

# **Russia's Greatest Enemy? Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions**

*Charlotte Alston*

**I.B. TAURIS**

RUSSIA'S GREATEST ENEMY?



# RUSSIA'S GREATEST ENEMY?

Harold Williams and the Russian  
Revolutions

CHARLOTTE ALSTON

Tauris Academic Studies

LONDON • NEW YORK

Published in 2007 by Tauris Academic Studies  
An imprint of I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd  
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010  
[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)

In the United States of America and Canada distributed by Palgrave  
Macmillan, a division of St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York  
NY 10010

Copyright © Charlotte Alston

The right of Charlotte Alston to be identified as the author of this work has  
been asserted by the author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and  
Patent Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or  
any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a  
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,  
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior  
written permission of the publisher.

International Library of Twentieth Century History 9

ISBN: 978 1 84511 261 5

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library  
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd  
From camera-ready copy edited and supplied by the author

# CONTENTS

<i>Note on Dates and Names</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
Introduction	1
1. New Zealand, 1876-1900	9
2. Journalism, 1900-1914	33
3. Britain, Russia, War and Revolution 1907-1917	76
4. From Revolution to Intervention 1917-1921	122
5. The Times, 1921-1928	171
Conclusion	195
<i>Notes</i>	199
<i>Bibliography</i>	255
<i>Index</i>	273

## A NOTE ON DATES

Until February 1918 Russia used the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar, with the effect that the Russian calendar was twelve days behind the western calendar in the nineteenth century, and thirteen days behind at the beginning of the twentieth century. When referring to events in Russia prior to the change of calendars in 1918, I have given both dates, in the form 1<sup>st</sup> / 14<sup>th</sup> March. When referring to events in Britain, and to the date of publication of Williams's dispatches, I have always given the 'new-style' western date. If only one date appears, it can be assumed that it is the date according to the Gregorian calendar.

## A NOTE ON NAMES

Russian names for places and people used in this book are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system, but without diacritical marks. The only exceptions are names which have a particularly well-known and accepted western equivalent (e.g.: Tolstoy, Yasnaya Polyana). Since Williams and his contemporaries often used western forms for Russian names which are now outdated, some names appear in different forms in quotes and in my own text (e.g. Izvolsky and Izvol'skii, Cadet party and Kadet party). Where places are referred to which now have a very different name, the current name appears in brackets – e.g. Reval (Tallinn), Lemberg (Lviv).

Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, whose married name was Borman and whose maiden name was Tyrkova, is referred to throughout her time in Russia as Ariadna Tyrkova, as this was how she styled herself. In London in 1918 and after, and in reference to her writings after this date, I refer to her as Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, as again, this was what she usually called herself (although she occasionally used Tyrkova, and sometimes just Williams).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Katherine Lickwar for permission to use the Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams collection at Columbia University Library, and to Christopher Seton-Watson for permission to consult the R. W. Seton Watson papers at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. The Arts and Humanities Research Board funded my doctoral research and gave me a travel grant to work on the Tyrkova-Williams papers in New York.

The following people also gave me invaluable help. Margaret Lovell-Smith shared her research on the Lovell-Smith family with me. Both Neena Williams in Christchurch and Alison Williams in London provided me with information on the Williams family's history. Rae Wilson, of the Methodist Archives of New Zealand, was especially helpful in tracking down information on the Williams family. Elisabeth Sandschulte provided important background on the Tyrkov family, along with several of the illustrations I have used.

Annika Grönholm of the Finnish Institute in London and Pekka Anttonen of the Paivelehdien Arkistosaatio in Helsinki helped me to locate Williams's Finnish correspondence, and Kati Blom helped me to read it. Harvey Pitcher very generously gave me the newspaper cuttings of Williams's articles he used to research and write *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution*. Paul Simmons shared with me his research in the police files on Williams in GARF. Michael Palmer and William Peters gave me information on Harold Williams, Arthur Ransome and William Peters. Nick Mays helped me to find relevant material in and outside the Harold Williams collection at the News International Archive.

For helping me to turn my doctoral thesis into this book, special thanks are due to David Cannadine, Lester Crook, Elizabeth Munns, and Gareth Prosser. I am enormously grateful to Patrick Salmon and David Saunders, who jointly supervised my doctoral research, and gave me a lot of support and very good advice. Any errors or deficiencies in this book are my responsibility entirely.





# INTRODUCTION

In 1935 Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, a prominent Russian liberal politician, writer, and one-time member of the Central Committee of the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) party, published a biography of her husband, the New Zealand-born journalist and linguist, Harold Williams. In a review for the *Observer*, Robert Seton-Watson summed up something of the appeal of the book, and of its subject.

