success. These people were, thus, also the civic elite due to their involvement in local politics. These positions of responsibility would probably not presented themselves to such individuals, if they had been in England or Ireland, but in the new country they were able to achieve such positions of eminence. No doubt there were also members drawn from other classes, but the executive the association was drawn from the ranks of this sector of Wanganui society. They were the most committed members of the organisation, so they would have set the tone for the association. Due to their philosophy of mutual-improvement and strict individualism, this may have alienated many potential members who would not have seen any real worth in respectibility. As Budd says of British Secularists: 'Far from being disreputable, many freethinkers were cut off fom the rest of the working class by their intense and rather solemn autodidacticism'.⁴

Such a situation could have occurred in Wanganui, although there were probably a number of casual members who did not pay their subscription fees, but who attended many of the meeetings.

In Woodville the prominent members of the Freethought association were also autodidacts, such as E.A.Haggen and I.F.Fountaine. Their associaion seems to have been set up as in opposition to the hegemony of the United Free Methodists that flourished at the founding of the settlement in the late 1870s. These people were also those that set the tone for much of the ideas of the association, although the challenge from Spiritualism must be kept in mind. This group of Spiritualists may have been drawn from another class in Woodville, although, I was unable to ascertain the occupation of prominent spiritualist Freethinkers in the Woodville community such as Dunsdale.

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 4 Budd,p.90.

Palmerston North's Freethought group seems vehemently anti-church, and none of the members mentioned were notables of the community, although T.R. Walton was a member of the Highway Board. The settlement was very new and had high proportion of males working as navvies. Budd noted that reasons that people became Freethinkers included alienation of individuals from their '...older social allegiances'.⁵ People in Palmerston North and Feilding would fit this explanation, but it does not explain why similar settlements in the Manawatu did not have Freethought associations. However, the reasons for the demise of these associations could be accounted for by the high transience of those who were likely to be attracted to Freethought. Nevertheless, there were individuals such as Miss A. Chamberlain, a relation of the Feilding mill-owner W. Chamberlain, who would have been wealthier citizens of Palmerston North or Feilding.⁶ Reports of these meetings often seemed to be the epitome of middle-class respectability, but that could have been the intention of the correspondent who was from the ranks of the settlement's petit-bourgeoisie.⁷ What such an analysis indicates is the way in which people from various classes were able to interact and mix.

What is evident from the studies of Freethought associations is that they were dominated by men which may have something to do with the gender imbalance in areas such as the Manawatu. However, Freethought associations seem to have been very concerned about the fact that their organisations attracted very few women. An address by Mrs M. Moore to the Wanganui Freethought Association on 'Women's Influence' outlined this problem. She argued that as women were the upbringers of children, then it was imperative that they were educated as Liberals so that these ideas of heterodoxy were instilled into the minds of the children.⁸ The nineteenth-century view was that women were the advocates of religion and that if they could be separated from the churches, then generations of Freethinkers

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 5 Budd, p. 96, p. 120.

6 Feilding Star, 3 Feb. 1885.

The Rationalist, 27 Sep. 1885, p. 2.

7 See for example The Rationalist, 1:17, 18 Oct. 1885, p. 4.

8 FR, 1:4, 1 Jan. 1884, p. 7.

could emerge.⁹ It was believed that if the Freethought associations adopted the ceremonial aspects of the churches, then more women would be attracted to this form of 'surrogate religion'.¹⁰ The reports given by Freethought association tend to mention women, but their role is generally assigned to the entertainment such as the playing of music¹¹. These women also tended to be the wives of Freethinkers. The association was a family focus for them.

This survey of the social composition of Freethought association gives little hard evidence that the zenith of Freethought lay in the membership. It may have contributed, but other reasons for decline must be explored.

The loss of charismatic leaders could have been a reason for the decline of Freethought associations. In fact, the secretary of the Wanganui Freethought Association, J.J. Bucknell, admitted as much when he stated that the loss of Ballance to parliamentary duties had weakened the association, but the "members were vowing to pull together".¹² The loss of people such as T.R. Walton in Palmerston North would have left the Freethought movement in that settlement in a similar predicament. The importance of charismatic leaders is that they act as a focus and identity for an organisation and may also gain it credibility if they are a respected member of the community.

