

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mihinare ki Aotearoa*

Allan Bruce Catley

Personal Recollections of and Reflections about ABC by Colin Brown (1927-2021)

(AHS Newsletter 36, March 2007)

The publication of Allan Catley's brief autobiography (c.f. Catley's autobiography at the end of this Paper) brings to mind the influence he exercised as Chaplain (1948-1950) and Sub-Warden (1951-1963) at St John's College.

I was a student there during that time and in my first year, as the only student doing the first two Old Testament papers, had two hours each week with him on a tutorial basis. Later I worked with him on the staff of the college from 1956-63 and we corresponded regularly until his death.

Allan Davidson, in his admirable history of St John's College has brought out Allan Catley's many-sided contribution to the life of the College and hinted at the limitations of his teaching method. It may be of interest if I bring out some of his personal characteristics as I discerned them during a long and rich friendship.

Allan Catley was a very private person (in my experience anyway) not greatly given to intimate self-disclosure. He could react sharply to students or junior colleagues who took liberties (as he regarded them) with him in conversation and asked questions or raised topics which he regarded as private matters. At all times (consciously or unconsciously) he maintained a certain distance between himself and those whom he taught and with whom he worked. I guess that this style was partly a generational matter: his generation was not much given to 'letting it all hang out.'

His life was an ordered one, bordering some said, on the regimented. During vacations my family and I, along with Allan Catley, generally attended

services at St. Chad's Church, Meadowbank. We would often ask him to come in for breakfast, but the invariable reply was: 'Sunday mornings are for writing letters.' And, of course, he was a voluminous and faithful correspondent. His own memoir gives hints at the variety and number of those with whom he kept in touch: former colleagues, the children of friends, students whom he had taught, relatives, godchildren and many others.

This careful ordering of his life helped to make possible his achievements on many fronts. Generally, his cyclostyled notes were prepared before the start of an academic year; sermons were normally prepared by Wednesday, and he was averse to reading lessons at services without prior notice. To a vicar who asked him to read a lesson as the choir procession was forming up Allan replied icily: 'I always prepare carefully for reading lessons. You can be sure that the Bible contains the Word of God: the same cannot always be said of sermons.'

But if Allan's life was tightly ordered, it was also balanced. Holidays, which took him back to Australia or exploring New Zealand, were regular and sacrosanct. Even in term-time he found time (in evenings mostly) to read quite widely. Most days he took exercise walking vigorously and, in summer, would march off to Ladies' Bay for a swim two or three times a week. All this partly explains why he found the whirlwind regime of Raymond Foster (Warden from 1962) hard to adjust to. I can recall Allan protesting that staff did need time to prepare lectures. Raymond

replied: 'Go in, throw out a few ideas, have a seminar.'

I can recall one vacation when Allan sighed with relief after the Foster family departed for a trip north. They were back in a few days, less than planned. 'Once we'd seen the famous sites,' said Raymond, 'there was little left to do except laze around on the beach.' Allan replied, 'That's what Kiwi holidays are about Warden.' Of course, the differences between the two went much deeper. Allan had long been habituated to the kind of quasi-seminary regime which Esmond Sutton maintained and it was precisely this which Raymond Foster set out to reform.

One of the things which comes through clearly in Allan Catley's memoir is the fact that he found his primary vocation in teaching which he greatly enjoyed and to which he devoted so much of his energies. But he was more than just an excellent classroom teacher. Indeed, some of his students valued, primarily, his sermons which were always meticulously prepared and delivered, witty and searching, informative and challenging and withal, a model for future preachers.

His wise, sensitive pastoral care of individuals supported many who turned to him for counsel and guidance. Certainly, administration was not his forte: when acting-warden on one or two occasions, he agonized over decisions, sometimes making them only to change his mind later.

He avoided (quite deliberately) being drawn into much in the way of activities outside the college. I think that there were two grounds for this. There was widespread suspicion outside the diocese of Auckland that the college and its warden were under the thumb of Bishop Simkin and, like him, unrelentingly Anglo-Catholic. Publicly, Allan Catley was impeccably loyal to those in authority (whether bishops or wardens) and can best be described as a mildly-liberal Anglo-Catholic of the outlook epitomised in *Essays Catholic and Critical* (1926). Yet he was

aware of the suspicions of the college and, privately, quite critical of Simkin's rigid Anglo-Catholicism and his lack of theological acumen.