What could be more romantic than this career of the young New Zealand Methodist probationer, born of solid Cornish yeoman stock – the typical “dark celt” of modern anthropological jargon – who already in his teens had mastered obscure Malayan or Filipino dialects, and was led to study Russian by his interest in Tolstoyan doctrine. He soon finds that the Church is not his vocation, and fate draws him, penniless but never daunted, right across the world to the racial hotbeds of Eastern Europe, and immerses him in the struggle for Russian liberation, which was indeed to end in the downfall of the hated Tsarist regime, but also in the forging of a despotism till then un-dreamt-of in the Slav world.<sup>1</sup>

Harold Williams was born in New Zealand, where he trained as a Methodist minister, but he left that country in 1900 for Germany, where he studied for a doctorate in philology at the universities of Berlin and Munich. He secured work as a correspondent for *The Times*, who sent him to Stuttgart to gather news from a group of Russian émigrés led by the political scientist Petr Struve, who published the constitutionalist newspaper *Osvobodzhdenie*. In 1904 the *Manchester Guardian* sent him to St. Petersburg as their first permanent correspondent in a foreign capital. There he provided coverage of Bloody Sunday and the events of the revolutionary year 1905. Williams remained in Russia for fourteen years, writing for a series of British newspapers (the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Morning*

*Post*, and the *Daily Telegraph*) and working with academics and writers like Bernard Pares and Maurice Baring to improve relations between Britain and Russia.<sup>2</sup> During the First World War he was involved in British propaganda in Petrograd, and he became a close advisor to the British Ambassador to Russia, Sir George Buchanan, lobbying for speedy acceptance by the British of the new Russian Government after the February Revolution in 1917. In early 1918, following the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, he and Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams left Russia for London, placing themselves at the centre of a campaign to encourage Allied intervention in the Russian civil war. In the summer of 1919 Williams returned to the south of Russia as correspondent on Denikin's front for *The Times* and the *Daily Chronicle*. In the 1920s he remained a central figure in the Russian émigré community in London, and he was closely involved in the establishment of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London. As Foreign Editor of *The Times* from 1922 he strongly supported the negotiation of the 1925 Treaty of Locarno, which had the effect of isolating the Soviet Union.

Williams was also a talented linguist, and he picked up new languages with an astonishing ease. He maintained an interest in philology throughout his life, and might easily have pursued it as a career. Stories about his remarkable linguistic abilities abound. There was the group of travelling Indians at Chudovo railway station, with whom only Williams could communicate, and the Papuan theatre troupe whom the Russian Premier's (Stolypin's) office asked Williams to see in order to ascertain whether they were being exploited. There were the Filipino parliamentary delegates whom Williams encountered in the Duma, and who asked him if he could help them to find the English philologist, Dr. Harold Williams, who had written the first grammar of the Ilocano language.<sup>3</sup> There was the time that Williams accompanied Bernard Pares to a field hospital during the war, and 'proved to know every language of the Austrian Empire'. When he had left, a group of Poles asked Pares where his Polish friend had gone.<sup>4</sup> On another occasion Williams, in Reval (Tallinn) for the visit of Edward VII in 1908, apparently astonished onlookers by replying to a toast in fluent Estonian.<sup>5</sup> It is almost impossible to know with what fluency Williams spoke any of these languages, or in what number – estimates, by the end of his life, range between thirty and fifty. After his death, friends and colleagues

were ready to testify to his ability to fluently read an Egyptian newspaper, or to his perfect knowledge of ancient and modern Greek.<sup>6</sup> There is little surviving evidence - his Russian correspondence was certainly fluent, but then he lived in that country for fourteen years. His surviving Finnish letters contain some minor errors in the early stages, but soon become perfectly accurate.<sup>7</sup> Williams had grammar books in his study for languages which included Japanese, Chinese, Albanian, Old Irish and Tagalog, and Gospels (from which he liked to learn) in, amongst many other languages, Lithuanian, Welsh, Hebrew, Swahili, and Mandarin.<sup>8</sup> Harold Nicolson, who also reviewed Tyrkova-Williams's biography, painted a picture of Williams lisping in Maori, speaking Serbian with a slightly Croat intonation, Rumanian with a Bessarabian lilt, and Swedish with 'a decidedly Norwegian accent'.<sup>9</sup>

There was a gentleness, modesty and apparent diffidence about Harold Williams's character which made a lasting impression on those who knew him. He carried his learning lightly, was shy yet unselfconscious, and had a strong sense of morality and spirituality. One friend described this as a 'commanding serenity'.<sup>10</sup> After Williams's death, Robert Vansittart, who had come to know him well in the 1920s, wrote that 'If ever ... I had been able for a day to believe that I had a character like his, it would have been a happy day for me; and if many of us could have or hold that illusion, even for a day, the world would be a happier place'.<sup>11</sup> Frank Swinnerton, another friend that Williams made in London after the revolution, left the following description of him: he had 'a peculiar tenor voice which, although it cannot have been raised at any time above a murmur, had a definite "tone", neither high pitched nor low pitched but with a strange singing quality.'

He laughed a good deal, in the same neither nasal nor throaty voice, and he was fond of filling any gap in a narrative with the words "and so on, and so on". The recurrence of these words, combined with his shy demeanour, helped to give one an impression of natural diffidence, and I think he was very modest; how far diffident I cannot say.

