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Pen drawing by H. McClintock.

DAME MARY GILMORE

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THE BOMB— TEN YEARS LATER

By Gavin Casey

The very magnitude of the devastation that can be caused—and has twice been caused—by atomic weapons has made the thought of war more horrible to millions of people who previously hardly thought about it at all unless and until they were involved.

Whether or not the mass destruction and torture of human beings is morally a greater crime than such treatment of a few may be open to question, but the impact on the mind of the knowledge that whole cities can be obliterated literally in a flash makes the fact one that no sane man can contemplate without fear—and the wish to do whatever may lie within his power to prevent such happenings.

When the first atom bomb was used in warfare the world paused for thought. Only the most insensitive, stupid, and brutal people were quite happy about it. But it did not pause long enough or think deeply enough before it went blundering on its greedy, self-interested way.

It has been vital to try to remind humanity from time to time of the issues involved and the dreadful possibilities. The voices of great and sincere men like Albert Einstein, whose powerful mind set scientists on the road to "splitting the atom," have been raised in protest against the criminal recklessness of so-called leaders who seem to regard the possession of the devilish "A-bombs" and "H-bombs" as a happy situation, like holding a good hand at cards.

Books like John Hersey's **Hiroshima** have told the awful story of what happened when and after the bombs were used, gaining in effectiveness from plain statement. There is not much need for adjectives when dealing with such catastrophes.

Now, ten years later, we in Australia can see a film on the subject that is powerful and deeply moving, like the best of the books, because of its restraint, its strong narrative thread and the great technical and artistic ability of those who made it. It is appropriate that these people should be the only ones who have so far suffered under the bomb, the Japanese, and it is appropriate too that the organisation responsible was the Japanese Teachers' Union.

"Children of Hiroshima" cannot, of course, be anything but a tragic story. The placing of it on celluloid for visual appreciation must have been immensely difficult, and it is hard to imagine that any Western organisation could have done it without falling into errors of blatancy, noise, and vulgarity. But the Japanese have avoided all these.

In their tale of Takato Ishikawa, a school teacher who spends her holidays in Hiroshima, where she was born and grew up, and where her parents met their end, there is no hatred of anything but war and violence. There are no recriminations, no outpourings of noble but unrealistic sentiments. There is nothing but the stark tale of what happened to a number of people.

What happened is so horrifying and is handled with such meek and gentle dignity that "Children of Hiroshima" is at times almost too excruciating to watch. During the short interval between the two reels that make up 85 minutes of showing-time there is silence in the audience.

One hesitates, for a moment, even to look at one's neighbor in the next seat. For people much like him and one's self did that—and people much like him and one's self suffered from it. The one message the film drives home is that we must never do it again.

This it does unforgettably, using properly and with restraint gifted actors and technicians who have developed their skill in the film medium to a degree that will astonish Westerners.

It tells, in essence, of the saving of one small boy for a brighter future—for he is almost the only one among the school teachers' old friends who can be saved. Others have more or less patched their broken lives, or are coming to their end, twisted, unhappy, and perhaps better dead; fearful of the future, not for themselves, but for the young, gay, useful, hopeful people who are as they were once.

The explosion of the man-made blast from Hell occupies only a minute or two of the film, and the loudest noise during the sequence is the ticking of a clock as its hands move towards the fatal moment, and the unsuspecting people work, play, make love, and attend to their children in the sunshine.

Then, on the clock's last tick, the screen fills silently with a fury of light and torn cloud, and the camera drops for a brief, awful moment of the wilting of all living things—a flower, fluttering birds, a mother and the baby at her breast, all the good as well as all the bad that was in most of Hiroshima.

For most of its length the film moves slowly, and that is how it should move, with the ponderous inevitability of fate and in time with the march of the common people. The acting is magnificent, particularly that of the girl who plays Takato, and who suffers a number of close-ups that would make most Hollywood actresses take an overdose of sleeping pills in sheer despair. She, however, manages such subtle difficulties of expression that one does not tire of seeing her sorrowful sensitive face occupy most of the screen, and that is an acting achievement rare and wonderful.

The casting throughout is excellent, and apart from histrionic ability, the types chosen are unmistakably Japanese without belonging to the species that might arouse instinctive feelings in the breasts of Westerners who suffered when Japan embarked on the course of violence and conquest that finally led her to atomic disaster.

As "Children of Hiroshima" ends, and the teacher and the little boy are headed away from the ruins and the makeshift re-building into an orderly, useful, and comfortable-enough life, a plane, which their searching eyes cannot see through the clouds, thrums its way far overhead.

It sounds like one of the big, four-engined jobs most of us listen to every day as they bear businessmen, statesmen, soldiers, and fun-seekers overseas and to distant States. Unless we are very young or very interested in aircraft, we seldom even look up.

But people who have been once struck by the atom-bomb look up, with a helpless apprehension that constricts the heart of the onlooker. There is no war. It cannot be harmful. But for all the logical reassurances their minds offer them, there is something in them that makes the drone of engines ominous. What happened once can happen again.

Most who see "Children of Hiroshima" will agree with Alexander Werth, who has declared: "If I were the world's dictator I would make this film compulsory education for all mankind."

