

BOOKS

A MAN OF PARTS

A BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM COLENZO.
By A. G. Bagnall and G. C. Petersen. A.
H. and A. W. Reed. Price 30/-.

(Reviewed by Doris McIntosh)

IN writing their exhaustive, scholarly and sympathetic biography of Colenso, Mr. Bagnall and Mr. Petersen must be congratulated not only on their successful collaboration, but also on their perspicacity in first of all selecting Colenso as the subject for research. In the colourful years of our early history, colourful characters abound, but surely of them all, as they parade before us, few can compare in interest with this quarrelsome, contradictory individual.

William Colenso, humble printer, disgraced missionary, gifted scientist, violent individualist, is a man who had stood out over the years as a giant, if an unpopular one, among his fellows. It is nearly half a century since his death and until now biographers have inexplicably passed by this most eccentric and flamboyant of human beings—a man who

must, in spite of all his faults of personality and character, be regarded as one of the founders of the country.

Colenso came to New Zealand at the end of 1834, a young man of 23, appointed by the Church Missionary Society as their first printer in this country. His duty was to establish a press at Paihia in the Bay of Islands and from there to print the word of God in the native language for distribution by the missionaries to the Maori people. Possessed of an incredible physical endurance and energy, with an intellectual equipment, although lacking formal education, far above the average, Colenso at once threw himself heart and soul into his work.

Because of the astonishing diversity of his interests, the study of Colenso's activities in Church, in the State, and in science is a most rewarding one in terms of far-away events. He did so much—was involved in so much—that even in brushing his life one can come to an appreciation of the events surrounding him. In this detailed biography a vast panorama is laid before

the reader. Not only is the book an intelligent study of a complex individual, it also paints the picture of the period with accuracy and understanding. It is difficult to imagine this biography being equalled, let alone surpassed, for many years to come. Some new ground is broken—the chapter on Selwyn is illuminating, and the story of Colenso's rehabilitation in society, and his entry into provincial and general politics, his explorations, his work as lexicographer, as schools' inspector, all make interesting reading.

In 1844, Colenso was ordained as deacon in the Church of England and was posted to Ahuriri, now Napier. Here his enthusiasm and energy had full scope. Burning with zeal to carry the Gospel to the furthestmost corners of his huge parish, he tramped on foot over most of the North Island, waded the rivers and climbed the mountains with a prayer ever on his lips.

This strange man, so violent in temperament, so sincere in his Christianity, has proved a rewarding subject for Mr. Bagnall's and Mr. Petersen's attentions. They have placed him as he should be placed in proper historical perspective—an individual caught up in events, a lone figure fighting evil within and without, struggling, exhorting, praying to the end of his long life.

This is no dull book of history—events are recreated impartially around this complex participator in them. Colenso, more than most, can count himself fortunate in his biographers.

BEYOND HIS REACH

AN OWL IN THE SUN. By Leslie Kark.
Macmillan.

THE theme of this book is difficult and can only be conveyed through subtlety, through delicate points of suggestion, through vivid portraiture. The author takes a very sensitive young man, torn between his French blood and his English upbringing, who goes to work in Turkey and falls desperately in love with a German *femme fatale* with a bad reputation. Knowing she will be bad for him he still marries her, and when he returns after the war, the victim of disseminated sclerosis contracted in a German prison, she flaunts his own brother as a potential lover. But in the end the brother kills her in a fit of jealousy and the moping "hero" dies of his disease.

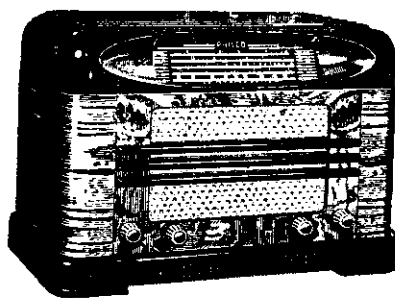
This difficult situation is presented in a style too factual for the theme and yet not factual enough for our interest; the characters are mere puppets, moving lifelessly and tonelessly across the pages; the Frenchman simply does not exist in

(continued on next page)

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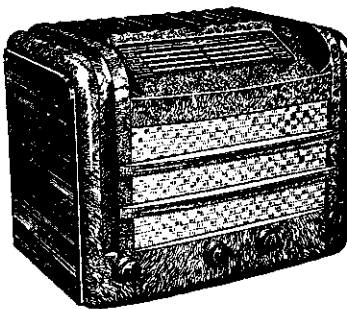
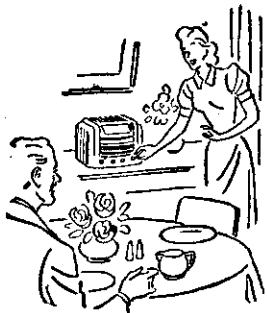
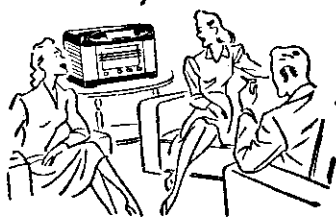


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