He was a tall man with a good idealistic head rising high above the ears, who wore his silver hair very short and a small neat dark moustache above the mobile lips. He had pince-nez upon his straight but unexpectedly short nose and looked as if he might be decidedly short-sighted; and one thought of him as a scholar and a

visionary as well as a journalist. He combined a serenely happy-go-lucky air with unembittered sadness at the fate of Russia; and as his Russian wife and Russian step-children did the same it was easy, in staying with them, to put the note of the household as one of merry melancholy.<sup>12</sup>

As a journalist, however, reviews of his work were mixed. His fierce involvement with the anti-Bolshevik cause and his use of his journalism to further this campaign generated violent criticism. Philip Knightley, for example, describes Williams as 'the worst of the war correspondents' in post-revolutionary Russia; a man who was 'so personally involved with the anti-Bolshevist forces that he should never have been given the assignment'.<sup>13</sup> Arthur Ransome, who worked as a journalist in Russia during the First World War and the Revolution, fell out with Williams irretrievably over their attitudes to the revolution and their contrasting journalistic coverage of it. Nevertheless, Ransome saw Williams as 'a quiet man, unselfish, extraordinarily kind'.<sup>14</sup> Maxim Litvinov, the Bolshevik government's representative in London in 1919 and later Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was provoked by Williams's anti-Bolshevik campaign to describe him as 'Russia's greatest enemy'.<sup>15</sup> For Williams, the Bolshevik government itself was the greatest enemy of Russia.

Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams's 1935 book, *Cheerful Giver – the Life of Harold Williams*, remains the only full-length published study of Williams's career. The book draws on some of Williams's newspaper correspondence, as well as personal letters and of course Tyrkova-Williams's own memories, and those of some of Williams's acquaintances. It is an engaging and frank account of Williams's work as Tyrkova-Williams saw it. In one respect her book has an advantage that no other study can have, in that she knew and remembered Williams intimately. However, one of the problems that any study of Williams faces is exactly this one of disentangling the views and actions of Williams and Tyrkova-Williams. Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams was a well-known liberal Russian politician, heavily involved in the liberation movement before 1905, in Russian politics before the war, and in émigré politics and social life after the revolution. Inevitably her view of the events of this period colours her biography; she is writing about events in which she, as well as Williams, was closely involved.<sup>16</sup>

As a couple, Williams and Tyrkova-Williams were certainly very close. Their work and the causes with which they were involved were often connected, and they shared many political views. They also depended on each other – when apart they were clearly unhappy, and wrote to one another almost every day.<sup>17</sup> However, their closeness as a couple does not make it impossible to assess their lives and careers independently. This study will deal with Williams on his own terms and attempt to establish his individual position, while taking into account the influences on it, of which Tyrkova-Williams was one.

In the 1950s and 1960s there were a number of attempts to rescue Williams from the apparent obscurity into which he had by this time sunk. Oliver Gillespie, a New Zealand journalist who became interested in Williams in the 1950s, produced a radio play entitled 'The Amazing Harold Williams', which was based heavily on Tyrkova-Williams's book, and was broadcast on New Zealand radio in March 1954.<sup>18</sup> Gillespie was convinced that Williams was 'the greatest intellectual [New Zealand has] yet produced', and was anxious to bring him to the attention of current generations. He was in touch with Williams's brothers, Aubrey and Owen, and tried to have Tyrkova-Williams's book republished in New Zealand, and later to publish a new volume. However, his tactless correspondence with Tyrkova-Williams seems to have made her reluctant to send him any of the material in her possession.<sup>19</sup> He began writing to acquaintances of Williams's in England, but this does not seem to have been particularly fruitful either. Arthur Ransome warned him that he was sticking his head into a hornet's nest, and advised him to postpone publication for as long as he could.<sup>20</sup>

In 1967, a chapter on Williams appeared alongside others on Katherine Mansfield and Sir Edmund Hillary, in Eugene Grayland's *Famous New Zealanders*.<sup>21</sup> This was based heavily on the information given in *Cheerful Giver*, and repeated many of the stories about Williams's linguistic feats. In 1969, Arkadii Borman summarized Williams's life story in the *Russian Review*. More detailed personal reminiscences on Williams can be found in Borman's biography of his mother, published in 1964 and based on his mother's letters to him and his own recollections.<sup>22</sup>

The first burst of scholarly interest in Harold Williams came in the 1980s, when Irene Zohrab, a lecturer in Russian at Victoria University, Wellington, began the publication of a series of articles

on Williams in the *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*. The first of these appeared in 1985, and gave a brief biographical introduction to Williams's career, with some commentary on his relations with the writers H. G. Wells, Hugh Walpole and Frank Swinnerton.<sup>23</sup> The remaining articles consist of previously unpublished manuscripts by Williams, some taken from the Tyrkova-Williams archive at Columbia University, and others from an unpublished manuscript given to Zohrab by Hugh Williams, Harold Williams's nephew, who had received it from Arkadii Borman after Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams's death.<sup>24</sup> Zohrab's commentaries stress Williams's New Zealand roots; for her, Williams was 'the most brilliant correspondent' of his generation.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Williams has featured in research by Paul Simmons, Michael Palmer, and Dorothea Brady.<sup>26</sup>

There are archival collections relating to Williams in the British Library, in the Butler Library at Columbia University in New York, in the archives of *The Times* in London, the *Manchester Guardian* in Manchester and the *Helsingin Sanomat* in Helsinki, in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, New Zealand, and in the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand. Williams's work in the Anglo-Russian Bureau in Petrograd is detailed in Foreign Office files in the Public Record Office in London. Correspondence between Williams and his friends and acquaintances can be found in, amongst other collections, those of Bernard Pares and Robert Seton-Watson at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), of Samuel Harper at the University of Chicago, H. G. Wells at the University of Illinois, Arthur Ransome at the Brotherton Library in Leeds, and Samuel Hoare at Cambridge University Library. This study is based on these sources, as well as on Williams's journalistic output, Williams's published scholarly articles, his books and those of Tyrkova-Williams.

