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Drawings above made by physician,
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BOOKS

ACADEMIC MATRON

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE: an essay towards a history by J. C. Beaglehole; New Zealand University Press, 15/-.

(Reviewed by E. H. McCormick)

ONE reader must belatedly confess that he could not share the enthusiasm of *The Listener* for Dr. J. C. Beaglehole's article on the jubilee of Victoria University College (*Listener*, May 13, 1949). On that occasion, Dr. Beaglehole appeared in the role of ardent lover celebrating the charms of his mistress—a difficult and even (as Dr. Beaglehole seemed to realise in his last paragraph) an embarrassing part to sustain in public, unless one is a lyric poet of genius. Dr. Beaglehole, scholar and poet himself, knows that love may be very simple or very complex—sometimes complex enough to embrace hatred. And love for a matron of mature years with a marked squint is clearly not of the simple kind; it can scarcely be expressed in lyric terms without suggesting the epithet "Indian"; to win credence it has to be amplified, analysed, perhaps qualified.

THE larger work, of which Dr. Beaglehole's article was the incidental secretion, has given him the space he needed. In 300 pages he has been able to make his devotion wholly credible:

we witness the humble infancy of the loved one, Cinderella of a brood; we watch her travel from stormy adolescence to full-bosomed maturity; we leave her past her middle span, wise, cautious, mellow, and if not rich in gold (never the object of her ambition), well within sight of social security. So far from ignoring the squint, Dr. Beaglehole has devoted pages to its diagnosis, and we are finally convinced that it is no inherited defect, no memento of a vulgar brawl, but the scar of honourable battle.

WITHOUT further preamble, it must be said that the volume is an achievement fully meriting the editorial praise heaped on what was, apart from the verbal gargoyles and literary stucco, scarcely to be distinguished from the conventional jubilee "tribute." That in its first half-century Victoria University College has produced a graduate and teacher with Dr. Beaglehole's fine blend of scholarship and imagination is, we agree, sufficient justification for its existence.

The crude "produce" and "justify" immediately suggest pertinent questions. To what extent has Victoria College "produced" Dr. Beaglehole and what in turn "produced" Victoria College? And why should an institution of higher learning need "justification?" To answer these questions would be to overtax the powers of this reviewer and the indulgence of his editor; in fact, it would be superfluous, for Dr. Beaglehole himself has supplied or suggested such replies as can be given to questions so elusive of answer and so vast in their scope. Herein lies the peculiar importance of the book; that in tracing the history of one university college through fifty years, Dr. Beaglehole has thrown light on other institutions and on issues that concern many beyond

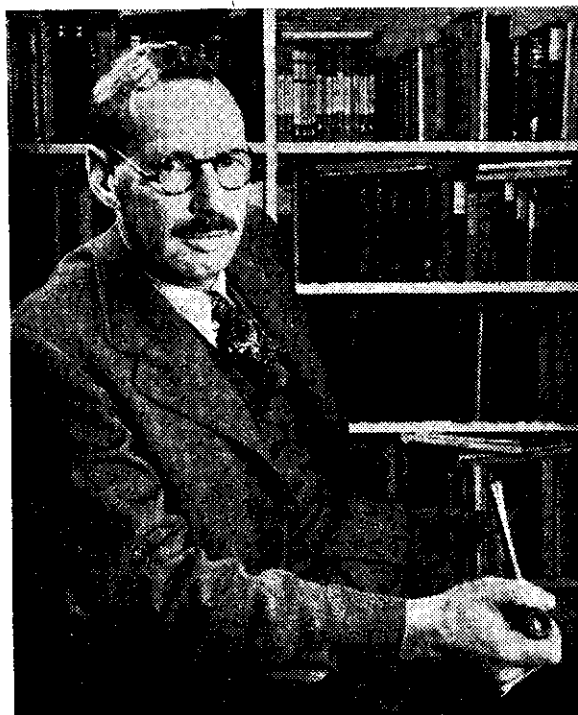
the governors, teachers, graduates, and students of Victoria University College.