UNCLE TOM

by Judah Waten

He was called Wingy because of his withered left arm, but his name was Jacky which was what his mother called him. The Ingate house had been often visited by sorrow; Jacky's father had died when he was too young to remember him and his Uncle Tom, his father's only brother, was a prisoner of war in Germany. Uncle Tom was Jacky's hero; he yearned for his return. Although he could not remember his face, the boy talked incessantly about his uncle and boasted about him to the other boys in the district.

Jacky and his mother lived in a wooden cottage near the meat works and the tanneries. There were several vacant allotments around. The boys met in those allotments. They played football and cricket and sometimes they fought. But it was Wingy Ingate who introduced the game of war to the boys. From then on the boys met and formed armies.

Wingy's army was known as the guerillas. Wingy was commander in chief, his aide was Dick Thomson, a benign looking, fat boy who was highly regarded as a fighter, and three or four other youngsters made up the rank and file.

They shaped the kind of battles that were fought. On one occasion they held a shed in the backyard of a condemned cottage while the opposing army tried to take it by storm. Both sides used jam tins, sticks and stones collected from the allotments which were also tips for the minor rubbish of the district.

Then there was the time when trenches were dug and bonfires lit to light up the faces of the enemies at night. The rubbish that burnt so brightly attracted boys from all over the suburb. Some came in home-made push carts. All wore martial caps of one kind or another; naval caps without bands, tin helmets, woollen balaclavas. Wingy wore an airman's forage cap which had been given him by an airman living in the street.

Most of the battles were won by Wingy. He played too fiercely for the other boys, some of whom were always getting hurt by flying stones. Wingy was the straightest throw in the district although he had only one good arm. He only needed one arm for hurling stones or using a stick. "Into them, boys," was his battle cry and he was always to the fore setting an example to his troops.

After a few weeks, the boys began to yearn for more peaceful games. Even the burly Dick, who was so good with his fists, was dying to play in the ruck instead of having to throw stones day after day. But he was a little frightened of Wingy. What if Wingy turned on him and battered him down with his one arm? Dick would never live down the shame. So he kept singing Wingy's praises, did everything his chief wanted him to do and thus made sure that no other youngster supplanted him as chief of staff in the guerilla army.

One day most of the boys stayed away from the allotment where the armies were formed and the challenges thrown down. They walked nearly a mile to another allotment to play a game of football. Wingy and his army followed them. During the play, Wingy shouted: "Into them." They ran wild over the ground punching the footballers.

The boys began to plead with Wingy. He could have comics, army belts, tin helmets, even a packet of cigarettes.

Wingy, his short left arm hanging loosely, his right fist cocked professionally, jeered into the faces of the boys:

"Just a lot of squibs, that's all you are. Aren't I right, Dick?"

His aide smiled a superior smile and said:

"I bet you could fight any three of them together. I reckon you and me could beat six of them. What about it?" He turned to the boys agressively, but he still looked his fat benevolent self.

There was no answer. The boys glanced down at their boots. But one crafty young fellow thrust his hand in his pocket and produced an American Marines' badge.

"I'll tell you what, Wingy," he said. "You take this and let us keep on with our game of football. I don't want the badge. It's something for you. It's a real fighting man's thing."

Wingy would not let on that he felt flattered. He looked at rare article casually, with the eye of a bored, distrustful expert, and only after a show of reluctance would he take it in his hands. Then he held it in his hand as if weighing it, made as if to hand it back and finally pinned it on the lapel of his coat.

"My Uncle Tom," he said, "has got rows and rows of badges on his coat. And medals, too. He must be the best fighter in the army. Took a lot of Germans to capture him. They had to surround him with tommy guns and everything."

With sighs of relief the boys began to edge back. Wingy winked at Dick and then called after them.

"All of you come back. I wancher."

They stopped and faced him sheepishly.

"You'll do as I tell you from now on." Wingy said in the language and tone of his favorite movie hero. "If I say you'll fight, you'll fight, see."

But he left the boys alone from then on. He had suddenly grown older and he looked for excitement away from the street. With Dick he often walked into the city and the two boys would attach themselves to groups of soldiers or sailors standing under the clocks at Flinders Street Station. They would talk loudly and whistle like the men at the girls who hovered round the concourse.

Other times they booed the American military police when they let fly at the soldiers with their heavy yellow batons. And they did not remain silent when the Australian military police bundled soldiers into waiting motor lorries. Like the men they had attached themselves to, they felt an almost personal hatred for the M.P's. "You wait till after the war," they would shout in imitation of the soldiers.

After one great battle outside the station, when the American and Australian military police fought the Allied soldiery, the boys ran most of the way home, bewailing the fate of their friends who had been removed to the military lockups.

"They put stones in their packs, they say," Dick said.

"Next time they should get waddies too," Wingy said. "The jacks wouldn't win if they only used their fists. They can't fight."

"There was one there who could," Dick said, "I was watching him. He was a champion. You should have seen his fists. Like big hammers."

"My Uncle Tom'd fix him," Wingy said, "He's a great fighter. He used to be in the ring."

