

Restless Spirit, Resolute Conviction: The Life and Times of Joseph 'Ivo' Evison

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Abstract

At first glance, Joseph Evison's life was a confusion of convictions and contradictions, played out in the pages of the many newspapers he edited and wrote for in New Zealand and Australia. A late nineteenth-century Freethinker, he would go on to edit a Catholic newspaper, just as he would readily criticise the British Empire, in spite of serving in its army and navy. Despite his obvious intricacies, historians have not been kind to Evison, reducing him to a mere one line curiosity, implying that he shifted causes to follow the money or because he was a simple contrarian at heart. However, Evison's unsettled nature means a study of his life and ideologies adds to a number of other histories including those of Freethought, Catholicism, conservatism, colonial settlers, empire, transmission of ideas, reader culture and biographical studies. This thesis therefore attempts to chronicle Evison's life, before arguing that his changing causes was down to deep-seated secularist and libertarian convictions, which left him always fighting for what he perceived as the underdog, against both the state and the Protestant majority. To do so, it not only studies his writing, which remains vibrant and engaging even today, but also his editing style at various newspapers and his speeches during a short-lived political career.

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MR. J. S. EVISON

Image of Joseph Evison, printed in the *Canterbury Press* in the lead up to the 1893 general election.
'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

Introduction

Joseph Evison is not well remembered. Today, he features only in the histories of New Zealand Freethinkers, Catholics, and Conservatives, as an oddity in a footnote that needs to be explained away. Evison did indeed operate in each of these spheres, but such dismissals are a disservice to a man who travelled the globe, privateered against pirates in China, wrote an account of the Taiping Rebellion for a Shanghai newspaper, served on the battlefields of Abyssinia with the Prince of Wales' 3rd Dragoon Guards, disappeared for years into the depths of India, managed the London branch of a major company, ran for parliament in the New Zealand general election of 1893, wrote for and edited seven different newspapers and journals over a sixteen year career, and hid his identity behind three noms-de-plume: Ivo, Watchman, and Phiz. Evison was clearly much more than the little written about him. Thus, this thesis seeks to remedy these deficiencies in the literature by moving beyond Evison the writer and editor, to expose his staunch secular and libertarian ideals and locate him within the story of colonial New Zealand and an expanding British Empire.

Until now, Evison has received only a few scattered mentions throughout histories of Freethought, Catholicism, and politics. Rating just three sentences in Peter Lineham's 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', Evison has his newspaper listed incorrectly and is summarily dismissed as a 'colourful newspaper columnist', who employed 'rather crude polemics' which 'upset the leaders of Freethought.'¹ In Keith Sinclair's biography of William Pember Reeves, Evison is introduced briefly as a 'frequently vituperative journalist.' Despite mentioning Evison only five times in the entire work, Sinclair designates him 'Reeves' enemy, "Phiz"', a rather grandiose title for a man who seems to have impacted Reeves so little.² Conversely, in Richard Davis' *Irish Issues in New Zealand Politics*, Evison is briefly discussed in connection with the *Catholic Times*, which 'under the general control of [Archbishop] Redwood, was dominated at the time [1889-1892] by J. S. ('Ivo') Evison, formerly editor of a free-thought periodical ... a bitter opponent of the liberal

¹ Peter J. Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.19, no.1, 1985, pp.68, 69.

² Keith Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p.154.

leaders.’³ Despite his being the *Catholic Times*’ longest serving editor, and receiving many positive reviews, Davis suggests that Evison’s ‘vicious anti-government polemics cannot have raised either the tone or the circulation of the paper.’⁴ Evison’s appearances in such conflicting roles highlight the inadequacies of labels such as ‘Freethinker’, ‘Catholic’ or ‘Conservative’ to explain his actions and identity.

In studying Evison, this thesis accomplishes three tasks. First, it provides a narrative of Joseph Evison’s life. Second, it examines his intellectual, moral, spiritual and social attitudes as they were expressed and altered on the public platforms of Freethought, Catholic apologetics, and conservative politics. Third, it explores his role as editor and speaker in the context of secularising colonies far away from any entrenched religion. In doing so, it shows how conclusions about Evison’s life and writing add nuances to larger histories of Freethought, radicalism, and religion in New Zealand, but also to ideas about Empire, the mobility of people and ideas, and relationships between colonial readers and colonial writers and editors.

From official records, his own writings and numerous newspaper articles, chapter one composes a narrative of Evison’s early life through to his time as editor and manager of various papers. Such an account is vital to interpreting his writing and editing career, as his life experiences find expression in his later work. The twists and turns of Evison’s life are compelling in themselves, as he sojourned as a sailor and soldier throughout Asia and Africa, and moved from Freethought iconoclast to editor and manager of the *Catholic Times*. These transitions and contradictions are at the heart of Evison’s story, and must be clearly laid out in order to properly understand his journey.

Using this narrative, chapter two explores the convictions behind Evison’s contradictory occupations and arguments, as illustrated by his professional writings. Whilst Evison has been variously labelled a Freethinker, a Catholic and a Conservative, these are insufficient to explain a man whose professional writings diverged dramatically, yet shared common roots in his utter belief in secularism and libertarianism. This chapter shall argue that, contrary to others’ analyses, his eclectic career in writing and editing is a response to state and religious antagonism towards Freethinkers, Catholics, and Conservatives, which led Evison to forgo monetary and

³ Richard P. Davis, *Irish Issues in New Zealand Politics 1868-1922* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1974), p.173.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.180.

political gain, and instead take work in defence of these minorities. In the absence of any personal papers, this chapter relies upon close reading of his professional writings over a sixteen year career (1883-1899), and speeches in court and on campaign, revealing consistent, if evolving, core beliefs of secularism and libertarianism.

Going beyond Evison the writer, chapter three examines how, and how effectively, Evison as an editor and speaker propagated his secular libertarian convictions. Drawing on insights from Ross Harvey, Tony Ballantyne, John Stenhouse, Reginald Tye, Sally Stein and Janet Wilson, it examines Evison in the context of his peers, his audience, and the society he inhabited.⁵ It concludes that Evison is not an unrecognised cultural touchstone, a father of irreligion in an increasing irreligious country, or that he controlled all that was around him. Instead, the argument is a subtler one; Evison is a significant figure, not for what he said in any one debate, but in his capacity to link many debates, issues, and causes.

Unlike James Bodell, the subject of extensive work by Keith Sinclair, Evison left no personal papers.⁶ As such, his life and beliefs are reconstructed from his professional writings. Complementing these are numerous newspaper articles reporting his actions to the colony. The transcription of a three day libel case Evison initiated in the Supreme Court provides further primary material.

Together, these chapters allow Evison to be located within a much wider historiography. Whilst this thesis centres on Evison, empire and the transmission of people and ideas are ever present themes. In the seminal *Webs of Empire*, Tony Ballantyne argues that settlers were anything but settled.⁷ The mobility of the individual meant that people passed in and out of fixed places such as towns and associations. It was thus the shared ideas and experiences of these mobile settlers

⁵ Ross Harvey, 'Bringing the News to New Zealand: the Supply and Control of Overseas News in the Nineteenth Century', *Media History*, vol.8, no.1, 2002, pp.21-34; Tony Ballantyne, 'Reading the Newspaper in Colonial Otago', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, no.12, 2011, pp.47-64; John Stenhouse, "'A Disappearing Race Before We Came Here": Doctor Alfred Kingcome Newman, the Dying Maori, and Victorian Scientific Racism', *The New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.30, no.2, October 1996, pp.124-140; Janet Wilson, "'The 'New Chum': Writings of the English Diaspora in New Zealand, 1860-1914'", in Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home' the English in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012); Sally Stein, 'The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of Middle-Class Women's Magazines, 1919-1939', in Richard Bolton (ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

J. Reginald Tye, 'New Zealand', in J. Don Vann, and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (eds.), *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

⁶ Keith Sinclair (ed.), *A Soldier's View of Empire: the Reminiscences of James Bodell 1832-92* (London: Bodley Head, 1982).

⁷ Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012), p.279.

which formed the core of places. Evison fits perfectly into this narrative as he moved across the empire and passed in and out of towns, associations, and movements, taking with him experiences and ideas, leaving lasting impressions in his wake. Working from Janet Wilson's ideas about diaspora communities, freethinkers as well as others of Evison's communities can be seen as their own religious and intellectual diasporas, disconnected from their Imperial metropole home, but reconnected through Evison as an editor republishing articles from Britain and elsewhere.⁸

Next to these works on empire and the transmission of ideas and culture, Lydia Wevers and Susann Liebich have recently completed works examining reading practices in colonial New Zealand. Both *Reading on the Farm* and 'Connected Readers' argue that the act and subject of reading directly connected people to their metropole home, and to ideas and discussions from across the empire and beyond.⁹ Evison is, by contrast, the other side of the reading coin. As a writer, Evison was quite widely read and thus shaped many people's reading experiences. As an editor, he was active in controlling the content that was coming from Britain and other places, leaving him to construct narratives and inform the way people consumed that information. If reading connects one to a particular world, then writing and editing are equally important as they inform and create the material read.

By examining the religious and radical forces acting upon Evison, and the rise and fall of his writing personas of 'Ivo', 'Watchman', 'Phiz', and 'Joseph Evison', this thesis offers new insights into several other historical and historiographical issues. Among these are: the rise of radicalism in New Zealand, religious and irreligious conviction, social and occupational mobility, the slow rise and rapid fall of the New Zealand Freethought movement, as well as the lively debate around religiosity and secularism in New Zealand. Evison's writing offers insight into freethinkers' simultaneous opposition to Christian ideas and obsession with Christian ritual, thus contributing to histories of Freethought and in so doing, further illuminating historiographical divides in religious history.

This thesis also sheds new light on biographies and histories of people and organisations whose paths intersected with Evison. Paving the way for Ivo and

⁸ Wilson, 'The 'New Chum'', pp.168-169.

⁹ Lydia Wevers, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2010); Susann Liebich, 'Connected Readers: Reading Practices and Communities Across the British Empire, c. 1890-1930', PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2012.

Freethought in New Zealand was Charles Southwell, whose beliefs have been considered by Bill Cooke and John Stenhouse.¹⁰ Ivo's peers included John Ballance and Robert Stout, both Premiers and forces of nature in New Zealand politics and society. Other contemporaries included numerous lecturers, politicians and clergy. Some, like Archbishop Redwood, stood with Evison, whilst others, such as William Pember Reeves, Alexander Hogg, and the Reverend George Isitt stood against him. Evison's work and mobility also sheds light on Catholic isolation and expansion in New Zealand.

Evison's character and writing were born out of travel and experience throughout the British Empire and beyond. As such, he should not be confined by a label which represents just a fraction of who he was and what he contributed.

¹⁰ Bill Cooke, 'Charles Southwell: New Zealand's First Freethinker', *the New Zealand Rationalist and Humanist*, spring 1998, pp.10-12; Bill Cooke, 'Charles Southwell: One of the Romances of Rationalism', *Journal of Freethought History*, vol.2, no.22, 2012, pp.3-41; John Stenhouse, 'Atheism, Imperialism and Race: Charles Southwell, Old Corruption and the New Zealand Maori', *Journal of British Studies*, vol.44, no.4, 2005, pp.754-774; John Stenhouse, 'Religion and Society', in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Chapter One: Thinker, Sailor, Soldier, Settler

In preparation for later chapters' analyses of Joseph Evison's political and religious convictions, this chapter provides a narrative of his life. Starting with the life of his father, John, whose career and beliefs heavily influenced his son, it then traces Joseph's journey through Britain, China and Abyssinia to his eventual home in New Zealand, where he would become such a divisive figure in many important contemporary debates.

A Life at Sea

In 1795, John Crouchely Evison was born in the village of Leake in Lincolnshire. The third child of John Dorr and Ann (nee Harrison), he was baptised on 27 April.¹¹ However, within five years, three of his five siblings, as well as his mother, had died. Much of John's early life thus revolved around his father's profession and at fourteen, he followed his father into the navy, beginning his lifelong naval career at the height of the Napoleonic Wars.

In 1809, John Evison saw service as a midshipman aboard the cutter *L'Entreprenante*. Captured by the *HMS Pandora* on 20 September 1808, *L'Entreprenante* went on to capture four French privateers near Malaga in 1810.¹² In 1811, *L'Entreprenante* continued her operations against privateers, destroying one 'under the batteries of Faro'.¹³ During operations in the Gironde in 1813, John served aboard the *Belle Poule*, still a midshipman.¹⁴ He then transferred to the *HMS Albion*, flagship of Rear Admiral George Cockburn, a Fame class ship of the line with 74 guns across two decks.¹⁵ After the defeat of Napoleon, the *Albion* sailed for America, harassing and destroying American shipping in and around Chesapeake Bay throughout the War of 1812.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, his son, Joseph, would have grown up with stories of such

¹¹ Births and Christenings, England, 1538-1975, ref.: FHL Film Number 504557, 508002, accessed through: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

¹² Joseph Allen Esq., R. N., *The Navy List and General Record of the Services of Officers of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines* (London: Parker, Furnivall, and Parker, 1850), p.142.

¹³ Allen Esq., R. N., *The Navy List*, p.142.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

actions. In 1815, after both the war with Napoleon and the War of 1812 had ended, John, now aged twenty, took his Lieutenant's exam. However, years of war had left Britain with an oversupply of capable seamen, and John's new rank was not conferred until 1827.¹⁷ Instead, he was posted to the Coast Guard on 28 April 1815.¹⁸

In 1822, John Evison, now aged 27 and still serving with the Coast Guard, married Maria Wilders in Tydd-St. Mary, in his home county of Lincolnshire. Within a year, the new couple had their first child, Ann Maria. Over the following five years, they had two more children, Charlotte Wilders in 1824, and John William Wilders in 1828. In the meantime, John was awarded the rank of Lieutenant, and upon leaving the Coast Guard, took the position of deputy record keeper and clerk of the King's Bench Prison.¹⁹ With this pay increase, the family lived well. In 1831, Maria died suddenly, leaving John with two girls under 10, and John William aged 3. Struggling to adjust to life on land, John used his free hours to work for the National Institution for the Preservation of Life at Sea, who awarded him a silver medal for his services in January 1834.²⁰ In October, with John William attending a Dame School, John was free to return to the Coast Guard aboard the brig *Lapwing*.

John remarried on 6 June 1839, in Bishopwearmouth, Durham. Henrietta Spence, aged 28, was 16 years John's junior.²¹ Again, within five years of marriage, the couple had three children, Rose Elizabeth in 1840, Joseph Spence in 1841, and Emily Hudson Evison in 1845, all of whom survived childhood, and would live into the twentieth century.²² The family lived with John's adult daughters from his first marriage. Soon after Emily's birth, John returned to the now Queen's Bench Prison, acting as Deputy Governor, the income providing security for his growing family.²³

Like his father forty years earlier, Joseph started at a Dame school; in 1851, aged just 9 years old, he was boarding on High Street, Titchfield, Hampshire.²⁴ Meanwhile, John, working from Queen's Bench Prison, now presided over a house of seven women: his wife, his daughters from his first marriage, Maria and Charlotte, Emily,

¹⁷ Great Britain Admiralty, *The Navy List* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1834), p.31,

¹⁸ Charles Haultan, K.H., *The Navy List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1841), p.66.

¹⁹ 'Obituary', *London Daily News*, 2 June 1873.

²⁰ Great Britain Admiralty, *The Navy List*, p.548.

²¹ 'John Crouchley Evison Maria Wilders Marriage Notice', *Stamford Mercury*, 15 February 1822, p.3.

²² Census Returns of England and Wales, Class: HO107; Piece: 1564; Folio: 232; Page: 35; GSU roll: 174797, accessed through: www.ancestry.co.uk.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Census Returns of England and Wales, Class: HO107; Piece: 1661; Folio: 460; Page: 12; GSU roll: 193568, accessed through: www.ancestry.co.uk.

as well as Hannah and Jane Jones, aged 23 and 17 (possibly in service or lodging with the family).²⁵ All in all, they were a solidly middle-class family.

Joseph achieved well at school, and in the early 1850s was off to the newly established Royal Naval School.²⁶ Dedicated in 1833, and created for the sole purpose of educating the sons of naval officers, the Royal Navy School was an attempt to specialise naval education long before apprenticeships began in early teens, in the hope of training the best naval officers in the world. Growing up on his father's war stories, Joseph seems to have been an ideal candidate for the school. However, he was in too great a hurry to be on the high seas. At fourteen, he left the Royal Naval School before graduating, to take up a post as midshipman aboard the *Northfleet*, part of 'the then celebrated mercantile fleet of Duncan Dunbar.'²⁷ Evison thus abandoned the Royal Navy for the merchant navy. On 17 March 1856, Joseph Evison, as midshipman, recorded in the ship's log that the *Northfleet* had set sail from London to Hong Kong.²⁸ Joseph spent the next twelve years at sea.

Under the employ of Duncan Dunbar, Evison frequently sailed between England, India and China. It was during one of these return voyages from Shanghai to the East India Dock in Blackwell, East London, that the *Northfleet* set a record for the fastest sailing on that route, taking just ninety two days, carrying a cargo of spices and tea.²⁹ Technology had changed, and Joseph's world was already much smaller than that of his father.³⁰ The young midshipman was just fifteen, and demonstrated himself to be a very capable seaman. Such an achievement ensured that Joseph was soon promoted off the *Northfleet* to serve on the *Cospatrick*. Here, he repeated his journeys through the Indian Ocean and on to Chinese ports.³¹ In later life, he would recall that on one of these many stops in India, he became enamoured with the romantic ideal of the cavalry officer. He thus left the employ of Duncan Dunbar, and joined an Indian cavalry regiment.³² Perhaps due to his lack of standing and purely naval training, he found it not quite to his tastes and soon returned to Duncan Dunbar, resuming his

²⁵ Census Returns of England and Wales, Class: HO107; Piece: 1564; Folio: 232; Page: 35; GSU roll: 174797, accessed through: www.ancestry.co.uk.

²⁶ 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ 'Northfleet Ship Log Kept by Midshipman Joseph Spence Evison', 17 March – 10 June 1856, National Archive Kew, ref.: PRO 30/26/10, accessed through: www.nationalarchives.co.uk.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Appendix C for a map of Evison's known travels.

³¹ 'All Sorts of People', *Free Lance*, 28 February 1903, p.3.

³² 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

officer's duties, aboard the armed brig, *Martha and Emily*.³³ Now in a military, rather than mercantile, placement, Evison, aged 18, convoyed against pirates, just as his father had done forty years prior, under Captain Carter in the South China Sea.

A former Royal Navy Lieutenant like Evison's own father, Captain Carter appears to have made a significant impression upon the young officer. Indeed, within a few short years of serving under Captain Carter, Joseph completed his contract at Duncan Dunbar, and took a position as a mate with Jardine Matheson and Co., attaining the position of Master within a few months.³⁴ These local convoys against pirates kept Evison in the South China Sea. However, he did manage to broaden his horizons. A newspaper in Shanghai, just 300 kilometres east of Nanjing and the centre of the Taiping Rebellion, paid Evison to write an account of the rebellion from what he saw of it on the waterways.³⁵ Despite being an officer on a British ship, Evison was shocked by British actions to quell the rebellion, which he would later claim amounted to England waging an illegal war against the peasants of China.³⁶ Speaking to the Wellington Secular Society in 1884, Evison decried 'the horrors and cruelty of that war, and the disgusting way in which it was carried on by the English.'³⁷ In spite of his views, the Taiping Rebellion was his first insight into newspaper work. Soon after the rebellion's end, Evison was offered a staff position at the paper, but declined it, citing 'failing health', and returned to England for the first time in years.³⁸

Joseph's time at sea had little impact on the rest of the Evison family. Despite being half siblings separated by twelve years, John's children with Henrietta cohabited well with those from his previous marriage. Ann Maria and Charlotte Wilders, John's eldest daughters, both remained unmarried, living with their father until his death in 1873. By 1851, both Joseph and John William had left for education and further training. Capitalising on empty rooms, census data reveals that beyond the immediate family, also living in the house were Harriett Isaac, 27, Hannah Jones, 23, and Jane

³³ 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3. Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.; Reported stories in later years suggest that at some point during this time Evison owned a small boat, but that it was surrendered to pirates; however, no evidence beyond later retellings of the story has yet been found; Harry H. Pearce, 'Unbelief in New Zealand', in Gordon Stein (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Unbelief Volume Two, L-Z* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1985), p.483.

³⁵ 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

³⁶ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 30 August 1885, p.3.

³⁷ 'Wellington Secular Society', *Freethought Review*, 1 December 1884, p.6.

³⁸ Ibid.

Jones, 17.³⁹ In 1860, John, now 65, retired with a promotion to the rank of Commander in the Royal Navy, entitling him to a significantly increased pension.⁴⁰ Charlotte became the breadwinner for the family in 1861, as the principal of a girls' school.⁴¹ Through the late 1860s and into the early 1870s, the different experiences of the two sets of children began to show. Maria Wilders' daughters remained unmarried, but in 1867, Henrietta's eldest daughter, Rose, married Duncan George Pitcher in the Channel Islands, before emigrating to India to start a family. In 1874, Henrietta's youngest, Emily, married Charles Carteret Corfe in Melbourne, subsequently moving to Christchurch.⁴² John and Maria's son, John William, also emigrated and married Ada Margaret Murray in New Zealand in 1872.⁴³

Away from the ships that had been his life for over a decade, Joseph Evison made his home in London. Drawing on his maritime experience, he became London branch manager for Pile, Spence and Co., a large company that specialised in ship owning, ship building, and rope manufacturing.⁴⁴ Joseph's position required him to coordinate between customers and the company's two shipyards at Jackson Dock and Swainson Dock in Hartlepool. The job, however, did not last long. In 1866, Overend, Gurney and Company, the bank Pile, Spence and Co. invested with, collapsed. With the 'Bankers Bank' gone, companies invested there, including Evison's employers, shut down.

After the collapse, Evison returned to sea, but as a soldier rather than a sailor. In his later writings, Joseph complained of being bored with life in England, but perhaps his desire to leave was a product of his unemployment. Thus, he signed up as a cavalryman for the British military expedition to Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia) in 1868, serving in the Prince of Wales' 3rd Dragoon Guards.⁴⁵

As the expedition would leave from India, Joseph returned to a country whose ports he had frequented over more than a decade. However, rather than sailing down

³⁹ Census Returns of England and Wales, Class: HO107; Piece: 1564; Folio: 232; Page: 35; GSU roll: 174797, accessed through: www.ancestry.co.uk.

⁴⁰ Authority, *Navy List* (London: W. Clowes & Sons for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1871), p.284.

⁴¹ Census Returns of England and Wales, Class: HO107; Piece: 1564; Folio: 232; Page: 35; GSU roll: 174797, accessed through: www.ancestry.co.uk.

⁴² Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839–1923, ref.: 7667, copy of VRPS 947; Australia Marriage Index, 1788-1950, Victoria, 1874, ref.: 3860; Advertisements, *Star*, 18 March 1885, p.2, accessed through: www.ancestry.com.au.

⁴³ 'Chief Vaccinator for Waimea District', *Grey River Argus*, 31 May 1876, p.2.

⁴⁴ 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; 'All Sorts of People', *Free Lance*, 28 February 1903, p.3; Military Campaign Medal and Award Rolls, 1793-1949, Ref.: WO 100; Piece: 43, accessed through: www.nationalarchive.co.uk.

to South Africa as he had done previously, soldiers were landed in Egypt, then marched overland to Suez, before re-embarking for India. They would then sail as a principal force for Abyssinia.

The campaign was retributive, a rescue of British and European prisoners, to be followed by significant looting. Emperor Tewodros had imprisoned an assortment of European missionaries and consuls, to use as leverage in negotiating British assistance against rebels as well as attacking Egyptian and Turkish forces. However, Earl Russell, the Foreign Secretary, neglected to answer Tewodros' letter when it arrived in 1863 as Britain was occupied reacting to the Prussian invasion of Denmark, the American Civil War, insurrection in Poland, General Garibaldi's campaign in Italy, the 'usual troubles in Ireland', domestic disputes in China, and wars against 'natives' in West Africa and New Zealand.⁴⁶ By 1864, however, calls from the captives' relatives forced the Government to respond, although bureaucratic difficulties meant its reply took two years to reach its destination. Two further letters were exchanged, culminating in March 1867 with the British Foreign Office sending an ultimatum to the Emperor; release the prisoners, or face military action. Tewodros did nothing. Cabinet then took advantage of Parliamentary recess to unilaterally launch a military expedition.⁴⁷

Despite being British-led, and partially manned by the British Army, the majority of the expeditionary force was Indian. In all, fifteen infantry regiments (four British, two Bengali and the rest from Bombay), six artillery batteries, eight companies of engineers, and six cavalry regiments (of which the Dragoons were the only British regiment), totalling 13,000 men, supported by more than 8,000 retainers, were sent.⁴⁸ The Dragoons in particular were held in high regard for their expert skill in riding and firing from the saddle. Furthermore, the expedition's leader, Lieutenant-General Robert Napier, Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army and future Prime Minister, recognised that the British riders would cope best with the highland conditions of Abyssinia, whilst his contemporaries naively imagined it to be as tropical as any part of the romanticised Africa.⁴⁹

In joining in the campaign, 27-year-old Joseph experienced something that would have been truly alien to the former sailor. The march from the coast at Zula, on

⁴⁶ Darrell Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.69, 74, 85.

⁴⁸ Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile* (New York: Harper & Row.), p.235.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.101.

the horn of Africa, to Tewodros' highland fort at Magdala took three months, traversing over 400 miles. The overriding problem was logistics, given the length of the trek, the 20,000 people involved and the lack of roads through the highlands. Indeed, elephants were drafted to haul the batteries into the highlands, creating a scene reminiscent of Hannibal's advance over the Alps more than 2,000 years earlier.⁵⁰ Having spent most of his adult life at sea, the trek through the highlands on horseback, surrounded by 20,000 people of multiple races and cultures would have been unlike anything Joseph Evison had ever encountered.

