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OVERLAND

34

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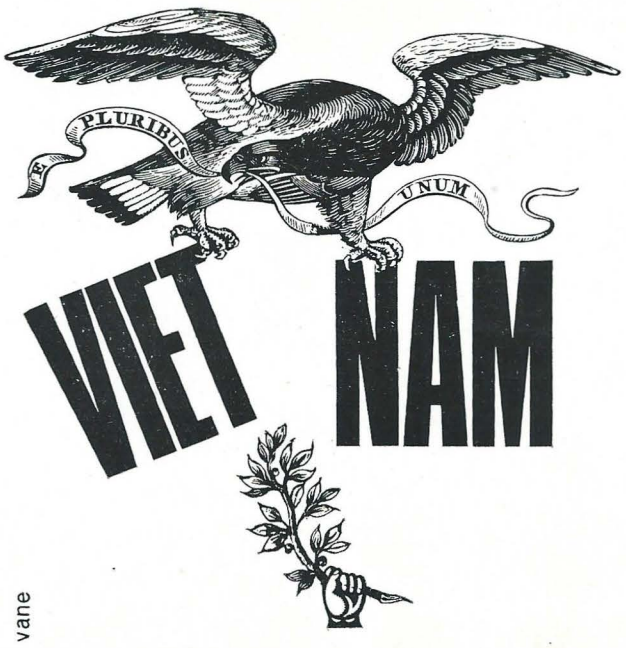

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Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a periodical.

stories

poetry

features

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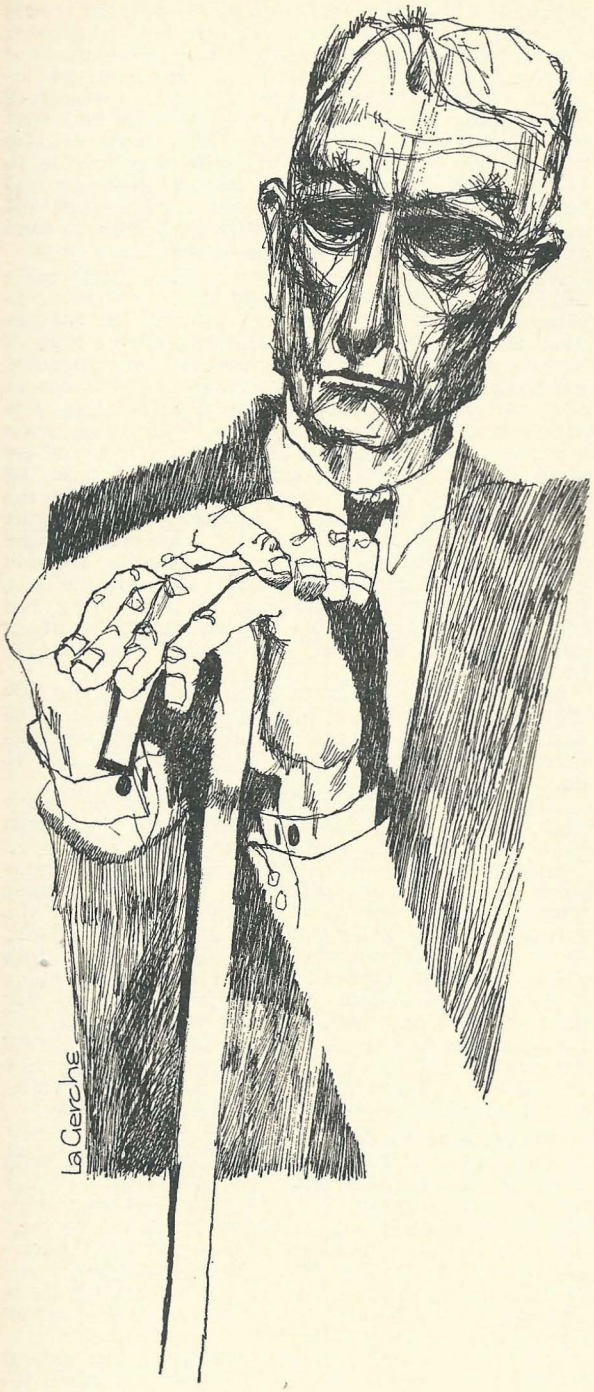
Overland is a quarterly Australian literary magazine. The subscription rate is two dollars a year (four issues), and the price of each copy is fifty cents. Manuscripts are welcomed, but will be returned only if a stamped, addressed envelope is attached.

All correspondence should be addressed:
Editor, Overland, G.P.O. Box 98a, Melbourne, C.1.

NUMBER 34 AUTUMN 1966

OVERLAND

Temper democratic, bias Australian



I HAVE always thought that the ending of Alphonse Daudet's novel "Sappho" is one of the most moving in all creative literature.

The long story of enchantment and degradation has been told. At the hotel in Marseilles Jean Gaussin awaits the coming of Fanny Legrand. Down at the quay a ship is ready to sail, the ship which is to bear mistress and man away to a far country, a final despairing effort by Jean to build something on the wreckage of his life. But at the last minute the fateful telegram is put into his hands by a waiter:

"Oh well, I am not going."

She writes that she is turning back to an old love, the engraver-forger Flamant: "I am in need of love and admiration and soothing in my turn. He will kneel before me, and he will never see my wrinkles and grey hairs."

I can never read it without thinking of a man I once knew who really was blind, and who, in his own grimly ironic way, was kneeling before a woman without seeing her wrinkles and grey hairs.

John Morrison

THE BLIND MAN'S STORY

His name was David Laidlaw. He had lost his sight in an industrial accident while in the prime of life, but, under the terms of the compensation settlement, had been kept on by his employer as some kind of storeman.

He was about sixty when I first met him but still a fine-looking man, only a little more than medium height, but perfectly proportioned and upright as a rush.

I came across him one evening groping his way with a white stick along the smelly subway of the old Richmond Railway Station. It turned out that we had both come in on the Box Hill line and were both making for the Frankston line platform. He had no regular guide just then, so I more or less adopted him, and for nearly two years thereafter used to pick him up for the Richmond changeover. He would just stand still where he got off the first train, politely declining all offers of help until I got to him. He told me he found the public very good, and only rarely went unassisted in the peak-hour rush. Our Frankston train was always full, but invariably someone got up to give him a seat. He was fit enough to stand, but he never protested, even if it was a woman. He had a way of accepting that made everybody in the compartment feel good: "Most kind of you, most kind of you. Thank you."

He was a happy man. Sometimes as the train began to empty out I got a seat opposite him, and could study him at leisure. There were times when I almost envied him, he looked so serene and self-sufficient. Perhaps even blindness has its consolations. Edith Sitwell's well-known observation that she liked listening to music and silence is quite intelligible to many of us with good hearing who have often wished we were deaf.

My blind man never relaxed against the cushions, but sat bolt upright, hands resting on top of the white stick held between his knees. Occasionally, for a minute or so, his eyelids would close, but he never slept. It took me some time to get used to the fact that the whitened and distorted pupils were telling him nothing.

He always had the air of a man who has no great worry, who has had a pleasant day, who is enjoying present company, and who is going back to a comfortable home and a good wife. Sometimes I wondered how much of the serenity of his expression was sheer discipline, a defence against the knowledge that someone could always be watching him. The blind can never quite relax, never take a chance, never do things in secret. I, for one, got to know every detail of David Laidlaw's face, right down to the little tufts of hairs that grew within his nostrils, a tiny white scar on his upper lip, the single fine furrow that ran across an otherwise smooth forehead.

All the same, there was nothing strained about his alertness. It was, rather, convivial, the alertness of a man who didn't went to be left out of anything. He missed nothing of what went on in the compartment, but drew a nice line between what was for general consumption and what was private. He could overhear a conversation right alongside him without batting an eyelid, but an amusing remark obviouly addressed to the company at large would bring an instant smile, even an appreciative turn of the well-poised head. He was like a good guest, with us all the time but never intruding.

My vision of a devoted woman watching over him began to build up from the very first. It showed not only in his abiding air of pleasant anticipation, but in the way he was kept. No doubt he changed on the job, but there was always a crease in his trousers, his shoes were always polished, his shirt well laundered, and he could always pull out a clean handkerchief. It showed also in his conversation, in the little references that inevitably crop up when two married men get together. Casual allusions that can tack themselves on to almost anything. I learned that he had only his wife for family, that there was a daughter who had died in infancy, that his wife was unable to bear another child, that she was in good general health, that she used to go out a lot before his accident but now stayed at home, that she was fond of gardening, and that she was a very good cook.

All this, however, came out without him really talking about his domestic affairs. It was more in response to my own innocent promptings, and as soon as I realised this I stopped prompting. I became aware of a certain wariness in his answers, a reluctance to enlarge, to confide. It struck me as odd, because it was consistent with nothing else about him, and because along with it there went a vague air of smug self-assurance. I felt that he knew I was becoming curious and was enjoying teasing me. That he was deliberately letting me smell a secret, but had no intention of letting me in on it. Sometimes, when the conversation led me to say something about my own family, I would glance at him expectantly and catch him with a faint smile, a smile which was not only smug, but scornful, as if I were touching on something about which he was informed far beyond my comprehension.

He didn't in the least mind talking about his blindness, took quite a pride in telling me how he had conditioned himself to it, enjoyed my expressions of surprise at the things he was able to do.

"You must remember, though," he said one evening, "that I was once a sighted man. I've been blind for only ten years. I grew up with eyes. I know what the world is like. I have my dimensions right—sizes and distances. I move in a home where I know where everything is. That's the great secret of getting along with blind people. Don't spring surprises on them, don't move things about. My wife understands all this. I get along fine." He fell silent, and I was about to ask another question when, glancing at him, I saw that he was wearing the familiar little smile. And before I could speak again there came from him something so incredible, and in such a low voice, that I couldn't believe I'd heard him correctly.

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"Nothing that really matters," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders.

I was fairly sure that what he had said was: "It was the best thing that ever happened to me," and the evasion served only to quicken my curiosity about his private life. There and then, however, I had no choice but to let the matter drop, and when we began talking again it was about books, our latest reading.

Indeed most of our conversation was about books. We used to talk with our heads close together, our voices rising and falling with the noise of the train and the murmur of fellow passengers. He'd been a wide reader, and our likes and dislikes gave us some fine discussions. He often lamented the limitations placed on him by braille: "So little of it, so little that's recent." His great joy was the radio. He listened to all the news, all book reviews, all kinds of educational sessions. He had a fine memory for what he had absorbed in his sighted years. He mentioned Sophocles one day, but courteously dropped the whole subject of the ancients when he realised I hadn't even dabbled. He admired English literature, but got no response from me when he spoke of Smollett,

Swift, Fielding and Goldsmith. Only on the great writers of France and Russia did we find common ground, with just enough differences to give bite to our exchange of views. Unlike me, he preferred Turgenev to Gorki, Pierre Loti to Balzac. Yet it was through Balzac that he was finally tempted to let me in on his secret. That, and perhaps the fact that a time had come when our paths were soon to part. I'd moved from Frankston to Hawthorn in order to be nearer my work, and in a few days would not be going on to Richmond.

We'd been comparing the varying degrees of competence with which great writers handled their women, and he had remarked that all the most conspicuous literary successes in this field had been scored with women who were morally weak.

"By the very nature of things," I suggested carelessly, and he picked me up in a flash.

"What things?" He had turned his head towards me, as if he wanted to look me in the eyes, and for once I was glad that he couldn't. "It doesn't do us much credit, does it? Madame Bovary, Fanny Legrand, Manon Lescaut, Anna Karenina, Carmen ——"

"You have two kinds of women there," I pointed out in an effort to recover lost ground.

"Of course. But Tolstoi also intended to be censorious. Flaubert too, though not quite so self-righteously. All the same, none of those women was without compassion. Few women are." He paused for a moment. Then, in the way of a man getting back to the point at issue, and with his mouth close to my ear, said: "The great bitches of real life, my friend, are all women of impeccable conventional virtue. Male selfishness and arrogance has led us into getting our values all mixed up. When we speak of a bad man we can mean any one of several kinds of viciousness. When we speak of a bad woman we mean only one thing. Which is absurd. We were speaking of Anatole France the other day — 'The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard'—remember where the dear old man is insulted by Mademoiselle Prefere? I can quote you his very words: 'Come, my poor old Bonnard, you had to live as long as this in order to learn for the first time exactly what a wicked woman is.' And we are not asked to doubt that Mademoiselle Prefere was a virgin."

I murmured my agreement and waited, not because there was nothing to say, but because I felt he was deliberately approaching something important, and I didn't want to stop him. A moment later he was referring me to Balzac.

"Balzac was another who said it. You've read 'Pere Goriot'?"

"Yes, but many years ago. I would have to go back to it."

"You have a copy?"

"Yes."

"Go back to it tonight. You'll see what I mean. Remember Madame Vauquier?"

"Yes."

"Well, not so much Madame Vauquier as a generalisation when she is being introduced. Chapter three—yes, I know exactly where it is, it was one of my little literary discoveries. It helped to clarify something which had been tormenting me for a long time. That is what makes great writers, you know: they reveal. Look it up tonight, then I might tell you something more. It's just a little piece, about people who seek in strangers what they can no longer find in their intimates."

Needless to say, as soon as I got home I looked up the passage indicated. I found it without any trouble. but had to read it several times before I isolated the point which my friend wished to make. I give it now for the sake of continuity. It runs:

> Some people, it may be, have no more to look for from those with whom they live; they have displayed the innermost recesses of their hearts to their neighbors, and these are left void and empty; they are conscious that they stand secretly condemned, and with merited severity. But they feel an uncontrollable need for flattery, which none offers them, or they are consumed with anxiety to seem to possess qualities which are not really theirs; and so they hope to surprise the regard or the love of strangers, in spite of the wish of losing it sooner or later.

I can't say, like my friend, that I found it a literary discovery. I wasn't particularly impressed, no doubt because it was relevant to nothing in my own personal experience. Be that as it may, my only thought at the time was to fit the passage into the pattern of my blind friend's life, where it obviously belonged. I felt sure that there was a deep human story behind his references to Balzac and Anatole France, a story which tied in with his abiding air of smug contentment, his caginess about his private affairs. There was also his remark: "I might tell you something more."

Several days passed before the subject was raised between us. It wasn't often that we got seats together early in the journey. The train never really began to lighten before it got to Moorabbin, and in the few days following the talk I have recorded there was little opportunity to get back to it Each evening, however, we managed to sit together for a few minutes, and I thought it significant that he didn't ask me if I had looked up the quotation. I concluded that he was biding his time until we could be sure of twenty or thirty minutes' unbroken conversation, as indeed I was myself.

When the opportunity did come, on our last evening but one, he seized it with almost indecent haste. He had been seated since Richmond. At Hawksburn a man sitting next to him got out and I immediately dropped into the empty place.

I put my hand on his knee and spoke to him, just to let him know who was there, and he sat in silence for a minute or so. Then, not bothering with any preliminaries, and putting his lips close to my ear, he said, in a voice that told me he was smiling:

"Well, did you look that up—Balzac?"

"Yes, I found it."

"What did you think of it?"

"It rang true, but it was a bit beyond me. I've never met a woman like that."

"Woman? He uses the word people. There are men like that too, you know."

"You've met them?"

"As it hapens, no. Only a woman. I married her."

There was a slight tremor in his voice, something new to me. I observed that he was indeed smiling, and holding his lips tightly closed. To control a trembling there also? Some of the excitement he was laboring under was coming to me through his whole body, for we were jammed tightly together.

"You surprise me," I said cautiously. "I always had an impression that you were happily married."

"So I am —— now!"

"A second marriage?"

"No, the same woman. She changed. She changed when I became blind. Can you understand that?"

"I think so. You said yourself there is compassion in all women."

"So there is, but it wasn't as simple as that in this case. I was married to her for twenty years

before my accident, and in all that time I lived in a domestic hell. Do you find this embarrassing, listening to a man run his wife down?"

"I do not. What you really want to tell me is that she's changed"

That seemed to please him. He gave my arm a friendly squeeze. "Yes, that's what I want to tell you. But first I want you to understand what kind of a woman she was. You know, I'm breaking the precept of a lifetime. Are you happily married?"

"Yes, I was fortunate."

"I've always maintained that a man who is unhappily married should never confide in a man who has done well for himself. He's never really understood, only scorned. A happily married man likes to take the credit himself. If another man complains, it's because he's a bad husband and won't see it, or because he doesn't know how to manage a woman. Follow me?"

"Yes, I'm with you."

"Ten years ago I wouldn't have talked to you like this. I'd learned to keep my mouth shut. She was too clever for me. Out-manoeuvring me and building up her own stocks was a science with her. She fooled nearly everybody, even most of my closest friends ——."

"One woman to her husband, and quite another one to outsiders," I agreed. The miles were flying past, and I wanted to get the story while he was in the humor.

"Exactly! As a matter of fact, she fooled even me for a long time. I learned quickly enough that I'd married the wrong woman, but it took me two or three years to fully realise the pickle I was in. She won other people so easily that I always felt a bit guilty after our first little quarrels. I thought that all I had to deal with was a nagger. A nagger with heavy leavening of house-pride and acquisitiveness. She was forever picking at me over trifles, but all men complain about that when they get together, and I used to console myself by thinking that I wasn't a special case, and that she'd probably grow out of it anyway.

"She didn't grow out of it, she got steadily worse. She used to dwell on me, catch me out in all kinds of little misdemeanors: coming into the house without wiping my shoes clean, not putting things away after me, leaving a tap dripping, letting a hole grow in my socks without telling her, leaving a light on after I'd been into another room. Fair enough, but she used to chip me without making a joke of it, without a smile, and that made all the difference. She used to drive me, too. I had a good job, head storeman with Leckie Electrics. I made good money, but it was never enough. There was never any pleasure in putting my pay packet on to the table. She was always talking about what some other woman had, how much some other woman's husband was earning. She kept a good house, no doubt, but it was never a home. Everything was done with an eye on the woman next door, if you get what I mean. She'd never ask me for something straight out. She'd tell me how some other woman had just got it—and keep on telling me. And as fast as I met one need she'd bring up another. If I kicked back, as I often did, she'd get upset, start dabbing her eyes, and make me feel the offending party. Whereabouts are we?"

"Malvern."

"But all this wasn't the worst of it. What exasperated me more than anything else was the fact that she made no concessions whatever to me as an individual in my own right. She took not the slightest interest in anything that intereted me. She'd smother me with all the fiddling tittle-tattle about other people's affairs, but the minute I mentioned something that concerned me, or ourselves mutually, she'd go as flat as a pancake. All her miseries were at home, all her joys outside. She was a woman for whom adulation was the very spice of life. Adulation, no matter how worthless, as long as she was getting it. Any pool, never mind how small, as long as she was the big fish in it. That was one of the reasons for her systematic housekeeping, she wanted plenty of time for gadding about. She was always up to the ears in some local organisation. You know these women's groups and auxiliaries: hospitals, Red Cross, Liberal Party, Labor Party, Animal Welfare, Progress Associations. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not passing judgment on them. They do good work, and there's a lot of fine women in them. But my wife would never stay put. She went through them all, picking them up and dropping them one after another as she got cut down to size. Same thing with the churches. One time or another she tacked herself on to them all: Church of England, Methodist, Presbyterian, there was even a Salvation Army period. Anything at all as long as she could carry a banner, blow a trumpet, or beat a drum. Anything for a bit of limelight. She'd take them all in for a little while, then, as soon as she tired of it, or found her stocks dropping, she'd get out and take up with something else. And while each one lasted I got it morning, noon and night, breakfast, dinner and tea. She used to drive me mad with her piddling, boasting and gossip.

"It was the same with individuals, odd connections picked up among the neighbors and around the shops. Her life was a long procession of transient friendships. She had a talent for attracting people, but she won them by deliberately laying herself out to win them. She'd pick up with strangers anywhere, flatter them by getting them to talk about themselves, asking them the kind of questions that people like to be asked. Believe me, in her own shallow way she was clever. She understood some human weaknesses and how to exploit them. She was a fantastic liar, one of those pathological liars who begin by deceiving themselves. She was always repeating to me nice things which she'd heard that people were saying about her. She would invent them, and immediately incorporate them as facts into the image of herself that she was forever building up. Nobody could tell her anything, she was an authority on everything under the sun. She got by through sheer brazen cunning, and the reluctance of people to drive her out into the open.

"When we had visitors she used to put on an act, join in by repeating things she'd heard me say on other occasions, all shrewdly designed to convey an impression of a devoted wife sharing her husband's life. Sometimes in her eagerness she'd draw the long bow, add something quite absurd, turn to me for endorsement, and get annoyed when I denied ever having said such a thing. The onus then was on me to smooth things out, but she would yield in a way that always made it look as if it were she who was giving in for the sake of peace. Oh, she was clever, clever! She had a genius for putting me in a false position, for winning people's sympathy. Can you understand all this? Is she beginning to take shape?"

"Yes, I'm beginning to see her."

"Good! She'll take on life-size in a minute." He gave my arm another appreciative squeeze. Whatever the story was worth, I know by now that I was going to get it in full. He was a man released, in full tide. I noticed that each time we pulled into a station he stopped for a moment, cocking

his head sideways, mentally checking where we were. "You're sure nobody else can hear me?" he enquired anxiously.

"Quite sure. I'd warn you."

"Yes, give me a nudge ——."

"You were saying she had a genius for winning people's sympathy."

"It was her whole life. She just couldn't help herself. It was behind everything she did, everything she said. I told you that we lost a child and that she could never have another. She used it directly by fussing over other people's children in a way that almost brought tears to their eyes. And she used it indirectly by pretending I was holding it against her that she couldn't give me a family. It was one of the wicked whispers that kept coming back to me. The truth is that it was one of my great grievances that she would never agree to adopt a child. I wanted to right from the first, but she couldn't be objective even about that. She said she could never bring herself to treat someone else's child as her own, which wouldn't be fair to the child. See how clever she was? That was the story for me. For outsiders the story was that it was me who wouldn't agree. One night I challenged her with all this. I told her that she wanted to keep up the existing situation because it was a perfect cross on which to crucify herself. From that moment she really hated me, because she knew I was seeing into her. No doubt Balzac had something to do with it too. It was about that time that I read 'Pere Goriot,' and the whole nature of the woman was revealed to me in a flash. What station was that?"

"Ormond."

"She loved an open quarrel, not because it gave her an opportunity to get things off her chest, but because it made me say things, gave her fresh ammunition. It endorsed the image of herself as a long-suffering wife. Perhaps it was bad for me getting on to that piece of Balzac, because my reaction gave her what she had always wanted. It made me fight back, and she took a great plunge for the worse. Believe me, she wanted a bad husband ——."

"She was a neurotic."

"Yes! Most women like to be envied. She didn't, she wanted to be pitied. And when I began to fight back in real earnest she was happy, in her own vicious, miserable way. She had something to complain about, true stories to tell her cronies. You must understand that all the time she kept her windows clean—follow what I mean? She knew how to lay money out, and she had good taste. The house was like a new penny, but it was a showpiece, not a refuge. I never went short of a clean shirt, because other people would have noticed that, but I never had a cosy hearth to sit at. One of her most provocative tactics was to be up to the ears in work just as I walked in of an evening. Going for the lick of her life with ths vacuum cleaner or at a pile of ironing. And she could glance at the clock, then glare at me, in a way that made my gorge rise. The whole implication being that she'd never stopped for a minute since I went out in the morning, and would have been finished if I'd come in at my usual time.