As he spoke he cast belligerent glances at his companion, but Dick did not give a hint of disbelief. Uncle Tom had been the cause of more than one fight and Dick was not prepared for battle tonight.

Dick followed Wingy into the Ingate cottage. Without a glance in the direction of Mrs. Ingate, who was darning socks in the kitchen, they passed her and walked straight into the boy's bedroom. Wingy sat down at the edge of the bed and handed Dick an exercise book in which were pasted newspaper pictures of the weapons of war.

"Mr. Jones down the road gave it to me," Wingy said proudly.

Dick turned the pages slowly. He stopped at a picture of a captured Japanese sword.

"I'd like one of these, Wingy," he said, holding up the exercise book.

"I wouldn't mind one myself," Wingy paused. "You know Dick, I think I'd like one of those curly swords. Mr. Jones was telling me the Turks used them in the other war. You know, the other war. Your grand-dad was in it. You know. Well, you can cut a hair in half with them."

"You think your uncle will bring back a couple of German swords," Dick said hopefully.

"I'll bet he will," Wingy said with great conviction. It was as if his uncle had written to him from the prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. "And I'll tell you he'll bring a couple of those German helmets as well. You know the sort."

He and Dick would share in the spoils of the war. There was nothing more certain.

But when Uncle Tom Ingate turned up during the school holidays after the war had ended he bought no souvenirs, no trophies of war, no swords or helmets. He did not even look a warrior. He was short, stooped and thin and his dark hair was white at the temples. He had spent some time in a hospital in England after his release from the P.O.W. camp in Germany, but he was still in poor health and he could not take much food.

Wingy would not leave him alone. He plied him with questions about the battles he had fought in.

"I only fought in one," Uncle Tom replied. "And I never saw much of it. You know more about what happened than I do."

He did not talk a lot about anything. He seemed lost in meditation most of the time. He sat on a chair in the kitchen leaning slightly forward, his bony wrists resting on his knees. He had got into the habit of sitting like that for hours while he was in the prison camp.

Tom Ingate became a great joke among the boys in the street. They grew very bold with Wingy.

"I thought he was going to bring a couple of swords back."

"And helmets."

"They're coming out on the next boat," Wingy said. "You don't believe me, eh?"

"Seeing's believing," the boy said and ran away.

From the other side of the street a boy shouted: "Your uncle couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag."

"The only medal he's got's the one on his britches," another boy said.

Wingy suddenly pulled a rubber shanghai out of his pocket. Although he could not load it with a stone and fire it, he used it like a whip. He raised it up over his head and chased the boy who had insulted his uncle. The boy ran down a lane behind the houses, but Wingy caught him. Wingy came back with a triumphant smile on his face. He said to Dick who had not spoken a word all the time:

"He'll mind his p's and q's next time."

"Yes," Dick said.

Wingy had not really enjoyed his triumph over the boy in the lane. In his heart he hated his uncle for humiliating him in front of all his companions. But he made another attempt to establish his fallen hero. At tea time he said to his uncle: "What medals did you get?"

"I don't know that you'd call what I've got medals. Now let's see, I've got the service . . ."

Then Uncle Tom went back to his meditations, while he chewed his food. When he finished his meal he kept looking at something on the wall invisible to the others. It was as if he was trying to remember something.

"There's a funny smell about isn't there," he said suddenly.

"I can't smell anything," Mrs. Ingate said. "Can you Jacky?"

"No, Mum," he said. "I can't."

Uncle Tom sniffed the air.

"Like a smell of burning dead meat," he said.

"It's the boiling down works," Mrs. Ingate said. "We're so used to them here we never notice anything."

"For a moment," he said, "it reminded me of the smell that hung over our camp. They say they were burning bodies not far from where we were. Russian prisoners who had died. I never saw it myself, but I saw them starved. The Germans used to throw bits of horse meat rubbed in mud at them. Not many lived long on that."

That night Wingy slept badly. Early in the morning he hurried into the kitchen, but his uncle had already left the house. Mrs. Ingate said:

"Your uncle's gone to the hospital to see the doctor. He's a sick man. His nerves aren't any good."

Wingy went into the street. He would try and keep everyone away from his uncle when he came back from the hospital. He sat down on the kerb outside his house and pretended to read a comic. When Dick came up to him and began to talk Wingy cut him short.

"Clear off. I've got something on I don't want you to be in."

The boy sat on the kerb for hours. It was a humid day and a thunderstorm was gathering. A mass of heavy grey cloud lay over the street.

When Uncle Tom came down the street there were no boys in sight, but a few old age pensioners were standing together near the Ingate house. Wingy jumped up to meet his uncle. There was a strained expression on Tom Ingate's face.

"How stiff can a man be," he said to Wingy. "I've got to go back to hospital. I said to the quack: 'Let me go back to work. I'll get better there with my mates.' But he said, 'No you won't. You'll never be any good if you don't get treatment'."

The old age pensioners nodded to him as he came up to the gate of the house. He stopped to talk to them. He told them about his visit to the doctor.

"If I don't get back to work soon," he said, "I'll never be good for anything."

The old men sympathised with him.

"You'll get over it, Tom," one of them said.