However, the group must be as strong as its weakest members and there are other reasons why Freethought declined in the Wanganui and Manawatu. It would seem that many members of the organisation were not very committed to the cause as is shown by some of the comments made by reports. Chas A. Bevan, the secretary of the Woodville Freethought association reported that many of their members were actually attending church instead of attending Freethought meetings so that attendance at these meetings was very low and thus those who

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9 Budd, p. 50.

10 Budd, p. 50.

ALSO SEE LINEHAM

11 See for example The Rationalist, 1:17, 18 Oct. 1885, p. 4.

12 FR, 1:12, 1 Sep. 1884, p. 6.

attended were discouraged from attending. Some members were also asking for singing and music instead of '...discussion on theological subjects'.¹³ It would seem that a number of members of this group merely regarded the organization as a social gathering where they could come into contact with a feeling of community. This would also account for the discrepancy between the number of people who attended lectures and those that actually called themselves Freethinkers in the Census. A number of these people were merely casual enquirers who saw Freethought meetings as a social gathering and would also have attended evangelical meetings for the same reasons. Their commitment to Freethought would wane very quickly.

Of the other internal reasons for the possible reasons for the decline of Freethought in the Manawatu and Wanganui, the differences between materialist Freethinkers and spiritualist Freethinkers must be sited as a reason. The fact that they believed in very different things caused internal factions as shown previously in the in the Woodville Freethought Association. The Vice-President of the Dunedin Freethought Association, Joseph Braithwaite, on his resignation from the group saw a weakness in the organisation of Freethought in New Zealand which centred around both Materialists and those tha believed in the supernatural: 'I see clearly that no association can accomplish anything beneficial unless its members are animated by one common aim and aspiration'.¹⁴ Stout replied that the association did not need to have one common idea, and that heterodoxy was desirable¹⁵. However, it seems that the Palmerston North Psychological Society as an entirely Spiritualist group did not last, but then the records of the Palmeraton North Lyceum and Literary Institute lasted longer due to its liberal platform. In this instance Stout was correct. Situations that were the downfall of one group were not necessarily the reason for the decline of another.

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 13 FR, 1:12, 1 Sep. 1884, p. 5.

14 FR, 1:5, 1 Feb. 1884, p. 6.

15 ibid., p. 6.

Persecution did not occur to Freethinkers very readily in New Zealand either. This aided the life Freethought in Britain with the Bradlaugh Case in the 1890s, but in New Zealand no such situations occurred. In fact avowed Freethinkers like Ballance entered government. The only occurrences of persecution in the Wanganui and Manawatu were very minor and scarcely worth a mention. In Palmerston North The Rationalist and Liberator, Joseph Syme's Melbourne Freethought periodical, were excluded from the public reading room by the city council. The Rationalist, reporting on this event, made the situation something of a monumental occasion:

'We place on record the names of the six men who, in the nineteenth century have shown their desire to establish a Protestant inquisition in New Zealand. Here they are: crs West, Snelson, Ferguson, Grace, Waldegrave, and R.S. Abrahams'.¹⁶

The paper did report, though that other Christians on the Council had voted against the motion to ban the Freethought papers.¹⁷

Similar 'persecutions' that occurred in Palmerston North included the Manawatu Times being forced to stop advertising and reporting Freethought lectures by the local clergy.¹⁸

In Fielding, the banning of the Freethought Review was seen as more just, because the Borough Council, on banning Freethought periodicals, passed a resolution to ban all sectarian papers from the reading room table.¹⁹ Such action was indicative of the 'live and let live' mentality of many settlers.

In fact, the problem for many Freethought groups in the area was that they were not able to gain the full contempt²⁰ of the clergy. For example, the Woodville group received some sermons preached against them, but then the only minister that was prepared to debate with them was Rev. Worboys who debated the 'Genuineness of the Scriptures' with the President E.A.Hagger²⁰. The only other

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16 The Rationalist, 2:18, 18 June 1886, p.5.

17 *ibid.*

18 FR, 2:23, 1 Aug. 1885, p.5.

19 FR, 2:19, 1 April 1885, pp.6-7.

20 FR, 1:10, 1 July 1884, p.6.

Christian to take on infidelity in the community was a lay Methodist Rendle²¹. When they attempted to invite other sects to attend, there were no takers, and this was even after the Freethinkers had been threatened by the clergy.²² Clearly the clergy in that town did not think it was worth the trouble, such actions would only bring attention to the Freethought associations. Only those clergy that inherited the same world as the Freethinkers, such as Worboys could have profited from debates with Freethinkers.