Despite Williams's close involvement in it, the stories of the pre-war work for Anglo-Russian rapprochement and post-war work for intervention are told largely from the perspectives of Williams's colleagues, men like Bernard Pares, Samuel Harper, and Maurice Baring.<sup>27</sup> Williams's contribution remains relatively obscure.

What this study hopes to do is to fill this gap, and, in so doing, to shed some light on some of the organizations and activities with which Williams was involved. It will provide a thorough assessment of Harold Williams's career, placed in the multiple contexts into

which his life fits – Methodism in nineteenth century New Zealand, British journalism in pre-war Russia, the development of the Anglo-Russian rapprochement, British propaganda work in Russia during the First World War, the campaign for Allied intervention in the Russian civil war, and journalism at *The Times* in the 1920s. It will also show how Williams, as a man who ultimately sought to serve society and do worthwhile work, moved from one cause to another throughout his life, and how he used journalism as an instrument in his work for these causes. Although it traces his life as a whole, the particular concern of this book is with Williams's role as an interpreter of Russia to the British, and of the British to Russia.

The five chapters that make up this book are arranged thematically but also chronologically, with some overlap, so that while they move forward through Williams's life, each of them addresses a theme central to Williams's career. Of course Williams had multiple interests and was occupied with many issues and interests at the same time. What I try to show here is that it is possible to trace his involvement in a series of causes which change and develop throughout his career.

The first chapter covers the period 1876-1900, and looks at Williams's life in New Zealand - his early interest in languages, his work for the Methodist church, his enthusiasm for Tolstoy and other social reformers, and his reasons for abandoning the ministry. The second chapter, which deals with the period 1900-1914, analyses Williams's work as a foreign correspondent, his attitude to his career, and his journalistic style. It offers some comparison of the newspapers he worked for, and the way in which they obtained their Russian news. It also comments on Williams's attitude to the major events he covered in his dispatches during these years. Williams's work for the *Daily Chronicle* during the First World War is reserved for chapter three, where it fits more appropriately into the context of his support for the Anglo-Russian entente. This chapter looks at Williams's work in the context of Anglo-Russian relations between 1907 and 1917, first in the development of the pre-war Anglo-Russian rapprochement, and then in attempting to strengthen relations during the war. It also covers the February revolution, which Williams initially saw as the final stage in ensuring complete unity of action between the Allies. The fourth chapter looks at Williams's work after the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, predominantly at his part in the campaign for Allied intervention in



the Russian civil war, and his return to the south of Russia to report from Denikin's front. The final chapter deals with Williams's work as a leader writer and then as Foreign Editor at *The Times* in the 1920s, the ways in which his involvement with and interest in Russia continued, and the broadening of his sphere of influence and interests to European politics as a whole.

## NEW ZEALAND, 1876-1900

Harold Williams was born into a large new second generation of European New Zealanders that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1881 the total non-Maori population of New Zealand had reached 489,933, and the census of 1886 recorded that almost 52 percent of this population had been born in the colony.<sup>1</sup> This new generation had to develop their own interpretation of the Utopian and Arcadian myths of the years of settlement, and establish their own perceptions of their society and its relations with a mother country that they had often never experienced. James Belich has described the years between 1880 and 1900 as a period of 'recolonisation', in which New Zealanders redefined their role in relation to Britain, accepting a close junior role, while maintaining the idea that life and people in the colony were of a better quality than in the mother country.<sup>2</sup>

Recent scholarship has challenged the traditional view of late nineteenth century New Zealand society as close-knit and community based.<sup>3</sup> However, it is clear that there were some forces that bound communities together, and one of these was religion. By the 1870s most of the major British denominations were represented in New Zealand. Although no more than a quarter of New Zealanders were regular church attenders, for those who were closely involved with religious life their faith formed the backbone of their lives and social contact. The New Zealand Methodists, despite accounting for only ten percent of the non-Maori population, were particularly tenacious.<sup>4</sup> Initially there were three branches of the Methodist church in New Zealand – the Primitive Methodists, the Free Methodists, and the largest group, the Wesleyan Methodists. The Wesleyans and the Free Methodists reunited in 1896, and the Primitive Methodists rejoined them in

1913.<sup>5</sup> It was Wesleyan Methodism that brought the Williams family to New Zealand in the first place, and it also provided the backdrop to much of Harold Williams's early life.