"I was at the Boer War," another said. "When I came back I only weighed eight stone. Me a man of twelve stone. I couldn't swallow a decent feed. But here I am all the same. And as good as many a young bloke."

Tom Ingate was so full of his own misery that again he told the story of his visit to the doctor repeating it word for word. Wingy could not look up at the old men, staring angrily at the ground.

The sky had darkened. A grey pillar of dust whirled over the houses and the hot street was cooling with the first drops of rain.

"Uncle, let's go in," Wingy said impatiently, tugging at Tom's coat.

But the man hardly noticed Wingy. He was engrossed in talking to the old men who nodded their heads, unable to get a word in. It was as though he was determined to make up for his past silences with one long outpouring of his heart to the strangers.

"The mates on my old job would do me a lot more good than all the hospital wards. I said to the doctor . . ."

Just then the sky flamed with dry lightning and a peal of thunder broke right over the roof of the house and went rolling away across the street.

Tom Ingate stopped in the middle of a word as though he had seen an apparition. His body quivering, he ran on to the verandah, banging on the door until Mrs. Ingate let him into the house.

One of the old men said, "Poor chap, he's got it bad."

"War never did any poor cow any good," another said.

"Even the generals go soft," still another old man said.

Wingy glared at the closed door. He would never forgive his uncle who had behaved like a frightened girl. Soon everybody would be talking about him and Wingy would be the laughing stock of the district. In his imagination he saw himself the laughing stock of the world. And it was as if his uncle had devised everything just so Wingy could be the laughing stock of the whole world. He would not go into the house as long as his uncle was there. But hunger drove him back home at tea time.

Tom Ingate had long pulled himself together. He said quietly to the boy:

"I don't know what came over me, son. It must be my nerves, as the doctor says."

The boy did not listen, averting his gaze. And through the meal he ate in silence and then he went into his room. There he took out of a box the exercise book with the newspaper pictures of the weapons of the war. He put it on the table and holding it firm with the elbow of his withered left arm he ripped out each page with his good right hand.

He came out of his room only in the morning. His uncle had already gone to the hospital. Mrs. Ingate looked at the boy sharply.

"Why didn't you come out and say goodbye to your uncle? Why were you crook on him?"

He could not have said exactly why. But in any case he would not talk with his mother about it. It was something very personal, something as between men, not for women, especially mothers. But Mrs. Ingate had an idea of what was going on in Wingy's heart.

"Soldiering isn't all beer and skittles. A lot of people think it is. Then they wake up."

He left the house before she had finished saying everything she wanted to. Dick Thomson was waiting for him outside. Wingy looked at him searchingly. He would knock Dick then and there if he as much as mentioned his uncle. But the benign looking burly boy did not say a word about him. He was much the same as ever. He said: "What are we doing today Wingy?"

"I dunno."

"There's a big march of soldiers on in the city today," Dick said. "I got enough for a couple of pies. I reckon that'll keep us going. What about it?"

Wingy shook his head.

"Let's go swimming, Dick."

(concluded on page 24)

CHILDREN IN A BUS

They huddle in the corner
And twitter in the corner—
A frail enchanted flock
Captive to the ogre
Who wields the steering wheel.

Despite their comic flurry
He is gentle and not evil;
He is their gruff protector,
A saviour in a peaked cap
Who, with a magic gesture
Or gravel-toned word,
Urges them to justice
And from many wild misdeeds
Such as leaning out of windows
Such as kneeling on the seats
Such as standing in the passage
(And all the time his calm
Enormous silver eye
Watches, watches, watches).

They live in a budding world
With its own predicaments.
We see and hear and touch them
But we cannot apprehend them
For death and children both
Do not acknowledge time:
Their each day is a star
Plucked from infinity.

You who wait to hurt them,
Can you not remember
Your own inquisitive
Bewildered cunning childhood?
When all (save love) was the
Inland of life awaiting
The cherubic pioneer
From the inhabited coast.
Love, you knew only love:
God, sun, enfolding
Arms, flesh—were love,
Love was always. Never
Would come the helpless hour
When love would cease as gift
And become the twisting need,
The imperative of being.

The moment came. It was there
Like granite. Other men
Possessed their personal spells,
Amateur wizards some,
Who fumbled with their wands,
Or lost their words, or tripped
Over a cackling broomstick . . .
Nevertheless they won
The golden-tressed princess
Who stood beyond the stone
Which, at a touch, was dust.
But you who wait to hurt,
You denied the stone
And broke like a puppet as
You ran against it; you lay
Crushed and bleeding, screaming
At the rock, in the endless night,
And slowly you became
One with the stone.

The driver's oblong eye
Is shut. The children play
At being people: some
Seem adults out of true.
A boy tentatively explores
His smiling neighbor child:
Runs up, embraces, retreats,
Runs up again and kisses
Absently then in passion
That serious neighbor child.

LAURENCE COLLINSON.

DAME MARY GILMORE

by A. G. Mitchell *

When in the dust my light is hid
Tell if you must the things I did,
But let no word betray
Truth from its narrow way.

Pity I take not of any;
Few to forsake me, or many;
Only I ask that you
Tell that my heart was true.

