MARION HATTON

All great traditions have their heroes and their heroines. And the Christian tradition is rich with such names. The Catholic Church holds dear the memory of the saints, ancient and modern, from St Francis of Assisi to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The Protestant Church has its own revered figures, from Martin Luther and Calvin onwards. A mixed bag, they include church reformers, theologians, social activists, artists, doctors, musicians and missionaries.

These are people who we can now see were filled by that *energy for good* that we understand to be the work of the Holy Spirit. 'Spirited people,' Shirley Murray called them; many of them leaders in their field—often much to their own surprise.

New Zealand's history is still brief in world terms: we are not accustomed to think of many 'spirited folk' among us, preferring to idolize warriors, scientists, sports women and sports men—physical or mental high achievers. But Church-going folk? Surely not!

And yet, there are some names that continue to impress: Samuel Marsden, Rewi Alley, Kate Shepherd, Archibald Baxter and Ormond Burton, Kevin Clements, John and Shirley Murray.

But who has ever heard of Marion Hatton, of whom the obituary writer in the *Otago Evening Star* of 1905 wrote: "Only the very youngest of our readers are likely to ask Who was Marion Hatton? To the majority of Dunedin residents and well beyond the frontiers of Otago, Mrs Hatton will be remembered'.....as what? 'As the leader amongst the small but persevering band that in 1893 fought for the women's franchise as a right, and in this city was socially a power for good.'

Thanks to the discovery of the Hatton family bible in our own office, and the researches of Donald Phillipps, some of her story can now be told and her memory rekindled. For she was indeed a 'spirited person', a leader in whom we can see the driving power of the Christ-Spirit, not in some far distant country, or in times long past, but among us, barely a century ago.

She was born Mary Ann Hanover in the little village of Preston, in Somerset, England, the daughter of a country inn-keeper. Probably her experiences of the crudities of pub life there later drove her to work against the liquor trade. She was working as a hat maker in Bath (only 200 miles from home) when she met and married an accountant, Joseph Hatton, in 1855. The couple moved to Bristol—and it was there that Joseph was given the big family bible he was later to bring to New Zealand. Both Joseph and Mary (she was always known as Marion) were good church folk, and before and after her marriage they took an active part in Sunday-school teaching and the temperance campaign being conducted by the local Band of Hope Union.

Before you're tempted to smile at the name, remember that nineteenth-century Sunday schools were often the only education provided for working class and poorer children, and that unregulated beer and gin drinking were the destructive equivalents of the modern drug trade. These teachers were fighting the familiar effects of poverty and addiction—domestic violence, crime and ruined lives.

Joseph and Marion worked well as a recognised team: their next move was to become members of the curiously-named Good Templars Lodge, a crusading Christian Society founded in the United States in 1851, whose aims were 'to reclaim and then sustain the intemperate, and to save the young from becoming intemperate.' Joseph and Marion travelled to Amsterdam to open the first Lodges in that city.

But they were to travel much further when they decided to emigrate to New Zealand. We don't know quite when they took ship for Dunedin—then the largest city in the country—but Marion was 57, having raised a family of six children by 1892, when she first publicly identified herself with the campaign for voting rights for women, by chairing a pro-suffrage meeting. What followed was simply heroic for a woman of a naturally quiet and retiring disposition.

She was appointed president of the New Zealand Women's Franchise League and demands were made for her speaking services from Gore to Waimate, where she addressed crowded meetings. The *Evening Star* wrote that 'her unaffected manner, her quiet way of speaking, her patient endurance of gibes that often went to extreme coarseness won for her the love and respect of thousands to whom a mere blue-stocking would have been an object of aversion.' Eventually Otago returned by far the largest number of signatures to the three successive petitions circulated from 1891 to 1893. 60% of adult women in working-class South Dunedin signed up, says historian Dorothy Page, 'emphasizing the importance of neighbourhood links and *religious affiliation*.

Just let us pause and think for a moment of what Marion Hatton was going through. The exhausting, physically-punishing coach journeys, the crowds, the noisy meetings, the angry abuse hurled at her both by men supporting the liquor lobby and traditionalists who argued that women were 'unsexing' themselves by being involved at all in public and political life.

Arguments raged in the local newspapers, and Marion found herself disputing in their columns with her opponents, led by Henry Fish. 'If the laws claim our obedience', she wrote, 'then we claim the right to have a voice in making the laws.'

And after the famous passage of the Electoral Bill in 1893, which gave New Zealand the right to vote, Marion Hatton continued to agitate for the *development* of women's rights. She remained President of the Women's Franchise League, which now 'aimed to extend the privileges opened up by our present political position, and further all those claims by which we seek to place woman in her rightful position among men.' She strenuously advocated for equal pay for women—still a subject for argument in our present society—and she was instrumental in setting up the National Council of Women, at Christchurch in 1896.

The previous year had found her out in the streets, exposed to the snow and cold of a record winter. The *Evening Star* of 1905 wrote: 'Those who remember the bitter distress in Dunedin in 1895 will not forget the active part she took in starting and sustaining the soup kitchens which were opened. Indeed, some of her closest friends attribute her physical breakdown to the daily exposure she endured during that bitter winter.'

But Marion had suffered from heart trouble for many years; in 1897 she underwent a serious operation (not under the care of any modern surgeon equipped with today's life-support systems), and in 1905 she passed away, says the Star, 'peacefully and painlessly, leaving behind her the record of a blameless and useful life.' How quaint that all sounds! How underwhelming! How totally inadequate for one of New Zealand's truly great women-citizens.

In a recent TV programme, one of the characters, a judge, remarked, 'We don't need more principles. We need more examples of goodness.' In Marion Hatton we can glimpse such a shining example of the *energy for good* which I believe is a mark of the action of the Holy Spirit among us. You or I may never match her achievements on our behalf, but we can do all that we can for good—for the good of our neighbours, our society, for the natural and the human world. 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can', said John Wesley. So let's go out and do it!

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