The Reverend William James Williams, Harold's father, had emigrated to New Zealand in 1870. He had been born in Cornwall, and converted to Methodism at the age of fifteen under the influence of the Reverend William Booth, a fiery and persuasive preacher who later founded the Salvation Army. Williams began to preach at the age of seventeen, and spent two years training at Richmond Wesleyan College before being invited, at the age of 23, to be one of four ministers whom the Foreign Mission Committee had been asked to send out to New Zealand. The other three were J. J. Lewis, J. S. Smalley and F. W. Isitt. The latter had already been a close friend of Williams's at Richmond College, and the families of all four would remain close throughout their new lives in New Zealand.<sup>6</sup>

Wesleyan Methodists had arrived in New Zealand even before official British control of the islands was established. Samuel Marsden and Samuel Leigh made the first preliminary visit from New South Wales in 1818, and after gaining support from the Wesleyan Conference at home, Leigh returned in 1821 to found a mission there.<sup>7</sup> However, as the European population grew in the decades after annexation in 1840, immigrants of all denominations found that although there were a reasonable number of ministers in the country, their primary objective was the conversion of the island's Maori inhabitants. There were few men available to minister to the Europeans. Communities fared as best they could, holding prayer meetings amongst themselves and taking advantage of visiting clergymen when available.<sup>8</sup> Periodically, ministers were sent out to meet the need. By the time the Reverends Williams, Lewis, Smalley and Isitt arrived in New Zealand, they joined a well-established and still growing Wesleyan community.

The colonial Wesleyan church was organised into a system of regional circuits, to which ministers were assigned for periods of three years at a time. Between 1870 and 1900 William Williams served in Auckland, Wellington, Wanganui, Lyttelton, Christchurch and Timaru. His wife, Alice Hosking, whose family home, Binnerton, near Crowan in Cornwall, had served for over a hundred

years as a meeting place for Methodists, came out to New Zealand to marry him in 1875. She and their sons, of whom there were eventually seven, moved with him around the circuits.<sup>9</sup>

Harold, the eldest son, was born at Grafton Road Parsonage, Auckland, on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1876.<sup>10</sup> He moved homes and schools as his father's work took him around the country, and as a result details of his early life are scanty. Those details that do survive seem to draw together some of the threads of his life in New Zealand – the Methodist ministry, the sea, and his fascination with languages. His father recalled that as a baby Harold was nicknamed 'the Young President', since the greatest achievement his parents wished for him was that he might one day become the president of a Methodist Conference.<sup>11</sup> Charles and Evelyn Isitt, a younger generation of the Isitt family, remembered him in Port Lyttelton in the mid 1880s, 'trotting down with other little boys, with model yachts under their arms, merry, brown and carefree to sail their boats in the water'.<sup>12</sup> Harold apparently had, along with his younger brothers, 'an intimate knowledge of every ship of every size' that entered the harbour.<sup>13</sup> In 1887 the Williams family moved to Christchurch, where Harold attended the East Christchurch Primary School, before winning a scholarship to the Christchurch Boys' High School, where he studied between 1888 and 1890.<sup>14</sup> Another friend remembered Harold at Timaru High School in the early nineties, where they were taught by George Hogben, a 'liberal educationalist' who had given the school a reputation for excellence, and advocated the teaching of languages by the direct method.<sup>15</sup>

Stories about Harold Williams's remarkable aptitude for languages begin very early. His interest was apparently kindled by the French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew grammars he found in his father's study.<sup>16</sup> He himself spoke about something 'like an explosion in his brain' which occurred when he was about seven years old – from that point on the acquisition of languages became easy.<sup>17</sup> He taught himself a number of Polynesian languages – Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Fijian – by studying Gospels and New Testaments which had been translated into these languages, and which a Christchurch bookseller helped him to procure.<sup>18</sup> In his teens he constructed a grammar and vocabulary of the language of Dobu, New Guinea, from a copy of St. Mark's Gospel which the Reverend George

Brown had translated; 'there was no more amazed man than the Rev. George Brown in the South Pacific' when he saw what Harold Williams had done.<sup>19</sup> In 1893, the *Polynesian Journal* published a vocabulary of Niue (Savage Island), which Harold had constructed from a Gospel sent to him by the secretary of the society, Edward Tregear.<sup>20</sup> He also corresponded for a while in Fijian with a native minister who had gone to New Guinea.<sup>21</sup> While at the 'Timaru Boys' High School he sat an examination for a university scholarship, and despite an accident which forced him to sit the exam with his eyes bandaged, he won the scholarship purely on languages – a remarkable achievement in that 'being unable to reach the standard in mathematics, his possible maximum was 500 less than that of the other candidates'.<sup>22</sup>

William Williams was posted back to Auckland in 1893, to take up the position of principal of Wesley College. Harold Williams returned to Auckland with his family, and took up his scholarship at Auckland University College. There he began work on his BA degree, for which he studied Classical and Modern Philology.<sup>23</sup> In March 1896, at the age of nineteen, he was accepted as a probationer in the Methodist ministry, and was posted to the St. Albans circuit, on the northern outskirts of Christchurch. St. Albans had a thriving Methodist community. A new church had been opened only two years earlier, and there was also a Methodist day school.<sup>24</sup> The circuit also extended to Harewood Road, Papanui, Knights Town and Shirley. The resident minister, whom Harold Williams was appointed to assist, was the Reverend. J. A. Luxford.<sup>25</sup> Amongst the devout members of the local community were the Smith family, whose friendship with Harold Williams makes it possible to gain some real insight into the details of his life and the development of his thought at this time.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1890s Will and Jennie Smith and their ten children were living in Upper Riccarton, in a house known as 'Westcote', but appropriately nicknamed 'Arcadia'. The Smiths were an earnest, devout family with a deep-rooted interest in social reform. They believed that their religious convictions should be expressed in essentially practical terms, and in all their actions and relations with others. This belief manifested itself in their active participation in the life of the local Methodist community.<sup>27</sup> Due to the size of the

family, 'Arcadia' functioned like a small community, in which physical work, music, reading and discussion were the fundamental elements. As a junior minister in the circuit, Harold Williams often visited their house, and as Macie Smith later recalled, became a favourite with them all.

