David Philips, *William Augustus Miles (1796-1851): Crime, Policing and Moral Entrepreneurship in England and Australia*

Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 2001, 216 p., ISBN 0-7340-2007-4

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- 1 William Augustus Miles has rarely made it beyond the footnotes of various histories of crime, policing and penal policy in nineteenth-century England and Australia. He was in the second rank of the moral entrepreneurs who investigated crime and its causes and urged a particular kind of reform in policing and punishment. He is best known in England for his writing on these topics during the 1830s and for acting as an assistant commissioner for the Royal Commission investigating the need for a rural constabulary in England. He is best known in Australia for commanding the Sydney Police between 1841 and 1848. David Philips has undertaken an astonishing piece of detective work in reconstructing Miles's life from a variety of archival sources in England, Australia, and also France where a collection of uncatalogued family papers shed light on Miles's murky origins and foolish early life.
- 2 Three basic themes run through the biography. The least important for the history of crime and policing is the working of the patronage system in early nineteenth-century England. Miles's parentage is unclear, but Miles himself claimed to be the son of George IV. The man who brought him up, also called William Augustus Miles, was allegedly the

illegitimate son of another William Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland and son of George II. Throughout his life the younger William Augustus Miles pestered ministers and royalty for financial handouts and for governmental positions; he constantly alluded to his royal origins and to an alleged promise from his royal 'uncle' William IV. Miles was an able individual. Philips notes in particular the impressive research that he conducted into the problems of Gloucestershire handloom weavers in 1838, and many of his sensible, reforming ideas for the Sydney police appear to have been undermined by the parsimony of the local authorities and their resentment at having an 'expert' from England foisted on them. But, like Edwin Chadwick who was responsible for preparing the Report of the Constabulary Commissioners and who specifically requested Miles's appointment as an assistant commissioner, Miles had clear, unwavering assumptions about who was responsible for crime and how best to deal with them. Crime was the fault of a vagrant criminal class who opted for their idle and predatory life-style in preference to honest labour. Miles's assumptions about crime and the lower classes, and his presentation of these ideas to ministers and to the public which contributed to the social disquiet of the 1830s and 1840s, constitute the second theme of the book. Here was an archetypal moral entrepreneur providing analyses of social problems and also putting himself forward as an individual who, with the appropriate resources that he had delineated, might solve the problems.

- 3 The final theme of the book is the administration of the criminal justice system itself. Miles would have preferred a post in England, and a grander one than Commissioner of the Sydney Police. But that was all he was offered and, in spite of his abilities, he did not make a particularly good job of it. This was not all Miles's fault. While in post he had to deal with a 'crime wave' largely manufactured on the back of two horrific murders. In addition there was the hostility of and squabbling among his immediate superiors (the colony's governor, its legislative council, and the city council of Sydney), and demands for economic retrenchment in the colony which meant strict control of the police budget and numbers. But Miles did not help himself. Youthful foolishness had seen him run up debts while at Haileybury College training for what would, in all probability, have been a lucrative career in British India; subsequent undefined behaviour had led to his expulsion from Haileybury. In Sydney he contracted debts, he imposed his own petty charges on the police officers under his command, and was accused of misusing police money. He also appears to have had rather too great a love of the bottle. In July 1848 he was removed from his position. Three years later, marooned in Sydney but still pestering acquaintances and his social superiors in England for a post, he died in relative poverty.
- 4 Miles's life was not a particularly edifying one and it is hard to be sympathetic towards him. David Philips has produced what must be the definitive account of the man. More than this, he has made an important contribution to our understanding of some of the individuals responsible for the social reform of the early Victorian period, their assumptions, their networking, their routes to appointment, and the problems that they could face when required to put their ideas into action.

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