The second reason for Allan staying clear of extra-curricular activities relates to his strong personal commitment to teaching and the demands this imposed. He taught across a wide range of fields and read quite widely in them, as he put together the notes issued to students. The preparation of notes for courses on particular New Testament books best indicates his style and thoroughness. Strewn around his typewriter with a stencil in it, would be several commentaries on the book in question, the Greek text handy along with (sometimes) a French publication or two since he read French fluently and regularly. When I joined the staff at St John's, Allan Catley said to me: 'If teaching is done properly - and that's what students deserve - you'll find it very time-consuming, more so than you probably imagine right now.'

Yet the fields in which Allan Catley taught were interestingly restricted. At St John's College (to the best of my recollection) he taught in the fields of Old and New Testaments, Introductory New Testament Greek, Prayer-Book, English Church History and Christian Ethics when the course was based on Kenneth Kirk's 'Some Principles of Moral Theology.' Notably absent from this list are doctrinal or philosophical subjects, fields in which I don't think he read a great deal and in which he did not feel that his expertise lay. The avoidance of such areas is a bit puzzling when it is remembered that his Cambridge studies had included philosophical theology.

Doctrinally he held quite conservative positions on most questions and, indeed sometimes, seemed to me disinclined to pursue them in discussion. Whether this was because study and reflection had led him to such a position or, perhaps less probably, he had doubts which he did not think it appropriate to share. I never felt

able to decide. Nevertheless, when I returned from two years' study overseas in 1964 and told him that I had had to reconstruct my personal beliefs from the ground up he replied that the only faith worth having was one which was genuinely one's own.

No account of Allan Catley's influence should overlook his generosity in financial matters. True, he was a bachelor of simple tastes with funds at his disposal, but he deployed them generously: to students needing financial help, godchildren, a range of 'good causes' and relatives. When I was going overseas on leave in 1962, Allan Catley, quite out of the blue, loaned me a considerable sum which made it possible for Anne and our two pre-school children to accompany me.

Of course, he had limitations and foibles: as he aged, he became a bit prolix and pedantic, and elements of inflexibility showed up. The ordination of women might have troubled him, I think. He was not an especially original scholar although a very careful, well-informed and stimulating teacher. Unlike Esmond Sutton and Bernard Williams, who expected students to take dictation from them, Allan Catley issued in advance carefully prepared notes on which he commented freely in lectures. He tended to discourage students who interrupted his lectures with questions or comments; for one thing his lectures were carefully rehearsed performances. He was, however, normally open to discussion over morning or afternoon tea (but not meals!) and in private consultation.

It has been claimed that students relied overmuch on his excellent cyclostyled notes thus discouraging independent study. There is some

justice in this complaint, but Allan Catley had students of moderate ability very much in mind and it has to be remembered that the college library was woefully lacking during most of the years when he taught at St. John's. My own experience was that his notes and, more especially his lectures, provided a basis for study, often suggested further lines of inquiry, and drew attention to both classic and new literature.

Allan Catley was intensely loyal to Esmond Sutton of whose approach to theological education he approved and who had provided the former with a welcome escape-route from a position as headmaster of a boys' boarding-school. But, within the limits which this loyalty imposed, Allan Catley did a good deal to humanise the Sutton-style regime by his good humour, his interest in and consideration for students, and the quality of his teaching. His personal spirituality rested on a deep Christian commitment and its constant refreshment from a well-ordered spiritual life.

One closing anecdote. Esmond Sutton had a firm rule that students were not allowed to have motor-vehicles on the college premises. When student flats for married men were planned, no garages were provided initially, and Allan Catley, deeming this misguided, spoke to a member of the governing body to good effect. Esmond Sutton was furious, especially when his trusted aide turned out to be the perpetrator of this act of disloyalty. I have always thought that the garages concerned should bear a plate naming them 'The Allan Catley Memorial Garages'.

The A. B. Catley Story

The Autobiography of Allan Bruce Catley (1971)

(AHS Newsletter 35, November 2006)

I was born at 'Kenwood', Denison Rd., Lewisham, Sydney, NSW, on 20th August 1903, the elder child of George Eric Catley, Dispatch Clerk at Vickers' Woolen Mills, aged 23 (one of the elder boys in a family of

eight living in Petersham) and Ethel May Woodroffe, aged 25 (one of the younger girls in a family of thirteen living in Lewisham.)

George and Ethel had been 'keeping company' for several years but when they wanted to marry, George's family objected on the grounds that the Woodroffes were of lower social standing. (George's father was Head Shopwalker at Anthony Horderns; Ethel's father was a gardener). As George was underage, they could do nothing about it, but the day after George's birthday (21st) the couple were married very quietly and then each returned to his or her home. After about 18 months, I began to show my presence; explanations followed, and the couple set up house together.