He told the younger ones stories, danced Maori 'Hakas' for them, wrote notes for a family weekly newspaper which was handwritten and published in the home by pinning it up on the wall of the dining room. With us older ones he discussed social and spiritual problems, talked of and read Tolstoy in whom he was greatly interested as in many other reformers. There was among us a feeling of confidence so that we could discuss freely any problem that presented itself. Harold's innate modesty made it impossible for him to realize his intellectual superiority, and he was just the very good and simple hearted friend of us all.<sup>28</sup>

Macie was the closest to Harold Williams in age, being only a couple of months older. Her brother Edgar was a year older. The newspaper mentioned here was one of a number of handwritten publications produced by the older Smith children, which covered family news and events in the house and the local community. Many of them survive in the Lovell-Smith Collections in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch. Harold Williams is mentioned within them as a 'chief contributor' to the *Arcadian News*, which unfortunately only survives in fragments.<sup>29</sup>

Williams was also a frequent visitor at 'Aorangi', the home of Will Smith's sisters, Lucy and Eleanor, and their parents. When their father died in 1896, Lucy Smith remembered Harold Williams doing 'many little kindnesses for my mother, sister and self'. At fifteen years older than Harold, Lucy Smith 'came to look upon him almost as a young brother or elder nephew.'<sup>30</sup>

As a trainee Methodist minister Harold Williams conducted weekly services at the local churches in his circuit (including Riccarton village church, the Smith family's local church), paid pastoral visits to the elderly and the sick, and was closely involved in young people's organisations such as the Band of Hope (a temperance society aimed at educating the young), and the Young People's Guild. Meetings of the latter included discussion of such

issues as prohibition, the evils of tobacco smoking, and the problem of poverty.<sup>31</sup> All of these were issues very close to Williams's heart. They were pertinent within the framework of the Methodist church, with its opposition to intemperance and gambling, and its history of advocating social reform.<sup>32</sup> They were also relevant within the wider context of New Zealand society. The prohibition movement was supported by all the non-conformist churches, and was in part based on theories that morality and economic and social success were intrinsically linked.<sup>33</sup> Many New Zealanders, old and young, were interested in the new literature on social reform that appeared in the 1880s and 1890s. Many still identified closely with problems which existed at 'home', in Britain or Europe, and were interested in the application of new theories. They were also intrigued by the possible remedies, or alternatives, which could potentially be applied more easily in a young society such as theirs. One particularly popular author was Henry George, who argued for reform of the system of land ownership, and for a single tax, on land, which he felt would resolve economic problems and relieve poverty. George's theories, along with those of John Stuart Mill, had a considerable influence on thinkers and decision makers in New Zealand in the late nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Harold Williams was familiar with this debate. He read George's *Progress and Poverty* (New York, 1880) in 1898, and while he was 'thoroughly convinced' by the criticisms of modern society within it, he was not entirely sure about the proposed solution. He could not reconcile himself to the rightness of any government by force.<sup>35</sup> This was a position he had assimilated from what was probably the greatest influence on his attitude to social problems at this time: the work of Leo Tolstoy.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Tolstoy's popularity in the English-speaking world was at its height. Not only was he a great artist, he was an earnest reformer, and this dual image was enhanced by the fact that, while his Russian audience had had time to appreciate the gradual change in Tolstoy's work from his major novels like *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* to his writings on social reform, English translations of his earlier and later works appeared almost simultaneously.<sup>36</sup> Tolstoy's condemnation of the modern state, his strictures on the gap between the 'overworked and underfed' poor and the 'idle and wasteful' rich, and his plea for a simple, moral,

broadly religious approach to life, as expressed in volumes such as *What Then Must We Do?*, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and *My Confession*,<sup>37</sup> found an avid readership amongst those who were uneasy about the social consequences of nineteenth century 'progress'. Russia was widely considered to be one of the worst examples of an oppressive society, but Tolstoy's damning assessment of modern society was seen to apply equally to society in other parts of Europe and the world.<sup>38</sup>

Harold Williams's enthusiasm for Tolstoy's ideas is abundantly clear in letters he wrote to both Macie and Lucy Smith after he left St. Albans, and it has also been discussed in some detail by Irene Zohrab.<sup>39</sup> As she points out, while Williams was interested in many reformers, Tolstoy dominated his thinking during the late 1890s. He makes frequent references to Tolstoy in his correspondence, and was even learning Russian by attempting to read Tolstoy in his native tongue.<sup>40</sup> Williams was not an uncritical disciple; there were aspects of Tolstoy's work that would naturally be difficult for him to accept, in his position as a Methodist minister, such as Tolstoy's condemnation of the clergy and of the institution of marriage.<sup>41</sup> Williams and his friends were intelligent and independent minded young people who were comfortable discussing and criticising current ideas. Harold, Edgar and Macie, amongst others, were members of a discussion group which they called the 'select circle'.<sup>42</sup> Although this was essentially a group of earnest young friends, they did have access, through family connections, to the ideas and opinions of people like the feminist and prohibitionist Kate Sheppard.<sup>43</sup>

It is interesting to see how Williams's Tolstoyan beliefs fitted into the structure of his Methodist upbringing and surroundings. In some respects, it seems to have been a natural progression; in others it was a radical step.