"There was another one of those tales she put around about me, that I was liable to fly into a rage if I walked in and found that all the work wasn't done and my dinner ready to sit down to. The truth was that she was a very good cook and my dinner was always ready. She had to invent persecutions. When we had visitors she was, of course, a different person. She was quite shameless and uninhibited. She'd call me 'dear,' fuss over me, fetch and carry for me, take on the role of the meek and mild little wife whose only desire was to please her husband. For my part I never could relax, never pretend. I did the best I could, for the sake of the visitors. But people could hardly fail to get an impression that I was sulking over something. Which was precisely what she wanted. See the impossible situation I was in?"

I could indeed. Actually there was a lot more than I have set down. I can't recall everything. He was talking fast, with only a murmur of assent from me now and then to show I was listening. We reached Mordialloc, and he went on to tell me how things got to such a pass that he began to take to drink.

"My friends were falling away. We rarely got asked out, and people don't like coming around a house where man and wife are obviously not getting along together. I began to do what a lot of men in trouble do, look for comfort in the pub. I'd always been in the habit of having a couple with a mate after work. Just two, never more. But I began to dread going home at night, and the two became four, then six. On odd occasions, even eight. That was always enough to light me up a bit, keep the dinner waiting, lay a charge that never failed to go off. I could hold my drink, you know. I was never helpless, but I found I could always face her better with a few under the belt. It suited her, too. People would see me coming along the street a bit the worse for wear—more strength to her arm! Another stick to flog me with, and the certainty of a ding-dong quarrel if she felt like it. I think the one thing she wanted more than anything else in the world was for me to strike her."

"Why didn't you leave her?" I asked. It was the question that had been with me for the past few minutes. It was immediately evident that it was also one he had been expecting. I might almost say steeling himself for.

"Leave her? Yes, why didn't I?" He faltered for a moment, and I knew that what he was feeling was shame. Shame of having confessed to putting up with such outrage for so long.

"I suppose it was because I was a certain kind of coward. A man can be a hero in some ways, yet lack the guts to make a big decision the consequences of which he can't clearly foresee. He keeps deluding himself that something will happen which will solve the problem for him. Micawberism takes many forms. I despise my self for it now. Think of it—of course I thought of it. I was always thinking of it, but when it came to action I always put it off. This week, next week, sometime, never. All I did was provoke her, particularly when I had a few drinks in.

"I used to challenge her to get out if I was such a beast. She loved that. It used to put new life into her. She had different ways of meeting it. Sometimes she'd burst into tears, seize her hat and coat, threaten to go out and throw herself under a train, jump into a river, poison herself. All so real that she would terrify me, and I'd grab her, prevent her by force from rushing out into the street. At other times she'd just stare at me, cold as an icicle, and tell me she'd known for years that that was what I wanted. 'Now we're getting the truth!' she'd say. 'Now it's coming out. You've got another woman, haven't you? You want me out of the way so you can fill the house up with her and your drunken mates.' And as often as not I'd put myself further into the red by going out there and then and getting real plastered. Is this Aspendale?"

"Yes."

I felt him gather himself together as he took a big leap forward in his story. "I'll have to skip a lot. I want to tell you how it all ended. You aren't bored with this, are you?"

"Far from it. Please keep going."

"Well, believe it or not, I kept my nose to it for twenty years before I decided in cold blood to bring it to an end, no matter what happened. I realised later, of course, that I shouldn't have said anything to her. I should have just packed a bag and cleared out one day when she wasn't in the house. But it's easy to be wise after the event. One evening I told her I wanted to leave her. We weren't quarrelling at the time, and I was stone cold sober. She was knitting and I was supposed to be reading the paper. I'd thought out exactly what I was going to say and how I was going to say it. Without any preliminaries I just lowered my paper and asked her, quietly and very seriously if she thought there was any sense in us carrying on any longer. And—listen, this is interesting—do you know how she took it?"

"Tell me."

"She took it as calmly as if I'd said I was going out for a packet of cigerettes. She didn't even lift her face and look at me. Her brows came down, and the needles clicked a little faster, that was all. She just sat without saying a word while I pointed out, as gently as I could, that we'd both been wasting our lives, and that the best thing we could do now was call it a day. I didn't reproach her, I didn't drag anything up. I took half the responsibility by saying that the simple fact of the matter was that we'd been totally unsuited to each other from the beginning. I talked to her for quite some minutes, and there was never a word out of her. She just sat listening to me with tight lips and cold eyes, not a muscle flickering in her face. It was too late when I realised how her mind was working. All I felt at the time was elation, relief. I kept thinking: 'My God, it's as easy as this after all!'

"I should have known better. When at last I stopped, and waited for her to say something, she look straight at me for the first time. 'I suppose there's another woman in this?' she asked. Believe me, there wasn't a tremor in her voice. And I gave the wrong answer. I said there wasn't. It was true, there wasn't, but I should never have told her. See what she'd been thinking?"

"I'm not sure. Just keep on telling me."

"Don't you see," his hand closed on my arm with such strength that he almost made me wince, "it was what she wanted! Another woman! It was what she'd always wanted, and for a few precious minutes she'd been thinking she was going to get it. Another woman, after all she'd put up with me. What a story to put around the neighborhood! What a role to fill! Abandoned, after all the best years of her life. All the time I'd been talking she'd been building up the vision, meeting people down the street, putting a brave face on it as she'd put a brave face on everything else I'd done to her, wallowing in pity. And in one little sentence I'd blown it all to smithereens. I was going to leave her and live on my own. No woman at all rather than her, and everybody would know it. If you could only have seen what that did to her! She scared the daylights out of me. I'll never forget it as long as I live. She gave one heartrending yell and jumped up: 'My God, that makes it worse!'

"Tell me, why should it have made it worse, for any woman except her? Even after all those years her mind was still beyond my reach. I thought that would have helped to console her, smooth the way. Instead, it drove her into a fury. Into hysterics. She shouted some terrible things at me. When I tried to calm her she rushed for the sideboard and dragged open the drawer, yelling she'd cut her throat and be finished with me once and for all. And, like the damned fool I'd always been, I seized her, struggled with her, made her drop the knife she never had any intention of using. She really did go over the wall that night, though. I had to put her to bed and send for the doctor. He knew, but doctors never tell. They're always afraid a time will come when you'll quote them to the patient. They just button up, prescribe a sedative, and leave you to it. Where are we now?"

"Almost into Chelsea. Only one more after that, for you. You didn't leave her?"

"No. As I said, I'm still with her. Only a week after that scene Providence took over. I had my accident, and that was the end of it. And this is what I really want to tell you—she came good."

"She what?"

"I was terrified when it happened, you know, when I knew my sight was gone. I saw myself delivered body and soul into her hands ——."

"Well, you were, weren't you?"

"Of course I was. But, don't you see, I'd become God's own gift to such a woman! A stage on which she could strut and perform to her heart's content. Imagine it! Stuck with a blind husband after all she'd been through. She slipped smoothly into the part even while I was lying in hospital. She visited me every day, often twice, and nothing pleased her as much as to find other people with me. I was never to see her face again, but everything came to me through her voice. She used to fuss over me, fiddle about with my pillow, sit combing my hair, stroking my hand. Over and over again she would assure me, usually in a voice just loud enough to carry to the next bed, that everything was going to be all right, I had nothing to worry about as long as she was alive. I'm afraid I wasn't very receptive. The whole performance used to nauseate me. I dreaded her coming in, and was always glad when the bell rang for visitors to go. I lived in mortal fear of the day when I would have to go with her. I thought it would all come to an end then."

"And it didn't?"

"No!" For the last time I felt his urgent grip on my arm. "Don't you see, she'd found a part which suited her so perfectly that she didn't have to play it. It fitted her needs like a skin. For the first time in her life she was a bona fide martyr, and let anybody deny it! She no longer had to rely on winning and fooling a fresh set of cronies from month to month. All she had to do was keep close to me, the helpless one, and the light of pity was never off her. All the adulation and sympathy her miserable heart had ever craved for. I wasn't to see the faces of my own close friends again, but from things they said to me I could read a changed attitude even in them—perhaps they'd been wrong about both of us after all! Everything she had ever longed for had fallen right into her lap. That's how I saw it, anyway. And it's how I believe it really was in the first few months."

He stopped, and I knew he was waiting for me to say something. His face was turned full towards me, the sightless eyes wide open as if they might help him to read me.

"In the first few months?" I repeated in some confusion.

"In the first few months. Even when she continued to smother me with kindness after I went home, I couldn't see it as anything but an act which would come to an end as soon as she got tired of it. It was inconsistent with everyhing I knew about her. After all those years of stormy

torment it was a weird experience, like waking up and finding myself in a glass jar. Exhibit number one. She had me exactly where she wanted me. I'd never been so precious. She loved taking me for walks, particularly on a Saturday morning, shopping, when everybody else was on the streets. Like a mother out with her first baby. Every now and then she'd stop and talk to somebody. One morning when it was a husband and wife I got snatches of what was going on between the two women while I was involved with the man. They were keeping their voices down, but we all have a special ear for a voice we know well. I heard my wife explaining how necessary it was for her to get me out as much as possible. 'He mopes a bit if he's left too much by himself. I could get through the shopping quicker on my own, but I give him a little basket to carry, and he thinks he's helping me. It's good for him, gives him a sense of independence.' I overheard a lot of things like that. See the skilful building up of herself? That, at least, was characteristic. Can you blame me if I was suspicious? I think she was disappointed when they found a new job for me."

"But she did keep it up?" Only seconds to go now, and something in his manner told me he hadn't quite reached the end of his story.

"She kept it up. Ten years now, and I've never had it so good. That's what I meant when I said it was the best thing that ever happened to me. And—listen, this is the very essence of it—for her too! For her too. I may be wrong, but it's a long time since I began to give her the benefit of the doubt. Whatever it was in the first place, I don't think it's an act now."

"You mean ——."

"Yes, yes, yes! Remember what I said—the compassion that is in all women. They must have something to look after, something to nurse, something to hold in their arms, whether it's a baby or a man." He sat forward in his seat as the train ran into Carrum station. "I believe she's as happy as I am. You'll keep all this to yourself, of course?"

"Of course." I got up to open the door for him. A Carrum acquaintaince stood ready to receive him on the platform. "Thank you for telling me. You've given me a lot to think about."

He had indeed. But there and then I was left with two clear reflections: how fascinating it would have been to go home with him and meet his wife, and how little of life some men are driven to settle for.

James Corbett : : CORRUPTER

After he'd savored
the first drop
he drank to the dregs,
and licked his lips
as if regretting
so late an introduction
to such a brew.

Then, adjusting his bed,
I did my duty and said,
"How shall we bury you?"

"Yes," he answered.
"The wind has changed.
Now we'll smell the pines,
their tangle penetrating
our city, while athletes,
exercising slowly,
may be invigorated
and set new records."

I needed patience
to perform my kindness,
"How shall we bury you?"

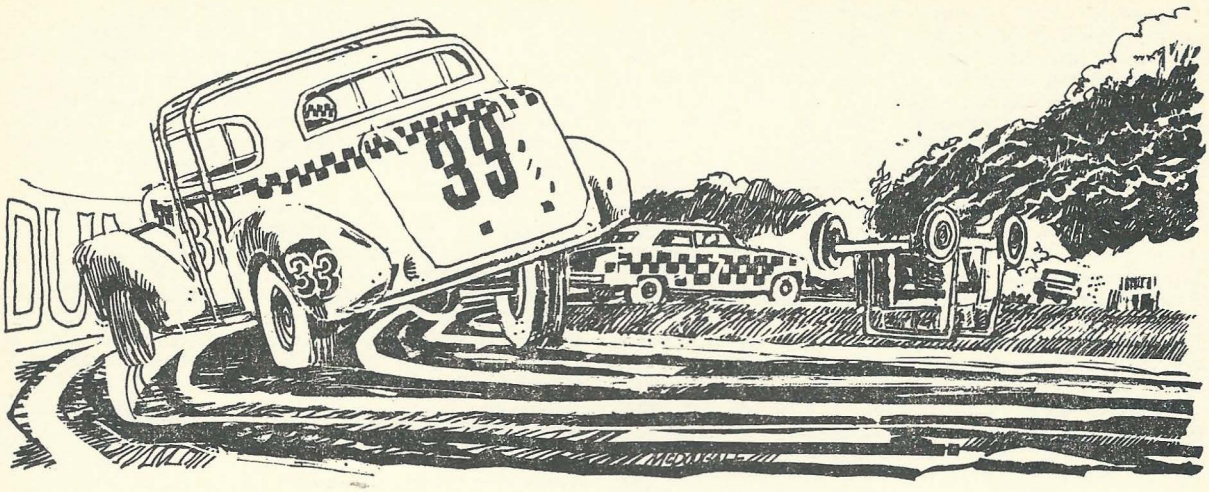
He sniffed the air,
testing, perhaps, the truth
of his observation.
"These bars," he said,
"are ineffective
or else they loathe
their work and will not jail
the smell of pines."

Once more I tried
to normalise his mind,
"How shall we bury you?"

He said, "The wind
won't stay in this direction.
Later, you'll smell
the fishing boats before
they deck the quay
with their salty labor,
but you'll catch a cold
from standing in the wind."

"How," I said.

"In any case," he interrupted,
"my bed is much too narrow;
if you follow."



For Kym Bonython

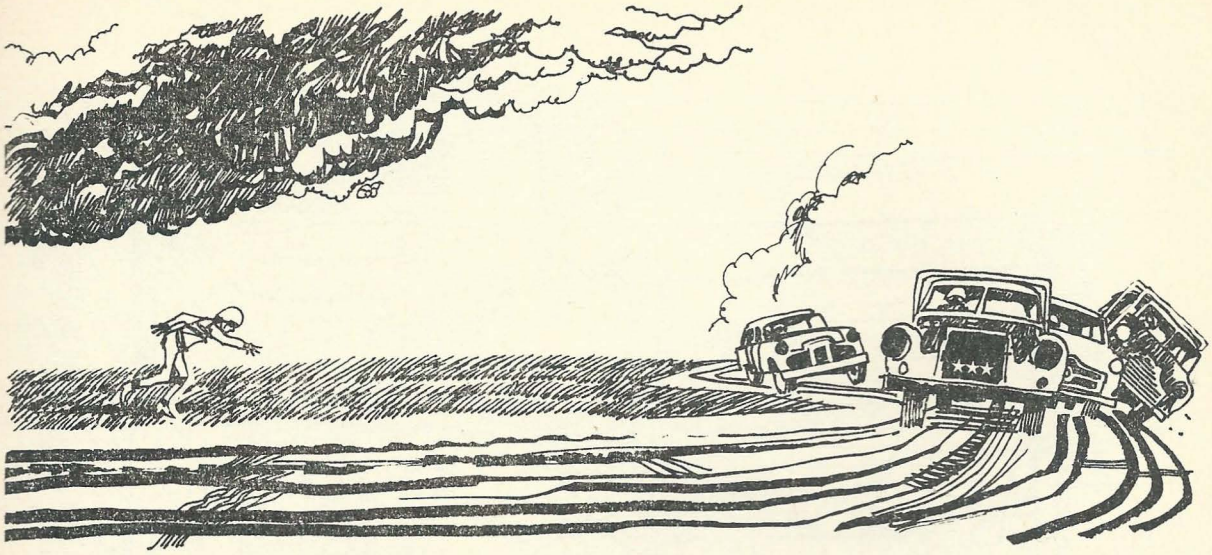
Geoffrey Dutton:

Born on the assembly line, they are queueing to be torn apart,
rolling in threes round the speedway slowly,
waiting for the start. Thirty-year-old stumpy Chevs,
a long-snouted postwar Humber, an Austin Princess
and commoner Fords and any number of Dodges.
The duco Dad used to polish now furry as a peach,
and scrawled with slogans: 'Nevastop' . . . 'Come on Fred' . . .
'Kym's Offy–?' . . . 'Bashem or Bust' . . . and the rings
rattling in the pots, and blue smoke clouding the track
and the watching thousands, the helmeted drivers
under a frame of welded tubes, and a can
of petrol where Aunty Mavis's legs used to go,
no lights, no glass, the doors all bolted shut,
and—the lights are green—they're off—they're racing!

For bash, not speed, for smash, not slowing down,
for crash, not giving way, and the last one rolling wins.

A beetle-back Vanguard cracks a Dodge on the wing
and she rolls, but as the Vanguard backs, a Hudson Terraplane
(labelled Terrorplane) belts her front wheel in.
The tyre tears off, but away she goes on the rim.
Now a black Chev and a yellow Ford are locked together
like mating dragonflies that cannot get apart,
rubber flies high as steam from a broken hose
but neither one goes. The Humber on one front rim
pushes its snout like a broken sled,
crumples a Ford like the one Cousin Fred finished off
the night he went to sleep coming back from the races at Strath.

It is New Year's night, and all over Australia
people are killing themselves in crashes they never meant.
But these wild boys make accidents on purpose,
and when they cop it square amidships, and over they go,
they show the comic untended underbelly
of the glossy tragical machine. Wheels spin



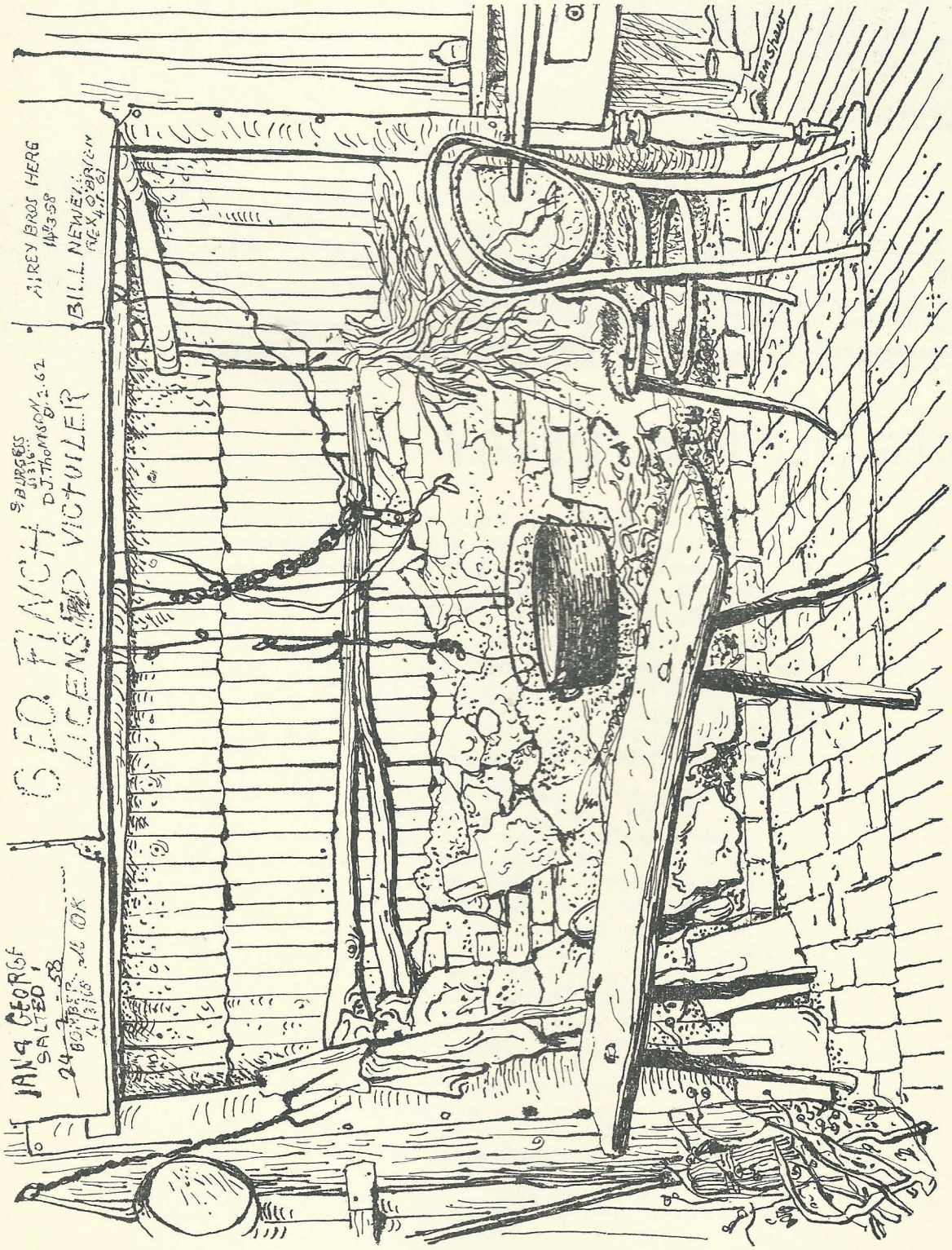
DEMOLITION DERBY

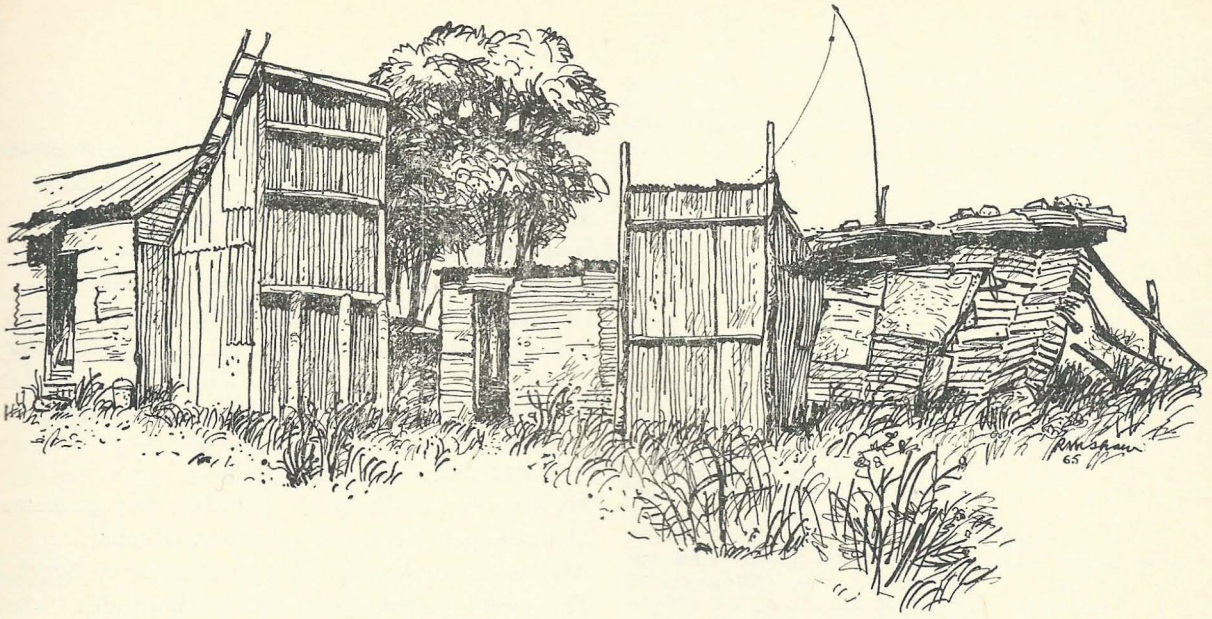
while the corpses all walk away and the only deaths
are the cars, eyes hanging out, dribbling front teeth,
a loose wheel wobbling like a half-severed head,
bumper-bars splayed out like compound fractures,
and cracked skulls and caved-in ribs on every side.

