

## MONTFORT TRIMBLE:

It has been difficult to gather much information about the background of Dr Trimble. An intensely private man, he has left us with few records of his personal life. A search of the various files at the Archive has bought no personal papers to light, and contact with various family members has shed no light on his personal life. A search of the records at Alexander Turnbull Library uncovered some information on his family background, and contact with other researchers has thrown some light on the afforestation issue of the 1930s.

## FAMILY BACKGROUND

Dr Montfort Trimble was the son of Colonel Robert Trimble and his wife Jane Heywood.

Robert Trimble was born near Belfast in 1824 and was educated at a local grammar school. He was employed for a period in the United States but returned to England in the 1850s and became the English partner in an importing firm. During the American Civil War he was a strong supporter of the northern forces, and was secretary of the Manchester Emancipation Society. He wrote a number of pamphlets espousing the cause of emancipation, and following the war he was presented with a silver medal for the work he had undertaken assisting liberated Negro slaves.

A radical liberal, he was a strong supporter of Gladstone and advocated free trade, secular education and the abolition of the state church. He was also a keen volunteer and rose to be colonel of the 15th Lancashire Regiment. In 1875 he was induced to migrate to New Zealand, where he took up land near Inglewood establishing a sawmill as he cleared his 2000-acre bush property. He also became involved in local politics, serving on town boards and acting as chairman of the first Taranaki County Council. He served as a Member of Parliament from 1879 until 1887, and was regarded as having a good understanding of Maori issues. He later served as a judge in the Native Land Court.

Colonel Robert Trimble died in 1899; his wife Jane died in 1925.

Colonel Trimble was fondly remembered in a number of obituaries published both in New Zealand and in England, where he was still highly regarded. One English obituary described him as "the incarnation of fearless reform and enthusiastic philanthropy."

The Trimbles left a family of four sons and three daughters. Information on the daughters has been difficult to track, but a little is known of each of the sons.

Alfred, the eldest, worked for the Department of Courts in a number of functions.

William the second son, also followed a career in the public service but during a period of retrenchment he was discharged and opened a bookshop in Dunedin. He subsequently worked for a period as the Hocken Librarian, and is credited with undertaking the first cataloguing of the collection. He was also an expert on the work of the American poet Walt Whitman. When he died he donated his large collection of Whitman's work to the Dunedin Public Library.

Montfort was the third son.

The fourth son, Harold, lived on the family farm, "Riversdale" near Inglewood, where he died.

The information on the daughters is scanty. In 1942 Nora donated the residue of her father's library, including some works he had written on the slavery issue, to the Alexander Turnbull Library.

The Trimble family seems to have been a politically liberal one, with family members having strong literary interest. Colonel Trimble's interest in Maori culture was to be followed by Montfort, and William Trimble's interest in the work of a poet whose major theme was the regenerative power of nature is also echoed in Montfort's interests.

## MONTFORTTRIMBLE

Montfort Trimble was born in 1863, in England, and came to Taranaki with the rest of his family in 1875. He was educated in New Plymouth, and then studied law, graduating a Bachelor of Law from Victoria University in March 1891. He had previously worked as an officer of the Wellington City Council. He spent a brief period in Carterton then moved to Masterton in 1899 to join W.G. Beard's legal practise. It seems he immediately assumed responsibility for the work for the Wairarapa North County Council, and its successor, the Masterton County Council. He was officially appointed the County Solicitor in 1918, following Beard's departure from the partnership.

In 1906 Montfort Trimble married Anne Martin Monckton, of, 'Newstead,' Featherston. At the time of the marriage both partners were in their forties and the marriage was not to bear any children. Trimble met his bride-to-be, usually known as "Birdie," while she was keeping house for her brother Ted at "The Brook." It is significant that Ted Monckton was a neighbour and friend of Douglas Cook, of the Eastwood Hills arboretum near Gisborne.

According to a family history, *The Colonial One* by Dorothea Joblin, Mrs Trimble was the eldest daughter of a large family, a plain woman whose life had been devoted to assisting in the management of the family. She was an active supporter of the Church of England and gave many years service as the Sunday School at Fernridge.

Trimble was a superficially austere man. When he and Birdie married in a quiet wedding at Newstead, the newly wed couple left for their honeymoon on bicycles. Montfort continued to use a bicycle as his principal method of transport

right through his life.

His one passion was books. It is said that their house was cold and uncomfortable, but it was filled with a magnificent library of books. He had a major collection of books on Italian statecraft, a collection he donated to the Alexander Turnbull Library in 1929. These may have been part of his father's collection, although Dr Trimble is said to have been a keen student of linguistics.

Although his Monckton in-laws regarded him as austere (they referred to him as Marcus Aurelius) they also used his legal skills. Mrs Monckton appointed Montfort as legal trustee for the unmarried Monckton girls, then living at a house in Rangitikei called "The Fobles," after an ancestral home. Dr Trimble, who considered the girls hare-brained and feckless, used to address correspondence to "The Foibles." It has proven very difficult to find any documentation of the personal life of Dr Trimble. He was a quiet, private man whose interests were those of the intellect. He does not seem to have taken part in major debates and the only correspondence he had with Masterton County Council concerned his legal work for the Council. Although he was not prominent in public he was highly respected.

His near neighbour Stuart Keith remembers him as very religious man, and a man of high-minded principles. He was a lover of the land, and wished to see the world a better place than it was.

In his obituary printed following his death in 1940 he is described as a man of eminent standing in the legal profession, a profound student of all literature, and a noted Maori scholar.