The same situation occurred in Wanganui. In that town an Anglican cleric, Cameron, made an address to the local Freethought association on the fact that science and religion were compatible. However, he was told by the Bishop of Wellington to '...confine himself to his parochial work'.²³ He thus stopped his addresses to the Freethought association and ceased to write articles to the papers on the issue²⁴. The Bishop of the largest 'mainstream' church in the colony knew the small numbers involved in Freethought and probably thought there were more important issues for Cameron to be addressing. Such activity only drew attention to it.

Those Christians who were prepared to debate with Freethinkers tended to be from the same world of the Freethinkers, except at the other end of the spectrum as far as ideas were concerned. Their orthodox arguments could be countered by the Freethinkers. Their relationship was, in one sense symbiotic. However, Freethinkers often complained about the type of Christian they had to debate with. For example, the correspondent from the Wanganui Freethought Association, J.J.Buckrell, complained of the uninformed opinions of lectures given by Revs. Farncourt and Whitehouse, a curate from Patea, at a public meeting held in the town.²⁵ Although, one suspects if their arguments had been theologically liberal, the

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21 ER, 2:15,1 Dec. 1884, p.7.

22 ER, 1:7,1 April, p.4.

23 ER, 1:1,1 Oct. 1883, p.1.

Wanganui Chronicle, 28 July 1883: 20 July 1883.

24 ER, 1:1,1 Oct. 1883, p.1.

25 ER, 2:15,1 Dec. 1884, pp.2-3.

Stenhouse, p.174.

writer would have also complained. What these Freethinkers and Christians were doing was fighting for the same thing, that is against religious apathy. As Royle has said: 'For the most part, Christians and freethinkers were on the same side, though they seldom recognised the fact. They were the ones who thought theology mattered enough to be argued about'.²⁶

The fact was that Christians were continuing to win the battle and this is not surprising given the short time which Freethought had existed in the colony. Ideas take centuries to change, and many people do not bother to even think about the issues. These people in one sense introduced an awareness about the place of religion in society. The fact was that many settlers on arriving in New Zealand had ceased to continue with a social practice that was central to community life in rural Britain, that is church going. The broken link with the 'old country' created new habits and this included finishing with attending church. Many settlers thus became uninterested in the theological debates that were occurring around them. However, one must remember that this was not always the case. Woodville was settled by members of the Waipawa Free Methodist Church. All but two, who were members of the Woodville Small Farmers' Association, were members of this church.²⁷ However, as I have already shown the attitudes of many settlers in Woodville had changed over a very short period of time. Perhaps this was the result of the climate of 'live and let live' which seemed to dominate settler society?. The materialism of settler society may have contributed to the apathy with which a major proportion of the Manawatu and Wanganui greeted theological discussion.

The secretary of the Wanganui Freethought Association commented on the attitude of the general populus toward Wanganui when he commented that Freethinkers '...should be careful to allow the same liberty to others that we claim for ourselves, and avoid

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26 Royle, p. 295.

27 R. Arnold, 'The Opening of the Great Bush, 1869-1881: A Social History of Bush Settlements of Taranaki, Hawkes Bay and Wellington', Phd Thesis, Victoria University, 1971, p. 123.

interference with the expressions of opinions with which we disagree'.²⁸ Such an attitude from a Freethought association probably heralded its death, because it was in the theory of conflict that Freethought was able to thrive. Once it became theosophical in its attitude, then it was certain to demise, because its role as critic of Christianity would be gone. It when then only exist as a social group.

The loss of enthusiasm of Freethought groups may also have been due to the fact that the essentially eighteenth-century arguments against religion were out-moded and did not fit the world that was nineteenth-century settler society. The battle against religion was a moral crusade that few were prepared to fight. There was little to fight, infact, because the draconian laws that occurred in Britain were not evident in New Zealand, a state religion did not exist and the the oaths that Bradlaugh was forced to take, had been done away with in New Zealand. In fact, Bradlaugh, when contemplating a trip to New Zealand and Australia in 1886 commented that he 'would not lecture on Freethought while he was there because '...there is no state religion, and everybody pays for what he likes. I do not see, therefore, why I should go in to denounce what is a matter of free choice'²⁹. The fact was that Freethought in some senses was battling ideas that did not exist within the fabric of settler society. Other ideas had more currency and were, therefore likely to attract more support. Therefore, Freethought declined at a time when the notion of state-intervention was gaining currency. New ideas bring other idea which fit into the construction of a new outlook. To many Freethought lacked currency.