This is the Mardi Gras of the mechanised age,
the festival where all assembly lines should end,
Ford, B.M.C., G.M., thousands every hour
until the crippled counties of little countries
couples will fall in love, marry and die
between the red light and the green.

Whack, bump, wallop, smack, scrunch, crumple,
and only the old Humber Super Snipe
and a yellow Dodge, a piker with hardly a dent,
are left to grunt and thump each other's bodies
like tired old pugs in a ring of steel.
Bumping one shoulder down on the rubberless rim
in a last rush the Humber bumps him to a halt.
The Dodge's front wheels look in at each other
like a desperate comedian's eyes. The crowd roars.
"Get rolling, Thirty Three. Beauty. You can make it,"
and the poor old Humber heaves, and almost moves,
and the unsilenced motor roars with dying pain
and the clutch screams and the back wheels whine
and she moves, she moves, she runs stumbling forward
like a collapsing soldier shot in a charge
and flops on her face in the middle of the ring.
Sixty five stopped cars all around, some up,
some down, some sideways, she alone the last to move.

The audience pours over the railings to touch the bodies
of the steel corpses lying unburied on the ground.
The festival is over. The crowd breaks up,
walks streets to the rows of shiny, unbroken cars.
They speed homewards. The next accident is overdue.


IAN GEORGE
SALTED
24-2-58
BOMBER
G FOR FINCH
LICENSED VICTUALLER
S. BURGESS
D.J. THOMSON
BILL NEWELL
AIREY BROS HERG
Jan Shaw



> He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,
> Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough;
> Where a horses's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride,
> The man who holds his own is good enough.
>
> —"The Banjo."

Roderick Shaw

A SNOWY MOUNTAINS HUT

THE Snowy Mountains used to be a rugged, untamed hilltop place where the writhing snowgums fought it out with nature and the snow in season fell in solitude. Nature was supreme. Now it has been squared and powered into a comparatively tame pathway for convoys of sightseers crocodiling over the mountains from point to point in their busy little cars. Who broke the ground first is not so important; perhaps it was surveyors like the Pole, Kosciusko — or the men from Snowy River who took cattle to the tops in summer to graze on the new grasses and nibble among alpine flowers. At all events it was the cattle men who made the real marks first with cattle tracks, mustering yards and camps. Even summer nights on these cattle leases, 6000 feet above sea level, can be bitterly cold. Camps had to be well made to shelter man for the long summer vigil and final muster before winter winds and snow forced a retreat.

It is now some ten years since the cattle men made the last retreats, when the Snowy Mountains Authority finally banned grazing on the high plains to avoid the inevitable erosion. Mustering yards and huts are now collapsing and being reclaimed by the fierce winter winds, the snow and the summer grasses. But some huts are still prepared to shelter men if they can find them. It was on a walk across the highlands from Guthega to Cabramurra that a group of us found an old camp and sheltered from the snowfalls last Easter twelve months. To this camp go no public relations' voices or sightseers in single, camera-clicking file—and there are no efficient white wooden fingers pointing into the scrub. There are no signs to forbid camping, or diagrams to tell how it was all done in the days when horses, axes and wire were the tools of the pioneers. This group of sticks and stones and wire tells its own tale in a language the poet dreams of.

A track down to the clearing is steep and rough —made by horses for horses—and it has pulled sapling and scrub across itself, dreading discovery. Half a mile down there is still no hint of where one is being led until, unexpectedly, a bend reveals the top of a corrugated iron chimney and the bleached-grey remains of the stockyard fences. And now, the red earth of the fenced yard, bitten deep below the grass level by the thousands of wheeling hooves, stands out in complement to the rich green grass. This is the mustering ground from generation on generation of sturdy mountain cattle. Coming down closer, the green clearing about the huts is seen speckled with yellow everlasting daisies and bluebells. One magnificent snowgum stands at the fence, isolated from its fellows like a proud spokesman bargaining for a truce with the axe-swinging cattlemen. Stockyard fences in the hills are usually constructed with an ingenious technique of forked or criss-crossed uprights supporting sapling railings—all axe work with no nails. Fifty yards or so from the stockyard stand the shacks—they seem deserted, and yet there are signs of men, a kero tin under a drip from the roof, some firewood and kindling against the wall and a piece of fresh string on a nail. There are two shacks—the first, obviously the pioneer, is low, rusty and askew. The corrugated iron and slab construction is typical of the bushman's architecture — rough and pretty well windowless.

Inside, built-in beds of sacking stretched over sapling frames are collapsing and rotting, and a makeshift canopy of spired-webbed canvas is still sagging over the beds—dirty and dusty. A rough hewn wooden bench is covered with discarded paraphernalia—turps bottles, old rum bottles, jam tins, lids and pieces of stone—and hanging from nails in the sapling uprights of the walls are the last remains of some of the men from Snowy River and their legendary horses: pieces of saddle, bridle bits, three pairs of rotten breeches, a grey waistcoat, wire, feed-bags and meat-hooks.

This old shack has not been slept in for about ten years. Rains have washed silt across the floors and the grasses have made themselves at home, climbing over the makeshift furniture and poking into every corner like a crawling baby.

The younger, larger shack stands in good condition, adjacent to its elder, but lacks its character. The chimney is skillion type, with a sapling ladder leading up to a smoking box at the top, used for meat or perhaps trout. There are two small windows, and one door which opens straight into the one large room. A fireplace takes up one wall entirely. There is a large galvanised iron box used for protection of bedding through the winter —from rats, perhaps, and it now contains the useless remains of two or three mattresses.

The furniture consists of a table from a homestead, an old Austrian chair with a hairy cowhide seat, and a bush-made four-legged form. In the drawer of the table some old knives and forks remain—and a battered meat safe sits on a shelf with some antique bottles. Everything else's in the fireplace—broom, home-made shovel, iron kettle and pot on a tangle of wires and chains that put an art shop mobile to shame—piles of kindling and loose bricks and remains of fires, rusty tins, old pieces of dishcloth and wire toasting forks. The flat surfaces of the fireplace surrounds are covered with the names of bushwalkers and shooters who have sheltered in the hut as we did. Perhaps one of the names belongs to a musterer.

With a fire going, and our party sitting drinking and arguing in front of the blaze, the shed seemed to come to life again. Standing at the door, later, when all was silent and the snow gently falling outside, one could hear the crack of whips, the shouting and the bellowing, and the yarns being tossed about in the pubs back at Kiandra and Old Adaminaby—and a poem recited in a classroom.

The ancient hills around the musterers' hut slumber, and dream about the inevitable.

Party

When people meet at a party and converse,
Noise is the mind's pants. If silence falls
We're naked, startled, fearfully we clutch
Inadequate shirt-tails lifted by cold wind,
And eyes look into other eyes to see,
Crouched in the thicket of the foggy mind,
Strange furtive creatures, straining to stay hid.
My rabbit shrinks before your possible greyhound
Or tiger-cat.
My leopard stalks your possibly shy gazelle.
My peacock hesitates between display
And wiser drooping. But new noise deflects
The peering eye, the penetrating blade.
Eyes can then parry other eyes. We hum
The latest hit, our feet tap out a dance,
We trail a nylon cloth before the bull,
Guild the dull hoax with smiles of plastic paint,
And punctuate slow time with sips of beer.

A. G. DAWS.

OBJECTOR

Tony Morphett

"LAY off me why don't you!"

Even the slam of the door was tentative, broken by loose hinges into a rattle not a bang. Even the quick collisions of his feet with the awkward curve of concrete in the lawn were sound effects put in later, just out of phase enough to be unreal.

Rattle of the door rattle of his feet, squeak creak of the gate, dark street, slots of light from poles at the ends and centre, warm night with small, front garden smells, and cicada noises, and a counter point of four television channels drifting in it.

In the other street, even his ring on the electronic chimes was tentative.

"Is Jan in?"

Jan, the slightly large-hipped and small-breasted body of nineteen-year-old everywoman, and brown eyes, and hair that was neither this nor that, and five feet of calm all around her.

I want to talk, can we talk somewhere? The dining room? The dining room. Last remnants of after-dinner smells going cold for the room's cold night and morning and dark afternoon before its next use in twenty-two hours. There was a rose in a specimen vase, and the low mutter of the television set in the lounge talking to its self-unconscious self and to Jan's parents, pipe smoking and sock darning, safe beyond forty, snug inside the television.

"He was on about it again."

"Again? But you told him . . ."

"Well, he was on about it again. About how he'd been a volunteer . . ."

Always started that way. So the old man had been a bloody volunteer in 1940, when, it seemed to him, it had been easy to be a volunteer, when there had been a real enemy, and a real war, and black and white values, and all the dictators on the other side. Always started that way. About how the old man had been a volunteer in that simpler war when even conscription had been a simpler thing and hadn't been run like a bloody lottery with your birthday drawn on a marble, and the winners the ones who were one day off two years. Not quite so simple now with the dictators on both sides, but our dictators washing three times whiter, and our casualties being picked by lottery before they were killed by mistakes. Chance and error, nothing quite so simple as volunteering, but that's where in these last weeks it had always started.

". . . about how he'd been a volunteer. He was on about it again."

"I'll be glad when it's over."

"Over?"

"When you know."

"I'll be in. I know it. I've got this feeling. Couldn't miss. My marble . . ."

The quick hand, the half-smile, the presence of the television in the other room. "You might. There's a chance."

"Jan." Her hand on his cheek, clapped gently and let rest, soft and smelling different from any other hand. Kissed her. It caged a moment of real time. He looked at her. The moment stopped, and he was back in unreal, suspended time, more at home there than in the real moment. Real time had stopped when he had put the papers in. There had been a moment of real time the day he knew the ballot was drawn. There would be another real moment when he opened the envelope. And then perhaps no more real time for two years. And because of all the chances, of the chance of his birth time being one side or other of a twenty-year ago midnight, and the chance of his health, and the way the barrel with the marbles rolled, perhaps a microscopic flaw in the stick which pulled his marble out, all the grains diverting the river, and perhaps losing another lottery in a jungle and real time would end, would run out before the two years. The time plaited between him and Jan would run out.

And the time stretched backwards to his boyhood and colored and carved so much by this man his father, perhaps that might run out, and this father who had been so much part of it, all he could say was that he had been a volunteer himself, and two years in the army never hurt anyone.

"Even the names on the Honour Roll, dad?" And he had watched his father's face remember dead friends, and felt a sickness with himself, and watched his father's face as he had seen it those early grey Anzac mornings when he had gone with that face to see dawn come slowly into the metal faces on the cenotaph, and dawn come slowly into the official faces of his father and the other once a year men.

He said "Jan," and kissed her again, and they walked outside from the last remnant of sausages and tea, and they stood in the dark front yard. Her hand felt like a child's hand, it was so soft.

"Will you be ashamed? When I ask for an exemption?"

"No. I hope you won't be. Not for what you believe."

"I can't kill for other people's politics."

"No."

"Or be killed."

"No."

"I can't think till I get that letter. Good way to spend a holiday. Waiting for a letter."

"Mmm."

"I wish we'd been able to get away."

"You know I tried . . ."

"Messed up the old man, too. You know, usually go away with him. Give the old woman a rest from us for a while. Just the week." The river, and the hired boat, and the long sunshine, and the line pulling taut over his right index finger, and the old man doing the gutting and cooking. "The old man's going to be ashamed. When I go to court for the exemption. He can't understand that it's different. Thinks I'm scared or something."

"I know you're not."

"Well I am. I'm scared of the waiting and the lottery. The lottery most, I think. With a bloody marble. And he doesn't understand that. All his life, the old man's spent all his life being two off a tenner, and he doesn't reckon there is anything but lotteries and losing them. Poor silly bastard."

The night sounds, and cicadas and television, and later leaving his displaced footsteps along his way home to the dark street notched at the ends and centre by the light on dark stems. Squeak of the gate, rattle of the opening door, echo of his own last shout as he had left, the echo drowning in the flow of sound, shadow of his going out fading in the flicker of the screen through the lounge-room door.

Bed was a lying still and waiting, and then just a lying still as the waiting darkened, and then a wakening with daylight coming in stripes through the striped curtains.

Breakfast, then the whistle from the gate, and the envelope.

Numb, as he stood by the gate. A never-before detachment. Knowing that this was it, and the answer was bad. The tearing envelope an insect's sawing.

He didn't understand the letter. He read it again, and then knew why he didn't understand it. The lottery didn't want him. He had had the wrong birthday, he wasn't being drafted. He had had, he corrected himself, the right birthday, he wasn't being drafted. He told his mother, and watched her happiness, and wondered why he didn't feel it with her.

At his father's office, he told his father. His father's face smiled at him. "Fine. Now you won't have to go to court, will you?"

"No. No, I won't."

"Well that's that. Now maybe you can settle down again."

"Mmm."

"Well, I'll see you tonight I suppose."

"Yeah. Tonight." Watching his father's face return to paper.

It was being cut off. He had always gone with his father, all the way, and now he was going to be different. His father had been twenty when he had volunteered. But it was different anyway, different because of the sort of war, the sort of people on both sides, and the differences had been important. The differences, he corrected himself, were important.

But the river and the hired boat, and the long sunshine and the line pulling taut over his finger, and being with the old man those early mornings, and feeling that it was like the old man being with his friends those other grey mornings with the dawn coming slowly into the faces and sometimes seeing so little difference between the faces, the once a year ones and the metal.

"Yeah. Two years never hurt anyone."

The city was around him walking. Confusion inside the calm shell of him walking inside the confused city.

When he got home his father was there already.

"Dad?"

"Yeah?" From the paper. He knew the face behind it was still reading.

"Dad, I enlisted."

"Yeah . . . what!"

"I enlisted today."

Very quietly. "You bloody idiot." Then shouted. "You bloody idiot!" And the rattle of fallen paper and the brief smell of his father's sweat, and his father's open hand clapping against the left hand waiting side of his head, and the two steps back, and the familiar, improbable taste of blood in the mouth. "You bloody idiot." His father sat down, very quiet, dark coming into his face like a dawn in negative. "Why?"

"You did once."

"Leave me out of it. You were all right, and so you couldn't leave well alone. You were in the ballot, you were in the draw, and you were ballotted out. There's no shame in that, son. No one's going to hold that against you . . ."

"But you wouldn't have minded if I'd been ballotted in."

"Would've been different."

"You mean it's better to be caught in a lottery than make up your own mind."

"You couldn't leave well alone! What about your mother? You think your mother wants you up there? Couldn't leave well alone."

"You volunteered."

"For a real war. Not for a half-arsed show like this."

"But it would have been better to have been caught in the lottery and not to have made up my own mind?"

"You've got too many questions and not enough answers, son. Couldn't leave well alone!"

"But you joined up off your own bat . . ."

"I'd have been called up any . . .!" His father listened to the last hanging threads of his own words. "Can't let well alone!"

He looked at his father. For no reason he knew, he felt like school, and the taste of old tears. "Lay off! Lay off me, why don't you!"

His body turned, and then his legs followed. Jan. Jan would be able to see it, understand why. The doubts began before the door, and even the slam of it was tentative, broken by loose hinges into a rattle not a bang. Even the quick collisions of his feet with the awkward curve of concrete in the lawn were out of phase.

Door, rattle of his feet, squeak creak of the gate, slotted street, scented, scraped with cicadas, edged with the sounds of television until the tentative electronic chimes.

"Hello. Is Jan in?"

Nineteen-year-old everywoman, brown eyes, hair neither this nor that, he stood inside the five feet of calm all around her, looked at the surfaces of the brown eyes.

"Jan . . ."

"Did you hear?"

"Yes. Yes, I heard."

"What."

He saw Jan's other face as well. The one he would see if he told her he was going by choice.

"My birthday was picked. I've decided not to appeal. It'd hurt dad too much."

The other face disappeared, the real resigned face came to his shoulder.

"Well, it's only two years."

BERNIE MEYER

If men were honored according to their worth, and their names praised as merit deserves, Bernie Meyer, of whom probably you have never heard, would have been famous. Not as a poet, perhaps, for he wasn't much of one, and renown is not built on couplets like this:

Workers in hovels and hostels,
Don't let the boss lead you by the nostrils . . .

I think Overland published only one piece of Bernie's verse, many years ago, and I should imagine it needed some editing. Bernie, you see, was a Dutchman, but of a kind of whom there are too few. He never let you forget that he came from Holland—he deserted a Dutch man-of-war with dozens of others during a "goodwill" visit in 1910. One of my treasured memories is of him gazing at the Sydney Harbor Bridge for the first time, from a car full of Realist Writers, and giving it as his opinion that in the Low Countries there were nobler structures.

His friends could tell you endless stories about Bernie, one of the greatest "characters" ever. How once he hired a theatre to give a one-man performance of a play of his, with about fourteen parts, plus songs and recitations: he composed the music and also sold the tickets. He must have written ten plays, if he wrote one. How one of his books in manuscript, like Carlyle's, tragically ended under the copper, how a woman hid his pants to prevent him trotting off to yet another meeting . . . there's no end to the tales, and they are authentic.

But there was one book which he did get published, after struggles which to call heroic would be a gross understatement, and this is a classic of its type. It is called "Forward and Do Not Forget," and appeared in Amsterdam under the Pegasus imprint, when Bernie was in his seventieth, battle-scarred year. No, you have not heard of the title, but your children will know it one day. It's a fine book, and largely about Australia.

In fact, the story of a remarkable life and remarkable man. Son of a midwife, brought up the hard way, he eventually became a sick-bay attendant in the Dutch Navy, took part in building the illegal sailors' trade union which organised a strike in East Indian waters, and joined the I.W.W. after landing in Sydney. The book vividly describes his first months as a boilerman in Macquarie Street, his sufferings in the depression, work on railway construction, in foundries and on ships. It seems that, with Bernie around, every ship became a death-ship.

But the facts alone are nothing: this is a great, uncommon, sappily written, pulsating, wrathful but often humorous tender piece of Australiana, an antipodean "Ragged-trousered Philanthropist," as rich in human incident as can be imagined, and for that matter also in animal incidents. Indeed, it is unique and ought long since to have been published here. It nearly was, once. Being among the few locals who had read it in Dutch, I wanted to review it in the pages of "Tribune," but I was persona non grata, the book was in a foreign language, and so, to my knowledge, the central organ of the party to which Bernie devoted his life never got round to discussing the work that is his lasting memorial. Things have somewhat improved since then, I am glad to say.

There was only one review in the end, in "Meanjin." But in Holland it was received with acclaim.

Nothing, however, daunted Bernie, and whenever we met he proposed to sponsor my re-admittance to the C.P. He was poor. He was sick. He wrote and wrote on, regardless. He also talked not a little. He tramped miles with leaflets (several times round the globe I guess, back and forth from Springvale), and kept his faith polished like a lamp. He translated from Dutch to English, and if modesty makes saints he was a Mahatma. He had the heart of an old lion and the delicacy of a young girl. Life gave him the back of its hand, but he did not know it. He died this April, aged 79, without fuss, almost unsung.

If there's a heaven for pure-souled agitators he now sits on the right side of Joe Hill, booming up Australia and reading him his latest poem or play. I hope they have printing presses up there, and sympathetic editors.

DAVID MARTIN.

ERIC LAMBERT

The news of Eric Lambert's death takes me back fifteen years to the first of many readings of the typescript of "The Twenty Thousand Thieves."

Having ploughed through so many thousands of words from those theorists of literature, the self-styled socialist realists, and having been disappointed by the narrow, superficial output that usually resulted, it was exciting to find an Australian author who had something to say, the ability to say it, and what is more, had done it. And in the process he had created an Australian classic.

I met Eric through Frank Hardy. I had just completed the incredible job of assisting Frank to produce the second edition of "Power Without Glory." Eric was thinking of publishing the "Thieves." So we discussed it at my place over, inevitably, a few beers.

It took five months, from the marking up of the typescript to the appearance of the jacketed copies. The run was 7000. I doubt if Eric made any money from that edition, but he had the satisfaction of seeing his book in print and in the form he wanted.

The "Thieves" was the only book published by Newmont. Frederick Muller took it over in England and became Eric's regular publishers. The Muller edition was selected by the "Daily Graphic" as its book of the month for October, 1952, and it went on to sell over 300,000 copies. I remember the first royalty cheque; it was for over £1100 sterling.

My recollection of the reason for private publication is that this was the only way in which we could ensure the book appearing without bowdlerisation. We agreed that the great Australian slanguage could not be conveyed by dashes or asterisks; only Furphy could get away with (adj.), (gerundive), (subst.), and we were intolerant of euphemism (although we thought it advisable in those pre-Lady Chat. times to use two). A comparison of the Newmont and Muller editions shows that our fears were to an extent justified. Although the English edition follows the Australian fairly faithfully, the blue pencil intrudes occasionally—for example, the derisive "You'll shit!" is inexplicably replaced by "Oh, yeah?" and "Shove it up your arse!" by "Shove it up your jumper!"

So it was decided. Eric put up his deferred pay and the stalwart George Seelaf of the Butchers' Union went guarantor for the rest. Newmont publishing house was registered by Eric (he even bought a hand press for £25 to satisfy some legal requirement) and the job got under way.

As a number of fanciful stories about Eric's career have appeared in the newspapers and on the dust jackets of some of his books, it is worth while to get the facts from his family and the Army.

Eric was born in England on January 19, 1918, and the family sailed for Australia about a year later. He was educated in Sydney but did not complete his secondary schooling as the depression forced his father to take him away from Sydney High School. He worked at various jobs until he enlisted in 1940.

The Army records reads:

NX31349 Cpl. Eric Lambert had the following service: —

Enlisted in Australia Imperial Force 10th June, 1940.

Overseas Service	Unit
Middle East 27th December, 1940, to 27th February, 1943.	2/2 MG Bn and 2/15 Bn.
New Guinea 28th July, 1943, to 19th March, 1944	2/15 Bn.
Singapore 27th August, 1945, to 3rd November, 1945	2/14 AGH and 6 Aust PW Reception Camp

Discharged (on account of demobilisation) 7th December, 1945.

His New Guinea service finished when he was blown up by a mortar bomb. This caused a condition which resulted in a duodenal ulcer for which he was under treatment by Repatriation during the time I knew him. I understand that later, in England, the ulcer perforated and surgery was required.

He told me that after the war he was secretary to the Automotive Chamber of Commerce in Melbourne until he received the Commonwealth Literary Grant in 1950 which enabled him to settle down and finish the "Thieves."

For a time he earned a few extra quid obtaining advertising for the "Meat Industry Journal," to which he also contributed stories.