Upon arrival, Napier's force of 13,000 was effectively ambushed by Tewodros' 9,000 troops at the battle of Magdala. However, despite Tewodros' soldiers being the fresher, his general charge was cut down by the British repeating rifles.⁵¹ The eventual arrival of Indian cavalry allowed Napier to launch his own charge, easily taking the field. The next day, Napier's sappers forced open the fortress' gates, and after a short battle, the defenders surrendered, Emperor Tewodros committing suicide with the pistol given to him by Queen Victoria. The short battle resulted in 700 Abyssinian deaths, with 1,500 wounded. The British suffered only two deaths.⁵²

Stationed far back in the column, Joseph Evison and the 3rd Dragoon Guards likely never participated in the main battle, but were probably heavily involved in the punitive looting and burning that followed (although sale of looted goods, when shared amongst the soldiers, netted Joseph a mere twenty-five shillings).⁵³ Punitive acts of destruction were directed at property of Abyssinia's Orthodox Church.⁵⁴ During the 400 mile trek back to the Red Sea, the army was dogged by attacks from small forces that sought to fill the power vacuum created by Tewodros' death.⁵⁵ By June 1868, the expedition had been conveyed from the Red Sea back to India. However, rather than return to Britain with the rest of his regiment, Joseph decided to stay in India.

Most likely, Joseph resided in Bombay with his older sister, Rose, and her husband, Duncan Pitcher. Evison was a man of diverse talents, probably having no trouble in securing work. However, sources are unclear as to what he did in India, only revealing that he stayed for four years.

⁵⁰ Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*, pp.129-130.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.177-178 and 182-185.

⁵² Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty*, pp.184-185.

⁵³ Ibid., pp.203-204.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.206-207

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.209-212

Joseph returned to England in 1871, aged 30, finding work in London he would later describe as ‘official business and literary pursuits.’⁵⁶ Most likely, he worked with a shipping company, whilst engaging in freelance journalism. Within months, Joseph married Matilda Pass.⁵⁷ Matilda was a year older than Joseph. Few records of her life remain but she was described in Joseph’s obituary as ‘a most amiable little lady, who endeared herself to all who knew her.’⁵⁸ The couple lived together until Joseph’s death in 1903, but never had children.

Joseph found himself unable to settle in England, having spent most of his life at sea or in India. In the late 1870s, the pair decided to emigrate. They arrived in Christchurch in 1879, and were helped into their first home by Joseph’s sister, Emily, who having married Charles Corfe, formed a key part of the Corfe family.⁵⁹ Just a few hundred kilometres away from their new home, Joseph’s half-brother, John William, was living as a well-respected rural doctor between Kumara and Stafford on the West Coast.⁶⁰ Between 1879 and 1883, Joseph, now in his late thirties, took a myriad of small jobs to support the couple, working as a book traveller, government clerk, and an auctioneer.⁶¹

The Rise and Fall of Ivo

In 1883, 42 year old Evison began to make a name for himself in Christchurch as an itinerant Freethought lecturer. A former Wakefield settlement built primarily around Anglican settlers, Christchurch boasted a substantial Freethought movement which met regularly, spurred into action by antagonistic clergy.⁶² Despite sources being silent on the matter, it seems likely that Evison began his Freethought journey at these meetings, before graduating to speak himself. Inspired by great thinkers of the

⁵⁶ ‘Christchurch Candidates’, *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

⁵⁷ England & Wales, Free BMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915, July – August – September 1871, Hackney London, vol.1b, p.739, accessed through: www.ancestry.co.uk.

⁵⁸ ‘All Sorts of People’, *Free Lance*, 28 February 1903, p.3.

⁵⁹ Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839–1923, ref.: 7667, copy of VRPS 947; Australia Marriage Index, 1788-1950, Victoria, 1874, ref.: 3860, accessed through www.ancestry.co.au; ‘Christchurch Candidates’, *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3. The Corfe family helped establish Christ’s College. Joseph emphasised his connection to the family when he ran in the 1893 general election.

⁶⁰ ‘Chief Vaccinator for Waimea District’, *Grey River Argus*, 31 May 1876, p.2; Advertisements, *Star*, 18 March 1885, p.2.

⁶¹ ‘Supreme Court Wellington’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 August 1888, p.2.

⁶² Peter J. Lineham, ‘Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.19, no.1, 1985, pp.66-67.

Enlightenment, freethinkers emerged out of dissenting Christian traditions in Britain and the German states. These men and women considered their minds ‘free’ from the stifling dogma that had accumulated over centuries of Christian monopoly. Whilst some stayed in Europe, others left for the colonies. Those who arrived in New Zealand found fertile soil, and their ideas spread, evolving into a vibrant Freethought movement. During the 1880s, Freethought reached its peak, led by Robert Stout and John Ballance, some of the first irreligious world leaders.

Evison’s first appearances lecturing were not under his own name; instead, he toured under the pseudonym ‘Ivo’. The *Freethought Review*, a monthly paper based in Wanganui, edited by the former Premier John Ballance amongst others, published a review of an early lecture by Ivo in their first issue, stating that:

On Sunday... ‘Ivo’ delivered his first lecture in Wanganui. We congratulate the party on having an advocate so well qualified to advance the cause on the platform as Ivo undoubtedly is. There is a sustained reasoning force in all Ivo’s lectures which is not, we think, to be surpassed by the veterans of a thousand fights. His language is happily chosen, the ideas run in natural sequence, and he can exhaust a subject without for a moment becoming monotonous. There is a flexibility of voice and manner which easily adapts itself to the various moods of the subject. We understand Ivo’s experience on the platform has been short, yet he is already facile princeps in the art of logical exposition before a popular audience.⁶³

Evison’s charisma and skill were evident even in his earliest speeches. As Evison had left formal schooling at age fourteen and was lecturing on subjects far beyond what would have constituted his education at the Royal Naval School, presumably Evison had engaged in extensive self-education. Such attempts at self-betterment were increasingly common in Britain by the middle of the nineteenth century. Freethinkers and politicians Stout and Ballance were also enamoured with self-education, with Lineham identifying it as a key tenet of Freethought.⁶⁴

⁶³ ‘Wanganui’, *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1883, p.5.

⁶⁴ R. J. Morris, ‘Samuel Smiles and the Genesis of Self-Help: the Retreat to a Petit Bourgeois Utopia’, *The Historical Journal*, vol.24, no.1, pp.92-93; Lineham, ‘Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’, p.68.

Evison carefully planned his lecture tours, arranging everything in advance. Intending to travel north, Joseph sent letters ahead to interested parties in each centre. They would provide accommodation in a billeting arrangement, and could select from a list of prepared lectures, depending on the interests of the local group. In the case of the Inglewood Freethought Association for example, Ivo wrote offering a choice of lectures on 'Religious Science', 'Why am I Damned', 'Charles Bradlaugh', 'Thomas Paine', and 'Home Rule'.⁶⁵ Freethought, as an umbrella term, contained a myriad of different, but progressive, beliefs such as atheism, agnosticism, humanism, Darwinism, and spiritualism. By offering a choice of topics, some theological, some political, and some scientific, Evison catered to the varying demographics of individual associations, ensuring the best reception and attention to a lecture (Inglewood Freethought Association chose Ivo's lecture on 'Religious Science'). By contrast, lecturers attached to specific denominations often toured a single lecture or small series, but this limited their audience dramatically.

1883 was an important year for the wider Freethought movement and Evison in particular. Robert Stout, the heart of Freethought in Dunedin, had begun to wind down the *Echo* for the final time. The paper had gone on extended hiatus before, occasionally for years on end. However, non-existent profits and a flourishing of Freethought throughout the country left those at the *Echo* feeling that it was time for someone else to shoulder the responsibility.⁶⁶ Taking *Echo's* place, John Ballance and members of the Wanganui Freethought Association opened the *Freethought Review*. Based in Wanganui, a central hub for post and travellers in the North Island, the paper aimed to foster the Freethought movement in New Zealand; indeed, the writers of the *Freethought Review* seemed almost evangelical in their approach. They provided masses of material and advice on how small groups of people across the country could set up Freethought associations. They suggested and pre-typed constitutions, and

⁶⁵ 'Inglewood', *Taranaki Herald*, 24 November 1886, p.2; 'Religious Science' and 'Why am I Damned' were lectures centred on using scientific reasoning and humour to refute literal interpretations of biblical stories and teaching. 'Charles Bradlaugh' was an up-to-date account of the ongoing scandal surrounding Charles Bradlaugh, the almost unchallenged leader of Freethought in Britain. Having been elected to Parliament in 1880, Bradlaugh insisted on taking a secular oath; he was denied entry into Parliament and imprisoned. Later re-elected, he faced the same problem and refused to back down. In 1886, Parliament relented and he was allowed to take a secular oath. 'Thomas Paine' was a biography of the influential Enlightenment thinker whose written work paved the way for nineteenth-century Freethought. 'Home Rule' was a more politically focused lecture, arguing the case for Home Rule in Ireland, a delicate subject in the settler colony.

⁶⁶ Timothy McIvor, 'On Ballance: a Biography of John Ballance, Journalist and Politician, 1839-1893', PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1984, p.240.

provided rules for meetings.⁶⁷ When associations were formed, large gifts of Freethought material were instantly donated anonymously under the pseudonym ‘Blue Pencil’, presumably relating to the word’s use in the legal context, where a document is ‘blue pencilled’ to allow material to be removed so that it might meet required standards without the entirety being repealed.⁶⁸ The Freethinkers thus aimed to blue pencil the material available at the time to remove the religious overtones.

Not only did the *Freethought Review* encourage ordinary people into Freethought, it also provided an ideal platform for a now 42 year old Evison to play a central role in the quasi-evangelical mission. Joseph’s lectures were popular and numerous, contributing materially to the paper’s stated goals. In 1885, at a lecture in Masterton, he called on supporters to form a Freethinkers Association.⁶⁹ Many obliged and notable local Alfred William Renall, upon whom ‘Churches, Clergymen, and Creeds made no impression’, became Chairman.⁷⁰ From then on, weekly meetings were held, with frequent guest lecturers in Freethought, phrenology, elocution, spiritualism and nihilism. The Association even found time for a Freethought baptism, thus cementing communal rituals within Freethought, which before were the purview of religion alone.⁷¹

Ivo’s largest single contribution to the *Freethought Review* came in the form of a ghost tale. As almost no notes beyond the titles of Ivo’s lectures remain, Ivo’s Ghost Story provides an insight into his style of rhetoric.⁷² In the story, Ivo detailed his time on boats off India, and an encounter with the ghost of a seaman who had recently gone overboard. He built the tension again and again, before concluding with a twist that he met the man who had supposedly died in Calcutta years later. He had faked his death and thus Ivo suggested that every ghost could be equally reasonably explained away.

⁶⁷ ‘Funeral Service’, *Freethought Review*, 1 October 1883, p.13; ‘Constitution and Rules’, *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1883, pp.6-8; ‘Funeral Services (for Infants)’, *Freethought Review*, 1 January 1884, p.11; ‘Funeral Ceremonies and Freethought’, *Freethought Review*, 1 March 1885, p.12.

⁶⁸ ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 October 1883, p.8; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 April 1884, p.4; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 May 1884, p.6; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 June 1884, p.8; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 July 1884, p.6; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 October 1883, p.7; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1884, p.7; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 March 1885, p.8; ‘Blue Pencil’, *Freethought Review*, 1 July 1885, p.7.

⁶⁹ ‘Ivo’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 17 February 1885, p.2.

⁷⁰ J. McIntosh, *The Renall Years 1813-1986* (Waiuku: Deed Printing, 1986), p.21.

⁷¹ ‘Short’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 25 February 1885, p.2; ‘Short’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 23 March 1885, p.2; ‘Short’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 20 July 1885, p.2; ‘Short’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 27 July 1885, p.2; ‘Short’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 3 September 1885, p.2; ‘Short’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 24 November 1885, p.2.

⁷² See Appendix A: Ivo, ‘Ivo’s Ghost Story’, *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1884, p.14.

Despite his prior experience in journalism, Ivo's role at the *Freethought Review* was not as a writer, but as a personality. Evison did write for the paper, but only published articles in four of its twenty four issues. Ivo, however, managed to make an appearance in almost every issue, as the paper reported on his progress lecturing up and down the country.⁷³ The dates and locations listed indicate that Evison was constantly moving, delivering a range of prepared lectures on popular topics, from Dunedin to Auckland, and many places in between. Whilst some drew on his experiences of the Taiping Rebellion and Abyssinia Campaign, many of his early lectures were built around inconsistencies in the Christian tradition. In each centre, local Freethinkers provided accommodation for Evison, sometimes for a series of lectures over five weeks, as in Nelson.⁷⁴

Not all audiences welcomed Ivo with open arms. One of Evison's first appearances in the *Freethought Review* came in a report about a group of Anglican clergy, along with the Archdeacon Stock, who protested a lecture Ivo had given in Wellington attacking the biblical King David.⁷⁵ During the lecture, noted by the *Freethought Review* as 'delivered in fine style', Ivo laid out a history of David, calling attention to his being 'so great a sinner', yet 'so narrated with approval'.⁷⁶ Elsewhere, Ivo's lectures turned into well attended debates, with much of the audience cheering on church debaters. At the Theatre Royal in Nelson, Ivo debated with Rev. Edward Lewis, the moot being 'is the Biblical Account of the Sin and Fall of Man consonant with Human Reason?'⁷⁷ A resounding victory for Ivo:

Lewis had no chance with "Ivo," who kept to the argument closely, whilst his opponent became very personal, ill-tempered, and weak in argument. As soon as Mr Lewis found himself pinned in a corner by "Ivo's" questions, and could not answer them, he flew off at a tangent, and continually reiterated "what he was taught by the scripture."⁷⁸

Evison was declared the winner before an audience of 600.

For all of his engagements, Evison fully exploited his nom-de-plume, Ivo; however, this anonymity would not last. In an open letter to the *Freethought Review*,

⁷³ See Appendix B for a map of Evison's lectures within New Zealand.

⁷⁴ 'Nelson Freethought Association', *Freethought Review*, 1 January 1884, pp.6-7.

⁷⁵ 'Defence of David', *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1883, p.2.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 'Nelson Freethought Association', *Freethought Review*, 1 January 1884, p.7.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

a careless secretary accidentally revealed Ivo as Joseph Evison.⁷⁹ The editors of the *Freethought Review* used the section titled *Progress* to advertise the growth of Freethought, connecting freethinkers with nearby Freethought associations. Each issue's *Progress* featured letters from Freethought societies all across the country. Letters were often from societies' treasurers or secretaries, detailing recent lectures, shared reading material, and new members. In the *Progress* report for Wellington, published in November 1864, society secretary, Alfred Jardine, thanked Ivo for a series of lectures on 'Spiritualism'.⁸⁰ Upon mentioning Ivo, Jardine included parenthesis containing '(Mr. Jos. Evison)'.⁸¹ In revealing the itinerant lecturer's real name, Jardine ensured that Evison could no longer hide his radical and often defamatory ideas behind a pseudonym.

The consequences of Jardine's naming Evison would not be apparent for months, and in the meantime, Evison continued his Freethought activities in new ways. In January 1885, Evison began working closely with the members of the Wellington Secularist Society to create a Sunday school for the children of Freethinkers.⁸² Freethought centred on replacing religion, keeping ritual and structure in place, but removing the divine element. The *Freethought Review* had already run Freethought funeral services, which with minor alterations could be orated as an order of service at the funeral of any non-religious person.⁸³ Later in the year, it reported Freethought weddings and even baptisms. Freethought Sunday School worked in much the same fashion, replacing Christian service and ritual with a Freethought counterpart.⁸⁴

Sources are silent on whether Matilda travelled with her itinerant husband as he lectured throughout New Zealand. However, letters published in the *Freethought Review* reveal that in 1885, Matilda was well versed in Freethought, campaigning with Joseph for the establishment of a children's Freethought lyceum in Wellington.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ 'Nelson Freethought Association', *Freethought Review*, 1 January 1884, p.7.

⁸⁰ 'Progress', *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1884, p.2.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The Society changed its name from Freethought Association to Secularist Society as a way to ease tensions within the community, opening it to more diverse membership. The Society received a negative reaction from the wider Freethought community, who were engaged in a struggle to maintain a strictly Rationalist focus, in the face of more spiritualist factions. 'Wellington Secular Society', *Freethought Review*, 1 January 1885, p.7.

⁸³ 'Wanganui Freethought Association', *Freethought Review*, 1 October 1884, p.7.

⁸⁴ 'Progressive Lyceum', *Nelson Evening Mail*, 28 April 1881, p.2; 'Masterton', *Freethought Review*, 1 May 1885, p.7.

⁸⁵ 'Wellington Secular Society', *Freethought Review*, 1 January 1885, p.7.

During this time, Joseph entered a six month contract with the Wellington Secular Society, engaging in scientific lectures every Sunday morning. This brief settling allowed the pair to set up the lyceum themselves later that year.

Ivo joined the comprehensive programme of lectures run by the Wellington Secular Society every Sunday night. Presentations by Evison, Selby, and other visiting lecturers (including female members of the society delivering the works of famous British Freethinker, Annie Besant), were interspersed with debates and musical pieces. Occasionally larger standalone gatherings and fund raising events were held for local charities, including Wellington Hospital.⁸⁶ In December of that year, the children of the lyceum were taken on a field trip to Island Bay.⁸⁷ Despite the eventual success of the children's lyceum, sources suggest a falling out occurred between the Society and Ivo. On 31 March 1885, the society advertised a farewell to Ivo, who just two months before had signed a six-month contract.⁸⁸

Whilst travelling later that year, Evison encountered the Auckland Freethought Association. Unlike the Wellington Society, which had moved to be less confrontational, Freethinkers in Auckland were dedicated to a more hard line and antagonistic form of Freethought. Members of the association, George Warburton, John Thomas Clarke, Frederick William Neuzer, Archibald Campbell, Samuel Charles Streeter, William Henry Webbe, and George Sturtevant, along with Ivo as editor, launched *Rationalist: A Weekly Freethought Newspaper*.⁸⁹

Evison had no interest in carrying on either the *Freethought Review*'s name or its mission statement. Instead, his and the *Rationalist*'s other signatories' goals were to take the *Rationalist*'s message and fight directly to those they perceived as the enemies of Freethought and secularism, writing:

We shall, in short, pander to no sect of freethinkers, but offer to all who believe they have truth to tell, a fair platform on which to tell it. We propose to attack and expose the whole list of venerable shams, and shall thereon say what other journalists can only afford to think.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ 'Hospital Sunday', *Evening Post*, 2 August 1886, p.3.

⁸⁷ 'Local and General', *Manawatu Standard*, 9 December 1885, p.2; 'Sunday Lecture', *Star*, 6 January 1896, p.4; 'Lyceum for Children', *Wanganui Herald*, 11 December 1883, p.2.

⁸⁸ 'IVO', *Evening Post*, 31 March 1885, p.3.

⁸⁹ 'Rationalist Newspaper Company Article of Association', Auckland Closed Companies File, Archives New Zealand, ref.:BADZ5181/50 328, 1887.

⁹⁰ Ivo 'Our Objects', *Rationalist*, 21 June 1885, p.1.

The *Rationalist* seems a direct contrast to the attempts of those at the *Freethought Review* to build communities. With its weekly, rather than monthly, issues, Ivo and the *Rationalist* also provided more material than the *Freethought Review*, and would both dish out and attract more vitriol.

In the *Freethought Review*'s penultimate issue, its editor produced a cautionary review of the *Rationalist*'s first issue, noting its possibilities, but reeling at Ivo's personal attacks:

It contains a large quantity of reading matter, nearly the whole of which is original. The editor thinks there is work enough for it to do as a weekly Freethought Journal, and he lays down a platform which promises pretty extensive work on the part of his journal... most of the articles are readable, but we notice a lamentable tendency to vulgarity, and a decided want of tone in some of the items. We should like our younger brother to be successful in his career, but care must be taken as to the matter admitted, and the style adopted. Vulgarity and license are not Freethought by a long way, and their use tends to hurt the movement.⁹¹

The gulf between the papers in their approach to the enemies of Freethought is evident. Where the *Freethought Review* had opted for a genteel philosophical discussion, Ivo and the *Rationalist* took aim directly at opponents, discrediting and attacking people as well as ideas.

The *Rationalist* had a core readership across the whole of the country. Subscribers and shareholders were mostly men; only five per cent of subscribers were female.⁹² However reports reveal a more balanced gender ratio for lecture and association meeting attendance.⁹³ The distribution of shares and subscriptions nationwide closely mirrored the location of fledgling Freethought associations, demonstrating that the paper was likely shared around Freethought communities. However, these dedicated supporters were not enough to make the paper financially viable in the long term, although Evison would later claim he never used Freethought to pay his bills.⁹⁴

⁹¹ 'The Rationalist', *Freethought Review*, 1 July, 1885, p.7.

⁹² 'Rationalist Newspaper Company Limited Shareholders February 1887', Auckland Closed Companies File, Archives New Zealand ref.: BADZ5181/50 328, 1887.

⁹³ 'Freethought Ball', *Otago Daily*, 21 July 1883, p.3; 'Freethought Association', *Star*, 21 March 1896, p.4; 'a Freethought Temple', *Grey River Argus*, 3 May 1882, p.2; 'a Freethought Failure', *Auckland Star*, 22 November 1888, p.8; 'Short' *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 27 July 1885, p.2.

⁹⁴ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo – Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

In addition to financial troubles, the paper also faced legal battles. In Auckland, Freethinkers encountered staunch legal opposition to their publishing on Sundays as well as their Sabbath lectures.⁹⁵ Instances of Freethinkers losing cases, or rumours of the paper's imminent closure, were met with cheering and celebration in more mainstream newspapers.⁹⁶

After two years and fifty issues, Evison published the *Rationalist*'s final edition on Sunday 8 August 1886. At the top of the far left panel of the paper's front page, all future inquiries were directed to Mr. J. Mathews, instead of 'IVO'.⁹⁷ Like the *Echo* and *Freethought Review*, the *Rationalist* had stayed afloat as a labour of love, as a curiosity and as an experiment. Never had the venture, or any paper like it, been a financial success. Indeed, at the closing of the *Freethought Review*, the previous year, its editors had called for new voices, new blood, and particularly 'new pockets' to carry on their task.⁹⁸ Unlike the *Echo* and *Freethought Review*, the *Rationalist* would not be immediately followed by another Freethought journal, and the movement would begin to rapidly fade from public view.

Convictions and Contradictions

After the *Rationalist*'s closure, Joseph and Matilda retreated back to the lower North Island. Whilst engaged in sporadic lecturing, 46 year old Evison sought a job to support himself and his wife.⁹⁹ In 1887, he was hired by W. C. Nation as editor of the *Wairarapa Standard*. Now based in Greytown, Evison became a notable figure in a district where, two years earlier, he had initiated a Freethought association.¹⁰⁰ The paper was a far cry from the *Rationalist*. Its local focus may have lent itself to Evison's politics, but it did not offer a platform for his Freethought ideals. However, this does not seem to have fazed him. Evison had a flair for writing and engaged in every debate he could, greatly raising the profile of the paper. His writing skill and appeal to his audience made him a resounding success, with one letter to the editor extensively

⁹⁵ Ivo, 'Truth Without Fear', *Rationalist*, 14 February 1886, p.1.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ivo, 'Notice', *Rationalist*, 8 August 1886, p.1.

⁹⁸ 'The Review', *Freethought Review*, 1 September 1885, p.9.

⁹⁹ 'Inglewood', *Taranaki Herald*, 24 November 1886, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ The Freethought Association had been located in Masterton. Greytown housed several members, but more prominent in the town was the Spiritualist Investigation Society. In most places, spiritualists were incorporated into the wider Freethought association.

praising his moral character, his temperance, and the fine education he brought to bear on any discussion he entered.¹⁰¹ Whilst he edited under the name Joseph Evison, he contributed articles to the paper under the nom-de-plume 'Wellington Watchman'. His writing as Watchman remained a secret until 1891.

Evison also produced material outside of the *Wairarapa Standard*. Over several months leading up to the 1887 elections, Evison entered into a prominent open letter debate with Alexander Hogg.¹⁰² Just three months older than Evison, Hogg edited both the *Wairarapa Star* and the *Carterton Observer*, and is best remembered as Masterton's Member of Parliament from 1890-1911. Despite running under a liberal banner, alongside famous Freethinkers Robert Stout and John Ballance, Hogg openly criticised Evison for hiding his identity as Ivo and for being a freethinker.¹⁰³ In response came a rare acknowledgement from Evison of his Freethought past. He declared himself to be Ivo, and accused Hogg of trying stir up religious antagonism against himself and the paper.¹⁰⁴

I knew that unfortunately there existed in your neighbourhood one person who by virtue of utter unscrupulousness, and unique stock of foul epithets, and by his powers of scurrility generally, had almost terrorised people who differed from him into silence, I knew this person was so pitifully mean minded, so utterly unable to argue rationally, so abject a coward with all his hectoring... You, Mr Hogg – no one better knows to whom I allude.¹⁰⁵

In 1888, their debate left the pages of the newspapers, and entered the Supreme Court. Richard Butcher, a journalist for Hogg's *Carterton Observer*, sued Evison as writer and editor, and W. C. Nation as proprietor, of the *Wairarapa Standard* for libel.¹⁰⁶ Butcher accused Evison of writing damaging and untrue material about him, including lines such as:

Who, owing to circumstances beyond his control, cannot write English or sense, and is unable to recognise truth when he stumbles upon it by accident... This person's feeble malice would, like himself, be a matter of

¹⁰¹ 'Wellington Watchman', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 29 June 1887, p.2.