On 30th Sept 1906, my brother Jack Douglas was born. Our mother never recovered from that birth and died several months later. As we had been cared for by the Woodroffes (Horace, Ida, and Edith, all unmarried) it seemed natural for them to accept the responsibility of (caring for) us. Horace was then working on the land near Douglas Park but soon after he entered the Government Service and spent the rest of his life first as an attendant and later manager in mental hospitals, especially Rydalmere. We moved first to Dundas and then to Parramatta (414 Church Street). Our father used to spend the weekend with us until he died after an operation in 1914. Jack was a mischievous child though sensitive to adult disapproval. A common question at bedtime was 'Jack a good boy?' On one occasion he anticipated the usual reply by saying in one breath 'Edie says *sometimes*.'

At first, I attended Parramatta North School but for my first year in Primary I went to Paramatta School. At the beginning of 1916, I won a bursary (ten Pounds a year plus textbooks). Thanks to the skill of my Aunts, the money clothed me. When I reported to the headmaster and told him that I was destined for a commercial career he placed me in class IE (Art and Geography); after a term, the Art mistress reported that I was hopeless, so I was transferred to ID (Latin) without regret. In that same year Uncle Horace had a house built at the Rydalmere-Paramatta border where we lived until Uncle married a widowed Scottish nurse (Auntie Johnnie), their only child being the present Bobbie Tysoe.

After five interesting and happy years at Parramatta North School I finished as dux and head prefect and from my leaving certificate exam earned a University Bursary and a Teacher's College Scholarship. I chose the latter, as it was worth more and I wanted to be a teacher anyway, rather against my Uncle's advice as he thought a man was a fool to enter the Government Service; (I had been a Sunday School Teacher from my fifteenth year); I had intended to do Science at University but was persuaded to change to Agricultural Science, a field in which there was an increasing demand for teachers.

The four years at Sydney University were full and interesting. At first, I commuted from Parramatta until we moved to Concord East as it involved much less traveling. The course in Agricultural Science brought me into close touch with country life ... 52 weeks of practical work on approved farms were required ... I saved a year by spending most of my vacations 'holidaying' in the country. By attending evening lectures in psychology, Principles of Education, etc., I satisfied the Teachers' College requirements, and so was ready for a teaching job on graduation at the end of 1924 (with First Class Honours and the University Medal).

My appointment was to Yanco Agricultural High School where I taught Science Subjects and on one occasion (having warned the class of the danger of bringing hydrogen into the proximity of fire) I brought about an explosion of the whole apparatus; fortunately, not even I, who was the nearest, suffered any ill effects. That job, which I had thoroughly enjoyed, came to an end in mid-1925 because the Walter and Eliza Hall Traveling Fellowship (worth 250 Pounds p.a.) had fallen vacant, and the Professor of Agriculture

saw that it was awarded to me. So, August 1925 saw me setting sail in 'Esperance Bay', sharing a cabin with Allan Callaghan, the Rhodes Scholar of the year, on his way to Oxford (we had done the Agricultural course together). So, after my first experience of seasickness, though not by any means the last, to Melbourne, Port Adelaide, Fremantle, (where we two almost missed the ship through failing to check the times of trains back from Perth), Colombo, (where I learnt NOT to eat curry with an old-fashioned steel knife' ... it spoiled the flavour') and Port Said, and finally to London.

There I spent a year at the Royal College of Science for advanced courses in Biology, Chemistry etc. For the first part of the year, I lived in a modest guesthouse in Earl's Court but later moved into a newly opened hostel at R.C.S., my first taste of community life. The General Strike of 1926 led me to volunteer as a Special Constable to spend the hours of 2-6 a.m. with another student on a beat in a quiet part of Kensington: this lasted rather less than a week. As the year wore on, I saw more and more of London and in vacation time went farther afield, even visiting Aunties' folk in Montrose.

Feeling that the R.C.S. was not providing exactly what I wanted, I transferred at the end of the academic year to the University of Wisconsin in Madison where the Professor of Agricultural Bacteriology had a world-wide reputation. University life there was very different from the London version. With two other students, I lived in the home of a widow woman. No meals were provided; I had coffee, toast and marmalade in a cafe on my way to the lab where work began at 8.00 am; other meals were taken usually in the University Cafeteria where the food was varied and good. For work, I attended several courses of advanced lectures and wrestled with a research problem in dairy bacteriology. On the strength of these, I was awarded the Master of Science degree at the end of the academic year, and it was suggested that by carrying on the research for another year (sponsored financially by some dairy company) I could gain a Ph.D., but the call of home was too great and at the end of the year I sailed from Vancouver on R.M.S. 'Aorangi' (Canadian-Australasian Line) for Sydney via Honolulu, Suva and Auckland. When I reported to the Education Department I was sent to fill a gap by teaching 'general (i.e., non-agricultural) subjects' at Hurlstone Agricultural High School - an interesting experience.