He married in Australia in 1950 and he and his wife, Joyce, left for England in March, 1955. The marriage did not work out and, after a divorce, he married again in England.

The first published story I can trace appeared in the "Meat Industry Journal" for February, 1949. It was called "I'm Wearing This for Charlie." Two other stories, "Back from Gangaiya" and "The Book," appeared in the same journal for February, 1950, and March-April, 1951, respectively. I have not been able to check the files to find out if there are any more. "Meanjin" printed two short stories—"Dinner at Moussa's (Winter, 1950) and the Goldhar Memorial prize-winning "Wings of the Morning" (Summer, 1951). The latter also appeared in Levis's "Coast to Coast" (1951-2) and Clem Christesen selected "The Gleam of His Wing" for his 1953-54 "Coast to Coast."

Stephen Murray-Smith included another version of "Back from Gangaiya" in "The Tracks We Travel" (A.B.S., 1953). Eric provided the narrative for "Gold—a folio of drawings by Ambrise Dyson with stories by Eric Lambert" (no publisher, 1951).

"Overland" published a series of humorous sketches and several reviews. Eric also contributed to "Overland's" forerunner, "The Realist Writer."

There are fourteen novels: "The Twenty Thousand Thieves" (Newmont, 1951; Frederick Muller, 1952), "The Five Bright Stars" (Australasian Book Society, 1954). The rest were published by Muller: "The Veterans" (1952), "Watermen" (1956), "The Dark Backward" (1958), "Glory Thrown In" (1959), "The Rehabilitated Man" (1960), "A Short Walk to the Stars," "Ballarat," "Kelly," "Dolphin," "The Drip Dry Man," "The Tender Conspiracy" and "McDougall's Farm" (1966).

Eric also wrote some verse, but I do not know if any was published.

As a person I found Eric to be generous, sympathetic, quick witted, a good mate. His sympathies were always with the underdog and he had no time for the Establishment. A compulsive writer, he regularly engaged in polemic in the correspondence columns of "The Age"; his name appeared there almost as often as those of the ratbag regulars. The spirit of revolt, however, was that of a naive personal anarchism, not that of a conscious member of the organised Left. It was probably this quality that led to his deterioration as a writer and a person in the succeeding years.

As a writer Eric was, as Ian Mair said, "in the tradition of Lawson, Furphy and Herbert. He writes because he believes he has something to say" ("Meanjin," Spring, 1951). His descriptive passages are first class, he had a really accurate ear for language, he could be tough and he could be lyrical and he had a sense of humor and an ability to depict the truly comic (no one—no ex-serviceman, at any rate—could ever forget the "Short Interlude for Bastardry" in "The Veterans").

Yet a dozen of the fourteen books showed no advance on the first two; in fact, they all show a marked retrogression. It is not appropriate at this time, nor am I competent, to attempt an analysis of this. However, once facet of the problem is suggested by A. G. Stephens's comment on some of Henry Lawson's later work: "He seems to have used all his vivid objective impressions without replacing them by subjective ideas of equal literary significance."

Eric's own words, from "You Write Because You Live" ("Realist Writer," No. 7, Sept.-Oct., 1952) might serve as a sorrowful epitaph:

". . . A writer should be aware of himself as a person with a responsibility to his people, with a duty to humanity . . . If you deny the people, then you deny yourself the chance of becoming the best you can become; you deny reality."

Whatever the reasons, he was denied or he denied himself this chance. We lost Eric, but we still have the "Thieves" and "The Veterans."

JACK MULLETT.

S W A G

This is the 34th number of "Overland." The first (only sixteen pages of it, printed then as now by Richmond Chronicle) appeared in Spring, 1954. The short story in "Overland 1" was John Morrison's "Nine O'Clock Finish"; John leads again in this issue. David Martin contributed to that first issue, and has contributed to almost every issue since. So did Eric Lambert; his unfortunate death is recorded in this issue. "Swag" began with issue No. 1, and "Overland" is still carrying it.

The man who has humped the bluey over all these years is Steve Murray-Smith. "Overland" started out with an Editorial Board, and it still has Advisory Editors. (I am the sole survivor of the original board—except, of course, for the editor.) The helpers have helped—mainly by reading and advising on manuscripts and by providing suggestions on new writers to approach, new themes to develop. But Steve has carried the burden.

This is the first time in 34 issues that Steve has not selected the material for "Overland," and only the second time he has not seen it through the press. (The other occasion was No. 9; Steve was overseas, and I had a happy time mucking about with the typography.)

It's a long time since I have put out a magazine, and I'd forgotten what a job it was. First the stories and poems have to be selected (fortunately the big job of sorting had already been done by John McLaren when I got them). Then arrangements have to be made with artists for the cover and other illustrations. (Vane contributed his first cover—an Olympic Games job—ten years ago.) Then features and reviews have to be decided on—and solicited—and followed up. Copy has to go to the printer, illustrations to the block maker. Proofs have to be corrected and the magazine laid out. Page proofs have to be checked. And only then can the issue be printed and sent out.

And all that in spare time, which is the real killer. This time I had to abandon a feature I badly wanted to run (a discussion on the underlying issues of the war in Vietnam) simply because I didn't have enough time to edit it.

Not that I'm complaining; I enjoy the physical process of producing a magazine, and seeing it turn out looking something like I imagined. But I don't know if I would be so patient if I'd already done it thirty-two times.

* * *

Ted Harrington was one of "Overland's" early discoveries — or, rather, rediscoveries. Frank Hardy wrote an article on him, Noel Counihan drew a portrait, and we printed three of Ted's ballads in issue No. 3. Earlier, someone had found Ted's song "My Old Black Billy" and put it into "Reedy River"; then they found the author.

When we got to know him, Ted (a veteran of World War I and a Mallee soldier settlement block) was on a T.P.I. pension. We used to run into him regularly in the basement bar of Phair's Hotel in Collins Street (these days it's a bank); if he collared a likely customer, he would walk over the road to his publishers, David Andrade's, and come back with a copy of his booklet of ballads, "The Kerrigan Boys," which he would proceed to flog (for eighteenpence a copy—the last time I saw one in an antiquarian catalogue, it was priced at $2.75).

Meeting a few writers persuaded Ted to drag his unpublished manuscripts out of the trunk under his bed in a terrace house in North Melbourne. A couple of years later, the Australasian Book Society published "The Swagless Swaggie." Bill Harney, an old mate of Ted's, reviewed it in "Overland 12."

Ted died a couple of weeks ago. He was old (71), he'd been sick for a long while, and he was pretty tired. In one of the ballads "Overland" published he wrote:

I want no angels or jasper throne,

I only want to be left alone.

Now he is.

* * *

The 1966 $1000 Melbourne "Moomba" award for Australian literature went to Thea Astley for her novel, "The Slow Natives," and the $400 Volkswagen award to A. D. Hope for his book of critical essays, "The Cave and the Spring." Myer awards for poetry went to Bruce Dawe ("A Need for Similar Name") and Rosemary Dobson ("Cock Crow").

It was pleasing, too, to see a Transfield award for quality of book production go to the Sydney firm of Edwards and Shaw for their production of art book, "Donald Friend." Rod Shaw, who has an article in this issue, was the designer. (His article has a special interest for me: Steve Murray-Smith and I were among the party who found Rod's hut just as it began to snow; so was Edgar Waters, who also contributes to this issue. It was when we reached the pub at Kiandra, after four days in the mountains, that we heard of the tragic death of our friend and advisory editor, Chris Masterman.)

* * *

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke at an evening organised by the Australasian Book Society—for the first time since I resigned as secretary of the A.B.S. seven years ago. The meeting was in honour of the publication of Alan Ashbolt's splendidly controversial reportage, "An American Experience." The six years I was with the A.B.S. were difficult years for Australian publishing; the numbers of books published annually in this country were at a post-war low. Somehow, the A.B.S. managed to hang on—thanks largely to the forbearance and generosity of its members, authors and printers. Now Australian publishing is booming, and so is the A.B.S. It has announced that it proposes to extend beyond the regular publication of members' selections into general publishing, and it invites the submission of manuscripts. In keeping with its tradition, it says "books of some social significance about Australia will be preferred." The Society's address is 189 Clarence Street, Sydney.

IAN TURNER.

A SEQUENCE OF HEROES

Robert Clark

I

He was an inward-furnished man
Who watched the ribboning stilt in flight.
He camped alone by hidden creeks
And heard the mopoke mourn at night.

And then he heard the call of men,
That creaking, plaintive, pleading sound.
He went, a pensive treading heron
Where screaming gulls obscured the ground.

He died content, a fancied debt
To kind not of his kind discharged,
Remembering sunlight on a creek,
A need denied, a life enlarged.

II

His mind was like a melting wind,
Strength silent in the supple touch,
Yet all his bent was gentleness.
Strength he had never valued much,

For strength implied the use of force,
Bending another to his will,
And to what end? The sapling broke
Or, once released, was upright still.

Strength met by strength brings violence,
A lily trampled, torn, and driven
Back to the slime from which it grew,
The sin that cannot be forgiven.

But violence came, the air men breathed,
The air they could not be without.
It mutilated mind and flesh,
Took misery in, hurled mercy out.

His latent strength rose out of sleep.
He fought, he ravaged, forced and killed,
Because he saw no other way
For gentleness to be fulfilled.

Once in, there seemed no mousehole out.
The cause of righteousness became
A juggernaut as frightful as
The monster he'd set out to tame.

His faith fouled up, he breathed despair.
His twisting mind could not be rid
Of joy and grief in killing men
Whose crime they'd done what he now did.

He died distraught, unreconciled
To means that violate the end,
In anguish that he'd missed his way
By some mischance he could not mend.

And none can tell him where he lies
What purity of will has done,
How by his soiling men are clean,
New lilies lift toward the sun.

III

He was a leader Nature made
To swing men to a bidden course,
As birds plunge headlong into space
Drawn by a pin-point powerful force.

Yet history will not know his name.
Fate counterpoised a greatness there
With greatness of a different kind
Few recognised and few could share.

A self perpetuating cell,
Freedom was tissue of his mind,
Freedom for him, for all—from him
And from each other. Spirit defined

By flesh, from which it grew, displays
The brittleness of close inbreeding.
Spirit was meant to stand alone,
The animal is always needing

To move in herds and to be led.
He'd known seduction by that power
Making men give their wills to him.
Sweetness at first, it then turned sour.

What is the vaunt of leadership
But the secretion of a gland
In leader and led, by which the herds
Resist in crisis or expand?

To so indulge the animal
Brings the decay of spirit near.
His wield of others checked their growth
And smothered his . This was his fear.

Though fame was loving, he turned his back.
To be unknown the only way
That he and they could grow as men
Into the hammering light of day.

IV

The world reveres those driven men
Who with the swingle chain of will
Swathe away scrub and build their dream,
Not thinking what they waste or kill.

Rich in that dreaming they endow
The world with everything they have.
Yet not so rich they understand
Their lack of that sustaining love

Which is awareness finds the weather
To nourish those with whom they live;
Or, knowing, think they're made immune
From common dues by what they give.

This man, like them, was given scrub.
He had no need to leave his mark,
Delighting more in what he found
Than fashioning something new and stark.

His image will not last like theirs.
He, too, had dreams: they found a place
In common with the wants of those
Who looked to him for strength and grace.

That was an art surpassing all,
Living the medium he chose,
A palimpsest of sand whipped clean
When the wind of dissolution blows.

Day perfumes night long after dark.
This nameless man, who with his skill
Brought stones to flower, will not be dead
While flowers from stone can blossom still.

STATEMENT

Whatever we may think of Australia's participation in the war in Vietnam, it is not a national cause, because the Australian community has not decisively demonstrated its support.

Therefore it is morally wrong that young Australians should be compelled to fight and perhaps die in Vietnam, and we ask the Government not to continue with the dispatch of conscripts.

Mena Abdullah, Hugh Anderson, Allan Ashbolt, Martin Boyd, R. F. Brissenden, Robert Burns, David Campbell, Jon Cleary, Betty Collins, C. B. Christesen, Charmian Clift, Mary Durack, Geoffrey Dutton, John K. Ewers, George Farwell, Pat Flower, Robert D. FitzGerald, Neilma Gantner, Oriel Gray, Rodney Hall, Frank Hardy, Gwen Harwood, Bernard Hesling, Dorothy Hewett, A. D. Hope, Flexmore Hudson, Florence James, George Johnston, Nancy Keesing, Sylvia Lawson, Noel Macainsh, Mungo MacCallum, Donald MacLean, J. S. Manifold, Leonard Mann, Alan Marshall, David Martin, Oscar Mendelsohn, Myra Morris, John Morrison, Walter Murdoch, Aileen Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, David Rowbotham, Roland Robinson, Thomas Shapcott, R. A. Simpson, Bernard Smith, Stephen Murray-Smith, Ivan Southall, Randolph Stow, Kylie Tennant, John Thompson, Margaret Trist, F. B. Vickers, Bill Wannan, Judah Waten, Tony Morphett.

Bernard Smith

THE SELLBACH ETCHINGS

UDO SELLBACH'S fine series "The Target is Man" so quickly call to mind Goya's series "Los Desastres de la Guerra," inspired by the horror of the Peninsula War, that it is desirable to consider the relationship between the two more closely.

Both in theme and in technique they are, of course, similar. Thematically it could hardly be otherwise. Anyone who seeks to depict the horror of war is not able to ignore Goya. In the same way any artist who chooses to depict lawyers at work must face Daumier, and those who paint the loneliness of the modern city must face the early De Chirico. All these men, in a very real way, took possession of their subjects, giving to them symbolic forms which have entered permanently into the vast stream of imagery which nourishes the creative imagination.

This raises a question sharply. Should later artists eschew such subjects? Are such themes worked out like exhausted quarries? Does competition with the masters on their own ground spell disaster? If this is true it follows that important areas of human experience are closed off, one by one, as each master stakes out a claim and possesses a subject and immortalises it in symbolic form. On this view the artist is a man pushed continually to the marginal areas of experience. A man forced to explore new emotional ground.

In one sense this is true. It is true that artists explore new ground; but it is not true to assume that old ground is closed off to them. This last mistaken belief is fashionable enough because it treats art as if it were a scientific activity—a continuous pushing forward of the frontiers of vision and sensitivity.

The theory is specious because art is not science The natural events which are the objects of science do not change their nature as they recur. The mathematician does not have to rethink Newton's inverse square law to ensure that it is as valid for the 20th as for the 17th century. He can build on Newton, as Einstein did, without upsetting either Newton's methods or Newton's results.

At first sight it might look as though the artist who works where Goya worked is rather like Einstein working where Newton worked. Neither artist nor scientist is in a position to ignore what the past has given him. But whereas the natural events with which Einstein worked are the same events as those with which Newton worked, the war to which Goya responded is not the same kind as that to which the artists of the twentieth century have responded. An artist cannot build upon past experience as a scientist can build on past knowledge. In appearing to say something that was said before, an artist is always saying something new about a novel experience.

It is not, that is to say, Goya, but life which has provided Sellbach with his theme. Yet Sellbach's response is made in the light of Goya's response. It could hardly be otherwise. Innocence of the law is, they say, no excuse; and innocence of past art is an aesthetic day dream. The whole field of known human experience is available to the artist, but so too are those symbolic forms which previous artists have made in their response to it.

An artist like Goya may render a theme timeless, but he is never able to say all that might be said. Goya is also a man of the eighteenth century. His 83 etchings stress the violence and bestiality of war, but in surprisingly naturalistic terms. We are witnesses of the brutality and sadism. We see the attackers and the attacked. Sellbach, by contrast, is twentieth century. His approach is much more abstracted, more symbolic. There are, strictly, no scenes, no events, only allegorical compositions. Each etching of the series represents a stage or modality of the humiliation of man. Goya shows man both as predator and victim. In Sellbach there are no predators; all are victims.

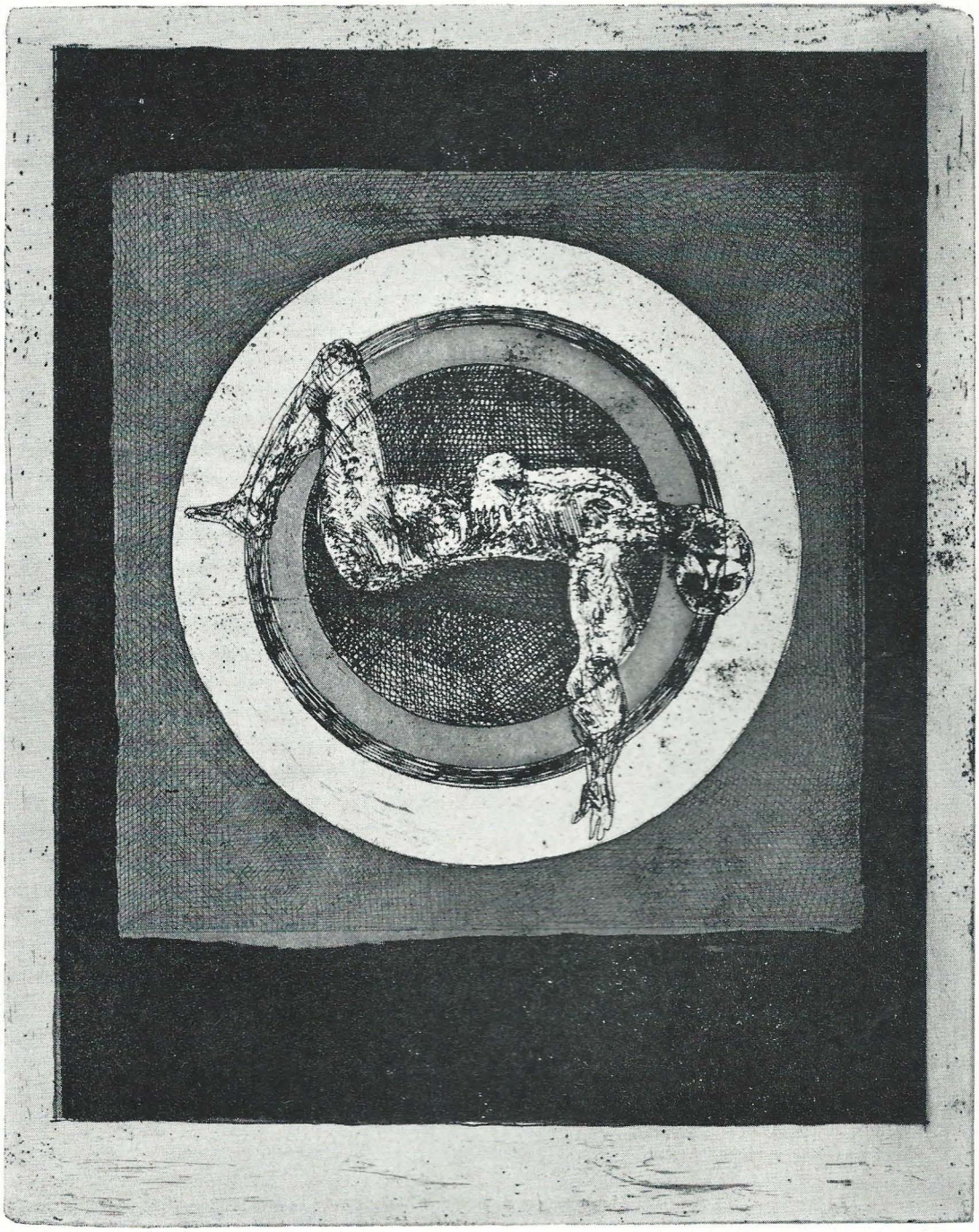
There is, in short, an important shift in emphasis here that is the difference between an eighteenth and a twentieth century point of view. Though both Goya and Sellbach present man essentially as victim, Goya does it by means of the narrative satire which he gained from Hogarth and advanced in its psychological depth, Sellbach does by means of pathetic allegory.

In technical methods, too, there is both affinity and contrast. Both use etching and aquatint as their primary graphic means. But Goya makes far greater use of line, three dimensional form, and dramatic chiaroscuro. Sellbach by contrast uses flatter and denser tones, including the thick matt blacks gained by deep etching. Goya maintains the dominance of line even in shadow; Sellbach uses line with an intentional hesitation, almost perfunctorily, to suggest helplessness. The only strong lines in his etchings are the inhuman lines of targets or chains.

Sometimes the figures are shown against backgrounds which call to mind the hard-edged optical devices of the current international style. This means that an art expressive of human pathos is juxtaposed against an art preoccupied with visual research. Sellbach's series of etchings has therefore a comment to make about the condition of art as well as the condition of man.

Originals of the etchings reproduced on the following pages, and others from the series of twelve, are available from the artist. Inquiries should be addressed to The Editor, Overland.

the target is man

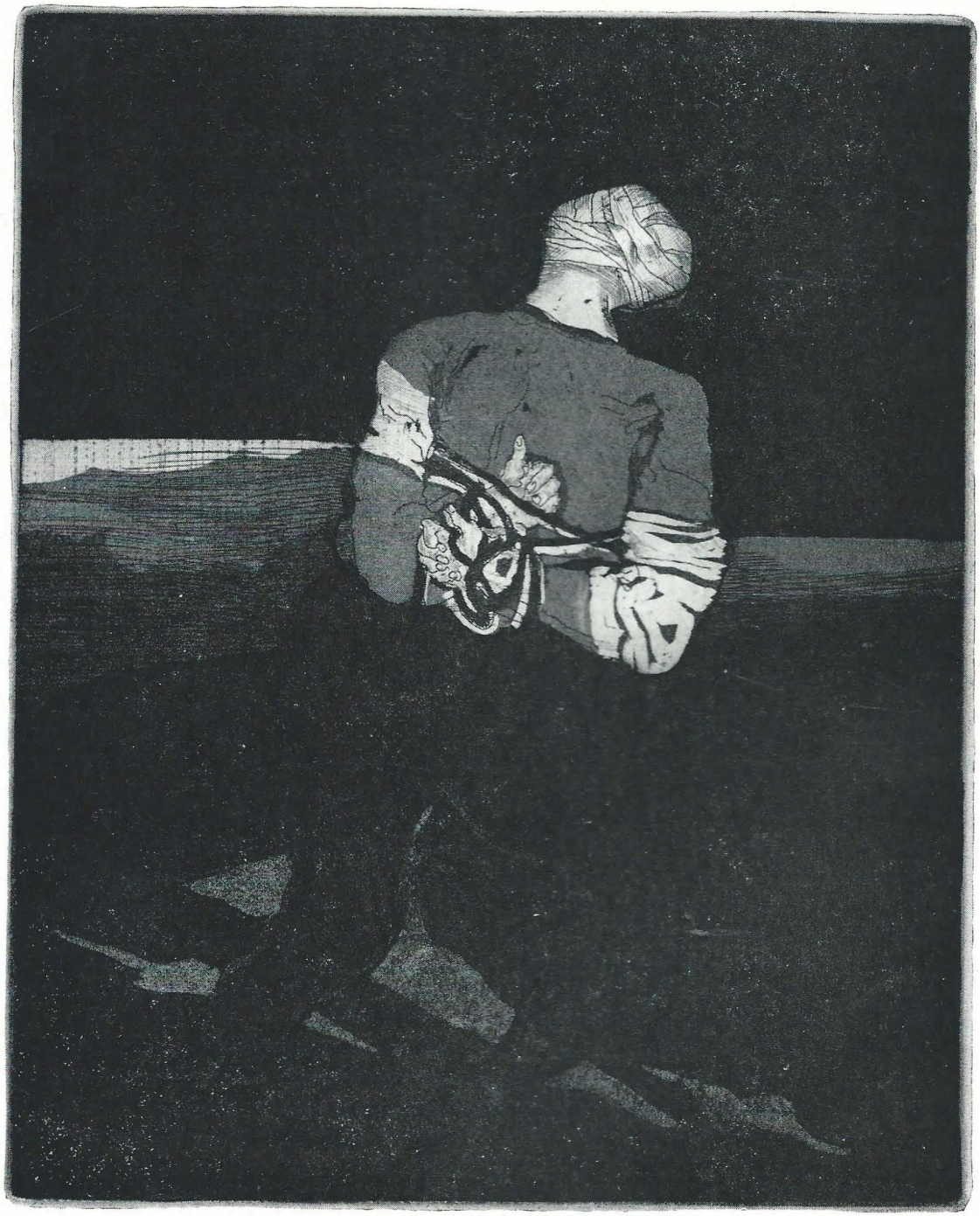


to sacrifice

the target

to persecute

is man



to chain

the target is man

to execute

N. Sellbach

This is a recent LETTER FROM SAIGON. A young Vietnamese intellectual (whose name is withheld) writes to an Australian friend . . .