It is not merely the accumulation of busy and many-sided years that have made possible for Dame Mary an amount of influence that it is given to few to exert. It must be for her, as it is for those who honor her, a wonderful thing to contemplate how many changes she has witnessed in the life of the country to which she is so passionately attached—all the hopes, disappointments, dangers, triumphs the country has seen and suffered in the eyes of one who loved it and sought to glorify it in song; how much that was deserving, how much that was unworthy.

It must be equally impressive to contemplate all the changes that have taken place in the development of literature in Dame Mary's lifetime—not only in the variety of those who have come and gone as writers, but in the changing status of the author, the many influences that have played upon them, the associations they have made, the various lines along which they have pursued the great and difficult purpose of showing Australians and their country to themselves, vividly, clearly, exactly, fully and deeply.

There is a particular appropriateness in letting the mind play about these things because in her long life Dame Mary has both worked hard and with all her heart in the cause of an Australia growing richer in humanity and wisdom and in the cause of a national literary art. She has been an inspiration to others in both these grand purposes and has not spared her gifts of guidance and persuasion.

All these developments over so long a time have won an added richness and significance because watched closely, consciously, hopefully and because they have come within the compass of one mind's observation and reflection.

When we reflect that these thoughts and insights have found expression in poetry through an unflagging creative impulse, we begin to understand how important to Australia this one person has been, is, and will continue to be. For though in her recent poetry the image has recurred of looking backward in age and hugging affectionately the treasures of remembered experience, nothing is more certain than that Dame Mary still looks forward as eagerly and as anxiously as ever she did and that she is no less interested in and informed about the world of today and its people. She contrived her non-typical celebration of her 89th birthday by publishing another collection of poems. Dame Mary herself has given expression to this power of poetry to spread inspiration as in ever-expanding waves, and in words that echo the famous lines of Chaucer:

Mark now this argosy which I set sail
A thousand ships, a thousand words,
Hoping that no contemptuous lettered flail
Beat all my merchandise to shards.

Each word a hold, each hold a word, how small,
How slight these carriers of freight!
Ah, even as we who are but breath to call,
A sigh upraised to challenge fate . . .

As I recently read through Dame Mary's poetry again I tried to discover the impression that it was leaving dominant on my mind—and I thought I found it expressed in Dame Mary's own words: "The great heart nought could slacken." The great heart, the great soul—great in its interest in all the things that dignify man and enrich his life. Her humanity is broad and warm and strong. As she contemplates the immensities of the universe in which man's life is set, Dame Mary is at times overwhelmed with the feeling of man's smallness and insignificance.

But one feels that Dame Mary always comes back to the conviction that an act of selfless courage, of compassion, practical devotion to an ideal is still the greatest thing that the world has to show. One of the burdens of her poetry is that these qualities, these potentialities that dignify the state of man, are quite independent of background, position or wealth.

The Rescuer

He was uncouth, he had no manners,
His hands were rough as iron spanners;
His hob-nailed boots had twine for laces,
He had no coat, he knew no braces.

Yet when earth trembled to the sound
Of blasting terror underground,
His was the first hand on the rope
Where none might go—and hope.

The things in humanity that Dame Mary exalts are courage, devotion to a larger cause through work and stress that is uncomplaining and asks no applause. So she lauds the pioneers and, with a rather special feeling, the pioneer women:

If ever in the dark embrace
Of fear it is our lot to stand,
Vouch safe, O God, to us this grace:
That we may be as those who stood,
Lone on the threshold of this land,
In their enduring womanhood.

* * * *

Dame Mary sees and lets us see the dignity and the worth of simple, plain and useful lives, contributing richly to a greater design, though hardly knowing it.

Fellow-feeling is one of the gifts of the poets—the ability to enter into and feel with other people, other creatures, other orders of being. In Dame Mary this gift of fellow-feeling is joined to a warm and quickly shared compassion for all things that are hardly used, hunted, denied and despised:

There was no hunted one
With whom I did not run,
There was no fainting heart
With which I had not part;
The baying hounds bayed me,
Though it was I was free.

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Where ere the hard-prest ran,
Was it or beast or man,
As step by step they went,
My breath with them was spent . . .

In **The Disinherited** there is a poem about a fox which one day the poet found asleep:

I found, one day, a fox asleep,
He too a hunted one.

The poet watches as the fox sleeps and then:

. . . as I stood there still, I saw
The rib of breathing pause;
He flicked an ear, flicked it again,
And twice he flexed his claws.

Backward I stepped; I could not drive
Into that heart the stake
Of fear, knowing how oft I, too,
In dread had sprung awake.

Yet, though so light I moved, he heard;
He went in one swift leap.
I stooped and touched the round, warm place
Where he had lain asleep.

As her compassion is for the hunted and downtrodden, her admiration for those who are equal to the demands of unselfishness, courage and moral strength and for those who unnoticed do the honest work of the world, so her impatience and her scorn are for the small, the mean, the puffed-up, the cruel, and the cheaply self-centred. But as you look back over her poetry it sings more in praise and encouragement of the virtues of man at his best than in condemnation of unworthiness. The unworthy stands revealed the more forcefully by implication when in the warmth of her wide humanity the poet talks of the sufferings of the rejected and the hunted.

