

'Home'?

J. C. Beaglehole in London, 1926-1929

T. H. BEAGLEHOLE

'Believe me' wrote John Beaglehole in March 1927 to Dick Campbell, a fellow student at Victoria College, who had just been awarded a travelling scholarship,

believe me, the man who gets a Travelling Schol. and does not come to the London School of Economics and Political Science has treated his patron lady Fortune in a shady and miserable fashion. . . . My dear Mr. Campbell come here; it is the centre of the universe. Harold J. Laski remarked to me tonight that he would rather be a crossing sweeper in London than a millionaire anywhere else; & by cripes, he's about right. Keep your undergraduate Oxford and Cambridge—this is life.¹

Beaglehole himself had been in London for five months when he wrote this (and had seen neither Oxford nor Cambridge), hard at work already on a formidable doctoral thesis, and writing home to his parents every fortnight letters of twelve or fourteen pages. They were not the only letters he wrote, but intended as they were for an extended family with brothers, uncle and an assortment of aunts, they give an account of his activities and his views on people and affairs from which one can recapture the feelings he had about both England and New Zealand at that time. For him, it will emerge, the trip to England was not, in any sense, a straightforward trip 'home'. The attraction of London was of another order. 'I lived, as it seems in retrospect, intoxicated', he wrote years later in *The New Zealand Scholar*.²

* * *

The Beagleholes lived in Wellington at 49 Hopper Street in a house full of books and full of music. Music was domestic, John's mother and aunts a positive 'nest of singing birds',³ the four boys in their turn played the piano and sang. John progressed to the organ, and played on Sundays at the Unitarian Church. Music was also a communal exercise, a choral exercise, a public exercise. Every year the family went to the *Messiah*, the 'immortal masterpiece' as it was generally known, of Handel; most years to *Elijah*, the 'immortal masterpiece' of Mendelssohn. Mother and aunts sang in the Musical Union (later to coalesce with the Choral Society) conducted by the 'revered Mr Robert Parker the touchstone of the musical art in

¹ A talk given to the Friends of the Turnbull Library, 22 October 1980.