DEAR Y.,

Thousands of thanks for your letter, it urges me to write this right in the afternoon I got yours. It was a kind one indeed, and I am happy to learn that you all are well and things are fine over there . . .

Thanks god that my family is still in good shape. We are all well and things are fine. My father works in the . . . my mother keeps a shop that sells . . .—and since I could earn some money myself, I am ready to help them in case of need.

Dear Y., it's a very strange war indeed, and I myself could not figure it out someway. Perhaps I would like to present here some of my observations or more properly what I asserted. The war here is just not the struggle for foods, clothes, houses—or not even the war for freedom, democracy. There are many people who need foods, clothes, houses, I admit—but if it's the only reason, the problem can be solved easily with the help of the American and other countries.

It's not the war for freedom or democracy, because for some of those who know what the words mean, they got freedom and democracy, and for the rest who don't care because they don't know what the words mean, and here are the solutions that the Americans are trying to follow.

Bringing in the large number of troops—militarily, no doubt, it has some effects, but here are the consequences.

The presence of foreign troops (not civilian) on this soil—this brings back the image of the old days when the French soldiers were here. They are different to the French troops, to me, but not to the peasants, who don't understand their langauge and their behaviour.

Causes economic and social chaos: Morally speaking, this causes a very upset and dismay situation. In Saigon and suburbs, bars are everywhere, with foreign troops to be entertained. Far away in the countryside, these sorts of entertainments appear with much a lower grade. Can you imagine a city with the troops in the war time? They always want to have a last fling. How many V.C. would be resulted from seeing such scenes? The V.C. may be classified as those who do not like the Communist, but also don't want to see such degrading scenes either! Most of the good lodging facilities in Saigon are occupied by the Americans. The traffics are jammed terribly because of many American installations in the city.

Very bad impression indeed. The American soldiers are paid nearly ten times as much as a Vietnamese one, due to the special rate of exchange of the currency. They spend their money of course but it is much better if they don't spend it in Vietnam . . . Most of the dollars that the government buys from the American servicemen here will be used for some "must" projects like building again roads, bridges, schools that are destroyed (that means non-producing projects—should be built just because of the war, and its cause comes back to the initial motive). In short, only the Americans who spend—and due to this—more destructions taking place—more spend—more troops and more . . . A figure was released last week 210 million U.S. dollars was spent every month just for bullets!—while a school reasonably well equipped costs only . . . 4200 U.S. dollars!

Another point, due to the agreement with the American government, we will be allowed the goods (clothing, daily needs) without tax shipped into V.N. for the G.I. Of course, every G.I. can buy the share. And now Saigon is flooded with these goods —the G.I. bought them with a very cheap price because without tax and sell them to the market (illegally of course!) to get profit.

Nylon wears, cosmetics, wool materials are flooded here! But who can afford them is another problem. It is a very serious problem—not mild as first looking at.

The Americans are doing a lot of good things here too, but they are blurred by these bad consequences. My conclusion here is, if the Americans think that this is the war due to social unjust —poverty—economic weakness, they wouldn't win if they bring in more and more troops because things would go worse, and if they believe that this war is caused by the North Communists, by China—they should fight them at another front, not here! Because they might win over Red China or North Vietnam but lose the south!

Dear Y., this is not an essay, I just put down some sketchy reports, and, in my opinion, play a great part in this war—I am not able to analyse this problem sophisticatedly and I believe the Americans are wrong because they treat the problem that way—

There is only one things that bothers me is that how long will this heart-broken business last? Another five or ten years? Some guess that it will last for twenty years or more, if so I decide not to get married since I don't want my children to fight anyone!

My best regards to you all . . . my family join me in wishing you all the best—yours

Z.

Vietnam: Two Vignettes

IAN WILSON
reports on
A SAIGON BRIEFING

VONG BOC ROAD was quiet as Woodie and I walked down it towards the centre of the city. The sun was shining and the fallen leaves along the footpath made one think of Melbourne's plane trees in May. Woodie kicked a pile of them and made a crack about not knowing that the defoliation programme had been extended this far. Garbage was piled in untidy heaps on the corners and was becoming very noticeable in the heat. If the residents were lucky the Government might send a man around this week to set fire to the pile but even this service was hard to maintain. "It's the emergency, you know," they would say.

In an hour Vong Boc Road would be jammed with jeeps and baby Renault taxis and the office girls in their long dresses on their motorised bicycles, filling the air with exhaust smoke and harsh noise. In four hours Vong Boc Road would not be as safe for us as it was now, for this was one of several sections of the city where little men in black moved unobtrusively from house to house before the curfew and collected their taxes. These were the men from the Front—Vee Cee's, the Americans call them. A new set of sounds would be heard at night in this road when the artillery barrage started on the outskirts of the city and the mortars replied, sometimes from within the perimeter, with their characteristic crashing explosions.

Then Woodie and I were at the barricaded entrance to the U.S. Army Public Relations Bureau. Our passes were examined and we were led into a small theatrette with a lectern, a yellow spot and several maps on the stage. This was the first daily briefing we had attended and we were feeling very new and green. I looked around and recognised some of the old-timers as they chatted together by the door, waiting for the show to begin. Hyman from "Newsweek" had been out here three years and had been wounded twice. He had watched two of his photographers die one afternoon as they all lay in a ditch after being ambushed only thirty miles out of Saigon on the main road south. Harry the Hawk from the "Chicago Tribune" had been shot down in helicopters four times and survived with nothing but a sprained ankle, but last week his new assistant had been blown open by a Claymore mine on a routine patrol and now Harry was showing signs of strain and anger. Most of the others in the group had considerably more military training, let alone experience, than the new units which were being flown out from Hawaii and into the battle. Woodie and I decided not to ask any questions this time.

A middle-aged colonel walked on to the stage, accompanied by an aide armed with a pointer and another map. The spot moved to him at the lectern and he introduced himself. Woodie whispered that he was a reservist and had worked for a large public relations firm until a few weeks ago. He had not been out of Saigon yet and his sleek appearance and freshly laundered tunic set him apart from the other men in the room. A real colonel might have been a better candidate for this job, I felt.

The colonel began by apologising to the newsmen that the captured North Vietnamese lieutenant he had promised to show them yesterday was still being interrogated but might be available later in the week. He then gave his account of the previous day's operations, pointing to the maps about him. Things seemed worse in the south but 1 Corps was holding well. It was a cold account, rather like a sales report. At least he had managed to adopt the dispassionate pose of his fellows as he delivered the details of the campaign. Then he came to the daily "kill-count" figures.

"Last afternoon our B-52's struck Sector Four in War Zone D," he announced, pointing to the spot on the map. He paused with what he thought was drama and went on. "Over one hundred Vee Cee's were killed!" He looked up, as though for approval or perhaps applause.

A deep sigh came from the old-timers and one of them groaned loudly. "Tell us anothery," said Harry in exasperation. The colonel appeared to have lost the sympathy of his audience and tried to reassert himself by repeating the statement.

This time one of the newsmen near the stage stood and asked politely, "How do you know, colonel?"

"The Arvins—the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam—told us."

This was the signal for further mock hilarity from the back row. One imagined that they had listened to all this many times. Someone yelled, "How the hell would they know! They haven't stirred for days."

The colonel was getting annoyed and flustered. He snapped back, "The Arvins — who are our allies, I would remind you—reported that this was the result of our raid."

Again the polite young man at the front stood up and asked respectfully, "Did they do a body count, colonel?" I began to appreciate that his questions had a point to them.

"No, the Arvins reported that they did not carry out a body count because they were moving through the sector too quickly."

This was an unfortunate turn of phrase and it was greeted with outright derision. "I'll bloody well bet they were!" called out another voice, this time from our side of the theatrette.

The colonel had really lost his audience by this point and I looked around to see most of the newsmen had put away their note-pads and were just sitting there, looking bored or talking amongst themselves. The briefing limped along for another half hour but the colonel may as well have been reciting last week's news for all the attention he was given. People started to shuffle their feet and collect their papers. A sergeant from Logistics moved down the aisle handing out copies of a four-page mimeographed brochure informing the newsmen that they would be missing the news story of the war if they overlooked the Logistics Branch and the fine work they were doing, keeping the supplies rolling. Not only this, but Logistics Press Unit could arrange interviews with soldiers from every state in the Union for those journalists covering the fighting for local newspaper chains. He got few takers.

The colonel droned on but showed signs of finishing. Then he mentioned that yesterday afternoon General Westmoreland had fallen while playing a recreational game of tennis and had broken a small bone in his wrist. Woodie turned to me and suggested we leave. Suddenly I realised that the press briefing had come alive again. Notebooks were open and fingers groped for pencils which had been put down half an hour ago.

"Who was he playing?"

"Will he be in plaster?"

"What was the score at the time?"

There was a brief flurry of scribbling, the colonel thanked them for their attention, and the newsmen filed out the door and towards the cable office. They had their hard news for the day.

PHILLIP ADAMS tests attitudes on UNCOMMON HUMANITY

ABOUT ten years ago a group of American social psychologists conducted a series of experiments to assess the effects of social pressure on behaviour patterns and on objective perception itself. The most vivid experiment went something like this. Researchers took children aged from five to twelve—and from widely divergent socio-economic backgrounds—giving each of them a device with an easily adjusted iris aperture. Each was then given a set of cardboard discs, which, unknown to them, were identical in size to their currency's coins. And they were asked to take each disc in turn and to adjust the iris until it was the same size.

The result was that all the children, irrespective of age or background, were remarkably accurate. In every case, the size of iris and coin closely corresponded.

Then the children were asked to repeat the exercise with actual coins. They were just as concentrated, just as methodical. But this time they were not accurate. In every case the iris was made too large—and the greater the value of the coin they were holding, the greater was the error. While the pennies were over-estimated, threepences were more so. In other words, it was the value of the coin, not its diameter that stimulated the exaggeration.

Their miscalculations had no relationship to age, but there was a strong socio-economic influence. The poorer the child, the larger loomed the coins. Which proved what we've always known; that we see the world through distorting lenses prescribed by our environment. As children our parents, as voters Sir Robert, and as debtors our bills, look bigger than they are.

And not only people and things, but issues and events can be made seem colossal or knee-high. An increase in council rates dwarfs the earthquake in Tokyo. The footy premiership overwhelms the Rhodesian crisis. Look at any newspaper and you'll see the iris being adjusted inaccurately.

Despite all our objectivity, our most private views, are, if not formed, at least modified by the consensus. For instance, as every U.S. Negro knows, no white American can be truly free of discrimination. What even the most liberal white must do is superimpose his new prejudice (for) over the old prejudice (against). It may take only a fraction of a second—and then in the subconscious—but it does take place. You are emphatically pro-Semitic? Well, next time you hear the word "Jew" spoken, analyse your immediate reaction. You will almost certainly discover a trace of residual anti-semitism that you must instantly crush. You're overcoming a more or less conditioned reflex, a part of our Christian heritage.

Which brings me to the war in Vietnam. How real and important is it to Australians? What is the consensus on the true value of a Vietnamese life? How does our racial environment affect our perception of their agony? Here goes with some amateur social psychology. It's far from 100% 24 carat academic, but it does, I believe, throw some light—or perhaps it's darkness—on an issue too often seen through the narrow eyes of **real politik.**

I prepared 100 sheets, each listing nine races and/or nationalities. A typical example: Indian, Eng-

lish, Russian, Chinese, Australian, Israeli, Vietnamese, Negro, Indonesian.

But no two were the same. The order was scrambled, and other nationalities (Japanese, American, German, Spanish, Tibetan, Swiss, Arab, etc.) were rotated. However, every list contained at least one of the familiar Western nationalities, and invariably included the Vietnamese.

Each was a deliberately confused racial spectrum of brown, white, yellow and black.

The sheets were given, one at a time, to 100 male and female white Australians aged between 20 and 53. Their educational qualifications and economic backgrounds were not as diverse as I'd have liked, as the subjects were predominantly middle- and upper-class. But they fairly represented left, right and indifferent political views, and their religious alignments were typical. With the exception of some younger men who had been ballotted out of the call-up, and one girl whose brother was being sent to Vietnam, their lives had not been directly affected by the conflict.

Before being allowed to read the list, more or less the following instructions were given: "The sheet lists nine races. You are asked to quickly (within 45 seconds) number them from 1 to 9. You are to think of yourself as a judge at an agricultural show. But instead of valuable livestock, you're rating human beings. Please don't double think. Be as honest as you can. Where a prejudice exists, admit it and number accordingly. Ready? Set. Go."

I gave no criteria for their guidance. They were not asked to consider the races in power, population, sexual or cultural terms. My intention was to get not considered value judgments, but primitive, non-intellectualised responses, suspecting that a longer period would allow too many rationalisations to take place. (This in fact was true. Those who did a second list tended to obscure their racial attitudes.)

Professional market researchers argued that people would be confused by the request, and not know how to proceed without criteria. But only two people objected, insisting rather defensively that they simply couldn't differentiate between nationalities. The other 98 didn't even ask questions. They simply read the sheet through, then voted—in a sense aesthetically—for their nine candidates.

The results were surprisingly consistent, but a few exceptions helped to prove the rule. Two very Strine patriots put Americans last. A would-be emigre put Australia last. A girl added Italians and Greeks to her list so she could rate them tenth and eleventh, and another enigmatically rated India first. But the overwhelming pattern was to group the Western nations first, and Asians last. The Vietnamese were, in 90% of cases, placed ninth.

In simple terms, the results seem to mean that East-West, home's best. That white, English-speaking peoples are to be greatly preferred, followed by most non-English speaking whites. Russians, Jews, Indians and American Negroes tended to be bracketed together, being a little strange but not utterly remote. African Negroes didn't do so well, nor did Malayans. But those alien Orientals might almost have been Martians.

Let me emphasise that being placed seventh, eighth, or ninth didn't necessarily mean that a nation was the object of overt racial hostility. I found no one, for instance, who was at all anti-Vietnamese. They didn't feel prejudice towards them. They simply felt very little about them at all.

In fact, the main value the Vietnamese had for my Australian sample was as objects of pity: "I feel sorry for them, but that's about all I could say."

Other verbatim comments (I discussed each numbering with its author) included: "Well I don't know anything about them." "I don't know. They just don't seem very important." "They're sort of savages. Coolies."

The Chinese and Indonesians were feared, but the Vietnamese—North and South—were shrugged off. Remember that even more obscure races—like the Tibetans—rated higher. And remember, too, that almost all the ratings were based on second-hand knowledge. After all, few of us have met Swiss, Russians, French or even Americans—let alone Negroes or Indians. So it's not simply a question of unfamiliarity.

Unfamiliarity? When every T.V. news-service and newspaper tells the Vietnam story? It may take second place to the price of eggs, but it's there. The streets of Saigon must look more familiar to most capital-city Australians than those of their outback towns.

In the individual discussions following each "vote," six distinct views of the conflict emerged, any one person holding up to three of them simultaneously. None of them had any relation to the lofty altruism professed by the Government, and all had an element of racism. (1) The isolationists (whose numbers swell the anti-conscription Gallup polls) held that Vietnamese aren't worth dying for. (2) The ardent patriots held that whatever it was we were fighting for it was better to fight for it in Vietnamese blood, because it was less significant blood. (They were vague about what it was we were defending—Christianity, Property, White Australia, or Freedom—but quite clear about the suitability of the battleground). (3) With some there was compassion, a suspicion that the Vietnamese were innocent victims of international power-politics; but even this suspicion was accompanied by a completely resigned attitude to Vietnam's fate. After all, Asians are used to suffering. If it's not war, it's starvation. (4) Here and there someone would try to prove his political virility by talking about the war as if it were a rabbit hunt, with the Americans and Australians the hunters and the Vietnamese the rabbits. This is not merely metaphoric. It was the emotional weight that about 15% gave the conflict. (5) Perhaps 30% are so convinced that Australia is doomed to be overrun by the Chinese that they see this war as vengeance in advance. And, in an offhand manner, they approve of it as such. The fact that the Vietnamese are not Chinese isn't considered relevant. (6) Many see this war as being simply better than the Bomb. All the Cold War they've been fearing Armageddon, so this small, far-away skirmish is both an anti-climax and a relief.

But remember, this whole collection of fearful grass-roots opinion shrinks like a punctured footy when related back to—well, to footy. Ron Barassi remains more controversial than Marshal Ky.

Having presumed to be a social psychologist, I'll presume to draw a conclusion. The tragedy of Vietnam, born in French imperialism, intensified now as a war of ideology, is tolerable—even acceptable — to Western public opinion because the enemies are little yellow men. While we know that propaganda can turn the most blue-eyed blonde into a cipher, when the enemy is Asian, propaganda is sadly superfluous. And I've got a hundred bits of paper to prove it.

From Professor C. P. FITZGERALD

who has recently visited

the United States:

AMERICA AND VIETNAM

EVEN a brief visit to the U.S.A. in this year serves to enlarge the vision of America and to reveal the attitudes which Americans take towards the war in Vietnam. It is perhaps no great surprise to find that the monolithic image of a nation resolute for victory at all costs, which is so assiduously purveyed in Australia, is hardly the reality on the spot. It may be that academic circles are more dissident than other groups, or that academics who are concerned professionally with Far Eastern matters are better informed; the fact is that they are all opposed to the war in Vietnam, and do not hesitate to say so very plainly in language which would make them suspect "Reds" if used in Australia.

The grounds of their complaints are, to begin with, that America slipped into this war, which constantly intensifies, without the expressed consent of the nation; indeed, they argue, against the wishes of the majority as plainly indicated in the vote for Johnson rather than Goldwater in 1964. It was in no small measure due to Goldwater's bellicose attitude that he was so overwhelmingly rejected. Americans do not like inaction; if they disagree with a policy, they want to express their view in some concrete manner. Part of the intense frustration now felt by those who disbelieve in the aims of the war, doubt the success of its methods, and see no solution in any military victory, is due to the total absence of any political party which could be expected to make this opposition effective.

The Republican Party, in any case shattered, has nothing to say, unless it be to accuse President Johnson of having stolen Senator Goldwater's policy. It is this which gave Senator Fulbright his nation-wide audience when his Senate Hearings were put on the television screens. All agreed that nothing similar to the interest these Hearings aroused had been experienced since the famous downfall of Senator McCarthy when he engaged the U.S. Army on the television battlefield. Senator Fulbright, and Senator Wayne Morse, with some others in support, have certainly opened a great debate, but it is far from obvious what this can achieve. The Administration, although its support has dropped on the public opinion polls, still has a clear lead. Very many of the critics themselves agree that they see no easy way out, and do not altogether blame the President for not yet finding one.

As these critics see it, there are three alternative policies possible. First, to continue the war, escalating if necessary, but if possible avoiding open war with China. It can be argued that this would produce in time and at great cost a reduction of the guerilla war to minor proportions, which could be contained by a large-scale military occupation by U.S. forces, of indefinite duration. The difficulty in accepting this policy, which so far appears to be that of the Administration, is that it leads to no lasting conclusion. Most Americans with any knowledge of Vietnam are completely disillusioned about the prospect of finding a party or group in South Vietnam capable of arousing popular enthusiasm for the war, or even of governing the country in any effective way. Thus the "victory" solution means in practice that America must take over South Vietnam, defend it, occupy it, and—inevitably—govern it also. This would indeed be "neo-colonialism" and a prospect most repugnant to Americans.

Another weakness in the policy of military victory is that it has no solution for the conflict with North Vietnam. Presumably, if North Vietnamese assistance to the Viet Cong ceased, or so greatly diminished as to be insignificant, the bombing would also stop. But as it is not American policy to overthrow the government of Hanoi, that

regime would continue, revive its strength, wait for American withdrawal or reduction in occupation strength, and then clandestinely start again to stimulate a guerilla war which would almost certainly be still in being. The Vietnamese as a whole obstinately insist that they are one people, and wish to be reunited—by the victory of one side or the other. There is no solution in trying to create two nations.

The opposite policy, total withdrawal, which would concede victory to the Viet Cong, is not warmly supported. Many people seem to think that this will be the outcome, but they fear the consequences. Not all agre with the domino theory, but most would expect a huge loss of influence and support for America throughout Asia. It is not so much that they expect other countries to "fall to the Communists" (whether internal or external), but that these nations would become distrustful of any close association with the United States and relapse into a neutrality favorable to Chinese policies. Very few Americans will contemplate this eventuality with indifference; distrust of China is a dominant attitude, even among those who recognise that China cannot for many years be a real danger to America herself.

The third policy is that which has been openly advocated by Mr. George Kennan, and has the support of many "Europe first" thinkers. They argue that Vietnam is not so vital as the Administration believes, that the escalation of the war is damaging American policies in more important places, and above all works in favor of the Soviet Union. They advocate a limited war: no more bombing of North Vietnam, no more attempts to suppress the Viet Cong by extended operations in the jungles, but the massive garrisoning of selected points upon the coast, Saigon, Da Nang and other bases easily supplied by sea. Beyond this pale, let the Viet Cong roam the jungles; in time, if they try it, they would find that the American enclaves could not be overrun. Stalemate would ensue, and then, at last, the Viet Cong and Hanoi would be prepared to negotiate. But what, ask some critics, would be negotiated? A new partition of the country, giving the Viet Cong areas to an enlarged North Vietnam? And would this be a solution, when the regimes which succeed each other in South Vietnam, then reduced to a few large enclaves, are unpopular,, weak, corrupt, and unstable. How long would it be before there arose in these enclaves a violent movement for full national reunion? And what would American policy be when those she has defended wish to be abandoned?