Tolstoy's approach to religion was a broad, and very personal one, which rejected dogmatic theology.<sup>44</sup> While the Methodist church had its own very clear tenets, the stress had always been on getting back to the Bible and the Gospels as the root of religious thought.<sup>45</sup> Williams naturally took an inclusive approach, and he seems to have been very open to other denominations. One of his favourite books of sermons was the Unitarian John Hamilton



Thom's *Laws of Life after the Mind of Christ* (London 1882), which he felt contained a 'rare thoughtfulness and sincerity'. On the whole, Williams took his inspiration for preaching from his general reading material rather than from published sermons.<sup>46</sup> A Quaker service that he once attended greatly impressed him, and he declared that he had never 'felt such a sense of true worship in any other service I went to'.<sup>47</sup> In his own sermons he tried to 'preach to the congregation as men and women, not as much as Christians and non-Christians ... to try and show that the duty of being Christ-like was binding upon them all whether they called themselves Christian or not'.<sup>48</sup> Only one of Williams's sermons from this period survives, and this was apparently written for children. In it he compares the multitude of languages spoken in New Zealand with the variety of nature, emphasizing that God is present in all of them.<sup>49</sup>

Williams preferred broad interpretations of doctrinal issues. When one of the Smiths wrote to him in June 1898 to ask his advice regarding the sacrament (they had just discovered that the Riccarton church was being supplied with fermented wine, which went against the Methodist belief in temperance) he advised them to follow their conscience and stay away in protest until the wine was changed.

No one need think that the fire of truth or love and purity will burn low in the heart because of the absence from sacrament ... I don't feel any irreverence to Jesus in saying this because I don't believe that he commanded the supper to be a perpetual institution. The words "This do [in] remembrance of me" are said by the best scholars to be an interpretation.<sup>50</sup>

He chastised some traditional Wesleyans for their lack of imagination in interpreting religious writings.

I believe that a majority of Wesleyans have about as concrete ideas of the geography of the world to come as they have of the geography of England. I expect many of those old [metaphors] of the early church writers about the sea of jaspers and the golden streets and the Lamb and the beast (this last by the way is a wrong translation) are accepted by the bulk of Anglo-Saxon Christians as representations of actual fact. Take them as poetry just as you would the scenes of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and you may find your soul helped to the warmth and emotion necessary for

receiving conceptions of the life beyond. But it must be a weariness and bondage to the flesh to look forward to a heaven [furnished] out with the symbols of the [Apocalypse].<sup>51</sup>

Williams also followed Tolstoy's belief in non-resistance, particularly in its application to the question of war. For Williams, as for Tolstoy, there was no 'just war'. He was appalled by the Spanish-American war of 1898, over Cuba, and at President McKinley's failure to stand up against the desire of Congress to go to war.<sup>52</sup> If the American action was inspired by a desire to dominate Cuban commerce, then he believed the war could not be too strongly denounced. But even if the United States were motivated by a genuine desire to protect Cuba, he argued

... is it possible to allow that such a war is right and Christian? I am afraid the average run of Christian people would say it is. But surely they make a great mistake. It is easy to be [misled] by vague generalisations. We talk about the STATES engaging in war, being moved by pity, acting righteously or unrighteously. And for the purposes of philosophy, for purposes of historical generalisation, for the purpose of working our certain social problems we have to generalise in some such way as that. But in a case of this kind we haven't got to judge of the actions of States but of our own personal belief and the kind of action it would inspire were we Americans. And do you think were we placed in battle face to face with the [enemy] and the command were given to murder him that we could honestly, with perfect sincerity dilute the cruelty of such a murder with the idea that we were acting as part of a state [which] in this way was bringing relief to oppressed Cubans? If it is wrong for me to murder one man to save another it is equally wrong to murder on behalf of a state which [professes] to be saving another people.<sup>53</sup>

Williams's own solution was Utopian in the extreme; he hoped that America might 'some day be Christian enough' to use the money it was spending on 'slaughtering Spaniards' to buy up land, either within the United States or 'in some south American republic', and to settle the Cubans 'out of reach of Spanish oppression'. He also displayed an element of missionary zeal: if enough

self sacrificing men could be found in the free countries of the world to give up [their] homes and their privileges as free citizens and go and live in Spain to become in due time naturalised Spaniards, they might have a fine influence as social missionaries ... gradually by such a process the whole condition and policy of Spain might be transformed.<sup>54</sup>

Williams was delighted to hear of the proposal put forward by Tsar Nicholas II in August 1898 that all the great powers should meet to discuss arms limitation. Although he 'hurrahed' over it, he was realistic enough to acknowledge that it would 'have hard work to steer its way to reality'.<sup>55</sup>

On the Boer War, also, it took a considerable effort for Williams to adopt the 'orthodox' viewpoint.<sup>56</sup> Many Methodists loathed the idea of the Boer War, but they justified it in imperial terms. The Boers, it was said, used their subjects as slaves, and encouraged the liquor trade amongst them. For the Methodist church, the British Empire was 'a providential institution, on the whole greatly to the advantage of weak and subject races'.<sup>57</sup> Williams was proud of the achievements of the British Empire, but he was also aware of its failings. In reference to the Boer War, he wrote