¹⁰² Due to neither the *Wairarapa Star* nor the *Wairarapa Standard* surviving well, only Evison's open responses in the *Wairarapa Daily Times* remain of this open debate, carried out June-August 1887.

¹⁰³ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo – Open Letter', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 1 July 1887, p.3; 'Freethought Ivo – Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo – Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ 'Supreme Court Wellington', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 August 1888, p.2.

no account did not his effusions appear in so respectable a journal as the Post.¹⁰⁷

In his defence, Evison countered that he ‘had no malicious intent whatever in writing the article, but had simply done it as a bantering.’¹⁰⁸ The case extended beyond the writers, as Hogg and Nation were forced to defend their employees. Nation took much of the heat away from Evison, taking the stand and declaring:

He had read the article which appeared in his paper, and inserted it with his full sanction. He believed every word of the article was true. He considered it did slightly impeach the veracity of plaintiff, but it had been merely written in a jocular way. He did not however, wish to withdraw any of the sentiments expressed in the article.¹⁰⁹

In the end, Chief Justice Prendergast found in favour of Butcher, but awarded damages of only £25, not the requested £300, perhaps indicating that he found the matter somewhat more trivial than the injured parties did.¹¹⁰

Evison left the *Wairarapa Standard* at the conclusion of the case. In 1889, he branched out further from his journalistic and Freethought roots with the publication of an account of a local murder. *Murder Will Out! Or, the Mystery of Kaiwarra*, documented the trial and conviction of Louis Chemis for the murder of Thomas Hawkins.¹¹¹ Published by Brown, Thomson & Co. in Wellington, it was released as a pamphlet to positive reviews.¹¹² The murder had occurred just outside Wellington earlier that year. Unusually for the period, the pamphlet was without advertising, yet ‘profusely illustrated.’ Evison’s new venture utilised his increasingly infamous name as well as the scandal of local murder. Chemis was sentenced to death, the first time such a sentence was issued based solely on circumstantial evidence. Evison thus felt the case would forever be a staple of criminal jurisprudence.¹¹³ During this time, Evison also joined the New Zealand Institute of Journalists.¹¹⁴

Coinciding with his book’s publication, Joseph took a new permanent position with the *Catholic Times* under Archbishop Redwood. The newspaper was operated

¹⁰⁷ ‘Supreme Court Wellington’, *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 August 1888, p.2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ J. Evison, *Murder Will Out! Or, the Mystery of Kaiwarra* (Wellington: Brown, Thomson & Co., 1889).

¹¹² ‘Review – Murder Will Out’, *Wanganui Herald*, 21 September 1889, p.2.

¹¹³ Evison, *Murder Will Out!*, p.4.

¹¹⁴ ‘Wellington Items’, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 28 March 1892, p.2.

out of Wellington, allowing Joseph and Matilda to be permanently settled in the growing capital. Catholics in late nineteenth century New Zealand faced an uphill battle. Peter Lineham's research suggests that at the time, the label of Freethinker met with acceptance, where Catholicism encountered only derision.¹¹⁵ To reinforce Catholic independence and identity, Archbishop Redwood sought to reinvigorate Catholics in New Zealand, and perhaps compete with the Dunedin-based *Tablet*, the colony's largest Catholic paper. As Ivo, Evison had lectured on the troubles in Ulster, and seemed familiar with Catholic material and doctrine. Here, he continued to write columns as Wellington Watchman.

Whilst the *Catholic Times* would be Evison's longest editorial tenure, some strongly objected to his appointment. In candid interviews in 1893, Evison was quoted as saying that the Archbishop, aware of Joseph's previous employ, stepped in to reassure unsettled Catholic congregants, stating clearly his support for Evison.¹¹⁶ Joseph claimed to have been asked only two things by Redwood before being hired; '[i]f he could and would conscientiously support the cause for Home Rule in Ireland and the Catholic educational claims', which sought exemption for Catholics from paying for secular state schools so that they could support their own institutions.¹¹⁷ Evison of course replied in the affirmative. Perhaps, his having to pay the tax yet having no children to benefit from it meant he could sympathise with their position. Reviews noted an instant improvement in the paper, and after reinvigorating the *Catholic Times*' readership, Evison moved horizontally to become the paper's manager, and Mr Loughnan, formerly of the *Lyttelton Times*, came on as co-editor.¹¹⁸

In 1891, the President and the Secretary of the Wellington Typographical Association, Thornton and Henrichs, sent a private letter to Archbishop Redwood.¹¹⁹ They accused Evison of sweating the printers; that is, retaining a portion of the money intended for paying the printers for himself. They also referred to Evison as Ivo, a Freethought lecturer and writer. Evison brought an action in libel against the pair for the printing accusation, and also made special note in the case files that he objected to

¹¹⁵ Peter J. Lineham 'Christian Reaction to Freethought and Rationalism in New Zealand', *Journal of Religious History*, vol.15, no.2, 1988, p.241.

¹¹⁶ 'Christchurch Election', *Press*, 13 November 1893, p.3; 'The Catholic Claims', *Press*, 23 November 1893, p.5; 'A Critical Moment', *Fair Play*, 18 November 1893, p.22; 'From the Waipawa Mail', *Hawke's Bay Herald*, 29 March 1893, p.2.

¹¹⁷ 'The Catholic Claims', *Press*, 23 November 1893, p.5.

¹¹⁸ 'Mr. J. Evison', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 May 1889, p.2; 'Catholic Times', *Evening Post*, 7 June 1889, Page 3; 'Chatty Gossip from the Empire City', *Observer*, 13 May 1893, p.4.

¹¹⁹ 'A Libel Action', *Marlborough Express*, 14 December 1891, p.2.

being identified as a Freethinker.¹²⁰ It was not the label that offended Evison, but Thornton and Henrichs' insinuation that his Freethought past made him unsuitable to edit the *Catholic Times*. He thus sought £600 in damages.

At trial, Evison asserted that whilst he had been a Freethinker, he had never been an atheist as the offending letter implied. In cross examination, counsel for the defence, Mr Jellicoe, read aloud several *Rationalist* articles and submitted even more, which contained detailed attacks on Catholic clergy in Auckland. Jellicoe pushed Evison to clarify his position:

He had abandoned Rationalism some time before he joined the Catholic Times, and ceased advocating Freethought because he thought he was doing more harm than good. It was possible that since he had been Editor of the Catholic Times he had attacked some of the tenets he had formerly held. He had never shown Archbishop Redwood any of the articles he had written in the Rationalist, but the Archbishop knew he had been a freethinker.¹²¹

The following day, Archbishop Redwood gave evidence for most of the morning, answering questions on Evison and his Freethought.¹²² Redwood confirmed Evison's claims, stating that whilst he knew Evison had been a Freethinker, he 'was given to understand that his views had undergone a change.'¹²³ Redwood went on to imply that were Evison still engaged in Freethought propaganda, he would have felt obliged to have him discharged.¹²⁴ Finally, the Archbishop stated that whilst Evison was responsible for the paper as a whole, separate staff provided the religious material; Evison himself did not write it.¹²⁵ The jury found in Evison's favour, with Justice Richmond awarding him £25 for each libel, totalling £50 plus expenses.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ 'A Libel Action', *Marlborough Express*, 14 December 1891, p.2.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² 'To-Day's Evidence', *Thames Star*, 15 December 1891, p.4.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ 'The Evison Libel Action', *Thames Star*, 18 December 1891, p.4; 'The Wellington Libel Action', *New Zealand Herald*, 4 March 1892, p.5. Later that year the details of the case were recorded in Joseph S. Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer: The sweating System and the Law of Libel ... Being a Full Report of an Action Tried in the Supreme Court, Wellington, on the 14th, 15th, and 16th Dec., 1891, Between J. S. Evison, Manager of the Catholic Times, and E. Thornton and J. W. Henrichs President and Secretary of the Wellington Branch New Zealand Typographical Association* (Wellington: Evening Post, 1892).

In 1892, 51 year old Evison, working at the *Catholic Times* and as a parliamentary journalist, commenced preparations for the following year's election by writing a series of satirical 'Political Portraits'. Evison again created a nom-de-plume; whilst Ivo had attacked the religiosity of the colony and Watchman had defended the Catholics, Phiz would ridicule its politicians. Published first in the Christchurch *Press*, then disseminated to other papers around the colony, Phiz provided often stinging reviews of Members of Parliament. Each week, Evison would spend time in the gallery, observing the politicians below. Coupled with rudimentary biographies, he would write sizeable columns on the most prominent members. Phiz's musings on Robert Stout topped 2500 words.¹²⁷ For newer or less well-known members, the *Press* would include three profiles at once to fill an entire column.

The tone was always playful, but the wit and sarcasm were ever present. When writing about John Ballance, former editor of the *Freethought Review*, Phiz wrote:

I may be disposed to admit that when his audience is favourable and he is trying to get something he particularly wants, and is handling a subject he likes, he becomes remarkably sleek and smooth in tone, caresses his subject with fond little oratorical pats and, metaphorically, exudes butter and honey. The python has a playful, but practical, little habit of lubricating its subject prior to deglutition. I intend to convey by this simile nothing offensive to – the python.¹²⁸

The weekly column became a hit for the paper, and around the country. As with his religious biographies in the *Rationalist*, Evison made an example of friend and foe alike.

Between 1892 and 1893, Redwood reorganised the *Catholic Times* into a limited liability company, at which point Evison resigned. He found work in Christchurch, taking up editorship of the *Truth* (unrelated to the more well-known *New Zealand Truth*). A new daily publication, the *Truth* was conservative in tone but remained free of definite denominational views on religious debate.¹²⁹ During his transition between the two papers, the *Liverpool Catholic Times* published an article on Evison, praising his initiative and his having raised the standards and profile of the Wellington *Catholic*

¹²⁷ Phiz, 'Political Portraits – Sir Robert Stout K.C.M.G.', *Mataura Ensign*, 7 September 1894, p.2.

¹²⁸ Phiz, 'Sketched from the Gallery', *Press*, 16 July 1892, p.5.

¹²⁹ 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

Times.¹³⁰ However, Evison's first daily paper constrained him more than his prior roles, and whilst the paper lasted sixteen years, within two Evison had moved on. The material Evison wrote differed little from what he had written at the *Catholic Times*; the biggest change the new employ heralded was the move from Wellington to Christchurch. Joseph's sister, Emily, still lived there and his half-brother, John William, resided on the West Coast. After years of living between Auckland and Wellington, and being dragged through very public legal cases, Christchurch seems to have been a refuge, where the Evisons could reap both the benefits of their association with the Corfes and also the popularity of Phiz, a much less controversial character than Ivo had ever been.

Truth opened to mixed reviews. One writer described it as being radical in nature:

But unlike the official liberal papers in the colony, it refuses to play the sycophant and live for no higher purpose than that of beslobbering Ministers and lauding their policy up to the skies six days out of the seven.¹³¹

They added further "“Truth” has already shown that it has opinions of its own and an independence that will not take kindly to ministerial challenges.’ Evison was considered ‘a trenchant and fearless writer.’¹³² Others blamed the unscrupulous former Freethought lecturer for destroying two papers.¹³³

In 1893, Evison, aged 52, attempted to convert family connections and the popularity of Phiz into electoral success. He stood on a conservative platform for one of the three seats in Christchurch in the first general election to see women voting.¹³⁴ Only two years earlier, Evison's Freethought past had been the subject of derision and near persecution. In the lead up to the election however, the question on the lips of many was his Catholic connections.¹³⁵ Rather than his writing, his lecturing served

¹³⁰ ‘Christchurch Election’, *Press*, 13 November 1893, p.3.

¹³¹ ‘Truth’, *Tuapeka Times*, 3 June 1893, p.2.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ ‘Beer, Bigamy, and Boycott’, *Fair Play*, 24 February 1894, p.9; ‘Straight Talk’, *Fair Play*, 2 December 1893, p.1.

¹³⁴ In 1890, the Liberals were ‘swept into office’, and would remain there for over twenty years, beginning the ‘New Zealand Experiment’; see Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, 1st ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959), pp.167-175.

¹³⁵ ‘Christchurch Election’, *Press*, 13 November 1893, p.3; ‘The Catholic Claims’, *Press*, 23 November 1893, p.5; ‘A Critical Moment’, *Fair Play*, 18 November 1893, p.22; ‘From the Waipawa Mail’, *Hawke's Bay Herald*, 29 March 1893, p.2.

him best here. Despite many people not agreeing with his conservative platform, all complimented his skilled oratory.¹³⁶ In the face of questions about his religious convictions, Evison gave positive but non-committal answers, to rounds of applause.¹³⁷

Despite constant campaigning, and endorsements from the Archbishop, clergy throughout the colony, and numerous newspaper columns, Evison lost the 1893 election.¹³⁸ Freethought connections did not hurt his cause, as two liberal Freethinkers, William Pember Reeves and William Collins, won seats. Some had touted Evison to be either the third man in, behind Reeves and Collins, or to be just out of running as the fourth out of eleven candidates.¹³⁹ The votes that actually came in placed Evison tenth. Joseph and his fellow conservatives tallied fewer than 2,000 votes each, Evison himself gaining just 1,765, whilst Reeves and Collins received 5,431 and 3,873 respectively.¹⁴⁰ Some journalists attributed an altercation with Reeves the day before as securing Evison a couple of hundred sympathy votes, which they joked may have been his only votes.¹⁴¹ Keith Sinclair credits newly enfranchised women with the conservative defeat.¹⁴²

To alleviate the monotony of producing a daily mainstream paper in a city where everyone now knew that he had lost the election, Evison brought back Phiz. 'Political Portraits' had stopped throughout 1893, most likely due to the change in job, and in the interests of fairness and transparency as he ran for election. In 1894, the *Press* again began running Phiz's 'Political Portraits', the first in his sights being those who had beaten him at the elections in Christchurch. During early 1894, Evison left the *Truth*, planning to head overseas, but still wrote for the *Press*. In February, the *Lyttelton Times* Company sued Evison for placing improper election advertisements in the *Star*. In Court, a Mr Capper, sub-editor of the *Truth*, admitted to placing the advertisements by telephone in both the *Star* and the *Times*, which ran counter to election advertising laws.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ 'Mr Evison at the Tuam Street Hall', *Press*, 1 November 1893, p.3; 'Mr Evison's Speech', *Press*, 1 November 1893, p.3.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ 'Christchurch Election', *Press*, 13 November 1893, p.3.

¹³⁹ 'Christchurch Candidates', *Press*, 22 November 1893, p.3.

¹⁴⁰ Keith Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp.190-192.

¹⁴¹ 'Truth on the Morning', *Oamaru Mail*, 1 December 1893, p.2.

¹⁴² Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves*, 190-192;

¹⁴³ 'New Zealand Telegram', *Grey River Argus*, 3 February 1894, p.3.

Later that same month, the *Catholic Times* came to an end. Some critics felt that the new manager and editor could not maintain the literary quality Evison had achieved and the paper had suffered a steady decline.¹⁴⁴ The result was the loss of a strong Catholic paper, but also a financial hit to the paper's proprietor, and staunch defender of Evison, Archbishop Redwood. Others, like the editor of *Fair Play*, argued that whilst Evison had lifted the paper to its highest heights, his history as an avid Freethinker, his clear inclination toward self-promotion, and his preference for attacking his enemies rather than opponents of Catholicism, were the paper's downfall.¹⁴⁵

Just days before leaving New Zealand, on Monday 9 April 1894, Evison reportedly assaulted a Member of the Legislative Council, John Rigg.¹⁴⁶ Before his appointment to the Council, Rigg had been President of the Wellington Typographical Association, succeeding Thornton, and had been involved in Evison's libel suit against the Association.¹⁴⁷ The fight broke out in a Wellington hotel, but little physical harm was done.¹⁴⁸ Two days later, Evison left the country, sailing for Sydney and a new job.¹⁴⁹ Court proceedings relating to the incident were thus put off until the following month. *Fair Play* reported that 'Ivo Evison' eventually wished to return to Wellington to start his own satirical paper, joking however that 'he'll have to watch the libel law pretty carefully.'¹⁵⁰ When the case resumed, a Mr Skerret appeared in Court on behalf of Evison, explaining that the matter had been settled between the Hon. Mr. Rigg, and Mr. Evison out of court.¹⁵¹ Evison would stay in Australia for several years, returning to Wellington in 1899.

In 1895, Evison and Matilda, now 54 and 55, were living in Australia. Evison took a job at the *Bulletin* in Sydney, a large and long standing paper. The staff of the paper filled its pages with news and opinion, but also invested heavily in the publishing of amateur fiction.¹⁵² Evison's writing here seems closer to *Murder Will Out* than the

¹⁴⁴ 'Beer, Bigamy, and Boycott', *Fair Play*, 24 February 1894, p.9.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ 'Assault Case', *Colonist*, 14 April 1894, p.4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.;

¹⁴⁹ 'You Don't Say So!', *Fair Play*, 1 May 1894, p.10.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.; 'The Hon. Mr Rigg and Mr Evison', *Wairarapa daily Times*, 15 May 1894, p.2.

¹⁵¹ 'Mr Joseph Evison', *Press*, 24 February 1903, p.5.

¹⁵² Janet Wilson, 'The 'New Chum': Writings of the English Diaspora in New Zealand, 1860-1914', in Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home' the English in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), pp.168-169.

Catholic Times. During his time in Sydney, Joseph allegedly engaged in an extra-marital affair with Ellen Agnes Kennedy, then aged 25. In 1898, Ellen gave birth to a boy, Cyril Francis Evison.¹⁵³ Perhaps indicatively, Joseph and Matilda left Australia the following year.

In 1899, over a decade after the *Rationalist*'s demise, Evison returned to New Zealand, and from Wellington began writing and editing a new newspaper, the *Critic*. Whilst not a Freethought paper, secular views showed through in its writing. However, Evison envisioned it as a vehicle to publish serialised stories and reader-generated content, as at that time the only serious publisher of amateur material in New Zealand was the Sydney *Bulletin*.¹⁵⁴ The pages of the *Critic* were filled mostly with serialised fiction. In early issues, the majority was written by Evison, and published under his full name. These tended to be classic stories re-told in modern times, such as Cinderella, retold as "'Sin" A Sydney Type'.¹⁵⁵ As a journalist who had rewritten articles from all over Europe and America, Evison seems to have had little difficulty in retelling famous stories with his own slant. Thus, he rapidly generated considerable content.

Sent in by readers, amateur writing was judged by Evison on a multitude of factors. He published lists of all the work sent in, stating if it was accepted or declined, and ways it might be improved.¹⁵⁶ Several declined works were considered appropriate for a Catholic newspaper, but had no place in the *Critic*'s strictly secular environment.¹⁵⁷

Due to its reliance on outsider material, the paper was inconsistently published, and after only nineteen issues disappeared completely. An editorial in *Free Lance* in 1903 put the end of the paper down to it being 'suspected of being a paper "with a purpose," and just as readers shun a story of that ilk, so they refused to buy "the Critic."' ¹⁵⁸ Contributing to its closure was Evison's being subject to another court case. One of his employees claimed to have suffered wrongful dismissal.¹⁵⁹ In the end,

¹⁵³ Australia Birth Index, 1898, Reg.17123, Waverley, New South Wales, accessed through: www.bdm.nsw.gov.au.

¹⁵⁴ 'Running a Newspaper', *Evening Post*, 20 December 1899, p.2; Wilson, 'The 'New Chum' in Fraser and McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home'*, pp.168-169.

¹⁵⁵ Joseph S. Evison, "'Sin" A Sydney Type', in *Critic*, 29 June 1899, p.15.

¹⁵⁶ J. Evison, 'Notes to Correspondents', *Critic*, 29 June 1899, p.10.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ 'All Sorts of People', *Free Lance*, 10 January 1903, p.3.

¹⁵⁹ 'Running a Newspaper', *Evening Press*, 19 December 1899, p.6.

it was revealed that the employee had quit in a rage, and then accused Evison of firing him.¹⁶⁰ Despite the positive result, the *Critic* soon came to a close.

After the *Critic*'s closure, Evison returned to Australia, leaving New Zealand for the final time. The Evisons, nearing retirement, went to live in Bondi in Sydney, Joseph providing occasional articles to the *Bulletin*.¹⁶¹ The following year, Joseph developed cancer. On 23 February 1903, aged 62, Joseph Evison succumbed to his illness and died.¹⁶² A report in the Christchurch *Press* described his having 'fought for the means to live, against acutest suffering, almost to the closing hours of his life.'¹⁶³ In a letter sent less than a month prior to his death, Joseph wrote that his illness over the past few years had left him and Matilda 'literally destitute.'¹⁶⁴ A subscription fund was established to provide for Matilda, to which friends and former colleagues in New Zealand and Australia contributed.¹⁶⁵ With the funds provided, Matilda sailed to England aboard the White Star Liner *Medic*, on 22 March 1903.¹⁶⁶ An article in *Free Lance* reported her goal of finding 'a publisher for three collections of those short stories of which her late husband was such a racy writer.'¹⁶⁷ Each collection gathered together stories concerning a period of his life, one military, one naval, and one of civilian stories. Each was named for the uniform of the occupation, *Scarlet and Gold*, *Navy Blue*, and *In Mufti*.¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, it seems these were never published. Matilda lived the rest of her life in England, surviving her husband by more than a decade.

Conclusion

Laid out in chronological order, the life of Joseph Evison is intriguing in its variety and its seeming contradictions. In the space of just a few decades, a boy who grew up on his father's stories of the Napoleonic Wars was himself a privateer against

¹⁶⁰ 'Running a Newspaper', *Evening Press*, 19 December 1899, p.6; 'Running a Newspaper', *Evening Post*, 20 December 1899, p.2.

¹⁶¹ 'All Sorts of People', *Free Lance*, 2 March 1901, p.3.

¹⁶² 'Mr Joseph Evison', *Press*, 24 February 1903, p.5.

¹⁶³ 'The Late Mr Evison', *Press*, 26 February 1903, p.5.

¹⁶⁴ 'Pars About People', *Observer*, 28 February 1903, p.4.

¹⁶⁵ 'Appeal for Mr Evison', *Otago Daily Times* 26 February 1903, p.7; 'The Late Mr Evison', *Press*, 26 February 1903, p.5; 'Pars About People', *Observer*, 28 February 1903, p.4.

¹⁶⁶ 'Entre Nous', *Free Lance*, 6 June 1903, p.14.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

pirates in the South China Sea, a cavalryman alongside a British and Indian force sent to punish an African despot in the Abyssinian Highlands, an office manager in London for a shipbuilding firm, and eventually became a lecturer, writer and editor in New Zealand. Once in New Zealand, Evison seems to have jumped from paper to paper, from cause to cause. In spite of all of his work, and the profile he built up, Evison died destitute in Australia. With few prospects, his 64 year old widow, Matilda, was forced to return to England, a place she had not seen in over twenty years.

In his book *New Zealand's Burning*, Rollo Arnold, quoting Elizabeth Bowen, identifies the need for 'Effective Nows' to make aspects of the past real today.¹⁶⁹ He argues that writing history with an abundance of specific details allows an 'imaginative entry into the past', thus thrusting 'into the spotlight a range of characters whose lives were usually anonymous and unrecorded.'¹⁷⁰ The benefit of this is, he identifies, that:

In giving a "feel" of the past through stories of particular persons in specific circumstances one avoids disrupting the flow with extensive probings into meaning and significance.¹⁷¹

This is precisely the effect created here. A narrative of Evison's life is fascinating on its own. In this thesis, it also provides a firm foundation from which his motivations can be properly examined. Only by knowing where, when, and what he did, can this thesis make sense of why he did it.

¹⁶⁹ Rollo Arnold, *New Zealand's Burning - the Settlers' World in the Mid 1880s* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994), p.113.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Chapter Two: Belief on Trial

Sir, you stand between the Scylla of Christian contempt and the Charybdis of Freethinkers' scorn. You run with the hare; you hunt with the hounds. You sell your noble "principles," your "honesty" and "independence" for a five shilling advertisement.¹

– Joseph Evison

Against the backdrop of the narrative given in chapter one, chapter two examines the convictions behind Evison's contradictory occupations and arguments. Whilst Evison has been labelled a Freethinker, a Catholic and a Conservative by various historians, it is a disservice to a man whose professional writings appear to diverge dramatically, yet share common roots in his adherence to secularism and libertarianism. This chapter argues that, contrary to others' analyses, his eclectic career in editing was a response to state and religious antagonism towards Freethinkers, Catholics, and Conservatives, which led Evison to forgo monetary and political gain, and instead take work in defence of these minorities. In the absence of any personal papers, it engages in a close reading of his professional written work over a sixteen year career (1883-1899) as well as speeches in court and on campaign to reveal these core beliefs.

Evison appears in various histories, articles on Freethought, Catholic histories, and a political biography of William Pember Reeves but often as a mere footnote, included as a point of contrast with more famous personalities. Evison was first mentioned in Keith Sinclair's *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian*, where Sinclair refers to him simply as 'Reeves' enemy, "Phiz"'.² Richard P. Davis gives Evison the title of 'bitter opponent of the liberal leaders.'³ Peter Lineham, writer of the only articles on nineteenth-century New Zealand Freethought, dismisses Evison, writing:

Among such men there was a strong emphasis on self-education and independent thinking, but they also aspired to self-respect and political

¹ 'Freethought Ivo', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

² Keith Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p.154.

³ Richard P. Davis, *Irish Issues in New Zealand Politics 1868-1922* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1974), p.173.

significance. Consequently the rather crude polemics employed by Ivo (Joseph Evison) upset the leaders of Freethought.⁴

Lineham concludes that Evison 'acted out of step with the rest of the movement.'⁵ Each of these authors, in their brief assessments of Evison, assume that his stated position during the period they are concerned with is a fair reflection of his wider religious and political beliefs. This chapter seeks to overturn this view of Evison, attempting to discover his personal convictions through the morass of hyperbole and inflammatory rhetoric he often employed.