The great force that holds all together and enables all in mutual helpfulness to attain the highest potentiality is love, and love runs a constant theme through Dame Mary's poetry, love not remote, contemplative, self-aware and self-centred, but present, active and self-dedicating:

Speak low of love:
Hast thou not known the spring?
Heard the young grass rise
To it, whispering?

Another of the abiding themes of Dame Mary's poetry is Australia. And not merely the face of the land, its beauty, its bareness and loveliness, its harshness and tenderness; not only the vegetation that clothes it and the shy and gentle creatures that it sustains, but also its people. And not only its people in action and living the lives of flesh and blood, but the people in what they might and should aspire to be, as agents in the building of a freer and better country of free men.

It is not, indeed, that the poet looks at the country and then at the people in it who have it in their power to glorify or despoil—she sees both together and neither separate from the other—the country that now rewards man beyond his deserts, now pinches him with hunger, and batters at his endurance through fire and flood: man who now in harmony with nature, builds, who now wantonly and perversely destroys. The broad and far-ranging vision of all this is one of the great things that Dame Mary has given us:

O thou, my country,
We, who were too young
To praise thee singing as the wintry
Lands are sung,

Now leave the callow
Rhythms of youth behind,
And sound thee from the ripened fallow
Of the mind.

We were so young we
Knew thee not, and feared
The fuller note we might have lent thee,
And endeared.

And thou wast stranger,
Too; where custom clung,
Thought lowly born in history's manger,
O unsung!

Part of the whole pattern meant in the poet's imagination by the word "Australia" is the Aborigines—the dignity of their bearing, the beauty of their songs and ceremonies, their inborn gentleness, their skills and ingenuity. No one has more constantly or more effectively than Dame Mary contended with those who dismissed the Australian Aboriginal as backward and undeveloped, and no one has done more to reveal the character and beauty of Aboriginal lore and custom, to make us aware of the undeserved tragedy of the Aborigine's lot since the coming of the white man:

Blow, blow ye winds, and bid the mountains hear
once more their call;
Echo again, ye streams, the rustle of a foot's light
fall;
Mourn for them, hills, and O, ye grasses, cry.
Grieving for those whom we condemned to die.

The poet then contemplates the manifold cruelties and stupidities of the white man who had not the wit to see what he was destroying, and brings home to us the pity of it all:

There is a Pity, infinite, wherein the slayer and
The slain lie in a sleep; and there the earth lays
hand in hand,
While Death pleads up to God for brotherhood!
O ill deeds done, be yet man's plough for good!

Such are some of the grand themes of Dame Mary's poetry.

We have been thinking of what has been said in poetry by a person who has come to occupy a special place in Australian life and who has exercised a many-sided influence.

What of her statue as a poet, as an artist?

A remark made, I do not know how long ago, I think probably by Douglas Stewart and certainly on the **Bulletin's** Red Page has stuck in my mind. I have not bothered to check because the interesting thing to me is that of all the critical judgments that I meet and applaud, or dismiss or am irritated by then forget, this one stayed in my memory—"The great soul, the erratic talent." And I should like to hark back to the words from Dame Mary that I quoted early:

When in the dust my light is hid
Tell if you must the things I did,
But let no word betray
Truth from its narrow way.

I take Dame Mary at her word and know that I should risk her scorn if I did otherwise. In that same poem she says at the end:

Only I ask that you
Tell that my heart was true.

That is a needless request. The true heart, the great soul, the integrity, sincerity, the self-forgetful devotion to great causes and high purposes, the deep humanity, the quick compassion—these impress themselves upon the reader in every line of the poetry that Dame Mary has written. And

to be honored for these and to work upon the hearts and minds of men through these would be a very great thing indeed.

But what more is there? There can be no doubt that Dame Mary would have no use for the conception of poetry as the means of subtle skills in the manipulations of images, sensations and syllables. Poetry for her is not merely an art of patterning associations and rhythms. Poetry for her must have something to say, and something enriching or ennobling to say. Otherwise it is dead.

In her determination to say the things that spring from deepest feeling she might, by this perspective, think less attention due to niceties of balance, harmony and patterning than some would like to see paid. She is didactic without apology and at her best is triumphantly successful in her didactic poems because of her gift of pithy and symmetrical statement.

The critics may complain here and there of diffuseness, of a relaxing of the tension, of rhythmical laxity, of artificiality in diction. While they may speak of these things they never question the imaginative range and insight, the clarity of thought, pressure of emotion, directness of sensuous impression.

I seem to have noticed a change coming over the critical assessment of Dame Mary's poetry. It used to be a common view that Dame Mary was a very great Australian who treated lofty themes in her poetry that had a special significance for Australians, but that she treated her themes with a disregard for the disciplines of technique that kept her from achieving the highest rank as a poet. The idea was that a rigorous critical assessment was to an extent hardly relevant.

But in the judgment of some critics with whom I have recently spoken, the most rigorous critical assessment has discovered in Dame Mary's work poetry that on all counts is great—in pattern, rhythm, balance, emotional tension, as well as in insight and warmth and urgency.

