

A CURATE'S EGG

HISTORICAL SOUTHLAND. By F. G. Hall-Jones. H. and J. Smith Ltd., Invercargill.

(Reviewed by David Hall)

THIS is a provincial history, published by the Southland Historical Committee. It embodies the result of much painstaking research and much collation of the research of others. It recapitulates faithfully the main topics of Southland's history—the early navigators, sealers, whalers, the Maori worthies, the inland explorers, the pioneers and more modern development. The attempt to compress all this rather heterogeneous material into 200 pages was certainly a valiant one. *Historical Southland* is, in fact, the sort of book which will be very useful to students of history, local or national, useful too to teachers, and useful to all who need either a work of reference or a popular exposition—for the author never loses the opportunity of embroidering a romantic story.

Mr. Hall-Jones's most substantial contribution in this volume to the general history of New Zealand is in his account of Southland's provincial politics. The real significance of many of the transactions of the provincial governments has remained obscure; this is, indeed, still a fruitful field for research. Now Mr. Hall-Jones has in great part done for Southland what A. D. McIntosh did for Marlborough in the Centennial History of that province. The author has, however, at times allowed himself to fall between two stools in his attempt to strike a balance between a lively, popular account and a procession of necessary facts. I feel too that the book loses rather than gains in vividness and actuality by the rather clumsy attempts at dramatisation, for instance, when some of the events of Maori history are put into the mouth of "an imaginary but learned chief."

There are also other blemishes, all, I think, avoidable, the blame for which the Southland Historical Committee should share with the author. The depressing format of the book is below the Centennial standard, and most of the

photographs with which it is encumbered reveal nothing so much as the limitations of the compilers. Then there are faults of editing, among them the lack of uniformity in the spelling of Maori names, which are sometimes given in contemporary European malformations ("Taboca") and sometimes in their correct form. The index is inadequate.

It may be considered harsh and pedantic to dilate at length on unessential faults. But when standards both of stock production and of editing have reached a high level of competence in New Zealand, a provincial historical committee should be ready to maintain them at something approaching this level. These standards are, after all, a direct reflection of standards of taste and scholarship.

A Reprint Bargain

THIS NEW ZEALAND. By F. L. W. Wood. Paul's Book Arcade, Hamilton.

THIS is a reprint under a new name of Professor Wood's *Understanding New Zealand*. The original appeared nearly two years ago and cost a pound. Now the price is 5/-, which makes it just about the best bargain in worthwhile books at present available in New Zealand. At its first appearance we called it "a good book by any standard . . . for the purpose for which it has been written, just about as good as it could be." That is our opinion still. But it is a better book now than when it first appeared, partly because it carries a 10-page postscript which brings it right up to date as an essay in interpretation, and partly because the illustrations have been overhauled and made more worthy of the occasion. In addition it has been given a most attractive New Zealand cover designed by Juliet Peter. It would certainly have been an advantage if the backing of the cover had been board and not limp cardboard, but that would have been impossible at the price. At 5/- there must be limits, but the publisher has taken the risk of pushing his limit to the level of a 7/6 book at least.

Parable of the Perfectionist

(By PAUL H. OEHSE in "The New Yorker")

THERE was once a man who was looking for something. He was a poet, and every few days he would write a poem, and every poem he wrote he thought was better than the previous one, and as he finished a new one, he threw the old one away. As a result, he never had more than one poem.

By and by he gave up poetry and became a painter. Every picture he painted he thought was better than the one before. He liked each one of them until he had made a new one; then the previous one disgusted him, so he burned each picture as soon as he had another to replace it.

This went on for many years, until one morning he woke up and discovered that he was seventy-five years old. He said to himself, "Judas priest! I ought

to be having an exhibition of my work." So he rented a gallery and hung up his one painting and placed his one poem under a glass on a table near-by. Many people came to see, and one day he overheard a famous critic say, "This man's art is infinitely better than his poetry." At this he removed the poem and destroyed it. The next day he heard another critic say, "This painting is wonderful; it transcends even the artist himself."

They found him the next morning with the gas turned on, his body slumped on the floor. The painting went for the rent of the gallery. After that it hung for a dozen years or so in a dentist's office in Manhattan. The dentist's wife, however, did not like the picture and finally gave it to a rummage sale.

There are many persons like that who do not appreciate art.

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