Although acknowledging the relationship between Evison's secularism and libertarianism, this chapter will explore them separately for clarity's sake. Secularism is here defined in terms mooted by the eminent Freethought historian, Edward Royle. It sought the fair and equal treatment of all religious denominations through 'a morality guaranteed by human nature, utility and intelligence.'⁶ Unlike other positions within Freethought:

Secularism did not attack Christianity as such. Its sphere of controversy was 'the criticism of Sacred Books and existing Religions only in those respects in which they seem to contradict ascertained Moral Truths, and are an impediment to Rational progress.'⁷

It is thus considered the 'practical side of scepticism', 'the province of the real, the known' and is perhaps best understood as seeking increased separation of Church and State.⁸

Libertarianism is a desire for small government, seeing many pervasive political, social, and religious frameworks as oppressive and corrupt. Its active support of individual rights is evidenced by Evison's resistance to all imposed external authority. For the libertarian, the individual is paramount. Royle notes that it was easy for enthusiasm for liberalism to spill over into libertarianism, thus skipping vital steps of political realism in the march towards similar end goals.⁹ Whilst both secularism and libertarianism are apparent throughout the articles and speeches produced by Evison

⁴ Peter J. Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.19, no.1, 1985, pp.68.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidel: the Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), pp.150-152

⁷ Ibid., p.150.

⁸ Ibid., p.150; Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p.x.

⁹ Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans*, pp.223-225.

and his aliases, they are perhaps most clearly delineated in a Supreme Court case of 1891, which provides the foundation for this chapter.

In analysing Evison's writing, I have been assisted by the use of several frameworks. Janet Wilson's argument that alienation dominates English writing in New Zealand aides in deconstructing Evison's writing.¹⁰ In line with John Stenhouse's investigation into contextualising authors, Evison's biographical information is utilised throughout to properly assess his writing.¹¹ Finally, Edward Royle provides a basis for understanding religious and 'political otherness' in the nineteenth century.¹² These enable a fuller investigation of the various material sources left by Evison.

Evison on Trial

In June of 1891, the president and the secretary of the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Typographical Association, Messrs Thornton and Henrichs, wrote to Francis Redwood, the Archbishop of Wellington. Their letter suggested, amongst other things, that Joseph Evison was not fit to manage the *Catholic Times* because of his past associations with Freethought through his lecturing and writing, and because he had engaged in sweating the printers.¹³ Having detailed how Evison had cheated the printers out of fair wages and concealed the fact from the Archbishop, the writers concluded their letter:

We trust your Grace will favourably consider our request and honour us with a personal reply, as hitherto our communications have been referred to the Manager of the Catholic Times (an individual who at different times has conducted a Freethought journal, lectured upon a Freethought

¹⁰ Janet Wilson, 'The "New Chum": Writings of the English Diaspora in New Zealand, 1860-1914' in Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home' the English in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), pp.168-169.

¹¹ John Stenhouse, "'A Disappearing Race Before We Came Here': Doctor Alfred Kingcome Newman, the Dying Maori, and Victorian Scientific Racism', *The New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.30, no.2, October 1996, pp.124-140.

¹² Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans*.

¹³ Joseph S. Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer: The sweating System and the Law of Libel ... Being a Full Report of an Action Tried in the Supreme Court, Wellington, on the 14th, 15th, and 16th Dec., 1891, Between J. S. Evison, Manager of the Catholic Times, and E. Thornton and J. W. Henrichs President and Secretary of the Wellington Branch New Zealand Typographical Association* (Wellington: Evening Post, 1892), p.2.

platform, and ultimately accepted the management of a religious paper) a degradation which we humbly submit we have done nothing to deserve.¹⁴

Evison and Redwood took offence at the accusations, and, that December, Evison commenced an action in libel in the Supreme Court.¹⁵

Over 14-16 December 1891, Justice Richmond presided over Evison's libel case, heard before a special jury.¹⁶ The trial became an instant scandal, attended by 'a large number of influential citizens, and members of the legal profession, as well as many Unionists.'¹⁷ Stoking the flames was counsel for the defence, Mr Jellicoe, who went against very pointed advice from the judge to argue that Evison had misinterpreted the defendants' refusal to speak to him and that they had in fact merely wanted to engage with somebody in a more senior role. Instead, Jellicoe accepted that offence had been intended and sought to defend the libel by establishing the truthfulness of the allegation. He thus attacked Evison on the stand, attempting to prove to the jury that, on the balance of probabilities, Evison's former position as a Freethinker meant he was an undefined 'religious adventurer, selling his beliefs to the highest bidder', and thus unfit to edit a religious paper.¹⁸ He also sought to show that Evison had indeed been sweating the printers. The trial lasted three days, and the jury found in Evison's favour on both counts. The revelations the case provided regarding his religious beliefs, professional life and non-engagement with the Wellington Typographical Association evidence Evison's secularist and libertarian beliefs.¹⁹

That matters even got this far is peculiar. The Association could have easily worked through the printers of the paper to ensure they insisted on being paid a suitable rate. Instead, they went through the paper itself to try and force its management to pay a reasonable rate to an ambivalent printer. It seems as though Thornton and Henrichs were overconfident in their attempt to bring the *Catholic Times* into line with other Wellington newspapers, most of which paid printers a set £3 weekly wage.

During the first day of the trial, Evison's lawyer, Mr Gully, opened his case by asking his client to take the stand. The discussion focused primarily on the first libel, sweating the printers. This, according to Evison's accusers, meant that:

¹⁴ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.2.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.2.

¹⁶ A special jury was one made up of men with 'sufficient' education and property to try the case.

¹⁷ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.1.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.5, 23, 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.32.

A certain sum of money is paid weekly to the manager or overseer, who is permitted to appropriate to his own use and benefit such amount as represents the difference between the sum received and that paid in wages to his subordinates.²⁰

Mr Gully disputed that Evison paid the printers less than what he was provided with to reimburse them, arguing that he had inherited the present system from the previous editor and manager, Mr Meale.²¹ He argued that the accusation was intended by the Typographical Association to force Evison and the *Catholic Times* into recognising the Association, something Evison refused to do.²² Gully then considered the outing of Evison's Freethought past. Evison took offence, not only at the Association revealing his past to his employer, but to their bringing up a past that he felt he was no longer connected with. He told the Court that he had never been an atheist, and that as editor of the *Catholic Times*, the Archbishop asked only that he support Home Rule for Ireland and state support for Catholic education, which he had promoted as far back as 1885.²³

Evison, his counsel and Justice Richmond presumed that the defence would argue that their letter merely objected to being directed to the paper's manager (Evison), rather than its proprietor (Redwood), thus removing Evison's Freethought past from contention.²⁴ However, when Jellicoe began his cross examination of Evison on the first day, it became apparent that he sought to prove that Evison had been a freethinker, more particularly an atheist, expounding views contrary to his current position, and thus demonstrating an unsuitability for the job. If successful, this would make his clients' claims true, thus clearing them of libel.

Despite Justice Richmond's attempts to dissuade Jellicoe from this line of argument, he would not be deterred. Jellicoe cross-examined Evison relentlessly. To questions of religious belief, Evison refined and qualified his earlier answers, stating that whilst he had never been an atheist, he had always been a secularist.²⁵ Evison held up well under questioning, his experience in public debates, ironically for Freethought,

²⁰ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.2.

²¹ Ibid., p.3.

²² Ibid., pp.9-10.

²³ Ibid., pp.4-5.

²⁴ Ibid., p.5.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.3-5.

telling as he sidestepped a question of whether he had struck ‘at the very root of Christianity?’ by replying:

What is the very root of Christianity? I have no desire to fence the question, it is necessary that all should know what you are talking about, I am not going to answer before I know what you mean.²⁶

Jellicoe proceeded to question his religious integrity, arguing that the special jury should see Evison as a ‘Religious Adventurer’. To this end, he produced a multitude of articles from the *Rationalist*, signed off by Ivo.²⁷ Confronted with these, Evison lost some of his previous decorum, giving ground to Jellicoe by stating that, on occasion, Ivo’s name had been attached to articles written by a small collective of authors.²⁸ However, whilst he denied writing the words as they were written, he did not address his responsibility as editor for all work published in the paper.

On the second day of the trial, Archbishop Redwood took the stand, and faced questions from both counsel concerning Evison’s religious beliefs, and his appropriateness for the position of Editor. Redwood defended Evison staunchly, arguing with Jellicoe that he had always known of Evison’s past, but that it was a non-issue as far as he was concerned. Evison did his job very well, had never before faced detractors, and had had a change of heart, although Redwood admitted that he was unsure as to exactly how.²⁹ Jellicoe tried to push the Archbishop into reading whole *Rationalist* articles criticising fundamental Christian beliefs. However, after many objections, Redwood was allowed to refuse to look at the material.³⁰

Regarding the claim of sweating the printers, Mr Jellicoe pushed on every detail of the pay and management of the paper; however, Evison evaded him at every turn. Concerning the pay deposited with the printer, Evison had little knowledge of the specifics, leaving it instead to the printer to manage its eventual distribution. He refused to micromanage as the system produced positive results, and he had never heard any complaints.³¹ Jellicoe eventually changed tack and argued that Evison had kept the Association from being in proper contact with the Archbishop, as proprietor of the *Catholic Times*, who the defence had evidence of being in support of joining the

²⁶ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.4.

²⁷ Ibid.; Ivo, ‘An Open Letter to Bishop Luck part 1’, *Rationalist*, 1 November 1885, p.4; Ivo, ‘An Open Letter to Bishop Luck part 2’, *Rationalist*, 8 November 1885, p.3.

²⁸ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, pp.5-6.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.12-14.

³⁰ Ibid., p.15.

³¹ Ibid., pp.10-11.

Association. Evison responded that he held himself to be the authority the Association should confer with, and that he had then consulted with the Archbishop.³² Evison objected to the Association's control over its members, and presumed influence over others. Mr Jellicoe's final line of questioning implied that Evison's treatment of the printers went particularly against Catholic teaching, and the wishes of Cardinal Moran. The Archbishop took great offence to this insinuation.

Evison's view of the Association appears to have been the source of the discontent that led to the initial letter being written. He had earlier joined the Association for 'a day or two', during his first few weeks at the *Catholic Times*, but immediately abandoned it after seeing how it dominated various papers around Wellington and nationwide.³³ Evison refused to be controlled by the Association, and so took every measure to keep the *Catholic Times* free of it, and the Archbishop agreed with his approach. Evison argued, and the original letters from the Association's president and secretary seemed to confirm, that by getting Evison replaced, the Association hoped to gain greater control over the workers at the *Catholic Times*.³⁴

Eventually, counsel concluded their arguments, and the three day trial ended with the jury taking just 35 minutes to decide in Evison's favour on both claims, awarding him £50.³⁵ This was in stark contrast to the Butcher libel in 1899, where the jury retired for a similar time yet awarded the plaintiff only £5, deeming the matter trivial.³⁶ Evidently, the accusations that he had sweated the printers and that his Freethought background made him unfit to edit the *Catholic Times* were considered highly detrimental to Evison's reputation by the special jury. Whilst Evison's religious beliefs and affiliations were not the entirety of the case, they accounted for a significant portion of the three day trial. The trial prompted substantial public interest, partially due to the scandal of an Archbishop being connected with an alleged atheist, demonstrating the continuing tension between Freethought and Christianity.

Despite the contemporary interest and Evison's later appearances in several historians' writings, his religious and political identities have never really been pinned down. During the case, Jellicoe argued that Evison was an atheist. He brought out old articles from the *Rationalist*, and insisted that Evison read them aloud to the court. The

³² Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.11.

³³ Ibid., p.9.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.9-11,25.

³⁵ Ibid., p.32.

³⁶ 'Butchers Sued for Libel', *New Zealand Herald*, 23 January 1889, p.5.

articles he chose are indeed compelling in isolation. Building from Evison's supposed atheism, Mr Jellicoe argued that Evison sold out his philosophical beliefs, working at the *Catholic Times* for profit, rather than conviction. However, having extensive experience as a newspaper editor, and a degree of notoriety, Evison's skills were in high demand and he could easily have found work more in keeping with his supposed views. Despite this, and its paying significantly less than other papers, he chose the *Catholic Times*. Indeed, Evison admitted to earning only £5 a week as the editor, then £7 as the editor and manager, and finally £5 as co-editor and manager.³⁷ Furthermore, a year after leaving the paper, he reported that he did not own property.³⁸ Despite working his whole life, Evison would die destitute. If he had been out to sell his convictions for a profit, he made a startlingly poor job of it.

Recent historians have similarly condensed Evison's views. Keith Sinclair, in *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian*, introduces Evison as a 'frequently vituperative journalist', before designating him simply 'Reeves' enemy, "Phiz"'.³⁹ Sinclair briefly implies that Evison was a Catholic, writing that 'the Catholic bishop asked all Catholics to vote for the three candidates who supported the demand for state aid for Catholic schools – Hoban and two of the conservatives, George and Evison.'⁴⁰ Yet in the following sentence, Sinclair emphasises Evison's Freethought identity, adding 'The last, though he once edited the Catholic Times, also wrote rationalist pamphlets under the pseudonym "Ivo"'.⁴¹ By not discussing Evison in any depth, the implication is akin to Jellicoe's, that he was a 'religious adventurer.'

A decade later, Richard P. Davis, in his 1974 work *Irish Issues in New Zealand Politics 1868-1922*, views Evison principally as an adversary of Stout and Ballance. Davis firmly places Evison in the Catholic camp, considering his Freethought years a minor dalliance. Davis also devotes much attention to another Catholic newspaper, the *Tablet*, sparing just a few lines for the *Catholic Times*, which:

[u]nder the general control of Redwood, was dominated at the time by J. S. ('Ivo') Evison, formerly editor of a free-thought periodical ... a bitter opponent of the liberal leaders.⁴²

³⁷ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.3.

³⁸ 'Mr Evison at the Tuam Street Hall', *Press*, 1 November 1893, p.3.

³⁹ Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves*, p.154.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.192.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.192.

⁴² Davis, p.173.

Despite his being the *Catholic Times*' longest running editor, and receiving many positive reviews, Davis suggests that Evison's 'vicious anti-government polemics cannot have raised either the tone or the circulation of the paper.'⁴³ Davis then reverses Sinclair's designation of 'Enemy', by stating:

In Christchurch a Catholic representation committee nominated J. S. Evison and two others as candidates for the city seat against their *bête noir* (their black beast), W. P. Reeves. Though the Press anticipated that Evison would poll well, he was beaten into tenth place in a field of eleven.⁴⁴

By identifying Evison only within a Catholic context and noting his selection by a Catholic representation committee, Davis strongly implies a Catholic grounding. Michael O'Meehan's 2003, *Steadfast in Hope: The Story of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington 1850-2000*, provides a blunter assessment, stating:

The *Catholic Times* never found a satisfactory editor. The first, Cyril Weale, was dismissed for drunkenness, looseness in accounting for money, and personal debts which led to his imprisonment. The second, Joseph Evison, was a free-thinker turned Catholic.⁴⁵

However, O'Meehan does not dwell on Evison and, after a sentence explaining the 1891 Supreme Court case, never mentions Evison again.

In 1985, Evison appeared in Peter Lineham's 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand'; even today, it is the only work to focus exclusively on Freethought in New Zealand during that period. Concentrating on the great leaders, Robert Stout and John Ballance, with notable mentions of William Collins, and William Pember Reeves, Lineham relegates Evison to acting as a counterweight.

Among such men there was a strong emphasis on self-education and independent thinking, but they also aspired to self-respect and political significance. Consequently the rather crude polemics employed by Ivo (Joseph Evison) upset the leaders of Freethought.⁴⁶

Lineham's final mention of Evison is also perhaps misleading:

Their campaigns reacted to the content of Christianity, in particular to evangelical Protestantism, for most freethinkers had been nurtured in this

⁴³ Davis, p.180.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.180.

⁴⁵ Michael O'Meehan, *Steadfast in Hope: The Story of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington 1850-2000* (Wellington: Dunmore Press, 2003), p.130.

⁴⁶ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', pp.68-69.

tradition. (The exception, Ivo, who had a Catholic background, always acted out of step with the rest of the movement).⁴⁷

Lineham attributes Evison's writing for the *Catholic Times* (which he did after writing for the *Rationalist*) as evidence of this Catholic background. However, Evison wrote in the *Rationalist* of his being Anglican before entering Freethought. The overriding image is of Evison's being an interloper; a Catholic who became a Freethinker but remained distinct from his fellows, and then left again to run as a Catholic politician. However, Lineham does add some nuances in discussing Evison's politics, writing that:

Not all freethinkers belonged to the 'left-liberal' camp. Joseph Evison, a colourful newspaper columnist under the pen-names 'Ivo' and 'Phiz', was a freethinker fiercely opposed to middle-class liberalism, and used vitriolic language in his magazine to strike 'blows at Bigotry, Class Tyranny and Injustice', but he stood as a Conservative against Reeves and W. W. Collins in the Christchurch election of 1893.⁴⁸

The depictions of Evison presented above are thus generally unsatisfactory.

These histories all designate Evison as primarily either a Catholic or a Freethinker, greatly devaluing Evison's contributions to the other, or indeed any other movement. Evison is understandably beyond the scope of these works as they are each centred on a specific sphere he moved through. However, an understanding of what drove Evison, and an examination of his particular brands of secularism and libertarianism, enriches these histories by shedding light on the complexities surrounding individuals and their connections to these movements.

Evison the Secularist

Despite numerous broad labels applied to Evison, a reinterpretation of his writing reveals the secularist ideals at the core of all of his work. In trying to avoid the label atheist at trial, Evison cautiously suggested that he had been a secularist. He hastened to add that he had experienced a change of heart, refusing to elaborate further. However, evidence for his secularism can be seen in his writing before, during and

⁴⁷ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', p.77.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.69.

after the trial in 1891. Evison's secularism is demonstrated in his campaigning for rights for Freethinkers against culturally entrenched Protestantism, in his campaigning to reinvest Catholics with rights they felt that they had lost at the hands of a Protestant majority, in his determination to expose immorality 'justified' by religion but to praise religious motivation towards humanistic ends, and in his dedication to equality of all religions and ideologies before the law. Such secularist beliefs meant Evison worked always for the religious underdog.

Secularism existed for Evison under the umbrella of Freethought, yet despite its being a subsidiary of the broader term, the groups sporting these titles clashed.⁴⁹ Secularism could be practised in an open ended manner, embracing those of no belief and those of strong beliefs, as long as they allowed each other to exist peacefully. This inclusion of religious groups chafed some in the Freethought community. In 1884, possibly at Evison's instigation, the Wellington Freethought Association became the Wellington Secular Society, to better identify its position on the continuum of Freethought.⁵⁰ This change was ridiculed in Freethought publications. The *Freethought Review*'s editor, for example, criticised the society for faltering in the Freethought cause.⁵¹ Secularism was thus vilified as a diluted form of Freethought, a halfway point for those moving towards religious disbelief.

Evison showed a trust in science above all else, demonstrated by his first published article in New Zealand, a ghost story in the *Freethought Review*.⁵² Whilst working as a midshipman on a boat in Hong Kong harbour, he alleged to have, on several occasions, encountered the ghost of a shipmate recently lost over board. For several paragraphs, he built the tension of the story. In the final paragraph, he revealed that, four years later, he met the ghost walking down a street in Calcutta. The sailor had faked his death to escape naval and family life, preferring to start life anew in India. Evison's final line proclaimed that 'Other ghost stories have just as simple an explanation'.⁵³ The article was intended to be humorous, but demonstrated a disbelief in the supernatural and an acceptance of science as a definitive explanation.

⁴⁹ In 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', Lineham concludes that Freethought failed at the end of the century partly because each of the groups within it defined themselves negatively. From there, each of the sub-groups inadvertently tore the movement apart. However, despite writing about the various leaders, for individuals Lineham does not move far beyond the identifier Freethinker.

⁵⁰ 'Wellington Secular Society', *The Freethought Review*, 1 January 1885, p.7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵² Ivo, 'Ivo's Ghost Story', *The Freethought Review*, 1 November 1884, p.14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Having positioned himself against the supernatural, and thus the beliefs held by many spiritualists within Freethought, Ivo laid down secularist rules for the *Rationalist*, soon to be the only Freethought paper in New Zealand:

We shall, in short, pander to no sect of freethinkers, but offer to all who believe they have truth to tell, a fair platform on which to tell it. We propose to attack and expose the whole list of venerable shams, and shall thereon say what other journalists can only afford to think.⁵⁴

Here in the *Rationalist*, a paper built for the sole purpose of standing as a bastion for Freethinkers against the organised and mainstream Christian denominations, Ivo rebalanced the divide by addressing the nuances within Freethought. He demanded a secular Freethought press, allowing all to have their views heard. Historians such as Lineham in New Zealand and Royle in the United Kingdom have attributed the disintegration of nineteenth-century Freethought to the split between the smaller movements under the umbrella term, noting in particular the divide between anti-religionists (atheists and agnostics), and the spiritualists.⁵⁵ Evison would appear to be a part of this division, in that he wrote against spiritualist ideas. However, his rigorous application of secularist tenets wherever he had control within the Freethought movement allowed spiritualists room to have their say at least.

Evison's secularist values probably developed over the late 1870s and early 1880s. He had earlier been a member of the Church of England, attempting to convert Chinese peasants whilst sailing with merchant ships, during the early 1860s. After he and Matilda came to New Zealand, the pair lived for four years in Christchurch, just as the Freethought movement began to thrive. Lineham singles out Christchurch as being particularly oppressive of Freethought in its early years, with booksellers refusing to stock their material.⁵⁶ Despite this, adherents regularly filled the 150 seat hall in Worcester Street. Faced with staunch opposition from the Anglican majority he had once belonged to, Evison probably began his secularist journey slowly in the

⁵⁴ Ivo, 'Our Objects', *Rationalist*, 21 June 1885, p.1.

⁵⁵ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', p.78; Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans*, pp.36-38; see also Shirley A. Mullen, 'Keeping the Faith: the Struggle for a Militant Atheist Press, 1839-1862', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol.25, no.4, 1992, pp.150-152. Spiritualism promoted the immortality of the soul, regardless of religious belief. Through rituals the souls of the deceased could be communed with, see Sally Morita, 'Unseen (and Unappreciated) Matters: Understanding the Reformatory Nature of 19th-Century Spiritualism', *American Studies*, vol.40, no.3, 1999, pp.99-125.

⁵⁶ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', pp.66-67.

cathedral city, attending talks by Reeves and Collins, Freethinkers he would oppose in later years.

Evison's secularism found application locally, but is also evidenced in his critique of international events. Over the first fourteen issues of the *Rationalist*, Ivo wrote an eight part column titled 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping'.⁵⁷ Possibly in-part a reproduction of his writing for the *North China Herald*, here Ivo heavily criticised the British suppression of the Taiping Rebellion in China, which he had himself witnessed. At the core of the column is a criticism of 'Chinese Gordon', Major General Charles George Gordon. Ivo claimed, citing first-hand experience, that Gordon waged war for Britain illegally.⁵⁸ In the article, Ivo asserted that, immediately upon Gordon sending off a written request to intervene in the growing religious conflict, which would take several months to reach Britain and generate a response, Gordon spurred his forces into action defending key 'Mantchoo' cities, and attacking Taiping forces.⁵⁹ Ivo described the Taipings as 'the true Chinese fighting for liberty. They were called "Rebels", as we may call the Poles rebels if they rose against the Russians.'⁶⁰ He argued that the war would have ended quickly in the Taipings' favour, but that Gordon's intervention greatly prolonged the conflict. This allowed time for the Taiping prophet leader, Hung, who considered himself the brother of Christ, to become debauched, poisoning the rebellion whose early years were pure and noble, fighting to depose the usurping Tartars, and to give 'national life to the Chinese.'⁶¹

Ivo attributed Gordon's gung-ho approach to his Christian convictions. He wrote of the British officers in China 'who are always so ready to do anything for Christ except succour their own poor countrymen.'⁶² In siding with the Tartars, who Ivo saw as terrorizing the populace, Gordon and his contemporaries were driven by profit, both religious and economic. Ivo went on to write about how these were closely

⁵⁷ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 5 July 1885, p.3.

⁵⁸ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 30 August 1885, p.3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 5 July 1885, p.3.

⁶¹ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 12 July 1885, p.4.

⁶² Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 7 August 1885, p.2.

intertwined, with Christian teaching giving a moral purpose for entering the conflict, whilst those missionaries that had been first in were able to make significant profit from their prominent position in society.⁶³ Evison came down harshly on Christianity, and harsher still on the officers of the British Empire.

Woven around this criticism of Gordon was Evison's defence of the religiously motivated Hung and his Taiping followers, who strove towards a moral national goal:

With the fall of Soochow, the rebellion was, for that time at least, virtually at an end. The Taiping cause still lives – and waits. The Taiping buried treasure remains buried. Someday the flag of China may again be unfurled. Hung was killed at Nankin [sic] in 1864; and the noble Chung Wang also bravely met his fate. When the true history of the Great Taiping movement is written, men will regard it in its true light, as one of the most wonderful struggles on record. I have in these papers, written solely from memory, endeavoured to show my readers that in our various transactions with China, honour, civilisation, and Christianity have all been made subservient to the Opium trade.⁶⁴

Evison's appraisal of the rebellion was that only Christianity could unite the disparate Chinese peoples. Detailing Hung's adherents, Evison acknowledged the tens of thousands of peasants, as well as pirates of the seas, robbers of the mountains, and brigands of the highway, and how all of these people, oppressed by the Manchu government, were brought together by the Christian gospel.⁶⁵ He argued that the Christian message of Jesus and the New Testament, spread by Hung and his followers, acted both to unify and civilise the disparate masses.