It is also argued against Mr. Kennan and his views that the enclave policy would in fact amount to a limited defeat for American policy, and would therefore have some of the consequences which a full withdrawal might entail. It is doubtful if other Asian countries faced with nascent guerilla Communist movements would rush to seek support from the U.S.; the prospect of what had happened to Vietnam happening to them would be too repellent. Better compromise with Communism and China before the country is ruined and divided. No one in South-East Asia can fail to contrast peaceful, orderly Cambodia with her neighbor Vietnam, and draw the conclusion that defence against Communism can be bought at too high a price. The move towards neutralist policies if the enclave system were adopted might not be a panic flight, but it would be steady and continuous.

The worried Americans who see no way out of this morass are not helped by the evasive character of the aims for which the war is being fought. These are expressed in negatives. It is not American policy to destroy North Vietnam; it is not American policy to go to war with China; it is not, with any certainty, American policy to refuse to negotiate with the Viet Cong. But just what kind of solution it is American policy to attain remains undefined.

As the war continues, costs rise and there begin to be hints that the commitment to victory in Vietnam is not only illusory in itself but may have increasing bad effects on the home economy. The Great Society blueprint is postponed, the incidence of the draft brings home to ever wider circles the real meaning of an open-ended war in South-East Asia; beyond is the very acute fear that ultimately the logic of this quest for military victory will result in an invasion of North Vietnam, a war with China, and all that that may imply. In an earlier period, the Korean War, the party in opposition was able to win electoral victory by promising to end the war and bring the boys home. It does not appear at present that this option is now open to the Republicans today, and the only alternative, a massive internal revolt in the Democratic Party, seems also improbable. Yet elections in the U.S.A. return at fixed periods, and issues must be faced. If the issue which most affects the people is completely evaded, the reaction of the people, when they find a leader to express it, could be massive.

IN MEMORIAM—Hart Crane

(committed suicide by jumping into the sea from the S.S. Orizaba two days out of Vera Cruz, April 26, 1932.)

For thirty-three unlucky years you held
The fluctuations of a vagrant mind
Obsessed by mystic oceans but to find
This grave solution which your poems spelled.

In womb of sea where, numberless, are shelled
Your dicing bones—no more to be maligned—
Your Appalachian fables are resigned
And the breath of unshaved sailors now dispelled.

To have dared the sinews of the secret sea
In leaping voyage is to have resolved
The tides of guilt that wore away your heart.
Now, Vera Cruz as headstone, you've dissolved
Those Pocahontas dreams, at last apart
From the double lust of love and poetry.

T. H. NAISBY.

A BOOK OF POEMS THROUGH THE POST

Len Fox

A BOOK of poems comes through the post—Vietnamese poems translated by an Australian poet—and I forget the present, the villages in flames and the bodies in the rice fields, and remember only a land where I lived for two years and where everyone seemed to be a poet.

Everyone—the simplest peasants who, we are told, had developed the art of swearing at one another, if the occasion called for it, in verse (much preferable, surely, to our montonous Australia style of cursing!)—the woman who stood up at a wedding and read a poem she had written for the occasion; I assumed she was a poet, but no, I was told, she was an ordinary trader at the market—the old woman of the Muong minority people who came and held our hands that evening when the air was full of fireflies and sang a song she had composed in our honor, a song that has strange overtones as one remembers it now:

Thousands of years have passed since the earth was created,
But people had never come to visit us from other lands.
Now you have come, showing there is unity and friendship
Between the people of our country and yours.

* * *

Everyone a poet—but mainly I remember four poets. Te Hanh, editor of the weekly journal "Van" ("Literature"), taller than most Vietnamese, quiet and thoughtful, telling us of his early tendencies to write romantically, then (in the time of world war and famine) pessimistically. Then came the defeat of the Japanese, the Declaration of Independence of August, 1945 (worded, ironically enough, in the same poetic vein as the American Declaration of Independence), and the eight-year war of resistance against the French.

"I no longer wrote of my self but of other people," Te Hanh told us. He turned, too, away from Western styles to Vietnamese popular poetry such as Ca Dao, which is based on a simple rhythm something like our ballad metre but with changes, as for instance this poem of a lonely girl thinking of her lover (translated to keep the metre and rhyme):

Last night the storm beat down.
And were you sad? I can not say.
The fish may swim away,
But when I'm sad where shall I go?

Te Hanh worked with a Song and Dance Group which travelled through the countryside; he wrote poems which were set to music and sung to the people. He learned much, he said, of the responsibility of a writer to be committed to a cause—as against this, he could now see that his poems became "schematic"—monotonous, lacking in lyrical and human feelings, tending at times to become mere political slogans.

By 1957 he felt he had entered a new stage where the personal feelings of his earlier poems were rediscovered, but could now be enriched by being related to the social background. Typical of his later writing was a short poem, very popular in North Vietnam, expressing the thoughts of a Southerner living in the North and thinking of his sweetheart in the South (thousands of such men came to the North in 1954 expecting to be reunited with sweethearts or wives in 1956 with the unification promised in the Geneva Agreements but rejected by the Diem regime):

I wake from dreaming
And know you are far away.
Sunlight glows on the wall
And I know that night has passed.
In the daytime I am busy with my work
So I keep the night for my thoughts of you.
In the daytime I am in the North
And at night-time in the South.
Wherever you and I may be
We are close together,
The day made bright by last night's dream.

* * *

XUAN DIEU was a man like Te Hanh in many ways, but instead of being an editor he was a member of parliament. And unlike most Australian members of parliament, he kept switching the conversation from himself to the ordinary people. It was the poems of ordinary peasants and soldiers that he wanted to talk about, not his own poems. (An unusual M.P., and unusual poet!)

He said that he and other professional poets had learned much from the poems of ordinary people, particularly from their spirit of optimism and their vivid imagery, and while it is always difficult to judge verse in translation one can sense what he meant from this translation of a verse written by a worker among a group of woodcutters felling trees for a jungle arms factory during the Resistance War against the French:

Teams of men surge like waves,
Pressing shoulder to shoulder;
Their flesh has become a ladder,
Their flesh has become a bridge
That climbs the mountains, crosses raging streams.

One of Xuan Dieu's best-known poems, "The Pillow," tells of two lovers in the Resistance movement sharing a pillow on their honeymoon. Then, when the war grows fiercer, they manage without a pillow. Then peace comes, and the wife makes a second pillow, and the poem closes on a note which one finds again and again in Vietnamese literature:—

Our eyes are sleeping but our hearts are still awake,
Your pillow and mine do not feel quite soft,
Even if filled with down or covered with brocade;
Our pillows will not be soft while somewhere men plan war.

Let's guard and preserve peace,
Preserve our land and our love!
Let's struggle, that our pillows stay side by side
And other separate pillows come in pairs together.

* * *

TO HUU may be known to a number of Australians through the translations of his poems by Aileen Palmer. Short, stocky, tense, but with a shy smile always lurking on his lips, he had been imprisoned by the French, and had written poems while in prison, which is perhaps hard enough at any time but harder when there is no pen and paper to write with.

But To Huu wrote by scratching his poems on leaves of branches which were left lying around for a sympathetic warder to smuggle out to friends, who transferred the verse from leaves of trees to leaves of paper.

Now, as then, To Huu's poems are committed poems. A leading member of the Lao Dong (Communist) Party, he writes of guerillas or peasants in the Resistance or of their aged mothers, or of people symbolically marching a road for freedom "with no more French blockhouses now". Some of his verse may be schematic, it may sound to our ears as though there is too much politics and too little poetry—to which To Huu might reply that the West has forced politics on to the people of Vietnam; that poetry can only come to them in the stark realities of bread and land and struggle; if some of his lines sound like slogans to us, he might say that they are the feelings of a people:

We have grown up in the fires of many battles;
forever ended is their hope of shackling
the feet of heroic people . . .

* * *

PRESIDENT Ho Chi Minh also wrote poems in prison. Travelling to China in 1942 to put the case of the Vietnamese people, he was arrested by the Chiang Kai-shek police and forced to march month after month from prison to prison, his hands bound, behind two guards carrying a pig. And so he began his "Prison Diary," a series of short poems that have been translated by Aileen Palmer. The character of the 100-odd poems can be seen from a few chosen here:

Reciting verses has not been one of my habits,
But now in prison what else have I to do?
These captive days I'll spend in writing poems,
And, singing these, bring nearer the day of freedom . . .

* * *

For prisoners, there is no alcohol nor flowers,
But the night is so lovely, how can we celebrate it?
I go to the air-hole and stare up at the moon,
And through the air-hole the moon smiles at the poet . . .

* * *

Outside the jail, people who gamble are arrested,
But once inside the jail, they can gamble just as they like;
So, of course, in jail the prisoners are often heard to mutter:
"Why on earth did I never think to come to this place before? . . .

* * *

Along the way we travel; the guards are carrying pigs.
Pigs travel on guards' shoulders, while men are dragged in irons.
Once a man is forced to surrender his natural human freedom
The value of a man is less than that of a pig . . .

* * *

Drenched with rain, flogged by wind, and with never rest at all
How wretchedly you work there, repairing the road!
Among the travellers passing, on foot, on horseback, by carriage,
How many of them are ever grateful to you? . . .

* * *

Suddenly a flute sounds a nostalgic note:
Sadly the music rises, its tune is close to sobbing:
Over a thousand miles, across mountains and rivers,
Journeys of aching grief. We seem to see a woman
Climbing a far off tower, to watch for someone's return.

Some of the same notes—particularly the awareness of sorrow and beauty existing side by side and each accentuating the other—are to be found in a series of later poems by Ho Chi Minh translated by New Zealand writer Rewi Alley and published some years ago in "Overland":

Moonlight comes through
the window, begging a poem;
but a soldier's work holds me
so I cannot compose one . . .

Ho Chi Minh also has a habit of writing short verses for special occasions. A verse will be printed in the Party newspaper for Children's Day, or "Uncle Ho" will recite a verse to a gathering that has come to greet him—or he will make a reply to people who have complained of feeling old:

Some people at fifty say they're too old.
At sixty-three I feel in the best of health;
In a simple, frugal life I find serenity;
I work in the leisurely rhythm of the sun and the moon.

We saw President Ho often, for he is no recluse, but seemed happiest among people, laughing and playing with the children or presenting flowers to women visitors.

It was an amusing experience when Wilfred Burchett took us to see the President, for one walks towards the huge French-built palace expecting to enter—and instead one is taken round the back to a little caretaker's residence where Ho Chi Minh in his simple clothes and sandals is holding out his hand and greeting us in English—the palace is useful for formal functions but the President is happier in the caretaker's cottage.

He talks simply, asks us if we find the Hanoi winter too cold, and tells us he remembers a story about an Australian in London who suffered from the cold. In fact, he suffered so much from the London cold that he was complaining all the time, and when he took ill his complaints grew, but finally he died (still complaining about the cold), and they took his body to the crematorium and pushed it into the crematorium oven, and thought that was the last of him. But as they stood looking through the oven door at the flames consuming him, they were startled to hear a voice shouting: "Shut that bloody door!"

* * *

POETS who talked with us, poets who laughed with us, poets who held our hands, poets who still send us poems . . . We think of the Vietnamese people as poets. That is how my wife and I found them. There are others who see them differently. I picked up a paper the other day and read:

"At 12 o'clock, a helicopter came in (to Chu Lai, South Vietnam) . . . A young red-headed machine-gunner sat in the doorway, chewing on a chocolate cracker. He kicked a small pool of wire out of the doorway and made room.

" 'We just rode Nuongs. You can tell that by the wire here,' he said.

" 'Why?' he was asked. Nuongs are Chinese mercenaries from Formosa. A battalion of them is in Vietnam, collecting good salaries for fighting for the Saigon Government.

" 'They always want the wire for the prisoners,' " the kid said.

" 'Don't you know that? They get a VC (Vietcong) and make him hold his hands against his cheeks. Then they take this wire and run it right through the one hand and right through his cheek and into his mouth. Then they pull the wire out through the other cheek and stick it through the other hand. They knot both ends around sticks.

" 'You never seen them with prisoners like that? Oh. you ought to see how quiet them gooks sit in a helicopter when we got them wrapped up like that.'

"It began to rain . . ."

COLD POTATOES

Cecil Edwards

THE Russians say: "A cat that's sat on a hot stove will never sit on a cold one." That proverb might have been coined specially for political parties, for they (contrary to their own image of themselves) mostly do not lead, but lag far behind public opinion, and continue to handle with firetongs potatoes long grown cold.

Occasionally, greatly daring, a party (to change the metaphor) tiptoes into an area that bears the faded notice, "Danger! Explosives!" — and finds that what was once political dynamite has become a damp squib.

* * *

Take **State aid for non-government schools.** The Federal Labor Party (or, at least, those who make and interpret its policy) continues to regard this as sizzling on a red-hot brazier. It remembers the violent controversies that led to secular education being established last century — when, strangely enough, fear of the Church of England domination sparked opposition to aid for church schools.

Federal Labor has a hard memory of how, 50 or 60 years ago, when Home Rule for Ireland sent Loyal Orange Leagues into paroxysms of sectarian passion, it was political suicide to advocate that the general taxpayer be mulcted to keep church schools in business, and even Roman Catholic politicians kept mum, dear to their hearts though the project was.

Federal politicians of all parties went on believing that public opinion had been fossilised for 50 years by the classic argument that if people want to educate their children at private schools and mix religion with teaching, they can pay for the privilege; if they don't want to use the State facilities that is their own business, so long as the taxpayer is not expected to stump up for the alternative.

Some State politicians could have told them a different story. At last, however, timid approaches revealed that, without the official knowledge of the parties, the majority view had reversed itself; **not** to favor State aid had become a sure way to lose seats.

Personally, I am old-fashioned enough to think that the classic argument is sound in logic. But I also recognise that it has become impossible in practice, because if private schools closed the States could not handle the numbers of pupils that would be dumped on their systems. Perhaps that is the way the public worked it out. Anyhow, the facts are that—whatever may be the view of individual M.P.s whose seats are in danger —Federal Labor as an organisation has not yet admitted it is still shying away from a dead dragon and that tales of "once upon a time" do not necessarily apply to the conditions of today.

That **Australians must not be conscripted for service abroad** is another cherished piece of political folklore. Not even the 1914-18 war could induce Australians to accept it, in a world whose nations were press-ganging men to fight anywhere. Australians would not face the logic that if you indulge in the major insanity of war you cannot baulk at the minor lunacies that attend it. By some kind of inverted emotion they continued to convince themselves that it was permissible to conscript men to defend their own soil but not to keep invaders at a distance.

William Morris Hughes felt so strongly about this that he split his party and formed a government in alliance with Labor's opponents, yet even he was not prepared, without the people's acquiescence, to force men to fight overseas. He sought that acquiescence twice by referendum; twice, although the questions were rigged and his opponents persecuted, the people said "No."

John Curtin talked the Labor Party into a measure of overseas conscription when the Japanese threatened invasion in 1942, but even then the conscripts could be sent only to a comparatively small area bounded by the equator and the 110th and 159th meridians, which included Papua and New Guinea, most (but not all) of the Solomons, and about half of Java and Borneo.

The war over, politicians shied well away again from conscription. Only volunteers went to Malaya and Vietnam. Clearly (although neither Hughes nor Curtin lost an election on the issue) a touch of the conscription tarbrush was considered to be fatal.

Then, a year ago, the Menzies' Government conscripted voteless youths for service abroad. (This is in the ancient tradition. When France adopted conscription to save the Revolutionary Fatherland, it was for those between 18 and 25, which, as the Encyclopaedia Britannica commented, was most satisfactory "because it was limited to a class which was neither sufficiently numerous nor sufficiently important politically to resist coercion.")

Australia's conscripts could be sent to Vietnam. Except from traditional quarters, the Menzies action provoked no loud outcry. Later, in the Kooyong by-election, there was—with a good deal of stoking and organised spontaneity—and yet the net effect of an election specifically proclaimed to be limited to that issue did not show that the general public cared very much.

It will be interesting to see whether Labor will choose a different battle-cry at the general election later this year. If they do, they will have perceived that another political hot potato has been growing cold without their noticing it.

* * *

For more than a decade the Waterside Workers' Federation defied the Menzies' Government, the arbitration tribunals and the rest of the trade union movement, made promises and broke them, sought by industrial blackmail to get what the arbitration system would not award.

A Labor Government in 1947 had granted the W.W.F. the sole right to say which men should work ships. The militants held a giant's power—and used it like a giant. How could that power be broken? Who was game to try?

Bruce had tried in the 'twenties with his Licensing ("Dog Collar") Act, and look what happened to him! That was the argument (a false

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one, actually, for though he lost a few seats in 1928 he still had what was, on paper, a comfortable majority; his government was smashed a year later on a quite different issue: abolition of the Federal arbitration system).

But late last year the Menzies Government, having done nothing for eleven years, introduced and rushed through in a fortnight legislation to end the labor selection monopoly and to permit the W.W.F. to be deregistered (and new unions registered) if it offended against the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, or interfered with overseas and interstate trade.

Everyone held his breath, including Labor (which also held its tongue; there were no fierce, immediate protests, as in Bruce's day). And nothing happened. There was no waterfront explosion. Watersiders even began to vote Communists and militants out of union positions. An unprecedented peace descended on the wharves; it is still there.

One more hot potato, on investigation, proved cold.

* * *

For two generations, Victorian governments had approached the question of late closing gingerly, if at all— and from all the signs they were right. Referendums had shown big majorities for retaining 6 o'clock closing. Experience with similar referendums in New South Wales having shown that the "No change" majority gradually dwindled until it vanished, it seemed that to convince the voters was the only way to get late closing in Victoria. (I happen to think that is the democratic way, but that is not the point.)

Bolte's Liberals swore they would make no change unless so instructed by the people at a referendum. Then, between elections—and fortified by the report of a Royal Commission and a volte face decision by the Victorian Liberal Party conference — the Liberals took the plunge and brought in 10 o'clock closing by legislation. Whether they were morally right in reneguing on their promise is a matter of opinion (I think they were not), but the interesting fact is that there was so little objection.

The opposition, which came from predictable quarters, had none of the fire of earlier years. Late closing will not be an issue at the election next year, for the Victorian Opposition—seeing at last that another hot potato had congealed—got its own Labor conference to pass a motion supporting the abolition of 6 o'clock closing.

* * *

White Australia, to which most politicians of all parties have paid lip-service for generations, no longer needs to be handled with asbestos gloves. Even the Labor Party has dropped it as a name.

* * *

Sunday observance is another bogus hot potato. Footballers play in arenas that used to be locked up, people run around municipal tennis courts, in some States Sheffield Shield cricket is played and picture theatres can open on Sundays if they want to. Sunday Observance Councils, which used to thunder when anyone faintly suggested Sunday entertainment, rarely open their mouths. Yet some suburban councils, fearing the blast from an extinct volcano, still vote against easing the blue laws on Sunday observance.

* * *

Perhaps many of the other serpents that terrify the parties have lost their venom. There is one way to find out: have a go. Any takers?

Edgar Waters on

The Stories of Henry Lawson:

SYDNEY OR THE BUSH?

I HAVE enjoyed reading the short stories of Henry Lawson—some of them, that is—for many years. It was only about three years ago that I first noticed that the two volumes which Angus and Robertson published as "The Prose Works of Henry Lawson" were lamentably incomplete. It happened like this . . .

I was reading, something that I had never read before, the introduction that Lawson wrote in 1915 for the first edition of "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke." I was puzzled to find Lawson describing Dennis's Bloke as "more perfect than any alleged 'larrikin' or Bottle-O character I ever attempted to sketch, not exen excepting my own beloved Benno." Now I had never set myself to make a systematic study of Lawson's work, but I was fairly sure that I had read everything in the "Prose Works," and just about everything in the "Poetical Works," at one time or another; and I could not recall this Benno . I took a swift trot through these volumes again, and still could not find him. I supposed that I might have missed a larrikin or bottle-o called Benno easily enough, if he had made only a brief and unimportant appearance. But then surely Lawson would not refer to a Benno of this kind as "my own beloved Benno," and speak of him, too, as though he could expect his readers to know this Benno.

I turned in hope of information to Green's "History of Australian Literature," and I found that the great authority—and I do not speak sarcastically, even though I am about to record one of Green's lapses—I found that the great authority quoted the words by Lawson that I have just quoted. In a footnote he remarked that Benno was a character of Edward Dyson's. But I did not think that Lawson would refer to a character of Dyson's as "my own beloved Benno."

So I cast around some more, and after a little search found two stories about Benno in "The Men Who Made Australia," a book of previously uncollected Lawson writings which Marjorie Pizer edited in 1957 (that is, four years before Green's history was published). Marjorie Pizer said that the stories came "from a series written between 1913 and 1915, with the general title of 'Elder Man's Lane' " and that they had been first published in "The Bulletin."

So the puzzle was cleared up, or at least part of it was, but my interest was stirred, so I set out for the Mitchell Library to look for more stories about Benno. Before I started on the lengthy task of reading through three years of "The Bulletin"—lengthy because I always get led off into fascinating side-tracks when I go through old issues of this journal—I discovered that Walter Stone had compiled a checklist of Lawson's contributions to "The Bulletin," and presented a typescript copy to the library. With the guidance of this checklist, I quickly made my way through the Elder Man's Lane stories, and discovered a number of interesting things: Lawson had contributed one story in the series to "The Bulletin" as early as 1912 and another as late as 1922; there were, at a rough count, about three times as many stories with urban themes and settings in this series as in the whole two volumes of the "Prose Works"; and, when I came to think about it, all the stories in the "Prose Works" had been written and published before 1912.

I left the library reflecting that Lawson studies were hardly in a flourishing state, and that it was more than time for Angus and Robertson to replace the "Prose Works" with a reasonably complete collection; and wondering why it was that Lawson should have made, in the second decade of the twentieth century, a more sustained effort to deal with urban life in his writings than he had made before. (It was obvious, incidentally, merely from Stone's checklist that Lawson had made the effort in verse as well as prose, and that the "Poetical Works" were as lamentably incomplete as "Prose Works.")

Lawson studies do not seem to be in a notably more flourishing state than they were three years ago. But at least Angus and Robertson have now given us a reasonably complete collection of Lawson's prose. The three volumes of "The Short Stories of Henry Lawson" look to contain all of Lawson's prose that will be wanted by anyone except the specialist student. The first two volumes contain all the stories that were in the old "Prose Works." The third and largest volume contains a large number of stories which have not been readily available before, including the Elder Man's Lane stories. In addition the volumes contain Lawson's "Fragment of Autobiography," six essays on Lawson by his contemporaries, and annotations to the stories by the editor. Cecil Mann's editorial methods are occasionally rather irritatingly casual, but the interest of his annotations more than makes up for this. (Mann, by the way, is one of those amateurs, like Marjorie Pizer and Walter Stone, who do so much for Australian literary studies; the comparative neglect of Lawson by the academic students of literature in Australia is rather curious.)

A number of literary critics have reviewed this collection, and have taken the chance to make

a re-assessment of Lawson as a writer of short stories. It is my impression—I have not read all the reviews—that at most of the important points these re-assessments agree not only with each other, but also with earlier assessments. The critics, I think, have always tended to agree pretty much about Lawson's achievements and about Lawson's limitations; and it would seem that contemporary critics have not found anything in the third volume of this collection—and I imagine that few of the critics had formerly read more than three or four of the stories in this volume—to lead them to important new judgments. Very few have made more than a passing comment on the stories in the third volume.

