

# BOOKS

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Grammar School, Junior University Scholar (third on the list), graduate with Honours in Latin, teaching, marriage and war-time separation; then back to the Whirinaki Valley (near Atiamuri), children—six of them, and the long fight for the husband's rehabilitation.

The tale is told with simple directness: there are no complaints about poverty or hardship, no self-pity. Yet it appears to be a plain fact that this young woman, already winner of the University Senior Scholarship in Latin, fell short of the Post-Graduate Scholarship in Arts through sheer under-nourishment in her final year—it was in the slump of the 'thirties. However, if the country lost a "blue-stocking" it has gained a fine bunch of children.

The story is genuine New Zealand stuff; and fact, not fiction. Names are given of persons and places—in fact, a

locality map might properly and with advantage have been included instead of the photograph of the Whirinaki Valley. But it's a strictly personal story—intimate enough as regards the principal actor, but delicately reserved as to others, in fact, too discreet, for the reader's curiosity is aroused but not satisfied concerning important people such as father, mother and husband. Nor is there any introspective searching and analysis: this is a plain tale of a hard life and an unusual career which a woman of character has made satisfying.

—L.J.W.

## ACADEMIC BODIES

*DEATH IN THE QUADRANGLE*, by Eilis Dillon: Faber and Faber, English price 10 6. *OLD HALL, NEW HALL*, by Michael Innes: Victor Gollancz, English price 12 6. *LANDSCAPE WITH DEAD DONS*, by Robert Robinson: Victor Gollancz, English price 10 6. *THE UNDOUBTED DEED*, by Jocelyn Davey: Chatto and Windus, English price 13 6.

ON the ground that they were bad advertisements, a university-minded dictator might consider censoring novels

of university life, including "detectives." Contact with immature minds that cannot answer back, a society somewhat walled-in and self-sufficient, and encouragement of narrow specialisation, tend to breed egotism and eccentricity. Perhaps professors are not really so odd as many of these stories make out, but the temptation to exploit such foibles for plot, character and satire is strong.

Consider this batch of university scenes and flavours. In *Death in the Quadrangle*, Eilis Dillon presents again a retired professor of English who has written "purple" novels on the quiet ("It's my misfortune that I taught like an angel and wrote like poor Poll"), and detects as a hobby. Returning to his Dublin college to lecture, he is confronted with the murder of the very unpleasant President. Professor Daly investigates in a familiar setting, and part of the fun of an agreeable book lies in the contrast between his understanding and the bewilderment of the official police in this academic zoo. The bright-

ness of the tale owes something to the Irish tang in characters and situations.

The school of English figures largely in *Old Hall, New Hall* (English "provincial"), with a professor so different from Daly as to be an ass. Perhaps the absence of a real corpse (the only one is ancient and turns out to be a statue), helps to make this the least convincing Michael Innes I have read. He treats a fantastic treasure hunt and young love with the erudition and style one expects (he is reputed to be a don himself), but the plot hasn't the strength to carry the traffic, and the work of the place is made to look petty.

There is a stronger air of belittlement in *Landscape with Dead Dons*, a tale of Oxford by an under-thirty product, who must have been bursting with cleverness when he wrote. Robert Robinson conceived an original "starter" in a discovered Chaucer poem, and gave a new slant to murder when he stuck the corpse of a don among the statues on the college roof, but cleverness rather went to his head. There are too many characters, and an excess of talk. This Oxford life faintly suggests the scurrying of disturbed insects. At the end, a string of completely naked dons pursue a naked colleague-murderer through the streets in broad daylight. The implication that this is funny may not be universally accepted.

I have included *The Undoubted Deed* because, though the scene is Lutyens's British Embassy Building in Washington, the chief character is an Oxford don who illustrates my thesis and talks philosophy on the slightest provocation, perhaps rather too much for some readers. As he arrived on his secret mission, Ambrose Usher reflected that everybody, himself included, needed to get away from the inner contemplative life of Oxford and be dropped into the world of action. He struck a murder during a highly diverting embassy party, and espionage. Congratulations to Jocelyn Davey on creating this learned, amusing human, and likeable little sleuth, on the variety of other characters and on the brilliant pictures of diplomatic social life in Washington.

—A.M.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE September issue of *Political Science* (Department of Political Science and School of Public Administration, Victoria University College, 2/6) prints the text of an address given in Wellington last May by Professor Arnold Toynbee. Its title, "The Resurrection of Asia and the Role of the Commonwealth," gives some indication of its scope; but only those who heard it, or who now seize their opportunity to read it, will know how brilliantly Professor Toynbee is able to relate current events to the wider processes of history.

*GREAT AIRMEN*, by Wing Commander Norman MacMillan; G. Bell and Sons, English price 12/6. A biographical treatment of the development of aviation.

*NEW CONCEPTS OF HEALING*, by A. Graham Ikin; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 12/6. Religious, medical and psychological methods are studied in a search for common ground.

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