Regardless of the reality, Evison's interpretation documented differences between religion utilised by the masses as a tool for freedom and civilisation, and the religious motivations of government representatives seeking only to oppress people. Unlike many in Freethought, Evison recognised that religious motivation could have both positive and negative outcomes, encapsulating Royle's requirement that secularism examine 'the dual standards of morality and utility.'⁶⁶ As an officer in the

⁶³ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 7 August 1885, p.2.

⁶⁴ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 27 September 1885, p.6.

⁶⁵ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 12 July 1885, p.4.

⁶⁶ Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p.150.

Royal Navy and thus a representative of the Crown being motivated by Christian convictions, ‘Chinese Gordon’ epitomised a connection between church and state that Evison detested. By contrast, for peasants struggling against an oppressive state, Christianity in the form of Hung and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom allowed them to unite against the government. Evison’s overarching message was that governments should not to be guided or influenced by religion, but that religion may empower disenfranchised people to act against the state. Thus, to Evison, Christianity for the Taipings was indistinguishable from Freethought for the atheists, agnostics, spiritualists and more represented in the *Rationalist*.

Evison reasserted his secular ideals later in the *Rationalist*’s run after increasing his stake in the business. In 1886, with Ivo firmly in control as the largest shareholder, he wrote a new serialised column, which focused on religious motivation at a more personal level. Published semi-consistently over the final twenty six issues of the *Rationalist*, Ivo wrote ‘Friend Christian, Some Reasons for Disbelief.’⁶⁷ All supposedly in response to a single letter, possibly written by Evison himself to stimulate discourse, Ivo used his fourteen reply columns to detail what he saw as the basic tenants of Freethought to someone who remained religious. In doing so, he risked criticism from long-term Freethinkers who wanted a development of new ideas, rather than a rehashing of the old.⁶⁸

Ivo’s explanation commenced by detailing a perceived divide within the Freethought community between beginners in Freethought, and those long into personal journeys.

Ah Christian, it is too evident that you have never edited a Freethought paper – you happy, happy man. You see it is rather difficult to please everybody. The RATIONALIST is only a small paper, and if we were to attempt to cater to every taste, I fear we should please none. The large majority of our readers have (some years ago) gone far beyond the mere alphabet of Freethought, have ceased to cavil at texts and interpretations; have laughed their last laugh at the eccentricities of Jonah and the Whale; no longer marvel at Jehovah’s partiality for David; are impressed no longer by the Mosaic mystery of creation, and are heartily tired of the

⁶⁷ Ivo, ‘Friend Christian, Some Reasons for Disbelief’, *Rationalist*, 21 February 1886, p.6.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

whole rudimentary business. What will these say, think you, if we refer to your request, and begin at the very beginning?⁶⁹

Ivo skilfully set himself up alongside the Freethought outsider, against the harshest and perhaps more fanatical members of the movement. In doing so, he made readers and potential converts more comfortable but also subtly created a Freethought movement within a Freethought movement, placing himself in a minority, sharing information and ideas contrary to those which the majority wanted to discuss.

Unlike 'Chinese Gordon's' serialised narrative, 'Friend Christian' allowed a new topic for each week's column. Ivo's second letter to Christian, for example, began with an exploration of the Jesus figure, judged by his peers and by the standards of his time as being not only an infidel, but the greatest infidel of all.⁷⁰ Ivo then turned the argument towards Freethought. Science, he argued, was constantly battling and banishing Christian stories. The persecution of Freethought this inspired in Christian denominations, he reasoned, was due primarily to the significant losses the clergy would endure should atheism become accepted by the world tomorrow. By contrast, such acceptance would gain those already atheists little.⁷¹ Religion was thus being used to justify a more selfish agenda.⁷²

Evison's writing at the *Wairarapa Standard* in 1887 took a different approach, criticising the individual within the tradition, whilst respecting the tradition itself. Evison's first writing on religion outside the safety of a Freethought paper was his exchanged public letters with future MP Alexander Hogg (as Hogg edited the *Star* and the *Observer* correspondence was printed in the neutral *Wairarapa Daily Times*). The criticism in Evison's letters bore strong resemblance to his criticism of Gordon years earlier, but in a nuanced and contemporary, rather than historical, way.⁷³ Evison's disagreement with Hogg warrants significant study in itself, documenting a history and competition between the editors of three of the Wairarapa's four newspapers.

In particular, Hogg attacked Evison's past as a Freethinker, to which Evison responded that religion was not essential to the discussion; it was being misused in this context. Evison wrote:

⁶⁹ Ivo, 'Friend Christian, Some Reasons for Disbelief', *Rationalist*, 21 February 1886, p.6.

⁷⁰ Ivo, 'Friend Christian, Some Reasons for Disbelief', *Rationalist*, 28 February 1886, p.3.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo: Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

Why then did you drag in the Freethought platform? I will tell you; because you thought it would create a prejudice against the Standard [Evison's paper]. You have dragged the name of God through your columns of filth to serve your base and pitiful purposes in an election squabble. You even parodied the most beautiful psalm in the bible and talk of my profanity! Mr Hogg, you are one of those – now, happily, rare persons – who never remember your deity until you desire to use him. What are you? A Christian or a Freethinker? Come; you introduce religion into this discussion, not I. But be a man; declare what you are. But remember, if you call yourself a Christian, that many have heard you boast your infidelity, and that you, with your vaunted “independence” owe to a Freethinker any position which you may have attained. A Freethinker made you, sir- I would it had been in his power to have made you honest and manly. Remember, on the other hand, if you claim to be a Freethinker, every decent Freethinker will disown you as a renegade. Sir, you stand between the Scylla of Christian contempt and the Charybdis of Freethinkers' scorn. You run with the hare; you hunt with the hounds. You sell your noble “principles,” your “honesty” and “independence” for a five shilling advertisement. You taunt me with my religious opinion because you know I am your superior- and that is not lauding myself extravagantly. Yes, sir; your superior in ability, courage, argument, and true independence, and as you daren't face and fight me on our respective merits, you attempt to stab me in the back. 'Tis the bravos' trick the world over. With more honesty you might have made an inferior of the Inquisition; with more courage a prosecutor of covenanters. Forsaken by fate; born two hundred years off shore after your proper era, you are the editor of the Star, and your name is Hogg.⁷⁴

Evison's writing reveals both a weariness of religious reasoning outside of theology, and a respect for each tradition discussed. Both identifiers, Christian and Freethinker, are placed carefully within somewhat reverential writing. Each is in its own way sacred, and should never have been brought into the debate by Hogg. There is an

⁷⁴ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo: Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

uneasiness in the writing as to who the subject might be, with much of it applicable to Evison himself.

Next chronologically came Evison's tenure at the *Catholic Times*. It might appear that Evison's employment as the manager and editor was religiously motivated; however, that is at odds with all that came before and after it. Based on the contrast with his previous employment, his admission to never being a Catholic, and his and Matilda's precarious financial situation, it may seem as though Evison needed a job and took what he could get. However, even here strong secular motivations are evident in his writing, demonstrating his secularism as being a compelling force for taking the position. In particular, Evison's respect for traditions and the people who followed them led him to campaign for equality for all before the law. Education had, in 1877, been secularised.⁷⁵ Catholics, not wanting their children to be taught in secular schools, became insular, operating private Catholic schools and thus creating a self-imposed exile.⁷⁶ The ostracism they perceived was heightened by Catholics paying for their own schools, whilst simultaneously sharing the universal tax to pay for secular public schools. Beyond persecution, Catholics' self-perception was so low, that Lineham identifies outrage amongst Catholics who perceived 'Catholic' to be a far more damaging slur than Freethinker. Evison shared this perception of Catholics, rather than adopting a critical assessment of their self-inflicted exile.

In an early article for the *Rationalist*, Evison had concluded that the education of children was first of all the parents' responsibility, although this was in the context of arguing that some denominations were threatened not by a lack of bibles in schools, but rather a lack of bibles in living rooms.⁷⁷ The home was sacred, the family was sacred, and the individual should not be interfered with by the state. Such views followed through into Evison's work at the *Catholic Times*, and viewed this way, his role there can be seen as more that of a crusader, fighting to protect those oppressed by the state and other Christian denominations. Despite Catholics being Christian, both they and Freethinkers shared a perceived space as religious outsiders in nineteenth-century New Zealand, when the vast majority identified as Protestants. Evison's secular principles thus allowed him to answer affirmatively the Archbishop's

⁷⁵ Peter J. Lineham, 'Christian Reaction to Freethought and Rationalism in New Zealand', *The Journal of Religious History*, vol.15, no.2, 1988, p.240.

⁷⁶ Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.91-92; Lineham, 'Christian Reaction to Freethought', p.240.

⁷⁷ Ivo, 'Give me your children, and I will make them Catholics', *Rationalist*, 1 November 1885, p.3.

only two questions during his hiring: whether Evison could support Home Rule for Ireland (Evison had supported Home Rule on a Freethought platform many years earlier), and whether he agreed with state aid for Catholic schools.⁷⁸

Evison continued his quest for Catholic equality in education upon leaving the *Catholic Times*, when in 1893 he ran for Parliament. In an hour long speech at the Tuam Street Hall, he further entrenched his own brand of defensive secularism. His lengthy speech outlined his ideals and called for greater unity in the government, whilst at the same time declaring he would not be a patsy to support Stout or Seddon.⁷⁹ He further claimed that going into Parliament would be an encumbrance on him and that he was instead doing it as a duty, in an attempt perhaps to appear righteous. However, whilst the *Press* the following day included much of his speech verbatim, Evison's comments on secular matters had been paraphrased. The *Press* reported that '[h]e approved of religious text books for school, provided the religious bodies and parents agreed.'⁸⁰ However, Evison was to lose out to Reeves and Collins, men whom Freethinkers believed would stand up for them rather than for some unspecified oppressed minority.

Evison had thus fought for Catholics, defending a perception that they were unfairly paying more than their due. For five years before that, he had fought a more aggressive battle for the Freethinkers to secure rights and acknowledgement where there had previously been none. Containing mostly political cartoons and reader generated short stories, Evison's final paper, the *Critic*, was still secular in tone, but was comparatively brief and quiet for this long time secularist crusader. The stories, written and published by Evison, do not stray into religious territory, preferring to leave religion in the domain of the individual. Each issue contained lists of work received, along with notes on why it would or would not be published (approximately half and half). Several of the pieces rejected are dismissed for being overtly religious. He suggested that they might seek publication in a Catholic magazine.⁸¹ Thus, having fought for both Catholicism and Freethought, when finally writing his own paper, Evison, eschewed both in favour of blanket secularism. For Evison, there were no longer desperate battles to fight.

⁷⁸ 'Inglewood', *Taranaki Herald*, 24 November 1886, p.2; Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.12.

⁷⁹ 'Mr Evison at the Tuam Street Hall', *Press*, p.3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ J. Evison, 'Notes to Correspondents', *Critic*, 29 June 1899, p.10.

Evison the Libertarian

Whilst the preceding section considered Evison's career and writings in light of his secularist beliefs, this section goes one step further. Whilst secularism explains why, for example, Evison was prepared to accept that Christianity might be used for both positive and negative ends in the Taiping Rebellion, it does not explain why he chose to argue in favour of one side over the other. Nor does it explain why Evison's particular brand of secularism focused on advancing the interests of oppressed minorities, when all secularism really requires is an appreciation of their rights to exist as they wish and a desire to keep religion separate from the state. To explain the detail of Evison's views, this section considers his libertarian convictions; his perennial preference for 'the little guy'. Evison's campaign against authority and the establishment is the common theme in an apparently contradictory career, in his battles against state intervention in education, state oppression of peasants in China, British intervention in China both economically and militarily, against union and investor control of his papers, and against the liberal politicians who held power almost unopposed.⁸² It is thus evident at many different scales of observation, and this fact will be used to frame the following analysis.

Due to profound political differences between Britain and New Zealand, much political terminology does not transfer well. Both Lineham and Sinclair identify Evison as a Conservative, but a Conservative party like the Tories in Britain did not exist in New Zealand at that time.⁸³ Instead, whilst the more unified liberals were winning the majority of seats, the loosely affiliated opposition inherited the term conservatives. Thus, the New Zealand conservatives were not real Conservatives by British parliamentary standards, but an assortment of contrarians opposing the liberal leaders for their own reasons. Whilst Evison may have had the support of some true Conservatives in his 1893 parliamentary bid, the term is rejected here for clarity's sake. Instead, Evison is identified as a 'libertarian', someone who pushes back against anything that infringes the rights of the individual.

⁸² See Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, 1st ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959), pp.167-185.

⁸³ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', p.77; Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves*, p.190.

On the global scale, Evison was critical of the role of Empire. In his ‘Chinese Gordon’ articles, he attacked the very foundation of British intervention in China (he himself referred to the English Empire, perhaps illustrating his focus on the seat of power).⁸⁴ Gordon’s Christian beliefs motivated him to intervene in China to disastrous effect. However, Evison was also critical of earlier, less formal, ‘interventions’ for the sake of profit. He asserted that politicians and merchants with an eye for commerce and Christianity sold thousands of weapons and other supplies to the Christian rebels early in their campaign. Politicians even joked about doing so in Parliament. However, when it became clear that the rebels sought to stop the opium trade, they quickly changed their tune.⁸⁵

In his descriptions of the rebellion, Evison definitively declared his allegiance as an ‘Ex Taiping’, despite serving on British ships, and firmly placed himself alongside the oppressed Chinese. Ivo described Gordon’s military interventions as being far worse than the actions which provoked them. He vividly recalled the burning of the summer palace, the destruction of inestimable beauty, art, and artefacts.⁸⁶ In addition to the cultural devastation, Britain demanded that the Chinese, who were already suffering famine, disease, pestilence, and every other evil connected with civil war, pay reparations for the deaths of British diplomats.⁸⁷ The ordinary Chinese, Evison asserted, did not even know of the war Gordon was fighting, only that he took from them millions in blood-stained currency, and penalised not the Tartar rulers who had insulted the British but a harmless, industrious, and peaceful people.⁸⁸ Evison considered that Gordon, and thus the Empire he represented, betrayed people they could have protected in favour of supporting a corrupt regime.

Evison’s contempt extended beyond the leaders of the Empire to any who had helped them accomplish their goals. Calling on his own experience in journalism, he argued:

The public thinks it knows everything, that the newspapers tell it everything, and that all is perfectly fair and above board. This is a touching delusion. The newspapers know just as much as it suits a minister, or a

⁸⁴ Ivo, ‘Chinese Gordon the “Christian Hero” as Judged by an Ex Taiping’, *Rationalist*, 5 July 1885, p.3.

⁸⁵ Ivo, ‘Chinese Gordon the “Christian Hero” as Judged by an Ex Taiping’, *Rationalist*, 2 August 1885, p.2.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

commander-in-chief to let them know: and publish just as much, or as little as their political party wants published.⁸⁹

Evison further reinforced his point through references to his experiences returning from the Abyssinia campaign. Upon returning to England, he railed against newspaper reports of great deeds the expedition had supposedly accomplished and dangers they had faced, but which in no way reflected reality.⁹⁰ The overriding theme is, once again, expressions of power over others, this time in terms of propaganda rather than military might. Again, Evison reinforced his critique by placing himself amongst those oppressed by the expression of power in relating his experiences as a midshipman, and as a low ranking cavalryman.

In attacking the power of the British Empire, Evison utilised Gordon as its representative. When attacking the entrenched authorities in New Zealand, Evison likewise directed his attacks at the liberal leaders, who were not only his contemporaries but had been fellow Freethinkers. He stated clearly from the outset 'I belong to no political party and I hold it to be the duty of a correspondent to belong to none, but to write of men and things as he truly sees them.'⁹¹ Evison attended every rally and debate he could, writing about them as Watchman. In doing this, he used current debates to further expose the entrenched problems he saw in the Government and its leaders. For example, concerning a meeting debating protectionism, Evison reported 'Now I have no word to say against Protection in the abstract, but I do protest against protection being made the rallying cry of party intrigue.'⁹² He continued on that 'Mr Ballance professes now to be a protectionist, but how about Sir Robert Stout? He is certainly a Freetrader. Are we threatened with another divided cabinet?'⁹³

Evison's criticism of the liberal leaders is one of the few things about him to attract significant attention from authors such as Davis and Lineham, although their focus tends to be on the shared history of these men within Freethought. Thus, authors attempt to explain Evison's vitriol, such as that expended on Stout when he accepted the honour of Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, as emanating from a longstanding rivalry. More likely, it stemmed from Evison as a

⁸⁹ Ivo, 'Chinese Gordon the "Christian Hero" as Judged by an Ex Taiping', *Rationalist*, 6 September 1885, p.2.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ 'Our Wellington Watchman', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 June 1887, p.2.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Freethinker objecting to a fellow Freethinker accepting a Christian knighthood conferred by the head of the Anglican faith.⁹⁴ However, Ivo did not merely censure the liberal leaders he had once known, but extended his critique into the rank and file of the party. The unifying feature of Ivo's targets was that they exercised power over people, who in Evison's eyes, were unengaged with the political process. Not only did he campaign for people to better analyse the religious stories they had grown up accepting, he sought to do the same for politics. To do this, he often turned to his weapon of choice: humour.

Perhaps the easiest way to get the populace to engage with politics was through the newspapers. Whilst editor of the *Wairarapa Standard*, Evison conducted an open letter debate with Alexander Hogg. To reach a wider audience, Evison even had his letters published in the more widely circulated *Wairarapa Daily Times*. Hogg had been a devastating critic of Ivo when the latter had lectured on Freethought in Masterton in 1885. Two years later, as the editor of the *Wairarapa Standard*, Evison wrote:

Well, sir, in 1885 I had no paper in which to reply to you. You were safe in Coward's Castle. I came up to Masterton, therefore to face and contradict you. I invited you to attend my lecture. I informed you I would castigate you for untruth. Sir, you remained away. You were discreet. But in June 1887 I had a paper in which to reply to your ornate fables.⁹⁵

Evison continued in this line, and evident throughout the piece was his attempt to address what he considered a power imbalance between Hogg and himself, now that he had an appropriate platform for his cause.

Evison also went beyond the individual and attacked the political collective, on both sides of political divide. He detested the faux pomp and theatre of Parliament which served to separate the politicians from his readers, turning them into a revered 'other'. Reporting on the opening of Parliament, Evison wrote that:

⁹⁴ Ivo, 'Robert Stout', *Rationalist*, 30 May 1886, p.5; Ivo, 'In Response', *Rationalist*, 6 June 1886, p.3; Ivo, 'Some Opinions About the Sir (Robert Stout)', *Rationalist*, 20 June 1886, p.4 – 'We do not think Sir Robert Stout will gain more respect in the hearts of the people than plain Robert Stout would have done, but on the other hand many will recognize that the Liberal leader has been bought over by a "device of the enemy," and no more belong to them. There are more ways than one of killing a cat, and when a cunning adversary cannot conquer and enemy he often "buys Him."'

⁹⁵ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo: Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

The sound of distant music of more-or-less martial description reminded your Watchman that the good old Parliamentary farce was on once again and that this path of glory led not to glory but to the House on the hill.⁹⁶

In the same column, he went on to declare that divisions within the House would halt progress in any meaningful direction.⁹⁷ His frequent targets, the liberal leaders, were part of the problem; whilst they might have fine intentions, they were too busy looking over their shoulder, expecting treachery at every turn. Whilst his critiques are humorous in their derision, they contain very real criticism of the state of affairs in nineteenth-century New Zealand. In particular, Evison highlighted the unchanging nature of Parliament after every election. No matter who occupied the benches:

We shall hear the same decomposed old arguments, the same nauseating egoisms, the same recriminations, and the same unavailing references to medieval history, whether “Whig” or “Tory” be in power.⁹⁸

Just as Evison laid out his secular ideals in the Supreme Court in December 1891, in January 1892 he took the opportunity to write a piece about his political leanings. In a faux autobiography, he detailed constantly changing his political belief, flipping between radical and conservative, always due to some external catalyst.⁹⁹ Evison thus expressed concerns about the formation of political identity within the individual. The first political identity is passed from the parents in their basic upbringing (hence the importance of the role of parents in education he had argued for during his tenure at the *Catholic Times*, and earlier at the *Rationalist*). The second political input comes through early working life, when one is at the bottom of the ladder and must learn from each person above him.¹⁰⁰ For Evison, this came during his early twenties, at the height of the Taiping Rebellion. Views then further evolve as work and private life change over time. Evison’s final argument about the formation of political identity is expounded through a fable about a radical inheriting property. As other radicals take fruit from the tree on his inherited property, the young radical learns property rights and is made a diehard conservative for the rest of his days.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Wellington Watchman, ‘Parliamentary Sketches’, *Catholic Times*, 30 January 1891, p.11.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Wellington Watchman, ‘Political and Autobiographical – More or Less’, *Catholic Times*, 22 January 1892, p.21.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Evison never inherited property, although he and Matilda would have lived reasonably well on his £300 a year at the *Catholic Times*. However, his views had been much shaped by the world around him as he travelled the length of the country lecturing, spent years in the peasant economies of India and China, and lived in London, where the gap between the wealthy and the poor was clearly delineated. The oppressed were thus Evison's main concern, and the audience he sought to attract. Yet perhaps counterintuitively for some today, Evison attacked the burgeoning liberal state because it condescendingly wielded power over the poor, in an attempt to help them improve their lives. Simply by having power, the liberal leaders siphoned it from those below them. No amount of state paternalism could hide the fact that those in government had power and wealth and others did not. The idea of the liberal leaders exercising power over the poor is deftly expressed by Evison at the end of the column:

Within the last few days, however, I have found out, or think I have, what all the trouble is about. The country is not Radical enough. That is what is the matter. True, here we have no kings, princes, dukes, or hereditary aristocracy of any sort. Have we not, however, what is as bad – citizens who wear black coats and stove-pipe hats? As long as those badges of infamy remain, so long will the people be crushed – pardon me if I spell it Ker-rushed – under the iron heel of despotism. Yes the Radicals of New Zealand have done much, but not all. They have abolished aristocracy; the hateful squatter hides his drooping head or seeks the cold shades of the Bankruptcy Court; they have humbled the pride of judges into the dust; they have burst up a considerable number of employers of labour, and trust yet to burst up some more; they have pointed the finger of derision and scorn against every man who owns a quarter-acre section and a mortgage, but the black coat and stove-pipe hat still cumber the earth. Neither peace nor prosperity can be known until these, and those who wear them are swept away. True happiness is alone to be found in a state or society where only shirt sleeves, more or less clean, and caps of the Phrygian type are to be found.

Let no one sneer at this latest and greatest Radical discovery. The evil is everywhere. Society is honeycombed with black coat and stove-pipe hat. They are found in our streets, in our marts, in our church, and last but by no means least, within the sacred precincts [*sic*] of the House of

Representatives. Nay, they are to be seen in the very Cabinet chamber itself; for it is a pregnant fact that in nine cases out of ten, when a patriot becomes a Minister, he assumes these outward and visible signs of an enemy of society.¹⁰²

Years of criticising politicians gave Evison something to consider when he attempted to enter Parliament himself. Those already in power, he asserted, would temporarily placate one class by discriminating against all others, when the goal should instead be class unification.¹⁰³ Evison built on this idea of unity at lower levels versus disunity at upper levels throughout his discussion of the platform on which he was running. He argued that infighting and general disunity were tearing apart any prospect of progress in Parliament. Rather than one side winning out over the other, they must come together. Evison proudly declared that he would never be a stepping stone or a patsy to any one political clique.¹⁰⁴

Evison criticised expressions of power at the inter-personal level as well. At the 1891 trial, Evison demonstrated his willingness to do almost anything to stay out of the purview of the Typographical Association, who would have controlled his workers, his wages, and more. At the *Rationalist*, Evison campaigned for several months against other investors in the paper who threatened its objectives, only stopping when, with the help of shareholders, he controlled the paper. Shares were held across Australia and New Zealand, with some even in the hands of the liberal leaders, Stout and Ballance. However, Evison's majority ensured he had control of the paper, which he increased in length and used to generate further revenue from advertising. Despite fighting for control against the Association and investors when at the *Catholic Times*, Evison got on well with Archbishop Redwood. The Archbishop left Evison to his own devices, simply ensuring that someone else (a Catholic), was present to edit the overtly religious material.¹⁰⁵ Evison controlled the majority of content, and ensured that the old systems stayed in place, satisfied that no one was suffering below him.

As an editor, Evison was responsible for all material printed in his papers entering the public domain. Prior to 1890, there were almost no avenues for amateur

¹⁰² Wellington Watchman, 'Political and Autobiographical – More or Less', *Catholic Times*, 22 January 1892, p.21.

¹⁰³ 'Mr Evison at the Tuam Street Hall', *The Press*, p.3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.13.

writers to publish their work as publishers lacked capital and confidence. Evison suffered from this himself, with his work published outside of newspapers being limited to a single true crime book. This lack of willing publishers also affected Matilda, who tried unsuccessfully to have her husband's memoirs published after his death. Evison sought to remedy the situation in the later years of his career. The *Bulletin* and the *Critic* circumvented professional publishers to give amateur writers an outlet for their work.¹⁰⁶ The *Critic* also contained political cartoons, still attacking the liberal leaders.

Conclusion

Evison challenged nearly every power structure he encountered. Keith Sinclair wrote in the introduction to his work on James Bodell that:

History has tended to be written about the rulers, the elite, and the educated. The lives of the ruled, the illiterate or the barely literate poor have been recorded in birth, marriage, and death certificates.¹⁰⁷

Evison would have agreed, and indeed he sought to change that. By always aligning with the oppressed, Evison ensured that he faced off against the biggest and toughest opponents; be they empires, Imperial officers, governments, unions, investors, or publishers.