As to our improving the condition of the natives, the less we say about that just now, the better ... England is great, but we are foolish if we think our greatness consists in a policy of the mailed fist.<sup>58</sup>

Like many young New Zealanders at this time, Williams combined his identification with England as 'home' with a pride in his own country's achievements. On reading Sir John Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (London 1883), he described it as 'a splendid refutation of the idea that the colonies are mere [possessions] of England'.<sup>59</sup>

Williams was interested in a variety of new pseudo-scientific ideas, particularly those concerning the power of thought. In this period he attempted to practise what was known as 'mental healing' – the art of healing a person by replacing their negative or destructive thoughts with positive 'affirmations'. He was also intrigued by the possibilities of telepathy.<sup>60</sup> He was a strict

vegetarian, and saw the vegetarian life as being 'more ethereal and refined than the life of a meat eater'. He gave up meat at the age of fifteen or sixteen, after reading 'an article in an American religious paper by an old minister who affirmed that he owed his ninety years to a vegetarian diet', then Tolstoy's 'First Step' in the *New Review*, and finally an article by Lady Paget on vegetarianism in *The Nineteenth Century*.<sup>61</sup> On this occasion the experiment lasted only six months, but after encountering more vegetarian literature he made another attempt shortly after his eighteenth birthday. From this time on he ate meat on only 'a very few occasions'.<sup>62</sup> His vegetarianism was based on four tenets; that it is wrong to kill animals for food, both on the animal's account and on the slaughterer's, that meat is unnecessary, as all the necessary nutrients can be found elsewhere, that meat is in fact unhealthy, and that a vegetarian diet increases 'clearness of brain and peace of spirit'. The only reason he might have for resorting to meat eating, he wrote, would have been a wish not to be singular, and that wish was never strong enough to overcome his 'absolute distaste for meat'.<sup>63</sup>

At the beginning of March 1898, Harold Williams attended the Methodist Conference in Dunedin, where his candidature for the ministry was to be discussed, with his father and one of his brothers. He was accepted on the condition that he be sent to a country circuit, Waitara, in Wanganui, on the North Island.<sup>64</sup> Waitara differed considerably in character from St. Albans. It was the largest circuit in the Wanganui district, with five churches and fourteen preaching places, 'situated at distances from three miles to thirty from the superintendent's residence' (in Waitara).<sup>65</sup> Since 1898 a second minister had been appointed, to reside in Inglewood, and this was the post Williams was to take up. His last service at Riccarton village was held on Easter Sunday, 1898, and on the following day he set off for Wellington.<sup>66</sup>

Williams's preaching responsibilities in Waitara centred around the towns of Inglewood, Midhurst, and Waipuku. A typical Sunday consisted of services conducted at Midhurst in the morning, Waipuku in the afternoon, and Inglewood in the evening.<sup>67</sup> Special services were sometimes held in other locations during the week.<sup>68</sup> The new minister was also occasionally required to conduct marriage services, and the fees associated with these provided a welcome

addition to his stipend, when they could be wrested from the people concerned.<sup>69</sup> Less pleasant were funerals, such as that of a man who had murdered his daughter and then drowned himself.<sup>70</sup> Much of the week was spent paying pastoral visits, often in the more remote areas of the circuit. This was one of the more trying aspects of Williams's work. He covered long distances on horseback, by bicycle or on foot. On one occasion in April 1898 he was obliged to walk nine miles in order to visit four people, as his companion had no horse.<sup>71</sup> By the end of May he had paid 100 visits in six weeks, but he still had 270 to go before completing his first round. He had also become an accomplished conversationalist on such subjects as the weather and cows.<sup>72</sup> The mediocrity of this kind of conversation bothered him more than the distances he was obliged to travel – he admitted to fearing that visiting would make 'less of a man' of him; often it left him feeling 'stupid and jaded'.<sup>73</sup> A welcome social held for the new minister in Inglewood was also trying. 'The games on the whole were extremely stupid', he reported, 'but I had to play or else be accounted a bear.'<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, Williams found that the people of Inglewood and its environs displayed a 'frankness and openness' which contrasted with the 'coldness and suspicion' of some of the people in St. Albans.<sup>75</sup> He sent back sketches of colourful characters to entertain his friends. A bachelor in Tarata had been a gardener for the Prince of Wales. The church steward at Waipuku, a dairy farmer named Coutts, was a Shetlander with bright blue eyes and an 'extraordinary dialect'. Another Waipuku man began each sentence at prayer meetings 'with a roar', and 'ended with a whisper'.<sup>76</sup> The children of the circuit developed a great affection for Williams. At a Band of Hope festival in Tarata he was surprised to discover that there was 'a tremendous competition' for the honour of being next to him.

When tea time came you would have been surprised to see my staid and [sober] form careering down to the church with a flock of small girls swarming around me, clinging to my wrists, fighting for the possession of a finger, hanging on to my coat-tails and generally trampling on my dignity.

Williams contributed descriptions of some of the local children to the *Arcadian News*.<sup>77</sup>