These, his immediate public, Dr. Beaglehole has served better—one is inclined to say—than most of them deserve. He modestly and ambiguously calls his work "an essay towards a history," but it is impossible that it will be superseded, though it will, of course, be added to. From a mass of reports, minutes, pamphlets, files of newspapers and student publications, even such trifles as concert programmes, he has fashioned a coherent narrative in a prose that is sometimes over-wrought but never undistinguished. He has succeeded in the difficult feat of suggesting unity as well as continuity in a history that covers a multitude of interests and an immense variety of people. As we follow, decade by decade, a complex story ranging in its setting from ministerial ante-rooms to the scene of student junketings, we see that Victoria College is something more than the sum of its component individuals and separate parts. It has a kind of corporate character and, now that Dr. Beaglehole has formulated it, a tradition of its own.

BEYOND the family circle of Victorians, the volume should be of interest to anyone concerned with the problems of university education in this country. It is illuminating—and saddening—to encounter President Jordan of the Leland Stanford Junior University, California, commenting not yesterday but forty-two years ago: "Degrees should not be granted for extra-mural study, and in general, not for attendance on night lectures or extension lectures." Or again: "the tendency in modern education was to ask not what degree a man had, or where he obtained it, but who was his teacher. . . ." We meet with the issue perennially facing the over-burdened New Zealand professor and lecturer: "He would be remembered more as an original worker, had he not been accustomed to put greater importance on his students' work than on his own. . . ." And to Victoria's

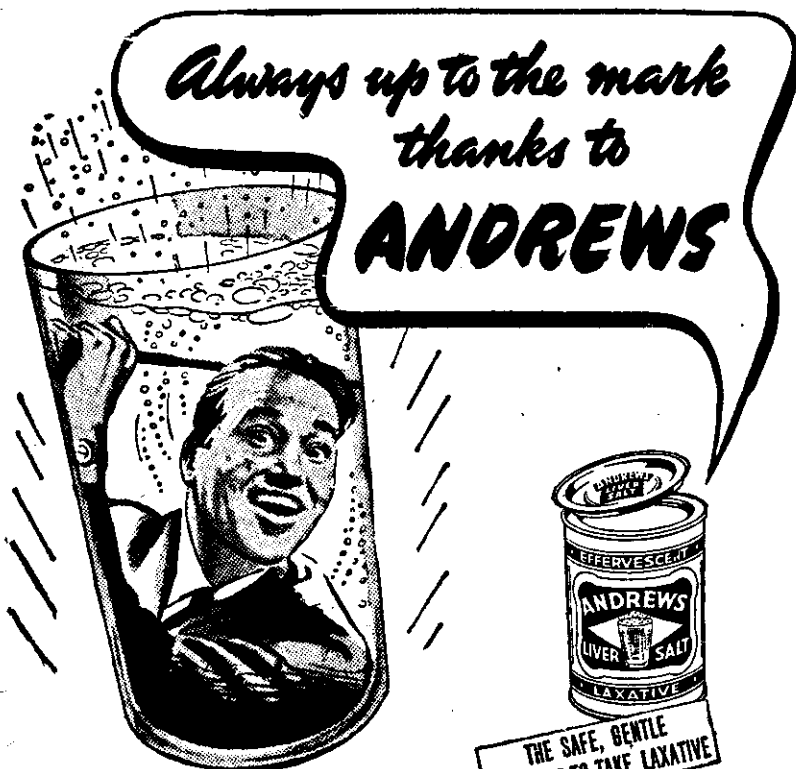
northern sister, Dr. Beaglehole's remarks on the site of the college have a peculiarly topical relevance: "there was that unhappy dogma the college must be in Wellington, it must be 'central'; there was that unhappy fact, it was founded for evening classes, for the part-time student. . . Always the short view triumphed. . ."

"ALWAYS the short view triumphed. . ." In commenting on one incident in the life of one institution, Dr. Beaglehole has supplied a criticism of our whole society. His carefully constructed history is, indeed, like the geological strata from which the general nature of the surrounding country may be deduced. In spite of mitigating circumstances and immense improvements in the recent past, New Zealand's record in the matter of university education, especially in the north, does it little



DR. J. C. BEAGLEHOLE

"The nature of the surrounding country may be deduced"



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