To those historians who have examined him, Evison's life is a fascinating footnote, with at least one aspect completely refuting whatever they assert about him. As yet, no one has attempted to reconcile his forays into Freethought, Catholicism, politics and international relations. In trying to correct that, this chapter suggests Evison's career was motivated not by greed or ever-changing religious views but by deeply-held secularist beliefs atop a foundation of libertarianism. He sought to destabilise existing power structures to allow those beneath to rise.

Evison once criticised Hogg for standing 'between the Scylla of Christian contempt and the Charybdis of Freethinkers' scorn.' According to Jellicoe, that was a more accurate description of Evison himself. However, the above demonstrates that

¹⁰⁶ Janet Wilson, *The 'New Chum'*, in Fraser and McCarthy (eds.), *Far From Home*, p.169.

¹⁰⁷ Keith Sinclair (ed.), *A Soldier's View of Empire: the Reminiscences of James Bodell 1832-92* (London: Bodley Head, 1982), p.16.

Evison did not choose between two such evils. Instead, he risked bringing both down upon him in an attempt to engage the general populace in issues of religion and politics.

Chapter Three: Dear Editor

Chapters one and two examined the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of Evison. Chapter one comprised a factual narrative of Evison’s life, what had occurred and when. Chapter two then examined why his career took the shape it did, concluding that strict adherence to secularism and libertarianism pushed Evison to always fight for the underdog. Chapter three now seeks to take this further, asking how else (and how effectively) Evison propagated his beliefs. Whilst chapter two concentrated on Evison the writer, this chapter refocuses on Evison the editor and sometime politician, demonstrating that Evison’s secular libertarian convictions followed through into these two spheres.

Part one of this chapter explores Evison’s tenure as editor and manager of various papers. It argues that article selection, retention of regular columnists and even layout decisions give insight into the inner workings of his editorships. This is particularly true of small publications, such as those Evison worked for, where he would have had far greater control than if he had worked with a large editing team. Ultimately, as editor, he was responsible for what was published and how, allowing him to further his own causes, although these had to be balanced against financial obligations to investors. Part two then considers one particularly significant aspect of Evison’s editorships, his responses to letters to the editor. Again, his decisions on what to include and his dialogues with readers (whether real or potentially fictitious) were carefully constructed to advance his libertarian secularist beliefs. Finally, part three compares Evison’s success as an orator against that of his contemporaries, as he lectured, debated and ran for public office.

Work by Ross Harvey, Penny Griffith and Keith Maslen will be used to contextualise the roles of newspaper editor, manager and proprietor in New Zealand, hitherto little-studied occupations.¹ Peter Mandler’s argument for having ‘an understanding of the relative “throw” – the weight or significance – of other texts’ brings Evison’s audience and his contemporaries into focus, examining how Evison’s

¹ Penny Griffith, Ross Harvey & Keith Maslen (eds.), *Book and Print in New Zealand: a Guide to Print Culture in Aotearoa* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997).

readers consume his work compared to that of others.² Building from Janet Wilson's argument that alienation from the metropole dominates English writing in New Zealand, the chapter deconstructs Evison's writing and editorial decisions by placing him within intellectual diasporas, far from their imperial centres where most new knowledge is created.³ In line with John Stenhouse's investigation into contextualising authors, Evison's biographical information is utilised throughout to properly contextualise his work.⁴

The purpose of this chapter is not to identify an as yet unrecognised cultural touchstone, a father of irreligion in an increasing irreligious country. Instead, it reveals a man passionate in his beliefs and canny in his methods, whose greatest achievement was to make the religious and political debates of the age accessible to other people. His attempts to further his own views were met with mixed success, but his capacity to act as a link across many debates and issues, drawing others into the discussion, is what makes him worthy of historical study.

Evison the Editor

The role of the editor in any paper is complex and influential. Confronted with articles, letters and advertisements, by writers, readers and investors, the editor must cull some and decide how to fit the remainder into the framework of the paper, giving them significant power over what enters the public consciousness. As Ross Harvey explains:

Journalists and editors, perhaps because their stock in trade is skill with words, manufacture their own myths and history rather more than other writers.⁵

Their job revolves around ordering information and constructing narratives for their readers. However, control over the paper also makes them responsible for its content.

² Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, vol.1, no.1, 2004, pp.96-97.

³ Janet Wilson, 'The New Chum: Writings of the English Diaspora in New Zealand, 1860-1914', in Lyndon Fraser & Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home': The English in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), pp.165-166; Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989).

⁴ John Stenhouse, "'A Disappearing Race Before We Came Here': Doctor Alfred Kingcome Newman, the Dying Maori, and Victorian Scientific Racism', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.30, no.2, 1996, p.124-140.

⁵ Griffith, Harvey & Maslen (eds.), *Book & Print in New Zealand*, p.128.

Whilst a myriad of writers may assert their own points of view, it is the editor who is answerable to the audience. Only rarely is a proprietor there to share the burden.

The cultural significance of the newspaper editor is not to be understated. In Britain, Harvey identifies a reading culture centred on printed books and pamphlets, as these long preceded newspapers. In New Zealand, due to a younger printing industry, capital and resource constraints, as well as distance from England's printers, the reverse was true and newspapers held sway long before large scale local book printing became established.⁶ Indeed, a newspaper became a way to demonstrate the progressiveness of any new town or community. In the words of William Hogg:

Our printing press, telegraph, and steam,
Proclaim our town's advance no Idle Dream.⁷

Harvey refers to the 1880s and 1890s, when Evison's editorial work was at its zenith, as a time of consolidation. Growing populations supported stable newspapers, whilst the telegraph allowed reporting on events from far further afield. Better transport and printing also allowed a much bigger circulation, whilst the annual subscription became more commonplace. The result was an explosion in newspaper numbers, although few survived in the long term, due to a lack of initial capital to carry them through until their popularity increased and print runs became self-sustaining.⁸ Yet even the short-lived papers became a focus for communities and a tool for developing social cohesion.

Despite his potential as a cultural figurehead, the editor is also beset by external pressures. The financial concerns which took down many fledgling papers pushed editors to include advertisements, and in some cases to promote subscription models or even the buying of shares. Initial investors and later shareholders had their own ideas about the direction a paper should take, or the tone of its articles. Meanwhile, proprietors and other writers sought to promote their own interpretations of the topics debated. As well as juggling these concerns, the editor might also wish to inject their own viewpoint into the paper.

In light of these pressures, it is unsurprising that Evison was as cynical about the job of editor as he was about everything else:

⁶ Griffith, Harvey & Maslen (eds.), *Book & Print in New Zealand*, pp.128-129.

⁷ William Hogg, 'Celebrating Nelson', in *Lays and Rymes*, (Nelson: R. Lucas & Son, 1875), quoted in Harry Orsman and Jan Moore (eds.), *Heinemann Dictionary of New Zealand Quotations* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1988); in Griffith, Harvey & Maslen (eds.), *Book & Print in New Zealand*, p.129.

⁸ Griffith, Harvey & Maslen (eds.), *Book & Print in New Zealand*, pp.129-130.

With regard to the city editor many persons suppose that he is a great centurion. That he saith to this one go, and he goeth; to the other, come, and he cometh. That he is a kind of grand Llama [*sic*] who sits on a big throne, and that all printers' devils, and comps, and reporters, and sub-editors, fall down and worship him. This is all a mistake. The city editor is frequently only a small pumpkin. He is not the dog that wags the tail, he is only a little portion of the tail that is wagged. Your real wagers are the parsons with a taste for newspaper profits and investments, your big banker bashaws. Poor little city editor, only your God and your wife, and the parsons who yelp at you and bully you, really know what a meek miserable little chap you are!⁹

His diatribe on the tragedy of the rural editor, written whilst editing the *Rationalist* in Auckland, continues this cynicism:

But the country editor is the man who has our truest sympathies. This poor creature bears the brand of Cain upon his brow. He is society's Ishmaelite – the man with many masters, and he has to please them all: that is to say, if any one reads his paper. Just fancy... what a variety of boots he has to lick, if he would sell his cheerful, harmless, generally innocent, little rag. He must cater for Protestants, for Catholics, and stray freethinkers. He must charm young maids and old ones. He must delight the watery souls of the abstainers, and tickle the brewer and the publican (if he would drink the costless alcohol). He must make the squatter smile, and the shepherds laugh: he must be perfectly acquainted with the natural history of his fellow townsmen, so that he may steer clear of awkward allusions. He must beland all the showmen who come along, and take an occasional whipping with serenity and grace... The only consolation the man has got is this: sometimes one of his many enemies in a moment of inebriety reads his (the editor's) leading article, and it kills him (the reader), and there is an inquest and a verdict of "by the visitation of God." Then perhaps our poor editor experiences a brief happiness. He embalms himself in the spirit of the country: he pours out in inexpensive libations to the Gods, and the

⁹ Ivo, 'Mixed Spice', *Rationalist*, 2 August 1885, p.4.

next day devotes a column to the “excellent quality of the vintages kept by our spirited fellow-townsmen.”¹⁰

Rather than accommodate the many voices clamouring for his attention, Evison believed the editor should be utterly confrontational. He strode to only cater to his particular base, and attack everything beyond that.

This approach is consistent throughout Evison’s very different editorships. Over twelve years, he was editor at five different newspapers, acting as manager at four of these and as chief shareholder/proprietor at three. From 1885-1886, Evison edited the *Rationalist*; half way through his tenure, initial backers stepped away, and shareholders appointed Evison manager as well. For three years after this, Evison acted as a guest editor for the *Wairarapa Standard*, a paper tightly controlled by proprietor, W. C. Nation. During 1889-1892, Evison edited the *Catholic Times*. Since Archbishop Redwood later hired a separate editor to take care of the religious material, Evison was in charge only of secular material for much of his tenure, but his stint as co-editor and manager did bring a pay increase. From 1892-1894, Evison edited the *Truth* in Christchurch, run to counter the *Press* and *Star*, although its short print run has ensured little remains of it today. Subsequently, from 1894-1899, Evison contributed columns to the *Bulletin* of Sydney, although he never acted as editor. Finally, for eighteen weeks in 1899, Evison owned and edited his own paper, the *Critic*, which whilst beset by problems, was exclusively Evison’s to control.

Evison held many jobs throughout his life; sailor, soldier, book traveller, government clerk, auctioneer, lecturer, writer, and more. However, it is during his editorships that he wielded perhaps the most tangible power. At first glance, nothing connects the eclectic collection of newspapers he edited. But all offered him the opportunity to publish the material he wished, where another more prominent paper might not have. And it was Evison’s material. Despite no other staff following Evison from paper to paper, all produced very similar material. If Evison could not find someone to fill a particular role he desired, he created a pseudonym and did it himself, giving the same dynamic to each paper.

The foremost task of the editor is to oversee the work of the writers below them, vetting material and its layout, thus influencing the message of the publication as a whole. However, the editor is also responsible for everything that appears in print,

¹⁰ Ivo, ‘Mixed Spice’, *Rationalist*, 2 August 1885, p.4.

including the opinions of other writers, and they would likely be joined in libel cases taken against the paper, as was the case in 1888 and 1891.¹¹ Those who libelled Evison in 1891 were angry that he was editor of a Catholic paper, having headed a Freethought paper.¹² Evison had no control over the religious material contained in the *Catholic Times*, but in his role as editor, he became the focal point for everything the Catholic paper stood for. His detractors argued that he could not uphold its tenets due to his past position at the *Rationalist*. This was despite Evison writing secular and libertarian-inspired material for both the *Rationalist* and the *Catholic Times*. It just so happened that Evison also printed the words of other writers who were atheists, spiritualists, Catholics, and all manner of other religious minorities. However, as editor, he was held responsible for all writing appearing in his papers. At trial, Evison was forced to actively point out that some of the material presented by the defence was actually written by a team of Freethought writers at the *Rationalist*, most likely inclusive of Terra and Isaiah, regulars at the paper who contributed educational, review, and more atheistic material than their editor, Ivo.¹³

In light of Evison's responsibility for all that appeared in his papers, his choice of articles to include may be indicative of his underlying views. At the *Rationalist*, he wrote in the paper's first issue that they would turn no one away, no matter their opinion.

We shall, in short, pander to no sect of freethinkers, but offer to all who believe they have truth to tell, a fair platform on which to tell it. We propose to attack and expose the whole list of venerable shams, and shall thereon say what other journalists can only afford to think.¹⁴

However, this is not to say that the new paper accomplished its task by simply printing everything it could from its relatively small supporter base. In reality, the *Rationalist* developed from the *Echo* and the *Freethought Review*, which had each been the key Freethought publication of their particular age. Through these papers, a community had emerged that produced large quantities of material. On top of local content,

¹¹ 'Supreme Court Wellington', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 August 1888, p.2; Joseph S. Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer: The sweating System and the Law of Libel ... Being a Full Report of an Action Tried in the Supreme Court, Wellington, on the 14th, 15th, and 16th Dec., 1891, Between J. S. Evison, Manager of the Catholic Times, and E. Thornton and J. W. Henrichs President and Secretary of the Wellington Branch New Zealand Typographical Association* (Wellington: Evening Post, 1892).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, pp.5-6.

¹⁴ Ivo, 'Our Objects', *Rationalist*, 21 June 1885, p.1.

Freethinkers in Britain and America produced writing which could be printed for free in the *Rationalist*. Thus, Evison had a wealth of material to choose from and therefore greater scope to cull that which he did not like, and whilst he was supposedly committed to letting everyone have their fair say, he controlled the tone and type of content. Furthermore, Evison rewrote material from overseas, ensuring that his, or at a least another local, voice permeated the article, giving it credibility and local flavour.¹⁵ It also prevented external voices from having too much input into local affairs, giving primacy to local opinions.

Whilst Evison's writing was confrontational, he made up for this as an editor by ensuring that others provided educational and supportive material. Evison emerged onto the Freethought scene in 1883, when Stout and Ballance were beginning to make real political gains. Each of their papers were still in print, and Ballance's *Freethought Review* in particular provided a wealth of educational and self-betterment material.¹⁶ There was thus no need for Evison to be the educational arm of the Freethought movement; instead, he positioned himself as the aggressive evangelist, taking Freethought to towns which did not have their own society or association, inadvertently outing some people as Freethinkers.¹⁷ He aggressively attacked the enemies of Freethought and built support, whilst others catered to its intellectual needs.

The *Freethought Review* stood in stark contrast to Evison's papers. In every issue of the *Freethought Review*, whole columns were dedicated to not only progress reports from Freethought associations throughout the country, but also lists of short responses to questions such as:

1. Is it now believed by the best oriental scholars that the original teaching of Buddhism excludes the idea of a personal ruler of the universe? – Agnostic.
2. Is it true that the Stronghold of Buddhism – Thibet [*sic*] – is, by the confession of Christian missionaries themselves, one of the happiest and most truly moral countries on the globe? – Agnostic.

¹⁵ Ivo, 'Jonah's Voyage in the Whale', *Rationalist*, 21 February 1886, p.6.

¹⁶ Peter J. Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.19, no.1, 1985, pp.61-81

¹⁷ 'Ivo', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 17 February 1885, p.2; J. McIntosh, *The Renall Years 1813-1986* (Waiuku: Deed Printing, 1986), p.21.

3. Can any of your readers give a brief and comprehensive view of the philosophy of Descartes? – H.
4. Would a Maori scholar give a description of the Maori Atua before the arrival of the Missionaries? – Centurion.¹⁸

Answered dutifully the following month, they enabled readers to share knowledge. A part of this phenomenon is what Lineham identifies as a predilection for self-education and betterment at the core of the Freethought movement. Freethinkers went to great lengths to extend their knowledge, partly because their local libraries would not have stocked relevant material, and partly due to the lack of like-minded people they could ask.¹⁹ Niche communities, separated from the Imperial centre, which created most new knowledge, still saw the development of ideas through the concentrated attention given to the material that did make its way to the community.

Newspapers were an important forum for collective sharing of knowledge for the community's betterment. Whilst Evison included some educational material, such as 'The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ', reviews of local ministers' sermons and material on freethought philosophy in every issue, he did not write it himself.²⁰ Terra and Isaiah, two pseudonyms belonging to persons unknown, provided the bulk of the educational material. Isaiah wrote the popular column 'Pulpit Sketches', appearing almost every issue, where he attended local church services, and gave critical reviews of the sermon and clergy.²¹ Other contributors included Saladin, Iconoclast, Agnostic, Mouzer, and Jehovah, whose material filled gaps Ivo was not willing to occupy himself.²² Educational material was thus observed throughout the *Rationalist*.

At the *Catholic Times*, educational material concerning religious and theological matters could not come from just anyone, and so Papal Encyclicals were printed in a serialised format, providing up to date Catholic dogma.²³ During his 25 year papacy, Pope Leo XIII issued 85 Papal Encyclicals. In 1891, while Evison was editor, the paper

¹⁸ 'Notes and Queries', *The Freethought Review*, vol.1, no.3, 1 December 1883, p.4.

¹⁹ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', pp.68-69.

²⁰ Gerald Massey, 'The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ', *Rationalist*, 11 October 1885, p.2; Terra, 'Words for Working Men', *Rationalist*, 20 June 1886, p.3; Terra, 'Marriage', *Rationalist*, 20 December 1885, p.2.

²¹ Isaiah, 'Pulpit Sketches', *Rationalist*, 1 June 1885, p.6. The column was printed regularly, appearing in almost every issue, often alongside Ivo's 'Mixed Spice' column.

²² Ivo, 'Still it Moves', *Rationalist*, 20 December 1885, p.4.

²³ 'Papal Encyclical', *Catholic Times*, 2 January 1891, p.13.

serialised *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo's most famous encyclical, addressing changes in the conditions of labour.²⁴ This 37th encyclical was of particular importance to a Catholic population overwhelmingly Irish and working class, although with an English Archbishop. The paper's proprietor, Redwood, offered occasional commentary on the religious happenings in the colony, including instructions for the observance of Lent.²⁵ Redwood's directions seem aimed at keeping scattered clergy in line, rather than being addressed to congregants directly. Such materials are to be expected in a Catholic paper, and as stated, Evison had no control over the religious material that appeared. In addition to the Archbishop's contributions, outside writers Vidette and Taihoa also provided educational material. Taihoa wrote a regular column on local athletics, to encourage betterment of body alongside the betterment of mind achieved by reading the paper.²⁶ Vidette conversely offered Catholic commentary on recent New Zealand and British history, although by assuming a wide knowledge base, potentially alienated some readers.²⁷

These two forms of educational material, the external theology and the articles produced in-house, are perhaps the norm for any such paper. However, it is Evison's inclusion of one-off articles which perhaps best illustrates his influence over the paper, and his willingness to push boundaries and include fringe material. For example, whilst coming to a thoroughly Christian (if not Catholic) conclusion, an article 'Was Christ a Buddhist?' would have been decidedly controversial for a Catholic paper anywhere, not least in a white settler colony.²⁸ The article began its three paper diatribe as a refutation of an article by Felix Oswald of the *Arena*, who concluded Christ to have been 'a remote disciple of Sakyamouni [*sic*]'.²⁹ The article then systematically compared Christian and Buddhist doctrine side by side, thus delving quite deeply into Buddhist belief and practice.³⁰ Despite concluding in the negative and assuming a unity of Christian thought, the article introduced readers of the

²⁴ 'The Encyclical', *Catholic Times*, 28 August 1891, p.1.

²⁵ Archbishop Redwood, 'Francis by the Grace of God and Favour of the Apostolic See', *Catholic Times*, 30 January 1891, p.16.

²⁶ Taihoa, 'Athletic Items', *Catholic Times*, 31 July 1891.

²⁷ Vidette, 'Catholic Topics', *Catholic Times*, 30 January 1891, p.20.

²⁸ 'Was Christ a Buddhist?', *Catholic Times*, 14 August 1891, pp.19-20; 'Was Christ a Buddhist?', *Catholic Times*, 21 August 1891, pp.17-18; 'Was Christ a Buddhist?', *Catholic Times*, 28 August 1891, pp.16-17.

²⁹ 'Was Christ a Buddhist?', *Catholic Times*, 14 August 1891, pp.19-20; 'Was Christ a Buddhist?', *Catholic Times*, 21 August 1891, pp.17-18; 'Was Christ a Buddhist?', *Catholic Times*, 28 August 1891, pp.16-17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Catholic Times to an intense discussion about Buddhism. Furthermore, it did not actually attack or refute Buddhist teachings, simply showing that Christ was not a Buddhist and assuming that its Christian readers would never be swayed from their beliefs. Evison had some first-hand experience of Buddhism, having lived between India and China for years as a sailor, and as a soldier in Africa. Now, as an editor, he provided his readers with probably their first taste of Buddhist doctrine, given its adherents were so few in the settler colony. Like others of Evison's articles, 'Was Christ a Buddhist?' was a means of pulling people into debates about topics beyond their normal life experiences, and instead of telling them what to think, allowing them to form their own conclusions.

Historian J. Reginald Tye notes a similar phenomenon on a wider scale, arguing that other forms of religious discussion have entered debate to break the religious monopoly of Protestant Christianity.³¹ In particular, he acknowledges the work of the *Rationalist* as a key component of the breaking of that monopoly of religious discussion.³² Whilst Tye does not go as far as to link the *Rationalist* to its editor Ivo, at the *Catholic Times* Evison continued to challenge the Protestant Christian monopoly by firstly working for a Catholic paper but also introducing ideas to challenge that Christian majority from within the paper.

Having sourced a range of articles, Evison as editor then placed them into the order in which they appeared not only on the page, but also within the paper as a whole. Sally Stein writes that in the early twentieth century, editors of ladies' magazines split articles up throughout a paper, forcing the a reader of a particular article to leaf through extra pages in search of the rest, thus exposing them to advertising material.³³ For Evison however, the advertisements were a necessity he tolerated rather than indulged. His papers were not financial endeavours; he never profited from them beyond his salary, and he never intended to, stating:

The paper is in no sense of the words a commercial speculation, and any profit which may eventually accrue will be carried to the credit of some

³¹ J. Reginald Tye, 'New Zealand', in J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. Van Arsdel (eds.), *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p.227.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sally Stein, 'The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of Middle-Class Women's Magazines, 1919-1939', in Richard Bolton (ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p.145-146.

subsequent project for the advancement of Freethought and the benefit of freethinkers and freedom generally.³⁴

Like the editors of the *Freethought Review* before him, he accepted that making a profit from a Freethought paper was impossible; indeed, financial failure eventually drove both the *Freethought Review* and the *Rationalist* out of print.³⁵ One of Evison's regular contributors, Saladin, described making a financially viable Freethought paper as a 'Forlorn Hope', playing on the military term, that by being first into the breach, they would surely fall but others would successfully follow after them.³⁶

In attempting to balance the books, Evison tried to sell 3,000 shares of £1 each, but only sold 1,200.³⁷ The rest had to be made up with advertisements. However, some advertisers avoided the *Rationalist* on principle, so much so that there was generally an entire column of empty space where Evison advertised advertising space. The *Rationalist's* advertisements were all placed on the final two pages of the newspaper, leaving the majority, or at least the first seven or eight pages, advertisement-free. His page of bits and pieces of Freethought ephemera 'Mixed Spice' usually occupied the last page before the advertisements. This seemingly inconsequential design choice meant Evison opened the first page with news from the editor, and closed the last with Ivo's 'Mixed Spice'. Whilst dedicated to giving all people a platform on which to share their views, Evison ensured that his opinions were the first and last read by the consuming public.

The *Catholic Times*, appearing half a decade later, did not follow the same structure, with articles split into parts throughout a single issue. This was partially due to size, with an eight page paper having different requirements to a sixteen page paper. However, articles within the *Catholic Times* adhered to a larger superstructure, splitting up articles so as not to end up with a theological quarter, a current events quarter, a humour quarter, and an advertising quarter. Instead, regular features appeared on regular pages week to week, with one-off articles fitted around them, requiring some be split. Advertisements were dealt with similarly to at the *Rationalist*, and restricted to a two page advertisement section before the paper's actual front page.

³⁴ Ivo, 'Our Objects', *Rationalist*, 21 June 1885, p.3.

³⁵ *The Freethought Review*, 1 September, 1885, p.9.

³⁶ Saladin, 'Still it Moves', *Rationalist*, 20 December 1885, p.4

³⁷ Ivo, 'Important: To Our Subscribers and Donors', *Rationalist*, 27 December 1885, p.1.

The front and back covers were thus of lower quality paper than the rest of the issue, crammed with advertisements before the paper began proper.

In regard to changing the layout and presentation of papers, the *Wairarapa Standard* and the *Catholic Times* were inherited, with long histories before Evison's stewardship, and with the former at least, Evison avoided taking liberties with its layout. Like the *Truth*, these were regional daily papers, and Evison kept their layout in line with the style of comparable papers. However, with the *Catholic Times*, Evison removed the heavy black lines separating columns, which may have saved some money, but also made for a more open paper, less confined by the cutting guide the borders were designed to offer. He also allowed articles to run together to leave more space for content. Theological material was often separated clearly so as to allow it to be removed and stored. Commenting on the changes in the *Catholic Times* after Evison's appointment, the *Wairarapa Daily Times* gave a review several issues into his editorship:

A journalist well known and not a little admired in the Wairarapa, Mr J. Evison, was...appointed Editor of the Catholic Times. We have not previously seen the paper in question for some time, but the last two issue are before us, and we perceive a wonderful improvement in the get up of the Catholic Times, but also in its contents... [which are] terse and crisp and sparkle with that keen humour not untinged with sarcasm for which the writer is distinguished.³⁸

Over time, column space was increasingly devoted to non-theological news, which was inviting to the reader but carried less of an expectation that each piece be removed for repeated consumption as was anticipated for the doctrinally important material.