I may say at once that none of these late stories seems to me anything like as good as the best of Lawson's earlier work. It seems to me that they are important just the same for a critical view of Lawson; and further, that they are important for the assessment, whether critical or historical, of general trends in Australian literature during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

It is a widely accepted view that the writers of Lawson's generation dealt with the contemporary Australian urban scene only by way of exception. Consider, for example, the way in which works which do deal with the urban scene are treated by Cecil Hadgraft in his "Australian Literature" (I choose the example because this work is generally considered, I think, a well-balanced account of Australian literature).

Hadgraft devotes three pages—in a book which contains 290 pages of text—to the ballads of Banjo Paterson, and ends by saying in part: "Paterson . . . should not be regarded so much as a poet as an historical document. Even today there are many people who can recite him by the yard. Any writer who can do this to his countrymen is not negligible as a force, whatever he may be as a poet."

This seems to me fair enough comment (though oddly worded). But could not much the same thing be said of C. J. Dennis? It is true, I imagine, that not so many people today can recite Dennis's verses about larrikins by the yard as can recite Paterson's bush ballads. But "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke" does continue to be widely read and recited. And the "Bloke" undoubtedly made an even more powerful impact on the Australian imagination at the time of its first publication than did Paterson's ballads. If we consider Dennis as a "force" rather than as a poet, I would be inclined to say he was at least as important as Paterson, and perhaps more important. But Hadgraft does not give "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke" so much as a mention in "Australian Literature."

Hadgraft is rather exceptional amongst critics and historians of Australian literature in the prominence and praise which he gives to Edward Dyson's short stories of factory life. But, when he comes to speak of the characters in Louis Stone's "Jonah," he says: "Except for Dyson, these were unusual in Australian fiction, and remained so for about a generation until the city and its types once more began to enter the novelist's range of raw material." Lawson's Elder Man's Lane stories are part of the proof that these urban working class characters were not so unusual after all.

I cannot call to mind any Australian book published before 1905, either of verse or fiction, notable either for literary merit or for its impact on the Australian imagination, that dealt with urban working-class life. But in 1906 Dyson published his first collection of short stories about factory workers, and followed it with others in 1911 and 1914; Stone published "Jonah" in 1911; Dennis published "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke" in 1915. So that in the years immediately following 1905 there were published five books of some importance in the history of our literature, all dealing with urban working-class life.

I say "of some importance"; but in fact, of the collections of short stories published during those ten years, Dyson's are second only—though second by a long way—to Lawson's; and of the novels published during those ten years, "Jonah" is second perhaps only to "Maurice Guest." And if Dennis is negligible as a poet, nevertheless there had been no best-seller in Australian literature to compare with "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke" before 1915, nor has there been one since.

My argument then is that it is quite mistaken to speak of works dealing with urban working-class life by writers of Lawson's generation as though they were oddities and exceptions. On the contrary, from the earliest years of the twentieth century urban working-class life became an increasingly important concern of these writers. (There is, of course, more evidence of this trend than I have cited; for example, the poems about larrikins which Louis Esson included in books of verse published in 1910 and 1912, and A. G. Stephens's use of larrikin idiom for "Bill's Idees," published in 1913. But this is hardly the place to argue the case at greater length.)

Now that this new collection has made Lawson's stories of his beloved Benno readily accessible, I hope—although they have been almost ignored by the reviewers—that critics and historians of Australian literature will soon be led to give them serious consideration. And when they come to consider why they are not as good as Lawson's earlier stories, I hope that they will not be content merely to recall that they were written when Lawson's grip was failing, but will recall also a statement made by one of Lawson's contemporaries, the bush worker and minor bush balladist who signed his ballads "6 x 8."

"Henry Lawson," he wrote in the "North Queensland Register" in 1913, "is well known to have taken the material for his graphic bush sketches mostly from yarns told him by bushies, rather than from personal experience." We will never know whether that "mostly" was the right word. But at least one of Lawson's most highly regarded stories—"The Loaded Dog"—is a re-shaping of a folk tale with international currency (Vance Randolph collected a version of it in the Ozarks). And it may well be that Lawson was often more successful in re-shaping for the printed page a story which others had already shaped as oral narrative, than in hewing entirely unaided from the raw material of personal experience or observation. Certainly, there are many of his bush stories besides "The Loaded Dog" which look as though they might be re-shapings of often-told bushman's tales; but few of his city stories that look as though they could have had a similar beginning.

The influence of bush folklore on the writers of Lawson's day has been as little explored as the trend towards urban settings in their writings. If Lawson studies are not flourishing, it is not because there is nothing to study.

The Stories of Henry Lawson, edited by Cecil Mann. 3 vols., Angus and Robertoon, 1964. Vols. 1 and 2, 35/- each; Vol. 3, 45/-.

TOM BARKER was a leading member of the Industrial Workers of the World in Sydney during World War 1. Today he is a Labour Councillor in St. Pancras. Here, stimulated by a history of Australian labor in the years he knew it, he remembers:

HOW I DID MY TIME AT ALBURY, AND WAS DEPORTED TO CHILE

PUSHED by fate and circumstance into Sydney in early 1914, and escorted out of Newcastle by Billy Hughes's Commonwealth Police in August 1918 — this hardly makes me an authority on the country's political and industrial history. And especially when I have read and re-read Ian Turner's vade mecum on his country's development in these fields ("Industrial Labour and Politics," A.N.U., $5.25) do I feel a sense of inadequacy. But it happens that I am a survivor of the period, and, endowed with a fairly retentive memory, I am enabled to pay a tribute to his masterly analysis.

In new countries, there is a tendency to neglect history, especially that of the factory floor and the shearing sheds. We know too well the floreate pattern of English history, the births, marriages and demises (some none too cleanly or clinical) of monarchs, all carefully vetted by the sob sisters of the B.B.C. And this, of course, for the kids. But what panoramas could Aussie dramatists make out of Billy Hughes's police force, born out of a Warwick (Q.) egg! Or perhaps of that heroic Old Testament character, Monty Miller.

What other Australian could have gathered 200,000 people on the Sydney Domain in 1916 on the conscription issue? This long, rangy Emersonian who survived Eureka with a bayonet-wounded hand was thrown into Long Bay gaol by Hughes in 1917 for refusing to renounce his I.W.W. membership. And then, when public pressure forced his release, Hughes deprived him of his pension. Monty Miller is indelibly engraved on my memory, standing high on his platform in the Domain, during his country's most dramatic days. A Tasmanian, a carpenter, a Westralian craftsman, a true descendant in the line of the deported Dorset farm laborers.

Turner's book, in its sharp, analytical way, has renewed in me the feeling of the machinery of that new and growing state, of the struggles between professional politicians and those who sought power elsewhere and by other means. Could this timely volume reveal perhaps the deep-rooted fear of the former for the latter? Well, in August 1917, with a number of other I.W.W. men, I was arrested, brought to court, and given six months with deportation to follow. This was under Hughes's Unlawful Associations Act, brought to bear on those who refused to contract out and renounce their organisation.

With a young Queenslander, Arthur Wyer, who worked on the Sydney waterfront, I was taken from Sydney police court—in my own clothes—not to Darlinghurst or Long Bay gaols but to Central Station. The general strike was on at the time, but an engine with a solitary carriage was waiting with two prison officers already on board. The police handed us over to our new guardians. We learned that we were going to the small gaol at Albury, on the Victorian border. No other passengers were carried and the train made only two stops.

Albury gaol had its own reputation, for both Tom Mann and Harry Holland had been housed there following the Broken Hill strike of 1909. As a matter of fact, later on, looking over the gaol records, I found that I was in Harry's cell. Tom, of course, was found not guilty by the cocky jury, but Harry was imprisoned. (By a strange coincidence, Harry and I were in gaol together in Wellington (N.Z.), charged with sedition during New Zealand's first general strike in 1913.)

The first morning at Albury, after seeing the governor, we were taken to a small yard in the corner of the gaol, right under a watch-tower on which a warder armed with a carbine kept watch on the dozen or so prisoners at work in the place. We were put on shirt-making, one each week. We worked under an open shelter, and there was a tap and billy can in case we got thirsty. The guard eyed us over from his perch, not unfriendlily. He seemed to know all about us.

Then he bellowed, "Hey, you!" "Yes, sir!" He let down a tin water ewer with a piece of rope which was fastened to the railing of the tower. "Fill this up with water—and I want it cold!" "Yes, sir!" And when it came into Arthur's hands we were both surprised. The N.S.W. prison service wasn't at all unfriendly. There were two bananas in the pannikin! The skins went back to the tower again with the water—and of course Warder Cocksfoot got his water cold.

It wasn't long before "Direct Action" (the I.W.W. paper) replaced the bananas and the passion fruit. Another warder, a young fellow from Northern Ireland, had a brother in the I.W.W. in Broken Hill. Letters came in, too, and went out through the same source.

The months wore on, and about Christmas time Arthur was released—his six months, less remission, was up. Arthur was an Australian. But I was an old lag, with less remission to come, and besides I was a Pommie. I was to be deported. I remember one day the elderly governor, quite a nice fellow near retiring age, came when we were

being given our tea from the gaol barrow. "Who are these fellows Lenin and Trotsky?" He told us about the October Revolution. Well, even though we could be classified as revolutionaries, we didn't have the faintest idea who the leaders were!

Arthur was sorry to leave me, he was a good, kind, true bloke. He told me much of farm life in the Dawson Valley, of the twelve apostles, of snakes sucking at the baby's milk bottle while she lay in the pram chortling with delight at her odd companions.

Life changed. I was put in the garden—inside, of course. My time expired and the governor called me in. "Well, Barker," he said, "nothing has been done so far about you leaving. I am ordered to hold you as a detainee . . . This has never happened before in my life, and between us, I don't like it!" It hadn't occurred to him that I was to be held for deportation. I said, "Well, you know I'm a Pommie." "You don't have to wear gaol clothes—you can use your own," he said. Which I did for a while.

They put me on to looking after the church, although I was down in the records as a non-believer. Soon I found I could open the back of the organ. I got my books out of my bag, and stocked it up with food tins. A pair of young Irish Roman Catholic sisters took me under their sweet and kindly wings.

There is so much I could say about Albury, its warders, prisoners and oddities, but this is supposed to be a review of Ian Turner's book. Albury was a long way from Sydney. Hughes wanted us split up, kept away from the main centres and from one another. Uneasy the head that wears a crown!

Reading Turner's book, you could not conceive that a prisoner could get dead drunk in gaol. Well, not a prisoner, but a detainee! The cook had completed his ten years and he was being discharged in the morning. He was a good cook and his kitchen was immaculate. One of the screws brought him in a bottle of whisky. At tea each pint pannikin had a noggin in it. But a third of the bottle he reserved for himself. The tea was served by the cook, in the wing from a trolley, before the lags went to their cells. As a detainee, I was first, often five minutes ahead of the mob. The screw in charge was an old soldier from the Royal Marines, Warder Cartwright, endowed with flat feet, and a dedicated whisky sozzler. Standing near the trolley he began to get uneasy and to wrinkle his nose. The cook got uneasy in his turn, and when I came along he pushed his own pannikin into my hands, to get rid of it. It was a glorious drunk. I was left with a fat head and a feeling that anything was possible in life, even in gaol under Hughes.

Six months passed, and I was still in Albury. Hughes wanted to send a number of us Pommies back to the homeland, but they said they had enough trouble-makers of their own. So, after returning to Sydney's Long Bay, a party of eight of us were taken to Newcastle to board the Glasgow tramp steamer "Mineric," bound for Chile. Reason —Chile, being uncivilised, had no immigration laws. The eight of us—three Pommies, one Irishman, one Swedish American, a Russian, a Dane and a Swiss (really German)—went aboard. But the skipper, a canny, mean Scot, was afraid of us seizing his old craft, and demanded an escort. So when we landed at the shipside late one night, manacled together, three of Billy's Commonwealth Police were there too. And, in the stormy Tasman Sea, one—a retired sergeant of the N.S.W. police force—was washed out of his bunk when the door of his deck cabin was smashed open by a big wave.

"Well, Mr. Barr-r-kerrr," the skipper later said to me, "you're going to start life in a new country, untrammelled by. for-r-merrr associations!" In Valparaiso, when two of the cops went ashore, one of our local members, who recognised them, took a pot shot not far away from them with a Luger. They got back to the "Mineric" in no time at all, and stayed there until the ship left for her next port.

Readers may wonder what all this has to do with Ian Turner's invaluable book, where the bare bones of those basic years are revealed. But, as you know, the human element, in tragedy or in comedy, is a part of the wider story. Look, for instance, at the doings of the dodgiest of all Australian characters, the politicians. Not a breed entirely unique, but mostly agreed on one thing—getting the most and the best of whatever was going. Example—Billy and his £30,000! And don't forget the sinking of the "Cumberland" by a mine left by the German raider "Wolf." The truth about that was held back to create the belief that the I.W.W. had sabotaged her from within. We even worried about that one ourselves!

About five years ago, with Bertha, my wife, I attended a service in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. It was in connection, I think, with the CND, and Canon Collins was the priest. After it was over, we wandered among the statues and memorials of this unique centre of Christian belief. Pausing for a moment. I had a strange feeling creep over me. And as I half turned there was a shining white bust of William Morris Hughes, looking straight at me. "Well, Barker," he seemed to say, "whatever you may think about me, I am here!"

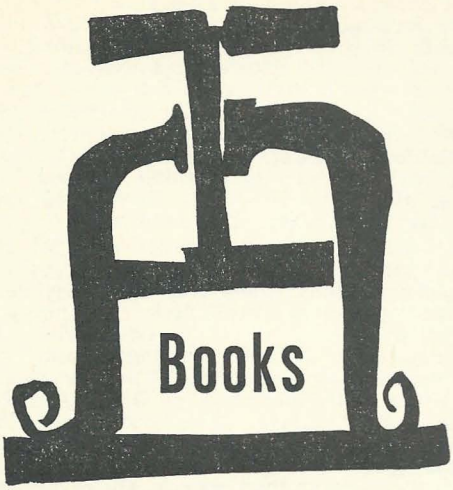
The last time I saw Billy in the flesh was in 1931, on the steps of Parliament House in Canberra. Frank Anstey was with me. "There's Billy standing there, Tom. He wants to shake hands with you." You can guess what the answer was—given with the emphasis appropriate to such an occasion. And all this resurrected by Ian Turner and his book . . .

On Anzac Day, 1932, I witnessed the Anzac celebrations and march, the men all in their own corps formations. At that time in Australia, unemployment was rampant. It was distressing to see the sad physical condition of many of the Anzacs. Often wearing old sandshoes, their clothing shoddy and ancient, it was hard to believe that fifteen years before they had been in the flower of their manhood. I visited the burlap humpies and old bathing sheds at La Perouse and Yarra Bay and on the other side of Botany Bay. Life was very hard, for nearly 30 per cent. of trade union members were out of work at the time in Sydney.

Of course, things are vastly different today. The new crisis in Vietnam, the Menzies-Holt conscription scheme—these are sure to create their own consequences. It is a smaller crisis than that of 1914-18, but the present uncertainty of the Far Eastern situation, and the determination of the Labor Party to pinpoint the issue by winning the coming elections, may re-create in some way the problems lived through in 1914-21. The lessons gleaned from Dr. Turner's book could well be pondered by those in Australia who have some regard for their own and their continent's future as the great Asian populations, including Vietnam and China, grow.

After all, Australian wheat is bought today by Communist North Korea. Goodwill to people with changing ideas and ways of life is better than killing and maiming, and being killed and maimed.

TOM BARKER



Living with Communism

The main point of Dr. Cairns' book "Living With Asia" (Lansdowne, hardback $3.95, paperback $2.75) is to show that anti-communism is an inadequate and dangerous basis for our foreign and defence policies. However, for this purpose there is too little direct consideration of the nature of the communist challenge in Asia, the reasons for its appeal in under-developed countries, and the reasons for the fear felt about this threat among ordinary Australians.

The importance of the contribution this book makes to the public debate on Australia's foreign policy needs no emphasis, and I therefore do not intend to devote any space to rehashing its major themes, which should be read in their context. The weakness of much of the criticism the book has already received in the Australian press has been due to a failure to appreciate the particular points of Dr. Cairns' argument as part of a whole, and the preference for extracting individual points to distort for reasons of sectarian propaganda. However, as the author is one of the leading members of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party I do propose to examine some aspects of his argument as a possible basis for a satisfactory Labor foreign policy.

But before doing this there are a number of detailed criticisms which should be made. Dr. Cairns' terms "monopoly capitalism" has now an emotional rather than a specific meaning, and the economic analysis which would justify its use comes at the opposite end of the book to the first appearance of the phrase. His analysis of the D.L.P. is valid as far as it concerns the origins of the party and its present policies, but he fails to explain why this minority group has been able to rally a degree of enthusiasm and commitment which is notably lacking in the Labor Party. Similarly, his account of the Liberal Party gives a just account of its policies and interests, but fails to consider why an organisation of such shoddy hypocrisy has been able to hold power and obtain eager new adherents for so long. Neither of these phenomena can be explained merely in terms of an affluent society or an advertising age—they rest at least equally with the divorce of the Labor leadership from any rank and file.

It is this blindness which seems to me the fundamental weakness in the book. Dr. Cairns is not offering a radical alternative to our foreign policy, but a cry to the conscience of the Australian people—a cry to which, on his own admission, they are unlikely to respond. Quite rightly, he offers no hope of any other party facing reality, but he is prepared to see the Labor Party become a permanent opposition rather than shape its policies to the felt needs of the Australian people. His long-term answer is the education of the masses, but he fails to explain how a Labor Party without a mass membership can fulfil this task.

The same blindness appears in his analysis of the trade unions, where he equates the right-wing moderates with conservatism, and the militants with left-wing socialism. The tragic fact is that the militant leaders are as wedded to a reactionary orthodoxy and as divorced from the thoughts and aspirations of the ordinary union member as any of the so-called moderates.

Yet the book contains all the elements of an effective Labor foreign policy. It is in its omissions that it troubles. It is not enough to state that communism cannot be halted by military means, or that our present policies are self-defeating even on their own terms. Dr. Cairns effectively disposes of the "domino" theory, but he does not spell out with sufficient clarity the fact that our concentration on Vietnam is making more likely a communist take-over bid for Burma, Thailand or Cambodia, and more likely the chance that we will send conscripts to fight in futile and immoral wars in these countries too.

Any effective foreign policy must be based on the facts that Australians are worried about the spread of communism, and that they have valid cause to be worried. It may be correct to say, with Dr. Cairns, that only communist totalitarianism has been able to mobilise the labor needed to start poor countries on the long road to development, but this argument is of doubtful validity in Vietnam, and does not excuse the utter suppression of personality witnessed in China. But Dr. Cairns does not in this book suggest any alternative way of mobilising human resources. For that, we must read his pamphlet on "Economics and Foreign Policy" (Victorian Fabian Society, 35c), a much more cogent and tightly argued document.

Having recognised this concern about communism, a Labor foreign policy would then need to explain why we cannot afford to still our fears by military action four thousand miles away, and what military measures we should take for our own defence. Dr. Cairns does outline a perfectly sound defence policy, but he underestimates our capacity to defend ourselves against any potential aggressor. More seriously, he takes no account of the manpower requirements of a sound defence policy, and consequently does not attempt to estimate the relative merits of the birthday ballot for ritual sacrifice and universal training for all. This latter proposal could well be linked with his hint at a peace corps for Australia, a hint he does not follow in any detail.

Finally, in his discussion of Vietnam, which is the country most extensively treated in his book, Dr. Cairns is content to deal with the stupidity of our past policy, but he over-simplifies the situation in which we find ourselves as a result of these mistakes. Unfortunately, we now have numbers of people in this unhappy country who have committed themselves to our cause, and we cannot simply desert them. To do so would be the final treachery in the miserable record of the Western

democracies in South-East Asia. The Labor Party is not fulfilling its duty to bring an end to this miserable war unless it shows how we can extricate ourselves, not with honor, for that was lost when we entered it, but without a further bloodbath.

The dilemma of this book is the dilemma of the Labor Party. For a party in office, it would offer perfectly sound principles of action; for a party out of office, it offers little hope. The Labor Party cannot afford to campaign on the negative basis of stopping the war or of halting conscription, but must offer a positive alternative spelt out in some detail. Yet this alternative must take account of the negative atmosphere of anti-communism which is the sole legacy to this country from the inglorious years of the thistle.

JOHN McLAREN.

Tasmanian Pacification

Throughout the four years of arduous dangerous journeyings, often in regions unexplored, George Augustus Robinson kept a diary and made vivid sketches with a view to writing a book about the Tasmanians. It is doubtful whether he had the skill to do this. Had he attempted it the journals might have been destroyed. At last, a hundred years after his death, we have the full record of his strenuous journeys and of the people whom he served in the way that his Christian convictions demanded of him. The work of editing and publishing was as formidable today as the journeys were then. Brain Plomley and some indefatigable helpers have given us the book of the Tasmanians—the intimate picture of them by which the worth of all previous writings about them must be assessed ("Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-1834," edited by N. J. B. Plomley, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, $12.60). No other writer lived their own life with them, won their confidence, learned their languages and shared their thoughts. In all extremes of climate, out of touch with settled ways for months on end, in trackless forest or snow-covered mountains, or bleak and rugged coasts, a small, devoted band helped him to persuade the dissident guerillas to put themselves under government protection—to end the killing times.

To those who object that it was futile—that as a people they were doomed—the journal shows that Robinson was well aware of that; what was to come was irrelevant while men, women and children were reduced to the level of hunted animals.

The scientist points out that he was not a trained observer while French visitors were. So much the worse for them. The frock-coated scientist came ashore for a few hours, met a reception committee and noted such scientific details as fitted his philosophy. Robinson had the philosophy of a Methodist lay preacher, a mere artisan, and by definition of no interest to scientists and other gentry. With no Latin and no literary polish, but trained in the ways of craftsmen, he was the better observer for those very limitations. He knew details of building; he saw their canoes but also saw them being made and crossed rivers by them (he could not swim).

The book has no literary tricks and few moralisings (the editor has wisely rationed us with these). What Robinson had abundantly was a simple faith in human equality and also a capacity to live up to that belief. The supreme instance is told so simply that a careless reader might miss it. He had a tent (though he often shared the bark shelters or the camp fire circle under the stars). During the torrential rain of the west coast his native helpers shared his tent and blankets, sharing also their vermin and their contagious skin infections which plagued him for months, almost to blindness. No trained observer would have discovered that aspect.

The candid living with them thus for months on end ensures the fidelity and accuracy of sustained observations. They told their past and present life in songs and dances. He noted tunes and (often) indelicate words. He played his flute for them, learned their languages and recorded their versions of clashes with sealers and shepherds. The daily incidents of the journeys show us the living culture, their bush-craft, hunting and fishing; their huts strongly set and snug even in west coast winter; their rafts made to order for river crossings; their spears, their games; their sad funeral rites for the dead victims of the white man's diseases. Always incidental, doubtless lacking in the precise details beloved of anthropologists—but as living arts, full of the human interest no trained observer could ever have learned from them. Learning is a reciprocal process.