Early in 1928, I was sent to be one of the founding staff of the first country Teacher Training College in N.S.W., in Armidale, where, to reduce the criticism that the College was in the Minister of Education's own electorate, staff members were required to have a Masters' Degree. My task was to lecture in Nature Study and Agriculture, thoroughly congenial of course. The College was placed in the disused jail, fortunately much modified. Most of the time I boarded along with two other teachers, in the home of a clergyman's widow and her six children, with several of whom I am in periodic touch now.

During my four years at A.T.C. I began seriously to consider becoming a clergyman. When I went to see the Bishop about it, he sent me off to St John's College, Morpeth, for an interview with the Warden, who rather spoilt things by suggesting that I should help some of the other students to improve their English ... I was going to Theological College to learn, not to teach. On the recommendation of Walter Best, Dean of Armidale and a distant cousin on my Mother's side, I applied for and was granted admission to St Francis' College Brisbane. It was a grand year, but my funds ran out and at the end of 1931 I was ordained by the Bishop of Armidale, on the understanding that I should continue my studies and complete the Th.L. diploma, which I did in 1933.

My appointment as assistant Curate was to Quirindi, an enormous parish where my agricultural science stood me in good stead among the farming community. Ordained Priest at the end of 1932, I was then informed by the Bishop that I was to join the staff of the Armidale School as Chaplain and teacher of agricultural subjects. Much as I enjoyed the Quirindi life, I could not but welcome the move; I had always

wanted to be a teacher and I was very happy at the school. In April 1935 a scholarship fell vacant and the Bishop nominated me for the opportunity of study 'at Oxford, Cambridge, or some other approved place of learning.' I chose Cambridge and was allotted to Jesus College. In August I sailed on the freighter (12 passengers) - 'Port Wyndham' via Suez to Dunkirk whence I crossed to Dover, via Calais, and after a few days in London to equip myself, I went up to Cambridge. As I was a few days late for the opening of term (October) I was placed in 'digs' run by a widow and situated about a half-mile from the College gates, (no regrets about the 'digs'; the college rooms were full of brash young men straight from school and my 'digs' were very comfortable and the landlady very kind ... I still correspond with two of her three grandchildren who were teenagers in 1935). A variety of interesting lecturers in theological subjects gave me just what I wanted and I graduated B.A. with 2nd Class Honours in June 1937 (The M.A. follows automatically after one has remained on the college books for a few years). I then had a month's holiday, chiefly in Scotland, before returning via Canada and the U.S.A. and sailing from Vancouver in R.M.S. 'Aorangi' again, and so back to the Armidal School for the school year of 1938.

But I was not to be allowed to stay there. Towards the end of the year, the Bishop told me that St Johns Theological College in Moipeth would shortly need a sub-warden and sent me off to be interviewed by the warden (not the same one as I had met before). He pointed out that my Cambridge experience could be used to greater advantage in a theological college than in a boys' school. So, at the start of the 1939 academic year, I was installed as Vice-Warden (usually called 'Vice' by the students) with responsibility for lecturing in Biblical Subjects, Educational Theory and Practice, and Greek. The intervention of the Japanese in the war brought a threat to Newcastle and for about two years the Newcastle Boys and Girls Grammar Schools were moved to the relative safety of Morpeth while the Warden and Students of the College went to Newcastle, and I was left behind to act as chaplain to both schools and to teach some Science to the boys. When things cooled down, the schools returned to Newcastle and the College to Morpeth and I resumed my vice-wardenship until the end of 1946. By that time, I had convinced myself that Theological College lecturing was the right task for me but my inability to say no to anyone who presented a plausible alternative led me to going as headmaster to All Saints College, a boys' boarding school on the outskirts of Bathurst. This proved to be a mistake. I enjoyed the teaching and found the handling of the boys interesting, but both the teaching staff and the domestic staff posed problems which I was not good at solving.

It was therefore with some relief that toward the end of the year (still 1947) I received a letter from the Warden of St John's College, Auckland (who had been the vice-principal at Brisbane when I was there) saying that he was finding it difficult to get a chaplain and if at any time I wanted a change to let him know. So, I resigned the Headship and early in 1948 set out for Auckland on the understanding that if I stayed two years my fares would be refunded. (I stayed sixteen years on the staff).