Evison was clearly very competent as an editor, evidenced by his consistently finding work in significant papers despite his questionable past. Evison was keen to protect this reputation as a capable editor. To that end, he actively sought transparency when the 1891 Supreme Court case was heard. To make sure his audience knew the facts of the case, and that he was not misleading them, the *Catholic Times* featured a two page spread containing all coverage of the case from papers around the country.³⁹

³⁸ 'Mr. J. Evison', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 May 1889, p.2.

³⁹ 'Public Opinion: Evison v. Typographical Association', *Catholic Times*, 25 December 1891, p.19.

At the *Critic*, Evison's choices were different from all of his previous papers. No longer centred on delivering new information through arguments and articles, the *Critic* instead offered serialised fiction, separated by political cartoons. The thirty page weekly paper was spread out to allow stories to be clipped and kept in their entirety, never backing onto themselves. Large political cartoons, often light-heartedly attacking the monolith Seddon, were spread throughout. The paper was a real attempt to foster writing, and to cater to people hungry for new stories.

Evison's placement of articles in almost all of his papers promoted the material and debate over everything else. Evison could have made money in these endeavours, or simply kept a small paper alive by catering to just the local Freethought movement, as William Collins did in Christchurch.⁴⁰ With a smaller run and narrower focus, costs were lower, and advertising space could easily be sold to local businesses. However, Evison's ambitions was too great; he wanted to spread his message too far. The *Rationalist* achieved only a small but dedicated list of subscribers scattered all over New Zealand, and even some in Australia. Working around advertising, Evison made the articles an uninterrupted focus of the *Rationalist* and the *Catholic Times*. By offering large central blocks of articles, Freethought and Catholicism presented strong centralised arguments in favour of their world views. Within these, he allowed room for individuals to have their say, and to have their own name atop the article. Libertarian motivations pushed Evison to put the individual centre stage, allowing others to judge for themselves. He brought his own unique style to each paper he edited.

At a recent symposium, Tony Ballantyne mused on the phenomenon of celebrity editors.⁴¹ The nineteenth century was a boom time for newspapers, which could be set up anywhere, and were then a focal point for a community. For new papers in larger areas or catering to niche interests, well-known editors provided instant credibility, making them more likely to be bought by a passer-by. Evison achieved this level of celebrity and/or notoriety, with his previous exploits as a lecturer and controversial reputation landing him his editorships at the *Wairarapa Standard*, *Catholic Times*, and *Truth*. Each of these new or struggling papers needed a draw to compete with their

⁴⁰ Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', p.78.

⁴¹ Tony Ballantyne, 'The Places and Paces of Colonial Reading: Thoughts from the South', unpublished paper, Fast Reading, Slow History: he pukapuka tatau tenei symposium, Victoria University of Wellington, May 2014.

better known and longer running competition. Evison's name carried that weight. However, Evison himself never relied on that celebrity status; indeed, he took active steps to downplay it, demonstrated by his extensive use of noms-de-plume. Others of his profession, however, fully utilised the standing it gave them. If a paper could unify a community, then its editor could foster a basis for political support. For Stout and Ballance, amongst others, editorships provided a starting point for political success.

Evison was clearly identified as editor from the *Wairarapa Standard* onwards. Whilst uncredited material is largely attributed to the editor, Evison also wrote named articles under various pseudonyms. Ivo, Wellington Watchman and Phiz account for the majority of Evison's written work, and they went some way to downplaying his role as editor. At the *Rationalist*, with little experience, and having been revealed as Ivo the lecturer, Evison and Ivo inhabited the same space, with articles written by Joseph Evison, Ivo, J.E. Ivo, or Joseph Evison Ivo. It thus became clear that the editor was writing a lot of material in the paper. By the time Evison was at the *Wairarapa Standard*, Wellington Watchman was strictly separated from Evison the editor, writing columns and articles all his own. The apparent reason for this relates to Evison's earlier description of the country editor, beholden to many to cater for and indulge their views and ideas. Wellington Watchman was a way for Evison to escape the role of editor, to avoid becoming constrained by the religious or political views of prominent supporters or locals. Evison could be a quintessential small town newspaper editor, and the paper a central part of Greytown's fledgling identity, whilst Watchman could attack the establishment and push for unpopular political and religious views, for example supporting free trade with China, or attacking the religious views of Ballance and Stout.⁴²

Unlike Ivo, who had disappeared with the *Rationalist*, Watchman carried on to Evison's tenure at the *Catholic Times*. Questioned directly about his being Watchman, Evison strenuously denied it.⁴³ Only in the Supreme Court in 1892 did Evison admit to writing the Watchman articles.⁴⁴ This is somewhat surprising given the Watchman

⁴² 'Our Wellington Watchman', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 7 July 1887, p.2.

⁴³ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo – Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

⁴⁴ 'Supreme Court Wellington', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 15 August 1888, p.2; Evison, *The Pope the Prelate and the Printer*, p.8.

articles clearly incorporated aspects of Evison's life, such as his time aboard ships in China. Watchman even goes as far as to retell stories that Evison had told elsewhere.⁴⁵

His numerous pseudonyms play a role in Evison's wider secular ideal, and their existence is an editorial decision, rather than one concerning his privacy. Noms-de-plume served to numerically bolster each paper and argument, despite his being only one man. By making himself three or four different people, Freethinkers got their editor, the Catholics had their commentator whilst conservatives and contrarians had theirs. Alongside these personalities, Evison existed in a different capacity, and under a different name. Two seemingly unconnected people, providing material to niche newspapers, made communities look bigger than they really were. Whilst Evison took some measures to keep his role as these other personalities secret, there is little to indicate that this was his main intent. Some of the names he was quite open with, reporting himself in the *Rationalist* as J E Ivo, or a variation on that. He also later admitted in the *Wairarapa Standard* to being Ivo.⁴⁶ At the same time, he was guarded about Watchman's identity, the issue here being one of cross contamination. Whilst the secular Evison flitted easily between different causes, their niche audiences could not be trusted to be as open and welcoming as he was; it was thus preferable to have someone supposedly unconnected with Evison to write the more controversial material.

Phiz operated in a slightly different manner to Watchman or Ivo, but again demonstrated Evison's dedication to the argument rather than the paper or celebrity. Whilst editor for the *Truth*, Evison published 'Political Portraits' of local politicians under the pseudonym Phiz. Unlike his previous pseudonyms, Phiz did not appear alongside Evison, but was printed in a competing paper. Whilst it did become well known that Evison was Phiz by the time of the 1893 general election, positive publicity and sales related to articles had gone to the *Press*, and not the *Truth*.

⁴⁵ Wellington Watchman, 'A True Ghost Story', *Catholic Times*, 5 February 1892, p.10; Ivo, 'Ivo's Ghost Story', *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1884, p.14. The story is the same, however with a drastically different ending.

⁴⁶ Joseph Evison, 'Freethought Ivo – Open Letter 2', *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 8 July 1887, p.2.

Letters to the Editor

Whilst as editor, Evison's control over his newspapers was firm and visible, perhaps the most interesting demonstration of his connection to his readers are his responses to letters to the editor. Every issue of the *Rationalist* and the *Catholic Times* contained a selection. Indeed, almost every issue of Evison's collected published papers contained several inches of column space devoted to letters to the editor, often accompanied by apologies to those whose letters could not be printed in that issue due to space or time constraints.⁴⁷ Here, readers in support of and opposed to the cause at the heart of the paper shared support, criticism, and asked questions of the editor and the paper's wider community. Evison's responses followed his own particular style. This in part emerged due to his selectivity in replying to only a small percentage of those printed and received.

Evison's responses are, as we might expect, not educative but argumentative; Evison responded to critics, not supporters. Previous Freethought papers had gone to great lengths to be educational to those both inside and outside Freethought. Evison, however, viewed aggression and argument to be the best means of advancing Freethought, or at least as his way of contributing.

At the *Rationalist* and the *Catholic Times*, Evison was consistent in his approach to letters to the editor. Evison's papers were pushed for space, and so often, small apologies appear, stating that letters were too long, or will be printed in the future when space allows. Given the support and inquisitive nature of letters received by previous Freethought papers, it is reasonable to assume that the *Rationalist* received much the same. However, Evison printed in its pages more letters from detractors than from supporters. These detractors were often opposed to the very basis of rationalism, and so they wrote aggressively against Freethought morals, and particularly against Ivo, as a useful figurehead.⁴⁸ The *New Zealand Herald* in particular was antagonistic towards the *Rationalist*, with a staff writer engaging in an almost serialised back and forth with Ivo.⁴⁹ Through these detractors, Evison found a way to open a dialogue between groups of people at opposite ends of the religious spectrum. Evison playfully

⁴⁷ Ivo, 'Notes to Correspondents', *Rationalist*, 28 March 1886, p.1.

⁴⁸ A Methodist, 'Ivo', *Rationalist*, 21 June 1885, p.7.

⁴⁹ Mercutio, 'To the Editor', *Rationalist*, 28 June 1885, p.3.

responded, alluding to the true meaning of Freethought or simply making fun of their beliefs and their writing.⁵⁰

Evison also included letters from Freethinkers, and in later papers, from supporters of their causes; however, he only replied to those outside his particular fold, almost always the aggressive detractors. Janet Wilson describes English writing in New Zealand as that of a diaspora community, linked more to England than to New Zealand.⁵¹ Whilst Wilson is focused on fictional material, Miles Fairburn in *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* similarly noted that society as a whole was held back by a focus on Britain as home.⁵² Evison tried to avoid this for Freethinkers as a religious diaspora. By engaging his local detractors, Evison made a spectacle of conflict and particularly the opposition the movement faced in New Zealand. Readers were thus prevented from only engaging with theoretical considerations from across the sea and forced to confront real prejudice at home. In this way, Freethought was grounded locally, not just in Charles Bradlaugh's debates in London.

Ivo's exchange with 'Constant Reader' provides an example of the type of letter Evison did respond to. In November 1885, 'Constant Reader' wrote to Ivo for clarification on Freethought doctrine as opposed to Christian belief. Despite no name or identification being given, apart from the pseudonym 'Constant Reader', in Ivo's responses, he assumed he addressed a woman, clarifying that the handwriting and the delicate paper on which it was written identified the correspondent as female.⁵³ She asked:

What is the belief of freethinkers as to the future. When a man dies, is that the end of everything? Is he, like a dog, never to be heard of afterwards? Will there be no future happiness? An answer will oblige! Merely this and nothing more!⁵⁴

There is clearly present an antagonism towards Freethought's position, with the question coming just after the death of Mercutio, a staunch opponent of the *Rationalist*, the movement, and particularly Ivo.⁵⁵ Also present in the wording is reference to the

⁵⁰ Ivo, 'Mixed Spice', *Rationalist*, 28 June 1885, p.3.

⁵¹ Janet Wilson, 'The New Chum: Writings of the English Diaspora in New Zealand, 1860-1914', in Lyndon Fraser & Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home': The English in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), pp.165-166.

⁵² Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989), pp.201-203.

⁵³ Constant Reader, 'That Sweet Bye-And-Bye', *Rationalist*, 29 November 1885, p.6.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ivo, 'Mixed Spice', *Rationalist*, 13 September 1885, p.4.

works of Edgar Alan Poe, particularly *The Raven*. Having almost ceased all lecturing after taking up the editorship of the *Rationalist* in mid-1885, in November of that year (just a week before the original letter to the editor was sent), Ivo had given a rare lecture on ‘some modern poets and humourists’, with the programme including his readings of *The Raven* by Edgar A. Poe, *Anger and Enumerations* by Danbury Newsman, *Two Women*, and *Kate Maloney* by George Sims, *Nathan Farmer*, and *Lady Godiva* by Tennyson, *Jim* by Bret Harte, and *Queen Mab* by Shelley.⁵⁶

Ivo’s response, signed off as Ivo rather than the editor, took up columns in two consecutive issues, comprising two very different halves. The first contemplated the language of ‘Constant Reader’, before moving to personal reflection. Ivo draped his response in a crude mockery of poetic language, creating a rather condescending tone. He bit back that she did not care what he believed, asking after all Freethinkers instead, to which he replied that he was not his brother’s keeper, and that they were not men of creeds etc. Instead, he alone had no reward awaiting him, nor fear of punishment to come.⁵⁷ He went on to talk (for the first time) about the divide between the freethinkers and the spiritualists and others of their ranks being so great, that one could never speak for all. Ivo went on to push his own belief, scientifically grounded, in ‘continuance of the bulk, and discontinuance of the sample.’⁵⁸ Humanity lives on, despite the death of a one individual human. Ivo jumped from his own ideas into again attacking ‘Constant Reader’:

Ah! Dear Madam, I see, you are young and beautiful, and you do not care to think your individual beauty shall be lost to the Universe. You do not care to picture yourself dead, deep in the bosom of dear mother earth; not even though after multitudinous you should blossom forth into the painted rose, or odorous jasmine. True, you will not, as we think, be there to see yourself dead, cold, and forgotten. And, if we are to put it as a matter of feeling and not of fact, there are other views to be taken of the annihilation of personal continuance, views not altogether disconcerting. There are worse things than sleep.⁵⁹

Again, Ivo refused to speak for others, or to be goaded into trivialities:

⁵⁶ ‘Lecture by IVO, Some Modern Poets and Humorists’, *Rationalist*, 8 November 1885, p.7.

⁵⁷ Ivo, ‘That Sweet Bye-And-Bye’, *Rationalist*, 29 November 1885, p.6.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ivo, ‘To Die Like a Dog’, *Rationalist*, 6 December 1885, p.3.

In his second reply to ‘Constant Reader’, having had time to contemplate the initial letter, Ivo was reflective, and opened up about his own experience. Ivo commenced by contemplating her reference to ‘dead as a dog’, focusing on the dog. He went on to share a rare (possibly fictitious) account of receiving news from England that the dog he had left behind had died:

I have here before me, dear Madam, a letter – black edged, the ink a little faded, the paper somewhat yellow. That ‘dog’ of yours is on my mind. I open the letter, I read: - “and now,” proceeds the writer, “I have some very sad news for you. I have already told you that poor Florence never seemed to get over your departure from England. She almost refused to eat, but day and night, night and day, spent her time in walking sadly between your house and ours. Owing to her infirmity she could not tell us what was amiss. But she cried very much; nearly always. If, thoroughly worn out, she fell asleep for a few minutes, she would wake up suddenly, gaze around, go to the door and look out, and then commence to sob bitterly. If she met any whom she had seen in your company she would follow them for miles, hoping she might meet you, and the pathetic, hopeless, yearning look in her beautiful lustrous eyes was truly terrible. One day, in your sitting room, she found an old driving glove of yours. She never once, even for a moment, relinquished that glove. She carried it with her everywhere and fondled it in her sleep. One night she came round the family circle, and looked at each of us very fixedly, but said nothing. Next morning, on the exact spot on which she had last seen you stand, we found her – dead; her head pillowed on your glove.” That is all, madam, my ‘Constant Reader,’ ‘Another lost Lenore?’ you ask. No – a dog.⁶⁰

Whilst there is a chance of it being fictitious, in order to gain sympathy, the situation for many would have been very real, and it portrayed a reality of death beyond the individual; that no matter what happened to the departed, there were those that remained who missed and mourned the deceased. Ivo did not get a reply concerning the story of his dog’s death; however, it is revealing that Evison thought it appropriate and suitable to be used not only in that instance of debate, but also in the pages of the *Rationalist* itself. The story at its core is an individualist one, relating directly to the

⁶⁰ Ivo, ‘To Die Like a Dog’, *Rationalist*, 6 December 1885, p.3.

experience of one, yet managed to be all encompassing by not talking about the experience of the deceased but of those that remained.

Evison's responses to writers such as Mercutio, Constant Reader, Alexander Hogg, A Colonial Society Lady, and Pachyderm Woman all reveal the adversarial nature of Evison's relationship with his audience. During the *Rationalist's* first dozen issues, Ivo engaged in an editorial letter back and forth with Mercutio, a writer and reviewer for the *Auckland Herald*.⁶¹ Eventually revealing herself to be a woman, Mercutio attacked the core of the Freethought movement as being in conflict with a good and proper Christian life, which she argued was what the majority of those in New Zealand sought to pursue.⁶² Evison's rebuttal was not a calm and measured explanation of Freethought ideas in an attempt to convince Mercutio of the error of her ways. Instead, Evison offered a simple attack on her writing, her character, and her employer. Having called her a 'vinegary virgin', a term Mercutio objected to, Evison responded by removing what he saw as the word which had caused the offence, virgin.⁶³ The pair sent each other a rather childish series of letters, such that eventually the *Herald* stopped printing them and moved on to other targets, believing the cause of Freethought to be irreparably damaged. Mercutio died shortly after the cessation of letters between herself and Evison. To mark the occasion, he wrote her one final letter in the pages of the *Rationalist*, blaming her editor at the *Herald* for pushing her to engage him.⁶⁴

In August 1892, a year after the infamous Supreme Court case, Evison wrote a column in the *Catholic Times* satirising the increasingly prolific, and in his eyes, inconsequential, ladies' columns.⁶⁵ These columns reported the activities and dress of society women, particularly Governors' wives. Evison wrote mockingly in a mix of upper class English and deliberately poor French. Intended as satire, some did not take it well. A writer calling themselves 'A Colonial Society Lady' wrote a damning letter to the editor, opening:

Sir – in the issue of CATHOLIC TIMES, of August 12th, you are pleased to be sarcastic on the subject of Society ladies in this colony. Why you spell

⁶¹ Mercutio, 'To the Editor', *Rationalist*, 28 June 1885, p.3.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ivo, 'Mixed Spice', *Rationalist*, 28 June 1885, p.3.

⁶⁴ Ivo, 'Mixed Spice', *Rationalist*, 13 September 1885, p.4.

⁶⁵ Watchman, 'Ladies' Society Items', *Catholic Times*, 19 August 1892, p.12.

the word “Sassiety,” I do not know, but probably, it veils a jokelet with which I am thankful to remain unacquainted.⁶⁶

She continues:

Anyone of bon ton (not bong tong, as you spell it –your French is on par with your society knowledge) must be a mystery to you indeed.⁶⁷

Watchman’s reply actually appeared earlier in the paper, ensuring that his side was explained before ‘A Colonial Society Lady’ had her say. Taking a few choice quotes from the letter, Evison set about asking how one is meant to spot a society lady, and:

What constitutes a New Zealand Society Lady; what gives a woman the right to have her new dresses, or old dresses – for some of them wear the same good old gowns at every function and have them described differently each time – described in all the papers that go in for “Society Items” in the colony.⁶⁸

The column is simply argumentative and aggressive, disdainfully pointing to a fictional idea of ‘position’ as holding these people above ‘the lower orders’. A Colonial Society Lady asserted that:

A gentleman cannot be mistaken for anything but a gentleman, and a lady is as different from persons of the same sex of the lower class, as her gowns are from theirs.⁶⁹

To which Evison replied:

Are they labelled like the sketches in some of our “comic” papers – “this is a cow,” or “this is Mr Ballance,” and so on?⁷⁰

It may seem a strange exchange to take place in a Catholic paper backed by Redwood, the Archbishop of Wellington. However, it speaks to a Catholic audience disproportionately of the ‘lower order’ to which the correspondent alluded.⁷¹

Evison’s personal beliefs in secularism and libertarianism are clear throughout all of his responses and non-responses to letters to the editor. Evison believed in the individual, in their right to their own beliefs, and their being free to express that belief. To this end, he left alone letters which shared their support of the Freethought system,

⁶⁶ A Colonial Society Lady, ‘Society Items’, *Catholic Times*, 19 August 1892, p.18.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.18.

⁶⁸ Wellington Watchman, ‘Ladies’ Society Items’, *Catholic Times*, 19 August 1892, p.12.

⁶⁹ A Colonial Society Lady, ‘Society Items’, *Catholic Times*, 19 August 1892, p.18.

⁷⁰ Watchman, ‘Ladies’ Society Items’, *Catholic Times*, 19 August 1892, p.12.

⁷¹ Peter J. Lineham, ‘Christian Reaction to Freethought and Rationalism in New Zealand’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol.5, No.2, 1988, pp.240-241.

since there was nothing to be gained in congratulating each other on their fine beliefs. What Evison did respond to was opposition, almost always from a Protestant majority. Here, he fulfilled the role he imagined for himself as a protector of side-lined minorities.

Evison's Soapbox

Completely removed from Evison's writing career, his foray into politics provided him with a soapbox to extoll his views, rather than a column on page four. Several accounts of speeches made by Evison have survived in newspapers. Standing on a conservative and Catholic-backed platform in Christchurch, a predominantly Anglican city with staunchly liberal elected officials, Evison did not stand a good chance of being elected. However, his public speaking engagements did win him some fans, and on election day, he found himself with 1,708 votes.

After his address at the Tuam Street Hall on the evening of 31 October 1893, two letters to the editor appeared in opposing newspapers, the *Star* and the *Press*. Coincidentally, both writers were politically opposed to Evison, but both thoroughly enjoyed the wit and ability with which Evison had delivered his views. The *Star's* correspondent wrote that Evison:

gave his hearers a pleasant entertainment, which was enjoyed by the audience who evidently appreciated the speaker's wit and ability as a lecturer more than they, or a good many of them at all events, did his political opinions.⁷²

At the same time, Scrutator wrote in the *Press* 'I write not as a friend of Mr Evison's, or a believer in all the planks of his political platform' yet described Evison as:

A draft of pure artesian water, after being compelled to put up with drinking water from a dirty pool... there was no servile truckling to the masses, which has proved one of the unfortunate results of universal suffrage.⁷³

The praise heaped upon Evison a decade earlier at his lecturing debut thus does not appear exaggerated; it seems he really was 'facile princeps in the art of logical

⁷² 'Mr Evison's Meeting', *Star*, 1 November 1893, p.2.

⁷³ Scrutator, 'Mr Evison', *Press*, 3 November 1893, p.2.

exposition before a popular audience.⁷⁴ A week after his speech to the Tuam Street audience, someone calling themselves ‘One of the People’ wrote into the *Press* to criticise the message Evison had espoused. They argued that whilst Evison started his speech by saying that he was an unashamedly hard line individualist, he later changed his speaking to place himself alongside the masses, using phrases such as ‘we are not taking any’, and ‘we don’t want to fight, but by jingo if we do’.⁷⁵ Whilst ‘One of the People’s’ argument was thin, and perhaps failed to distinguish between Evison’s opposition to collective politicians rather than a collective public, its timing and content reveal a reality of Evison’s work. After a week had passed, the wit and rhetoric had been forgotten and the audience was left with the actual content of the speech (examined in chapter two).

In replying to letters to the editor, Evison’s penchant for conflict distorted the published record to imply that most opposed his views. In speaking publicly, he had no tangible control over the audience or its reporting, and we perhaps get a more balanced view of how audiences interacted with his opinions and presentation. As a Catholic-backed conservative candidate not aligned with a conservative party, Evison’s views were not popular, with both critics and supporters panning his planned political moves.⁷⁶ However, his ability to express his views was widely lauded. Overwhelmingly, he was seen as skilled in his field, but like his papers, his speeches generated only limited numbers of adherents, catering as they did to unpopular minorities, whose views did not align with the majority Protestant Liberal beliefs.

Evison’s run at parliamentary office is different from those of his contemporaries in earlier elections due to the nature of universal suffrage, introduced in the 1893 elections. His first foray into politics coincided with an entirely new political world, with wider enfranchisement in turn widening the political spectrum, and requiring particular thought and nuance in delivering messages. Evison had seen great changes to the electoral system during his time as an editor, with 1887 being the last election with plural votes for land owners, 1890 being the first election without plural votes, and then in 1893, he saw the widening of suffrage to women. In his speech to the Tuam Street Hall, Evison objected to prohibition in every form, staunchly expressing Libertarian ideals. It is here that he also fleshed out his ideas on how the

⁷⁴ ‘Wanganui’, *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1883, p.5.

⁷⁵ One of the People, ‘Mr J. S. Evison’, *Press*, 6 November 1893, p.3.

⁷⁶ Gwyllum Cullynn, ‘Mr Evison’s Candidature’, *Star*, 25 November 1893, p.5;

secular education system would be altered to include Catholics in a positive way, where grants would be made to pay for the schools, as long as on top of religious education their students also met vigorous government standards.⁷⁷

Having made a name for himself as Phiz, insulting parliamentarians, Evison abandoned a lot of his direct aggression, and to some extent, humour. His silver tongue was directed at a vague political other, rather than particular individuals.⁷⁸ Part of this was the necessity of much wider subject matter; not having a column to talk about one small aspect, Evison had to convey his views on a myriad of topics in just a few thousand words, requiring that he stay on point and not spend that time advertising others. But more so, it was about Evison reading and playing the audience. Unlike a niche newspaper, where most readers were staunch supporters and debates were mediated by him, speeches presented a different challenge. With no control over the crowd's composition, and the presence of an independent mediator, Evison trod somewhat carefully. Whereas Freethinkers had struggled through being defined by what they were not rather than what they were, Evison was careful to positively identify his policy direction, and to only make witty implications about his opponents, rather than comment on them directly.

Evison also utilised self-deprecating humour, much to the delight of his audience. Where Reeves suffered the heckles of larrikins and rowdyism, Evison opened his address:

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen – I am, as you are aware, a candidate for your suffrage at the next general election. I propose to address you on a number of important issues tonight, and on one unimportant subject. (Hear Hear.) The unimportant subject is myself. (Laughter.) Unfortunately for both you and me I must talk a little about myself. I promise, however, to make that portion of my address very brief.⁷⁹

By beating hecklers to the punch, Evison won the crowd over very early, and was able to give an uninterrupted discussion of his vision for Christchurch to a hall of 2,000 people. One observer recollected:

⁷⁷ 'Mr Evison's Speech', *Press*, 1 November 1893, p.3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ A Staunch Supporter, 'Mr Reeves' Speech', *Star*, 3 November 1893, p.3; 'Mr Reeves' Ovation', *Press*, 31 October 1893, p.4; 'Mr Evison at the Tuam Street Hall', *Press*, 1 November 1893, p.4.

