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Books

NEW ZEALAND ESSAYS

DISCOVERED ISLES, a Trilogy, by M. H. Holcroft; Caxton Press (with the aid of the State Literary Fund), 22/6.

(Reviewed by A. E. Campbell)

THE three books in which M. H. Holcroft explores our national consciousness—*The Deepening Stream* (1940), *The Waiting Hills* (1943), and *Encircling Seas* (1946)—have all been out of print for some years. As they have made literary history, and are indispensable to anyone wishing to enlarge his understanding of what it means to be a New Zealander, their republication is to be warmly welcomed. They now appear conveniently in a single volume, with no important alterations in the original text but with the addition of a few new paragraphs, a dozen or so footnotes, and a brief but very interesting introduction.

The essays wear well. As Mr. Holcroft explains in his introduction, they were written mainly for his own satisfaction, and grew out of a strongly-felt impulse to comprehend more fully his own situation as a New Zealander; and they retain the freshness and intimacy of the record of a personal quest, pursued with excitement and high seriousness. More than this, of

course, the essays have the enduring qualities of the work of a mature and very original mind, at once reflective and deeply responsive to experience. What we are given is frankly a personal vision. But if Mr. Holcroft is in many ways a very personal writer, stubbornly loyal to his intuitions, he has the artist's special sort of detachment. His search for meaning is never diverted from its path by the desire to impress or instruct or admonish or by any other irrelevancy. More than anything else, it is this complete artistic integrity that gives his work its unity and its permanent value.

His vision nonetheless remains a personal one, which his readers may share in whole or in part, or largely reject. For myself, I find a great deal in the essays that is convincing. Mr. Holcroft seems to me to have made explicit much about this country and its people that was hitherto only vaguely perceived (or not perceived at all), to have opened up promising tracks in many directions for others to explore, and generally to have widened and deepened our consciousness of ourselves. Naturally, I cannot always see things as he does. Some of his more mystical excursions leave me earth-bound. As a view of New Zealand his account is, I think, too much coloured by his South Island experience. And though I find his analysis of the relations between our natural environment and our ways of thinking and feeling highly suggestive, and sometimes very illuminating, I would say that his preoccupation with this theme leads him to pay too little attention to the ordinary processes of cultural transmission.

But such reservations do nothing to qualify the opinion that *Discovered Isles* is a most impressive creative achievement.

DECLINE OF THE WEST

THE AGE OF TERROR, by Leslie Paul; Faber and Faber. English price, 18/-.

A PHYSICIAN called upon to diagnose some obscure and alarming complaint would doubtless insist upon an exhaustive inquiry into the patient's early life, the environment in which he had grown up, and the habits he had acquired. The case history thus revealed might be highly informative, cautionary, or even interesting, but should the diagnosis arrived at prove indefinite, and the patient be merely told that his only chance of future well-being lay in returning to the simple and virtuous courses pursued by his forefathers, he might conceivably express some disappointment—especially if he entertained some doubts as to whether his forefathers were as wise as they are sometimes held up to have been.

In seeking to explain the present sickness of an ancient civilisation, Mr. Paul begins by discussing the geographical factors that have influenced the subdivision of Europe's people into nations, and goes on to examine the ideas, social, political and theological, which have provided the "motive forces of history." As may be expected the origin of Europe's malady, deriving as it does, not from one but from many causes, is not easy to discover or define. While pursuing his search Mr. Paul goes over much old ground, and restates problems that have been, and are still, the subject of endless debate. This is perhaps unavoidable. The patient's case history is intricate. An exhaustive recapitulation must precede the physician's finding, which, when finally pronounced, is to the effect that European "humanism went wrong by basing itself on the phenomena of nature—it lost itself in the scientific 'discovery' that man was only a piece of nature, something different only organisationally from a rock or a crystal or an electron."

The Age of Terror, then, is by and large a condemnation of materialism. Its author has no specific remedy to prescribe for the apparent decline of Western Civilisation—nothing but a grim warning that the only hope of salvation lies in spiritual rebirth. "European man is grinding his continent to pieces because, disdaining the spirit and worshipping material advantage, he cannot, because he dare not, surrender one tittle of material power to anyone else. Only when he throws up that struggle for the pursuit of the immortal life of the spirit, only when he grows careless about the distribution of daily bread so that the bread everlasting is not denied to him, only then will it be possible to decide his bloody and unending struggles in a spirit of justice, equity and love."

—R. M. Burdon

THREE NOVELS

INSURRECTION, by Liam O'Flaherty; Victor Gollancz. English price, 9/6.
THE PEACOCK, by Jon Godden; Michael Joseph. English price, 9/6.
THE HUNTER, by James Aldridge; The Bodley Head. English price, 9/6.

LIAM O'FLAHERTY at his best is a very good novelist indeed, and he has chosen a worthy theme for this book—the tragic hours of the Easter Rising of 1916, which W. B. Yeats commemorated in one of his finest poems. O'Flaherty pictures his rebels at first as a bunch of fanatics in love with an idea.



In Strong Demand

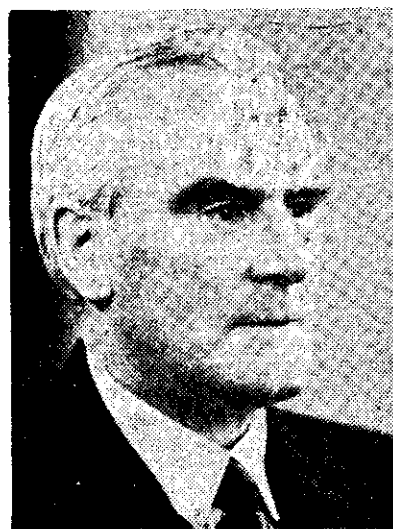
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"THE YOUNG LAG," by Sir Leo Rage, is to be reviewed by B. L. Dillard (above) in the ZB Book Review session next Sunday evening, June 3. The chairman of the session will be Professor L. G. Pocock, and other books for review are: "John Robert Godley," by C. E. Carrington (Lieut.-Colonel O. A. Gillespie); "Men and Gods," by Rex Warner (Les Edwards); and "Antarctic Ocean," by Russell Owen (Lieut.-Colonel T. Orde Lees)

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 1, 1951.