Oh, could we weep,
  And weeping bring relief!
But life asks more than tears
  And falling leaf.

Though year by year
  Tears fall and leaves are shed,
Spring bids new sap arise,
  And blood run red.

Nurse no long grief,
  Lest thy heart flower no more;
Grief builds no barns; its plough
  Rusts at the door.

VERSE

A pharisee builded a famous church,
  Where he in the front seats sat; the poor
Were given a place at the back,
  Where the wind came in at the door.

Alone in his pride the pharisee sat,
  Empty the seats from the front, apart,
For the poor they prayed, as all men may,
  In the church of the heart.

—Mary Gilmore.

"DEAR FRIEND"

Tributes to Mary Gilmore

A milieu, a society, can perhaps do no better service for certain personalities than provide them with nourishment for a hope of a better kind of society, and present them at the same time with the opportunity of fighting for that hope. Perhaps the best thing that can be said of Australia, during the past ninety years, is that it has supplied Mary Gilmore and a few others of her kind with such nourishment and with such an object for their loves to work upon.

Certainly, in her ninetieth year, Mary Gilmore seems to her younger contemporaries to have lived a life of eminent personal fulfilment; a life of a kind that perhaps will never be possible again, beginning as it does in the severities and simplicities of a pioneering environment, and leading into the complexities and confusions of the atomic age. Yet it is her special achievement that she does not seem in any way out of place in this age into which she has, not survived, but lived. There are certain attitudes to life which do not "date," because they have in fact no date—they are basic, and mean as much in the twentieth century as in its predecessors. Dame Mary is notable for her truth-telling, but her truths are of a special kind; they are not the truths of the intellect, which change from decade to decade without our noticing the alteration, but the truths of feeling. In an age frustrated by its own cleverness, she asserts a certain kind of almost-lost wisdom—"the wisdom of the heart."

It is this attitude to life—one perhaps only fully possible to age which has lived fully—that makes even her less successful writings and her most arguable positions into something we would not like to lose—they are part of a personality which has grown beyond our smaller fears of being ridiculous or of being inaccurate. She has reached a point to which few people even aspire; she has accepted, not only life, but herself.

Probably this is why she can always manage to make her critics seem, in the end, a little silly. It is hard to criticise effectively the work of a writer whose personal width and depth are generous enough to include and accept all that one has to say in opposition. It is her tolerance and her generosity that silence the carping questions one might ask of anyone else. To ask them, one would have to be convinced that one's motives for asking were good enough to withstand comparison with her motives for writing—that one's experience and one's conclusions from experience go as deep as her own. And few of us indeed have more than eighty years of life thoroughly lived and acutely observed, to draw upon.

Time, the enemy of most writers, is Mary Gilmore's ally; she has known how to use him to her own advantage. No-one is beyond criticism—but a few people are so complete that criticism, however relevant, leaves them with the essential last yord. Perhaps Mary Gilmore's last word has been written by herself:

Life's combat I have loved,
Full harvest have I sown,
And I have loved my kind: who go
On that strange path alone.

Judith Wright McKinney.

The glory of Mary Gilmore lies not only in the exquisite lyrical quality of her poems, but in the passion and vigor of her evangel for Humanity.

In her youth, with high courage and selfless devotion, she took a rough track which she believed would lead to socialism. Through the fogs of disappointment and disillusionment, she struggled for years to find the path which will lead to peace and a better way of life for mankind. In her old age, she was able to declare she had found this path, and to rejoice that she could still serve the great purpose of scientific socialism: the freeing of men and women from all that oppresses and degrades them.

Her poems have always breathed a love of Australia: a sympathy with ordinary working people in their hardships and sorrows: indignation and grief for the Aborigines who have become outcasts in their own land. But her writing has been inspired, also, by the shrewd intelligence and militant spirit of a practical fighter who knows that "arrows" shot into the air must strike somewhere, and piercing the veils of ignorance, superstition and calumny, bring some consciousness of truth and the need for clear thought and action to many minds.

Dear Mary Gilmore, we remember her birthday with pride and affection! She will always stand for us among the truly noble women of our time.

Katharine Susannah Prichard.

Ninety years is a long way to have travelled with a youthful step. Dame Mary Gilmore may write:

The little songs of age
Come as our autumn leaves,

but the season of her spirit, and therefore of her writing, is always spring; she is still able to give us poems which are not only wise, but as fresh and sparkling as six o'clock in the morning.

The secret, surely, is her unflagging interest in life—not only in its momentous events and issues, but also in those commonplace happenings which to less perceptive minds, may seem trivial; for Dame Mary has never—to use the Biblical phrase—"despised the day of small things."

Nor is her interest academic or detached. It is the interest of an ardent and tireless participant, and it has brought her, besides the respect and affection of her many friends and her innumerable readers, deep wisdom, warm understanding, and perpetual youth.

Eleanor Dark.

Many years ago when I was a school-girl with a first little book of very childish verse, published in kindness and encouragement by J. L. McArdle, later of the Melbourne **Herald**, I shyly knocked on the door marked "Editress" in the office of **The Australian Worker."**

I was to meet Mary Gilmore, then our best-known woman poet, author of "Marri'd and Other Verses." beloved and quoted by Australian women everywhere, and also a woman whose idealism and fearlessness were helping to build the "working-man's paradise" that is Australia today.