Settling into College life in Auckland was relatively easy because the Warden's ways were those that I'd learnt in Brisbane and the syllabus was essentially the same as that at Morpeth. My study overlooked the harbour; bedroom and bathroom were very comfortable.

Keeping in mind the 'two-year proviso' I used most of the vacation time in seeing New Zealand, a fascinating experience. At the end of 1949 a vacancy on the staff led to my being offered the Sub-Wardenship, which I was very glad to accept. For the next fourteen years I held the position, thoroughly enjoying the work, the associations both inside the College and out and the further opportunities of exploring New Zealand. This spell was broken by two periods of study leave of a year each viz., 1953 and 1964. On each occasion I traveled by Port Liner via Panama and spent one term at St Augustine's College,

Canterbury (then a study-centre for Anglican Clergymen from abroad) and the rest of the academic year in Cambridge, living in a flat and spending most of my time in the University Library. On the 1953 leave I was collecting material for a thesis, and on the 1964 leave I was clearing up all sorts of outstanding problems.

But meanwhile there were changes at St John's College. The warden retired at the beginning of 1962, and I acted as Warden until the new man arrived from England at the end of that year. My thesis was accepted by the Australian College of Theology, and I was awarded a Doctorate (Th.D.). On the month's trip to England from the end of 1963 I had time to think seriously about my future. I had been at St John's for sixteen years and had seen a complete change of staff; was this a suitable time to leave? I came to the conclusion that it was and the first letter I posted on arriving in London contained my resignation, thus giving the Warden ample time to fill the vacancy. The news of my resignation soon circulated around the Auckland Clergy and several months before leaving England I received a letter from my friend, Archdeacon Steele, vicar of St Barnabas' Mt. Eden offering me an attractive job. It was to be his assistant in the parish, but to be free for several Diocesan tasks as well, and general supervision of the recently ordained clergy (This involved visiting many parts of the diocese from time to time), wardenship of the lay readers, and lecturing in Sunday School Teachers' courses. I accepted the offer at once and leaving England on a Port Liner (again) I arrived in Wellington on New Year's Day 1965 and within a few days I was installed in a flat near the Church and Vicarage and taking over my duties under a very understanding man with a kind wife and four attractive children. The scheme of divided labours worked very well and promised to last a relatively long time, but towards the end of 1968 I received a letter from the bishop reminding me that sixty-five was the recognized age for the retirement of the clergy. So, I wrote to the Director of Selwyn Village, on whose list I had been for some years and acquainted him with the news that I should be glad of a place in the Village early in 1969. In November he wrote to say that a cottage would be available in a month or so.

In the same week as his letter arrived, one arrived from the Principal of St Francis' College, Brisbane, stating that he had heard that I was retiring and that as he had found it impossible to find a suitable person as chaplain, he asked whether I was willing to give the College two or three years' service before I finally gave up. The offer was very attractive to me. The College had moved since my day to old Bishopbourne, much more accessible to the city, the syllabus remained essentially the same as I was accustomed to, and I thought that it would be interesting to work with the new regime. So, I accepted, notifying Selwyn Village of the changed circumstances and leaving the Mt. Eden parish in January 1969.

I visited the Catleys on my way north and by mid-February was living in a convenient flat in the College building and swotting up my Old Testament and Introductory Greek in readiness for the opening of term in March. I spent two years there, using my vacation to see something of the continent previously unknown to me, especially in two major trips, one to Cairns and the other a roundabout trip to Sydney via Townsville, Mt Isa, Alice Springs, Port Pirie and Broken Hill. Towards the end of 1970, I heard from the Director of Selwyn Village that a cottage would be ready for me at the end of the year. So, having given notice to the Principal of St Francis' College several months earlier, I left Brisbane, spent Christmas in Sydney and arrived soon after Christmas and settled into the cottage (which had been finished only a fortnight earlier) where I am writing this.

I need add only one thing, viz., that a Retirement Village (especially if it is a real village, with chapel, hospital, post office, mini-market, hairdresser, and arts and crafts' centre) does not necessarily mean a do-nothing life. Thus, I gave a half day weekly to volunteer work in the Auckland Museum Library until

early this year, I am on the roster of clergy for services in the Village chapel, I lead a weekly Bible Study Group, and I help with mails and other small tasks. In addition, I find much time for reading and probing the mysteries of the Greek language. In the background is the awareness that care of every kind is available round the clock. I can think of no better place for an old bachelor who during most of his working life lived in a community.

Looking back, I believe that I see the hand of God in much that has happened, and I am grateful for the friendship, encouragement and support of members of my family and of my many friends.

Allan B. Catley, 1971.