Except for the good fortune of having Mr Reece in the chair, he had no adventitious aids to pull him through. Behind him was no ring of old friends and political supporters; before him were two thousand people of whom only the merest fraction knew him personally, whilst half of them had probably never even seen him. Yet he got such courtesy and such appreciation as any political veteran might well have been proud of. And he got it by dint of sheer grit.⁸⁰

The observer was quite right about Evison having few political allies and being relatively unknown. To bolster his campaign, Evison revealed himself as Phiz and took advantage of his notoriety; however, it had little impact on his eventual tally.

This said, some commentators seemed willing to defend his stance. One writer calling themselves Common Justice wrote in to address:

He is accused of insincerity by the supporters of Mr Reeves! Of Infidelity by the supporters of Mr Collins! Of sweating and other dishonest acts whilst editing *The Catholic Times*, although his retirement from that position was a matter of universal regret, and he has now in his possession letters from the Archbishop and others of clergy, testifying to their respect and appreciation of his character and work whilst in their employ, as well as testimonials of affectionate regard from his subordinates and fellow-workers. But the accusation, apparently the most damning in the eyes of the Christchurch electors, is that ten years back he published a pamphlet vilifying and slandering the Catholic community, which he is now anxious to represent.⁸¹

Common Justice further argued that if one were to pull up ten years history on each of the candidates standing for Christchurch, few would come up as clean as Evison. Instead, he blamed Christchurch's Catholic population for being swayed by negative reporting of Evison's role as editor, stating that they should support their candidate.⁸²

Despite Evison's competence as a speaker, he placed very poorly. Message was ultimately more important than delivery. In the speeches he gave during his election campaign, Evison was light on the technical detail of his plans if elected, but forthright in his stance on numerous smaller issues. Many commentators considered Evison to

⁸⁰ 'Mr Evison's Speech', *Press*, 1 November 1893, p.4.

⁸¹ Common Justice 'Mr Evison's detractors', *Press*, 27 November 1893, p.3.

⁸² *Ibid.*

be highly competent, and in fact one of the best speakers they had seen. However, votes went to the incumbent Reeves, despite almost all of his speeches in the lead up to the election being beset by hecklers and larrikins, who had served to distract and stifle his speaking.

Conclusion

In order to communicate his ideas about secularism and libertarianism to not only his supporters but also the wider public, Evison varied the writing, tone, audience, and presentation of his work to as the situation demanded it. Evison was met, it seems, with equal parts failure and success. Clearly, he had an impact, and his exploits in his roles as editor and political candidate were well reported and well received, with proprietors of newspapers across the country hiring him to edit their papers, and present their views to the world at large. On the other hand, Evison's papers often met untimely ends, with the *Rationalist*, and the *Critic* (where he had the most control) ending after relatively short runs. His greatest success seems to have been the *Catholic Times*, where his changes to the paper and his notoriety served to ensure strong readership. Only after his departure did the paper experience troubles which would force it to close. As an editor, Evison courted celebrity and controversy. He was very good at the job, and most likely could have written for any of the colony's prominent newspapers. However, his determination to break the monopoly of the majority saw him throw his lot in with outsider minorities. Brave decisions, such as the publication of a discussion of Buddhist teaching alongside the most important papal order of a generation, meant Evison was able to manufacture his own narratives out of the work of others.

Conclusion

Joseph Evison was undoubtedly a colourful character. His incessant wandering and ability to advocate for radically different groups means that a study of his life adds to a great many and varied narratives of nineteenth-century New Zealand. But more than that, he provides flavour, or as Rollo Arnold describes it ‘effective “Nows”’, generating a ‘feel’ for the period and the many conflicts which bubbled below society’s surface.¹

In recent times, Evison has appeared as a one line curiosity in histories of Freethought and Irish Catholics in New Zealand, as well as political histories of the right and left. None of these have granted Evison more than a few lines, understandably since he is not their focus. He is instead a small footnote in histories of much bigger movements and people. What little is written confines his identity to that of a Freethinker, Catholic, or Conservative, with the other possible labels dismissed entirely or briefly explained away. Whilst these may be valid snapshots of Evison’s long working career, they are just that, giving no sense of his life and work as a whole. Evison worked for many different people and causes, and should be examined in his entirety to see what he actually brought to each.

Born in England in 1841, Joseph Spence Evison spent his 62 years moving across an ever shrinking globe. Evison escaped his middle-class family, leaving home for a life at sea at just 14. After helping set record times for sailings between England and India, he found himself a privateer against pirates, watching as the century’s deadliest war, the Taiping Rebellion, unfolded before him. Unable to settle into his first newspaper job, Evison became a cavalryman, just in time for the expedition to Abyssinia. Alongside thousands of people from different cultures all speaking different languages, Evison went to war. Yet he saw almost nothing of battle, relegated instead to punitive acts of destruction against the Orthodox Church in Abyssinia. Having completed that tour of duty, Evison fled the influence of the army and navy to live for a time in India. When Evison eventually returned to England, he married

¹ Rollo Arnold, *New Zealand's Burning - the Settlers' World in the Mid 1880s* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994), p.113.

Matilda Pass, working various jobs in London to support the couple. Whilst they were able to make ends meet, they soon abandoned England in favour of the colonies.

Upon arriving in New Zealand in 1879, it was not long before Evison found his niche as an itinerant Freethought lecturer. Drawing from a wealth of experience, Evison gave well-attended lectures on controversial topics. Where other Freethought personalities sought to educate and evangelise Freethought to a population increasingly disinterested in attending church, Evison's approach was more provocative, aggressively antagonising anyone who stood against Freethinkers. To better attack the movement's opponents, he started the *Rationalist: A Weekly Freethought Newspaper* in Auckland. Such activity, in conjunction with the efforts of key personalities such as Stout and Ballance, meant that within a few years there remained little active opposition to Freethought.

With no one remaining to fight against, Evison left Freethought and his pseudonym Ivo. Having worked in the Wairarapa for a few years, Evison found himself in the employ of Archbishop Redwood, editing the *Catholic Times*. He would later be forced to clarify his religious position, and to argue that his past did not make him an unsuitable Catholic defender, in Court. Redwood did not desert his editor, standing by him throughout, despite facing ridicule himself. Still with Catholic backing, Evison ran in the general election of 1893. However, he was defeated by Freethinkers Reeves and Collins. He thus exiled himself to Australia. Evison returned one final time to New Zealand, but his newspaper, the *Critic*, could not support itself, despite facilitating amateur publishing, something sorely lacking in the colony. Evison died destitute in 1903. Matilda then left for England, attempting to publish a book of her husband's short stories, perhaps not realising that his fame lay only in New Zealand.

The above narrative of Evison's life demonstrates the mobility of settlers in his colonial world. Tony Ballantyne has argued that settlers were anything but settled, and that their mobility and past experiences carried huge weight in the formation of communities, even if they only passed through and never settled there.² Whilst it is clear that Evison does not suit labels of Freethought, or Catholicism, or Conservatism, he impacted many different movements and places. Looking just at the Wairarapa

² Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012), p.279.

town of Masterton, Evison gave several lectures on Freethought there between 1883 and 1885. His visit spurred the creation of the Masterton Freethought Association, bringing numerous supporters out of the wood work, such as prominent landowner and borough councillor, Alfred Renall. In 1887, Evison returned to the Wairarapa, living two towns over in Greytown. As editor of the *Wairarapa Standard*, Evison eagerly engaged in a public exchange with Alexander Hogg, who would be the Masterton MP for the next 20 years. Their dispute eventually ended in the Supreme Court the following year. Whilst Evison never took another appointment in the Wairarapa, his later exploits were thoroughly reported there, demonstrating the demand for information as to his activities and his position as something of a local, if not national, celebrity.

Evison's narrative repeatedly intersects with the histories of particular places such as Masterton, and the exercise above can be replicated for any of the places he visited, demonstrating the deep-seated connection between his mobility and influence. Evison had a global life, but in passing through places, he ensured a role in their histories. He well understood the importance of 'going to' the people. In no better way is this demonstrated than when, after his death, former colleagues throughout New Zealand and in Australia collected funds to support his widow, Matilda, allowing her to return to England.

Chapters two and three then examined Evison's beliefs. In an attempt to defend him from the charge of being a mere one line curiosity, selling his religious convictions to the highest bidder, they demonstrated that Evison was in fact a staunch secularist and libertarian. Such views may well have taken hold in China and Africa, where he saw deplorable treatment of people, particularly religious minorities, by an overwhelming British Imperial State. Escaping much of this oppression to a colony largely free from religious and state control, like many before him Evison found plenty of battles remained. Much work was still needed to secure a secularist ideology in New Zealand that fairly treated the non-religious and the religious minorities, alongside the majority of Christian Protestants. Evison did his part to try and spread secularism; by enflaming debates between the religious and non-religious, he could ensure they garnered greater public attention. To this end, he picked holes in the strongest traditions to slow them in their advance; he called out hypocrites who ridiculed his beliefs yet failed to live by their own, and he argued that all had a right to their own beliefs as long as they did not force them on others.

When the Freethinkers stood atop the colonial government and few remained to openly oppose them, Evison started the fight again, this time for the Catholics. Arguably, Catholics during this period were oppressed only by their own standards and desire to separate from wider society. Whether that is true or not, Evison understood them to be treated differently from other denominations. He brought to the *Catholic Times* that same aggression which he had thrown at Freethought's enemies, as he sought to defend Catholic education claims and promote Home Rule for Ireland.

Interwoven with his secularism was a staunch libertarian streak. Evison had been an officer and a rank and file soldier, and understood the delicate relationship between those with power, and those without it. Spurred on by this, Evison argued at every opportunity against authority structures which sought to dominate the individual. This variously took the form of opposition to British domination of China, opposition to New Zealand's liberal leaders, and even opposition to publishers who stifled the writing of amateurs. Evison relentlessly attacked these structures and the people who perpetuated them. When he tried to enter politics, he aligned himself only with his constituents, ever dedicated to fighting those already in power.

An anti-state libertarian, Evison's attention was focused solely on the government of New Zealand and the actions of top-tier Imperial officials. Evison campaigned for workers' rights, but only when the state was an employer, and was so utterly disconnected from Māori people and issues that they do not appear in any of his professional writing. Focused on the state and the Empire, Evison seemed to completely ignore ideas surrounding New Zealand as anything more than a white settler colony.

Secularism and libertarianism together explain Evison's career as a writer and editor in New Zealand far better than labels like Freethinker, Catholic, or Conservative. They also demonstrate that Evison was not a mere contrarian. His writing and speeches provide clear end goals, suggesting that he could be sated in his ambitions. The rise of Freethought demonstrates Evison's criteria for true freedom being fulfilled. When Freethought stood equal with Protestant denominations (if with fewer adherents), and its members held the highest positions in the colony, Evison stepped away and moved on to support the next underdog. Upon reaching that point of acceptance (or at least, minimal opposition) to one of his causes, he was apparently content. Evison's radical ideals of secularism and libertarianism have here been uncovered through a close reading of the material he wrote in his life time.

All of the material surveyed was available to anyone in the 1880s and 1890s, and indeed much of it saw truly national circulation with subscriptions at both ends of the country. It is his prolific writing and the availability of that material which squarely places Evison between colonial readers and the myriad of ideas and debates from around the world, which he interpreted for them. He thus acted as the other side of the reading coin presented by Lydia Wevers and Susann Liebich.³

Despite an ideological drive, Evison was rarely uninhibited. To protect himself, and to prevent his former work from interfering with his current debates, Evison created pseudonyms to fight his battles for him. These also served to subvert the concerns of investors and proprietors, who did not want their star editor caught up in too much controversy. Evison was very skilled at what he did as an editor, and could easily have taken his talents to work at any number of perhaps more profitable papers. Instead, his convictions kept him working for the underdog. However, smaller papers allowed him to control information and narratives within the groups they catered to, as he vetted and repositioned all new material entering the discussion via his newspapers. Evison did take time to reply to correspondence, but again his focus was requisitioning discussion to repurpose it for the larger debates he engaged in. Evison printed letters of support and let them speak for themselves. He replied only to his critics, using all of his wit and skill, bringing these debates into people's homes, and locating global struggles in their very local contexts. Evison was the lens through which much specialised information entered New Zealand. It bears considering how secularist and other narratives might have varied were debates and articles vetted through someone with a different agenda from Evison's.

Connecting reading with Janet Wilson's work on diasporic writing, Evison used the *Critic* to enable individuals to print their own stories so that others could read them.⁴ This attempt to open up amateur fiction, which Evison had first seen at the *Bulletin* in Sydney speaks to the ways in which Evison as an editor was connected with readers beyond simply being a writer.

³ Lydia Wevers, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2010); Susann Liebich, 'Connected Readers: Reading Practices and Communities Across the British Empire, c. 1890-1930', PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2012.

⁴ Janet Wilson, 'The "New Chum": Writings of the English Diaspora in New Zealand, 1860-1914' in Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From 'Home' the English in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), pp.168-169.

In spite of his written and verbal skills, Evison was by no means as successful as some of his contemporaries. Where editorship and new ideas catapulted Freethinkers like Robert Stout and John Ballance to political success, Evison languished with ideas perhaps too far removed from his strongly liberal audience. However, he was ever present in debates, always voicing his opinions, and those of the minorities he strove to represent. In this regard, Evison is an important connecting figure, traceable across many varied debates. Furthermore, in examining the life of Joseph Evison and trying to determine his political and religious convictions, insights can be gained for future biographical work, particularly those which seek to explore the motivating factors behind individuals.

Evison was no mere 'colourful newspaper columnist' who employed 'rather crude polemics' which 'upset the leaders of Freethought.'⁵ Instead, Evison's life was a back and forth of success and defeat, driven by a firm belief in secularism and libertarianism, which saw him move around the globe, leaving indelible impressions wherever he visited.

⁵ Peter J. Lineham, 'Freethinkers in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.19, no.1, 1985, pp.68, 69.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ivo's Ghost Story

In 1856, I was one of eight boys on board a ship which formed one of the fleet then in Hong Kong harbour. Among our crew was a sailor named Belcher, a man of great physical strength, and remarkable for his morose disposition and taciturnity. One day, Belcher went ashore, and when he came off to the ship again was drunk and quarrelsome. A row occurred between him and the steward, the latter being knocked down, and the end of it was that Belcher was put in irons. As the irons were being put on him, he said to the steward, 'I'll Kill you for this!' the remark was noticed all the more at the time because of Belcher's taciturn habits. Some evenings afterwards in the dog watch the steward, Walters, was sitting on the rail smoking a cigar, and this was the last that was seen of him. At about half past eight o'clock that same evening, the captain came storming out of his cabin wanting the steward, who could not be found. The ship was searched from stern to stern but there was no sign of the missing man, his half-finished cigar was found lying on the deck just underneath where he had been sitting. His hat was found floating near the ship. The police were communicated with and through a search and enquiry made, and it was incontestable proved that no communication by boat had taken place between the shore and the ship, or the ship and the shore, and it was also an undoubted fact that Walters could not swim a stroke, more over the harbour swarmed with sharks. It was also remembered that the last person noticed near Walters when sitting on the ship's side was Belcher. There was, of course, but one opinion in the minds of everybody, namely, that Belcher had pushed the Steward overboard, but, of course, there was no proof. It must be mentioned that Walters, the steward, always wore the black evening suit of a waiter, and that on a projection near where he had last been sitting, a strip of black cloth was found.

It was some time after these events, one night I was on watch, and had just struck one bell for the half hour past midnight. I then went forward to see that all was right, and upon reaching the man on the look-out

forward was informed that he had seen someone moving about aft. I immediately went aft to search, and when abreast of the mizzen mast perceived a figure in black ahead of me. In about 20 seconds I went after the figure, which proceeded noiselessly along and ascended the companion steps and then disappeared. I immediately went through all the quarters of the ship, but found everyone in his proper place, and no sign of anything wrong. I again went forwards, and the fore watch once more told me that he had seen something moving about aft. Proceeding in that direction again, at the same place as before a figure in black appeared, proceeded ahead of me, ascended the companion ladder and disappeared. Another search through the ship showed everyone in his proper place and nothing wrong. On going forward, the same man on the forecastle insisted he had seen someone moving about the ship, and was just telling me how Belcher had been sitting near him, remarking how murderous and fiendish the man looked when all of a sudden his face paled and his teeth chattered as he pointed down below. I turned and looked down, and then saw turned up towards me the ghastly features of Walters, the murdered Steward. It was not courage but sheer fright, that made me jump down at the apparition, which, however, seemed to glide away from where it had stood. I followed and once more the figure went aft, up the companion ladder and disappeared as I reached the poop. So did I – down to the midshipman's mess, where there was soon a regular state of confusion, for the captain came dashing in declaring he had been annoyed by someone in black moving about his cabin. All hands were mustered, a thorough overhaul of the ship made, but no explanation of the occurrence could be discovered. After that nothing more was seen of the figure in black which had appeared to some half dozen on board, and the event remained a profound mystery.

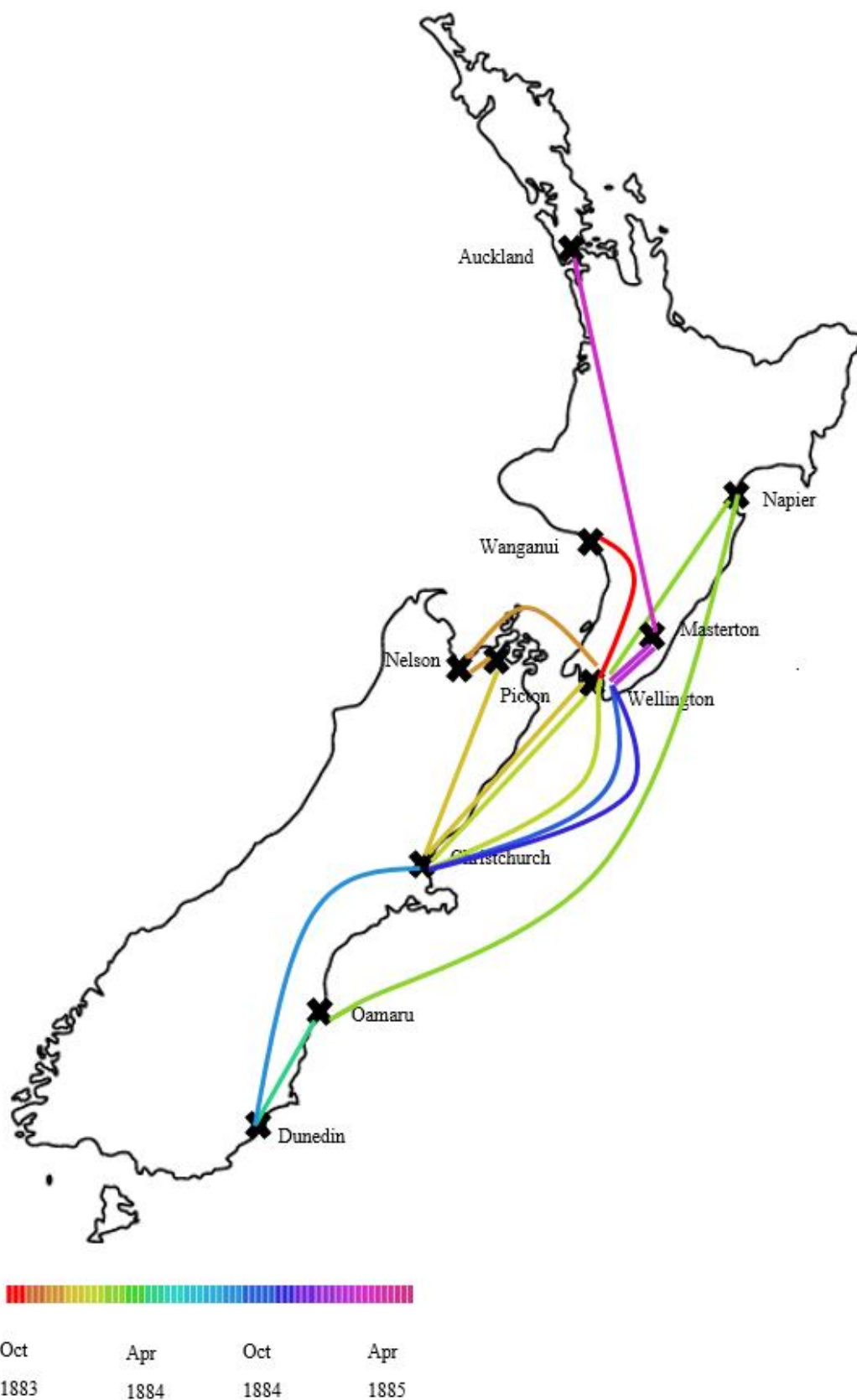
“There,” said Ivo, “is a ghost story, complete in every detail, to be vouched for by many no doubt alive this day, and without a weak spot in it, except one. Some four years afterwards, in Calcutta, I met the ghost again, and it then weighed 14 stone; or rather I met Walters, the steward, in the flesh. He had deserted the Hong Kong harbour, and for some reason or other wishing his relatives at home to think him dead, had arranged

accordingly, and the very man who assisted him to carry out his scheme was the man Belcher by means of a black suit and India rubber shoes. And other ghost stories have just as simple an explanation.”

Ivo, ‘Ivo’s Ghost Story’, *Freethought Review*, 1 November 1884, p.14

Appendix B

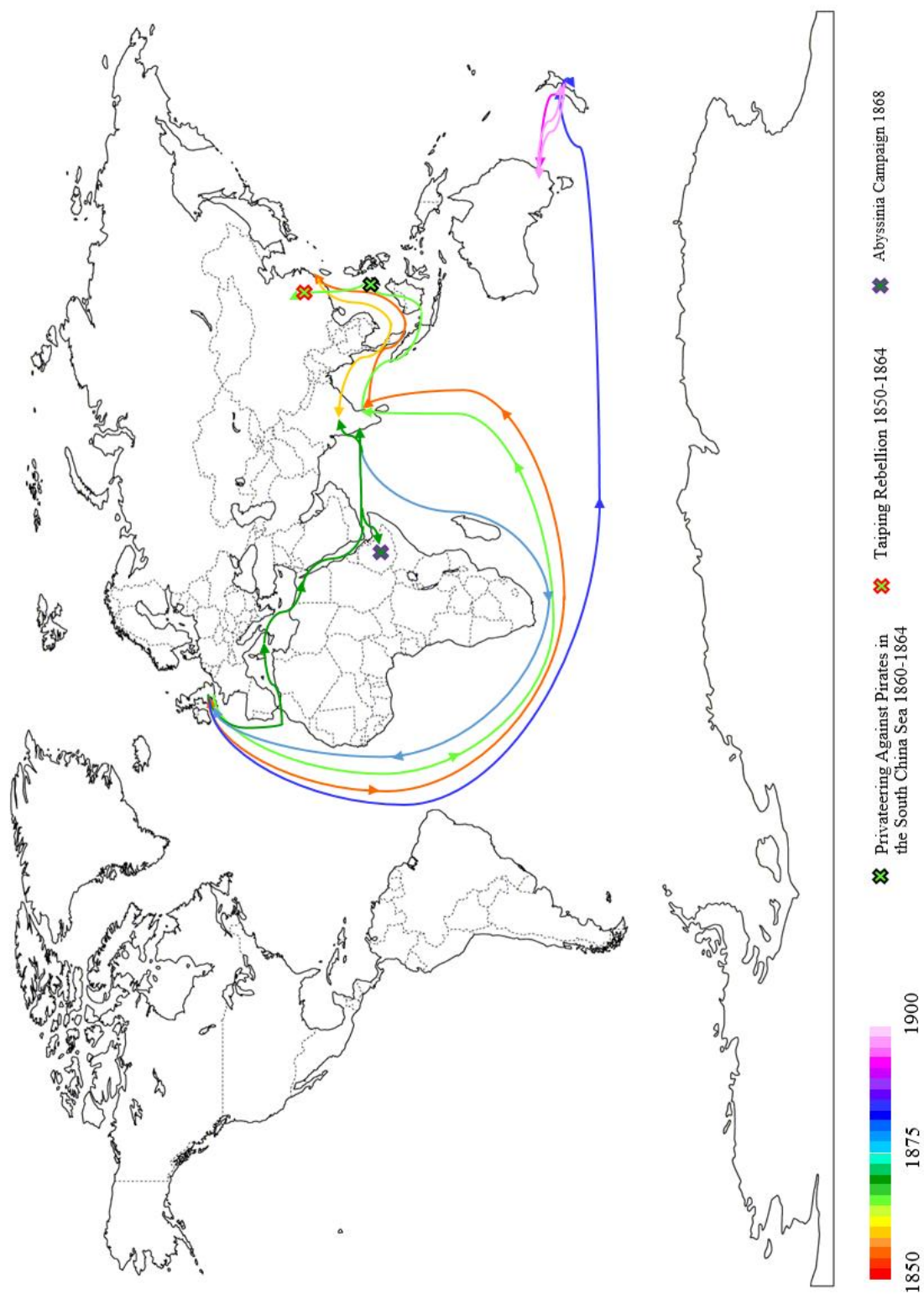
Map Showing Ivo's Reported Lecture Schedule



Compiled from 'Progress', *Freethought Review*, 1 October 1883 to 1 April 1885.

Appendix C

Map Showing Evison's Known Global Travels



Compiled from evidence discussed in Chapter One: Thinker, Sailor, Soldier, Settler.