The book fills some gaps of great moment in our knowledge of Tasmanian culture. It puts beyond doubt the authenticity of the stone circles and other rock markings, which some scientists working from "first principles" had denied. At least one new site was made known from the details of the Journals.

Of their successful adaptation to their original environment there is abundant evidence, now. While theorists have proved that they could never have crossed Bass Strait, the evidence appears that large catamarans ventured out even to the Eddystone Rock (twelve sea miles of southern ocean) to hunt seals. Of their story of their origins as a people, of their myths of a creation, we have ample detail. Around the camp fire, with Canopus and Jupiter blazing in a frosty night, they told their version and heard Robinson's. When Black Tom expressed a preference for the white man's version the faithful-fickle Truggernanna had the woman's last word:

"Where did you come from? White woman?"

We know now too, beyond reasonable doubt, that they were a far more numerous people than scientists have been prepared to admit. Their extermination began from the first white contact and was mainly from respiratory diseases. We have the dual aspects of the enslavement of their women by the sealers and also how these women refused to bear or to rear slave children. We have evidence of wholesale slaughter and their reprisals (they had stolen guns and could use them but lacked powder). The real horror lies in the insidious, sudden mortality from microbes—of one remote tribe, still twenty strong, only two survived the two-months' transition to the island settlement.

Of Truggernanna there is little mention except in crises. Only nineteen years old when the mission began, she had already known enough of strife and horror. Her conviction of the purpose clearly equalled Robinson's. Through all the toils and privations of west coast winter rains and highland snows she did more than a woman's work. Ferrying the party over wide rivers, pathfinding, negotiating, sagacious and competent for everything—yet her name appears infrequently.

In the extremist danger she was the chief agent. Robinson had crossed the river to meet a hostile tribe. In the night his people warned him, and at dawn when the strangers rushed for their spears the others scattered. Robinson made the river bank. To him came Truggernanna and on a makeshift float swam him to safety. Then the lay preacher in only a shirt (not even boots) and his rescuer, mother naked, rejoined their party. If there were anything of intimacy in their partnership would a forty-plus lay preacher record such details? Honi soit! She was to outlive him by ten years.

The book is an experience comparable with Doughty's "Arabia Deserta." True it lacks literary quality—but many scholars might emulate the simple vigour of narrative. It overtops all the contemporary descriptions of and moralisings on the Tasmanians, just as Doughty leaves for dead all contemporary writings on the Bedouin.

Both men had the same utter conviction of the righteousenss of their calling, the same unshakeable faith in the quality of man. Without this neither of them would have undertaken, and persisted in, and survived, the strains and trials of living for years in the wilderness with a strange people, winning their confidence by being at one with them.

Both books demand of the reader his whole time and concentration and no reader who gives himself to the task can ever be quite the same again. Both books, too, end in a similar morass of doubt and disillusionment; the authors must face the world and ask themselves "What next?"

Robinson might have said, with Doughty, of his faithful brethren, "Time and the world and the inhumanity of religions had parted as forever."

K. M. DALLAS.

Unrounded Theatre

George Coppin was the son of English strolling players. When he first landed in Australia, in 1843, he had himself been appearing on stage for more than half his lifetime; he was then almost twenty-four years old. In Australia he soon became, and long remained, a favourite actor. He also became a leading theatrical entrepreneur, in the half-century or so when the theatre was, in Australia, a form of popular entertainment as important as television is today (and important for much the same reasons).

Coppin had other business interests, and was a member of both houses of the Victorian Parliament for long periods. It does not appear that he had any great influence on the course of political life in Victoria. In any case, Alec Bagot's biography, "Coppin The Great," is concerned chiefly with Coppin's theatrical career.

Coppin's life would make an excellent subject for popular biography, and Bagot seems to have been half-inclined to write a popular biography. He avoids footnotes and other pedantic embellishments that are thought so necessary by scholars and found so tiresome by the reader in search only of entertainment. He tries, especially in the early chapters, to write in a lively and colorful style. But his style is at best pedestrian, and he can never really forget that he is a scholar; more than that, a scholar of the antiquarian kind, a collector and hoarder of details. It soon becomes all too plain that Bagot would like to show every detail in his hoard to the reader. The reader in search of entertainment will soon begin to find the going dry, as he runs across more and more passages like this:

"Coppin embarked on the general screw steamship "Argo" that left Southampton on Wednesday, 4th October, 1854, bound for Melbourne and Sydney, via the Cape of Good Hope. She was a splendid vessel, 1,236 tons, capable of steaming a steady ten knots. This was her first voyage to the Antipodes, but Captain George Hyde had no doubt she would transport her 136 cabin passengers to their destinations in comfort and safety . . ."

Leonard Mann remarks in his foreword that "theatre and the entertainment of the people cannot be neglected by the social historian," and I heartily agree. Not only the social historian, but also the general historian of Australian culture and the specialist historian of the theatre may find things to interest him in "Coppin The Great." But the historians will be greatly exasperated by the book, not so much because Bagot puts in too much irrelevant detail, as because he leaves out so much relevant detail. I may quote an instance which particularly exasperated me.

"Correspondence received from Andrew Birrell, theatrical agent of 1525 Washington Street, San Francisco, covering a period of eigth years ending 1877, reflect [sic] Coppin's insatiable quest for stage attractions and equally deep interest in public affairs . . . The special value of these letters rests in their depiction of a close association between Californian theatres and Australian; their contemporaneous development, similarities, and disparity, of public appeal. Published with other Coppin letters, they would provide a fund of information for further research."

Now I think that Bagot is on to something quite important here, because I have myself decided that there are interesting relationships between California and Australia to be explored in many aspects of culture, and not just in the theatre. But Bagot quotes only a few meagre scraps from Birrell's letters, and nothing at all from Coppin's letters to Birrell. (In other parts of his book he quotes extensively from letters dealing with trivial as well as important matters in Coppin's domestic life.) And does Bagot even tell us where these letters, which would provide such a fund of information for further research, might be found by some scholar bent on further research? Pig's he does.

In a couple of pages of acknowledgments at the back of the book, Bagot gives a sketchy account of his sources. From this it appears that one of his main sources was a large collection of papers "made available" by Coppin's daughter, who is now dead. He does not give any hint of the present location of these papers! One would not expect a book of this kind to be documented as meticulously as a doctoral dissertation (though I expect that Bagot would be able to document it quite meticulously). But just because the book does offer so many clues for further historical research, one could surely expect a somewhat fuller account of the source material than this, especially from a book published by a university press.

"Coppin The Great" is likely to be welcomed wholeheartedly only by the collectors of Australiana and Alec Bagot's fellow antiquarians. It is a great pity that it is so difficult to run down two hares at once.

EDGAR WATERS.

Alec Bagot: "Coppin the Great, father of the Australian Theatre." (Melbourne University Press, 1965, 65/-.)

Many Lives

The 19th century biography—characteristically a tale of physical or spiritual endurance or heroism—was designed to uplift. The 20th century biography—characteristically the story of the man of affairs—is designed to enlighten. Instead of being a text in character building, biography has become an appendage to history.

Of the men treated in the biographies here under review, the one who comes most fully to life is that most strange of all Australian Prime Ministers, Stanley Melbourne Bruce. Why strange? Because he seems to have lacked all the qualities of the popular leader. He had not the leadership of Deakin, or the demagoguery of Hughes, or the cuddliness of Lyons or the conviction of Curtin, or the reassurance of Chifley. He did not even have (or so he said) the ambition of Menzies. Yet he became Prime Minister only four years after he entered Parliament and one after he first became a Minister—because the National Union (the secret organisation of businessmen which dominated the anti-Labor party) backed him and because the Country Party was prepared to have him. And he stayed longer in office than any previous Prime Minister had done.

A rich man with no personal need of a parliamentary career, Bruce appeared to those around him cold, arrogant, stand-offish. He left Australian politics in 1929, when his government was defeated and he lost his own blue-ribbon seat, almost as light-heartedly as he entered it. Or so it seems, from Cecil Edwards's account ("Bruce of Melbourne," Heinemann, $7.50). And Mr. Edwards's account is convincing, perhaps because he talked with Bruce over many hours and recorded his remarks. Much of the story is told in Bruce's own words, which are amplified by reference to the written record. By letting Bruce tell his own story (with careful editing), Mr. Edwards brings him to life.

One of the National Union men who were manipulating politics from behind the scenes when Bruce became Prime Minister was Herbert Brookes, a wealthy mining engineer and company director and chairman of the Chamber of Manufacturers. Rohan Rivett, in his biography of Brookes, "Australian Citizen" (M.U.P., $6.50) makes out a case for Brookes being much less to the political right than this record would suggest. As a child and young man, Brookes knew railway construction workers and miners, and came to respect the point of view of working men. An intimate, later a son-in-law, of Alfred Deakin, he absorbed some of Deakin's radicalism; but his political life was dominated by his anti-Catholicism (he had been appalled by Dr. Mannix's "sedition" during the war) and support for whatever was the anti-Labor party of the day. Yet there is clearly a basis for Rivett's reading of Herbert Brookes, for late in life he fought (as Deputy Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission) against conservative forces for an independent news service for the A.B.C. Brookes emerges from Rivett's account as a man of honor, intelligence and culture, yet never quite as a human being.

Among Bruce's other claims to fame was that he was the first Australian Prime Minister to fly —a back country trip from Winston to Longreach, with Hudson Fysh as pilot of one of the first Qantas planes. Sir Hudson relates this story, and many others of the early days of his airline, in his autobiography, "Qantas Rising" (Angus and Robertson, $5.25). The book throws considerable light on the history of Australian aviation. Sir Hudson speaks disparagingly of his early attempts to write short stories and feature articles, of his "rather flowery" style; unfortunately, he exchanged this style for one which is overly pedestrian.

There could be no greater contrast to Bruce as a politician than Edward William O'Sullivan, the compositor who became one of the first trade unionists to sit in the parliament of New South Wales, five years before the Labor Party was formed. O'Sullivan was a self-educated working man of the old kind, a believer in the rights of labor and the community of interest between workers and their employers. His political career was devoted to bringing together the forces he thought of as "democratic"—the workers, manufacturers and small farmers—in a coalition against wealth and privilege. He had considerable political capacity, as revealed by his tenure of the Ministry of Public Works; but his ability was never given full rein, because he was caught in the depressed economic circumstances and the political flux of the beginning of the century. Bruce Mansfield, in "Australian Democrat" (Sydney University Press, $3.00), gives a sympathetic account of O'Sullivan's career and personality, and an extensive and acute analysis of the political and social ideas which made O'Sullivan a characteristic figure of his times.

David Syme, in editorial control of the Melbourne "Age" from 1860 until his death in 1908, was another 19th century radical who saw the coalition of worker, manufacturer and small farmer as the hope of Australia. But, in contrast to O'Sullivan, he was kingmaker rather than would-be king. A dour, humorless man who showed little affection

The Floating Fund

The account for the blocks used in this issue (some of them, not all of them) has just come in: $103.59. That's why we have a floating fund, because the actual publishing price of "Overland," by the time you subtract overheads, bookshop discounts, etc., doesn't fully cover the cost of printing it. So very many thanks to those who have contributed a total of $321.90 since the last issue:

RM $20; RM $18; KF $10; WMB MD MM PH VM IG HH $8; AB $7.50; KT TH $6; RM $5; MG MM RG VMcD $4; AG TT JO'C DMcL JS $3; JH AW JP BR BV MC EO SC PM MA LG JMcL RA JB BS LB BB ER RW RS EF MKH EC JE EW RJ KB EMcL PMcM AD VB LL DR JN TE JG AB AS GMcI MB DG AP AT HS CH LF JC MH $2; RGT NC $1.50; JS OR DL HH LB EA JH MR AW RW FM EM MMcG JA EP MJO HT PT DG DA CG TG NS JW DB JS BNS JZ RC CH DE LS AS GP RL TT DR MW E&S BR HW NG GB JS RO LF OP LMcK PG RS RM $1; Cvan R 90c; BI WS 80c; GK AK JH WG BN JP JS AE MM SK 50c; AC JG PK GC IW JC AMcD HP GMcD 40c; EC 30c.

and no desire for human intimacy, his life was his paper and his land. For two decades he made and unmade Victorian governments, even deciding on "Age" candidates for parliament. He used his great influence for democratic government, protection of native industry and "unlocking the land," and against privilege, maladministration and corruption. An inflexible and indomitable character, he was feared or revered by many, but loved by almost none. C. E. Sayers tells his story in a book ("David Syme," Cheshire, $7.00) which is a pleasure to read, although it lacks some of the scholarly apparatus which would enhance its value for students of Victorian history.

The men of these five books form something of a continuity, spanning the last years of colonial politics and a fair part of the politics of the Commonwealth. The subjects of two other recent biographies stand far removed.

The first is Alexandra Hasluck's well-told story of one of the founders of the colony of Western Australia, "Thomas Peel of Swan River" (O.U.P., $6.00). Peel came from a wealthy Manchester manufacturing family; dissatisfied with his prospects at home, he resolved on making his fortune in Australia. Western Australia seemed, from reports reaching London, to be a likely place. A man who thought on the grand scale, Peel finally persuaded the home government to grant him a million acres around Swan River, on condition that he introduced 10,000 settlers into the new colony. Peel's sleeping partner in this venture was Solomon Levy, a wealthy emancipist merchant of Sydney. Peel failed dismally. His partner did not provide the supplies that had been agreed on; Peel's settlers became a charge on the government; Peel was not able to make a go of the quarter million acres that he was granted. Circumstances were against him, but it is hard to avoid the impression (although Mrs. Hasluck does not subscribe to this view) that Peel, by impatience and a reckless optimism, brought much of the trouble on his own head. A hardy and independent man, belligerent towards his equals and autocratic and scornful towards his "inferiors," Peel was a sad rather than a tragic figure; Mrs. Hasluck's book is perhaps too sympathetic, but she convinces that there was a balance against Peel that needed to be redressed.

The final study, R. B. Nicholson's "The Pitcairners" (Angus and Robertson, $4.75) is a "biography" of several hundreds of people rather than of one — of Fletcher Christian and his fellow-mutineers from Captain Bligh's "Bounty," the Tahitian women they took with them to their remote refuge on Pitcairn Island, the handful of Europeans who joined them there, and all their descendants (some of whom live on Pitcairn today). It is a fascinating, romantic and (in the early days) bloody story of the successful attempt of these refugees from the yardarm to create a new life for themselves—an adult "Lord of the Flies." Mr. Nicholson misses little of the drama; one however regrets that he does not have William Golding's capacity to translate this extraordinary escapade into anthropological terms.

IAN TURNER.

Recent Novels

"The Solid Mandala" (Eyre and Spottiswoode, $3.25 Aus.) is the most enjoyable novel by Patrick White since "The Tree of Man." The style still remains allusive and often puzzling—not knowing the smell of saltpetre, I cannot understand why blotting paper should affect Waldo Brown so strongly—but it flows much more freely than in the earlier novels. We no longer feel that White is constructing a fragile world from the most delicate fragments of experience, but rather that we are being taken for a loving, sometimes caressing, journey through the lives and minds of his chief characters. The purple moments are still there—the Chinese woman under the wheel-tree, the dream of icebergs splintering, the swimming in the mist—and so is the fascination with the obscene details of real life—cows' turds, dogs licking their balls or tearing at the genitals of the corpse, faesces in the bedsheets. Real life perhaps, but certainly not everyday life. There is still enough symbolism in the book for regiments of scholars to delve through in pursuit of doctorates, but it lies unobtrusively under the surface, a lead to deeper understanding, not the key to our reading of the book. Above all, there is a human compassion which has only been hinted at in White's recent work.

This difference can be seen most clearly in the character of Mrs. Poulter, who first appears on the Barranugli bus as one of the familiar hags of Sarsaparilla whom White normally depicts as the enemies of everything life-enhancing. However, as the novel unfolds, she comes under the influence of Arthur Brown and is allowed her moment of revelation when he dances his vision of the mandala for her. By the end of the novel she has some of the qualities of Mrs. Godbold in "Riders in the Chariot," yet she does not ever lose connection with her essentially commonplace character.

This perhaps is the key to the growth in White's perception which is shown in this book. The characters, apart from the two brothers Brown about whom the story is written, are not so much projections of the writer's own consciousness as they were in the earlier works. In these works there was a distinct gap between the targets of his bitter satire against man's chosen pettiness and cruelty and the expressions of his own longings for peace and unity. This time he brings his understanding of the potentials of human life to enlarge his portraits of his subsidiary characters, who are seen playing out their pathetic parts as they strive for the larger good of the feelings while being forced to settle for the smaller good of respectability and normality.

The two main characters, however, act out the familiar patterns. Waldo, the would-be intellectual, jealously guards the privacy of his own thoughts at the same time as he resents his brother showing any similar pretensions to a soul. Cutting himself off from all others, he cuts himself off from life, and dies of his own hatred. Yet White paints him with pity, particularly in his childhood, where we are shown how his desperate attempts to force recognition are rendered futile beside Arthur's effortless giving of himself. Waldo is tagged as the brainy one, but Arthur is given the affection. Beside Waldo, Arthur's character earns easy sympathy. Although we are told, and he believes, that he is simple, he emerges from the story with considerable intellectual as well as spiritual strength. But although he has the secret of life for himself in the symbol of his mandalas, the marbles which symbolise the ultimate unity of life, and although he has the capacity to bring harmony to others, he realises also that his very capacity for life makes him a reproach and a torment to others, particularly to Waldo.

All these implications are, however, worked out in human, not in mystic or symbolic, terms. Arthur's accepance of life is a real thing, just as

Waldo's hatred for him is real and psychologically convincing. The book succeeds on its deeper levels because it is first of all a compelling picture of real life, albeit life in a peculiar Whitean landscape.

On the other hand, "The Slow Natives," by Thea Astley (Angus and Robertson, $2.50) is a realistic novel which tries just a little too hard to achieve symbolic significance. The middle-aged music teacher and his alienated teenage son, the priest who is unsure about his vocation and the nun who loses hers, the withered-up spinster and her part-witted garden boy are real and important characters whose lives demand our interest. But the story line is just a little too brittle, the plot slightly contrived, the ending too sentimental to convince. Nevertheless, the novel shows an awareness of contemporary urban life and its problems, spiritual, moral and physical, which justifies its success in winning the Miles Franklin and Moomba awards.

"North-West by South," by Nancy Cato (Heinemann, $2.75) is a leisurely historical novel about Sir John Franklin and his energetic wife during and after their residence in Tasmania. The main characters are brought to sympathetic life, and the problem of the Tasmanian Aborigines is treated gently and movingly, but otherwise the book has little to say to the present age.

In "Trap" (Cassell, $3.25), Peter Mathers has written a gay, serious, rumbustious novel which reminds us that the realist tradition still has the power to move and excite. This is a book which breaks all rules and still succeeds magnificently. It is a book about a part-Aborigine which is not a novel about the color problem. The character of its hero is convincing, larger-than-life, and yet still eludes us at the end. There is no plot, but we are compelled to read on. The writer plays with streams of consciousness, the narrators indulge in bouts of introspection, yet it is an objective novel.

Certainly, the book has its faults. There are moments of tedium, particularly during the biography of the hero's father, Wilson Trap, which threatens at times to become another of those accounts of how the hero found his soul when he joined the Union/IWW/Labor/Communist Party. However, we easily forgive these lapses in a novel which offers us a rich array of people and events from all levels and varieties of society, from the back streets of Fitzroy to the shores of North Queensland, all linked in a free flowing prose style which neglects few of the resources of the English language and its local variations.

Amid these events, the narrator plays an ambiguous part. He is neither spectator nor participant, for he is unable to decide which of the many worlds he belongs to. Nor does he really tell much of the story—he records the words of others, who in turn speak the thoughts of others, so that we can forget for pages at a time who the ostensible speaker should be. Yet this method is not confusing, but an integral part of the author's vision. He, too, stands outside events, pretending to be neither impartial nor omniscient, yet not seeking to escape from the pressures of reality by retreating into the tortuous recesses of his own mind.

The device of the diary enables Mathers to address the reader directly, a rare occurrence in the modern novel. In "The Solid Mandala," as in all of Patrick White's novels, the characters speak to themselves. Even when White uses the third person, he is still using language to build a picture of the universe as seen by one particular individual. It is this subjective quality which lends power to his symbols, for things are seen not as themselves but as events in the consciousness of various people. In the other novels reviewed, we have a more traditional use of language. The writer looks down at his characters and describes what they are doing, saying or thinking. The language is neutral, and any comment is made by a figure in the novel.

"Trap," however, is told entirely by people talking in their own various ways to other people. Their language may be dense, lucid, coherent or disjointed, but it is always concerned with making a point or achieving an effect on some one person. Even when the narrator, or recorder, is noting his private thoughts in his own diary he is aware of a possible reader, for he not only attempts to explain his own reactions but also his reasons for recording them. So the reader of the book is confronted with both a series of events and a series of divergent and contradictory judgments on the events. In the end, both characters and judgments are left unresolved, for the writer is implying that this contrariness is a part of the very stuff of life.

The question of whether "Trap" is a successful novel is irrelevant. What we are faced wiith is a new voice in Australian literature whose range encompasses both the sprawling anarchy of events and the subtle pin-pointing of detail. Although his book embodies a host of influences, from Patrick White to Xavier Herbert, and from James Joyce to Alan Sillitoe, Mathers' greatest strength is his determination to steer clear of contemporary fashion and make standards of his own. In this, he has abundantly succeeded.

Les Haylen's book, "Big Red" (Australian Book Society, $2.50), is curiously old-fashioned. It has the ingredients of the traditional Australian social realist novel—boyhood on a farm during the depression, first fight, first girl, first love, first strike. The family and neighbors are, of course, Irish; there is an indomitable old matriarch, a yielding mother and a drunken father, not to mention two wise old boozers who act as mentors to the hero, instructing him in socialism, poetry and the rights of man.

Yet, despite its stock ingredients, the book lives. It says little that has not been said before, nor does it offer any food for the academics, except perhaps a glimpse of humanity, but it does give a view of the gap between what life could be and what men make of it. The book is planned as the first of a trilogy, and Haylen makes us look forward to discovering what happens to his hero when he reaches the city.

"All the Green Year," by D. E. Charlwood (Angus and Robertson, $2.50), is another story of adolescence, this time set in a Port Phillip township and occupying one year in the life of its narrator, Charlie, and his misunderstood friend Johnno. It is a tale of man's inhumanity to minors, and the hypocrisies and fantasies of boys to each other. The incidents are highly colored, and although the end leaves everything unresolved Johnno remains clearly in the reader's mind.

In "The Wayward Gang" (Rigby, $2.75) Wal Watkins tells a neatly constructed story of tension and violence among a gang of fettlers out from Port Augusta. The setting enables him to assemble a small group of contrasting characters, he sketches in the background of each, and the story takes over from there. One character is an aspiring writer, and magazine editors come in for a good deal of criticism. One day, a novelist may write about the hardships of a magazine editor .

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Published by S. Murray-Smith, Mount Eliza, Victoria; and printed by "Richmond Chronicle," 5 Shakespeare Street, Richmond, E.1, Vic.