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28 FR, 2:20,1 May 1885, p.7.

29 Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand', p.72.

CONCLUSION

Freethought as a movement declined following its incredible growth in the early 1880s. The only region which continued to prosper was in Christchurch where W.W.Collins, the grandson of a prominent Chartist, continued the cause through the 1890s¹. What happened was that in the areas where Freethought had flourished only a few years before, it now was almost non-existent. In fact it never recovered, although Rationalism in Auckland was able to gain some degree of support especially during the 1920s when the local bodies threatened to close all places on Sunday that charged money for admittance. The Rationalist and Sunday Freedom League gained some support. However, it was never to gain the eminence that it gained in the early years of the 1880s. Infact one could argue that the years following this 'Golden Age' were like the years that preceeded it, ones that showed some interest in the notion of unbelief, but that there were not enough people to continue the efforts. Auckland continues to have a Rationalist Association with its own literature, but it is the largest of the very small infidel outposts.

The Freethought movement of the 1880s was relevant to the people of the time, because it characterised the liberal climate of settler society at that time. It was a reminder of the ideas from the 'old country' and seemed relevant. However, this was to change as the strident individualism that these Freethinkers advocated was replaced by something that was more pragmatic. The notion that mutual-improvement would help the progress of the greater society was replaced by the idea that the State should provide for all of one's securities. Freethought was part of that utilitarian thought that held that laissez-faire was the ideal way to run a society, so that when 'stateism' became the dominant idea, the arguments that Freethought preached became largely outmoded.

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 1. Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand' p.67.

However, in the 1880s this thought had not yet become dominant. Freethought associations were able to develop in even the remotest areas of the country, because of the interest in such topics. Areas such as the Great Bush were permeated with the sounds of revivalists and sectarian religion. It was a fertile place for the discussion of theological matters. Organisations were able to be established in Woodville, Palmerston North and Feilding, because people enjoyed discussing such matters. Wanganui was a more established settlement. It had its own intellectual avangarde. People such as Ballance and Pharazyn were of ~~the autedidactic position in~~ society, so in favour of the mutual-improvement and theological enquiry that characterised Freethought. They were able to build a society from their position of civic prominence and draw crowds to their lectures. The activities of Freethought associations as I have shown did in many ways fill the gap that non-belief left. Those that were dissatisfied with the way in which the churches in New Zealand thought could find that sense of community in the Freethought associations. The activities of the organisations filled this social gap. Lineham has described these organisations as in terms that would make them seem 'surrogate religion', but one must remember the cultural milieu that Freethought came from.² Given that nearly all individuals came from a Christian back-ground, it is not surprising that the 'trappings' of Christianity were used. It was part of the culture of the society.

I have also shown that Freethought was part of the liberal thought that existed at the time. The organisations saw themselves as the vanguard of a movement that would herald the dawn of a new society. Particularly their conviction that science, and especially evolution, proved that religion was fallible and therefore unnecessary. They debated this point with Christians who either attempted to destroy the Freethinkers 'new religion' of science or saw that science and religion were compatible.

However, the ideas of of some Freethinkers might conflict with other Freethinkers. This did not matter when it came to points such as

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² *ibid.*, p.66. For an example of this.

land nationalisation. But, the situation was different when one considers the objections materialist Freethinkers held toward the ideas of spiritualist Freethinkers. Such disagreements could hinder the activities of Freethought associations. In the end such incompatibility helped to destroy many Freethought associations, as with the case of Woodville.

Therefore the Freethought associations in the Manawatu and Wanganui went into a state of decline, because they could not continue with their inward contradictions. The attitude of most Christians to ignore them also meant that the small groups were unable to gain audiences to hear their messages. The only churches that tended to take notice were those of the more fundamentalist brand who used the same methods and similar arguments, except at the polar opposite, to spread their ideas. The more 'mainstream' churches tended to ignore Freethought, because, otherwise, they would merely bring attention to it.

The other reasons for decline included the fact that other ideas seemed more relevant to the social, political and economic life of New Zealand. The basically moral-force arguments did not seem to provide a solution to many pragmatic settlers. The dream of establishing a society based on reason and science with humanity at the centre was not attractive to all. The dream was lost.

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