A firm quick step answered the knock and a tall brisk Mrs. Gilmore, in a grey suit and pince nez glasses, gave me a warm handshake, a welcome more direct and sincere than merely pleasant—and a deeply-valued friendship that has lived through all the years.

It was one of her "Friday afternoons" for writers and poets, great and small. There were five or six well known **Bulletin** names in attendance. Dame Mary was discussing everyone's latest work and the world in general as she made tea for us all on a spirit-stove in a corner. In the midst of us was her life-long friend, Henry Lawson, whom she always mothered in his later years. He was saying little because he could hear so little, but with his very live brown eyes he was dreaming his own dreams.

I have never forgotten that meeting, the "excelsior" urge and the glowing interest, which in one of the blessings of life have been mine very often since then. Her unfailing and practical zest and help in work to be achieved, the reward of her instant "summing-up" with generous heart-warming praise or other observations, always perceptive and sincere, have made me one of her "literary children."

(Continued over)

BIAMI

An Aboriginal legend re-told by Mary Gilmore.

Biami, the father God, had sons, and there came a time when these thought their father too old to be chief God, and that one of them should be chosen in his place. Biami, being astute, said nothing, though he knew what was going on. At last his sons came to him; he listened quietly to all they had to say, then, without anger or argument, he said he would arrange a contest of skill for all, himself included, but that as he was their father he would come last. They agreed, as the winner was to take his place, and he was an old person, easily beaten.

When the day came and they were all together the first one to act pointed to a far off high tree where there were three small leaves against the sky. He took his spear, flung it and cut out the middle leaf without disturbing the other two.

The second one turned to a hillock, sent his waddy full force against it and crumbled it to dust. That dust still flies on the wind and falls as duststorms.

The third son pointed to a passing river where a great fish was swimming with the current; he jumped in and swam with such speed that he outdistanced fish and current; then turned back, met the current, caught the fish and laid it at his father's feet.

The next indicated a jut of rock on the far side of a deep gorge. He leaped to it, jumping high as he lit and turning in the air, so that he landed with his toes pointing home, and then sprang back.

The fifth drew attention to the sky where two eagles were circling so high that they were just specks. He leapt far up beyond the eagles, and in coming down, as he passed them plucked a feather from one to show where he had been. His brothers acclaimed him as the winner.

But Biami, the wise old man, stooped down, took up his boomerang and flung it into the sky. It went so far it stayed there and became the new moon. It is always trying to return, but can never come back. It whirls and whirls, and at such speed it becomes the full moon. It can come no further, and has to return. Biami had outdone his sons and remained chief God.

Only a few nights to ninety, this evening I knocked on her door, where a light of welcome always shines for those who know her and love her, and for those who need her whether they know her or not. How many have I met there at any time o' day—men, women and children. A knock on her door is her best surprise, so much does she love people.

There was the same firm quick step and loving greeting, a regal Dame Mary, white-haired and gentle but just as brisk. There was the same little band of poets, writers, artists, friends, but of the third—or fourth—generation, telling their dreams and their schemes, listening to wisdom and knowledge and the ninety years of memories. There was the same tray of cheering tea, brought in by her devoted friend, Miss Crombie.

There was still the most beloved and quoted woman poet of Australia, with many volumes of rarely sensitive and deeply-emotional poetry breathing the very spirit of Australia and its people throughout the pageant of its history.

A great woman is with us still, from "Old Days and Old Ways" into the new—so clear her vision and comprehensions, so keen her perceptions and so resonant her voice and, more than all, so warmly loving her heart to all humanity that joyously and with confidence we can wish her "Many Happy Returns of the Day."

—Ernestine Hill.

I first saw Mary Gilmore—without knowing who she was—at an hotel in Sydney, thirty years ago. Perhaps because I was young and in a wheelchair, she smiled at me—and I thought it was the nicest smile I had ever seen. When, a little later, we were introduced and I learned that she was Mary Gilmore, I knew why I had always loved her poems so much.

Shaking with fright, I finally showed her some of my own literary efforts. She proof-read my endless and over-wordy texts. She re-wrote passages to show me the effective way of saying the thing that I had bungled. She also changed by evaluation of life—though in some things I did not know how right she was until half a life later. In case she did not know that I was grateful, it may please her to learn that in the thirty years since we met, whenever I have written something that I thought was at least a little good, I have thought, "I think Mary Gilmore might like that!"

As perhaps a higher tribute—since I think that this is perhaps the acid test of the impact of a personality—when on several occasions I have been in great trouble, I have thought, "I wish I could talk to Dame Mary!"

Nothing that could hurt a human being was trivial to her. That is why, in my opinion, her best work is the best work produced by any Australian poet. She has the gift of empathy—of the transference of personality.

The problem of capital punishment for crimes of murder was discussed at our table on one of the first nights we dined together. Mary Gilmore made no immediate comment. Then she touched my hand and indicated an old and obviously rather countryfied couple who were entering the room. The old lady's face showed the innocent excitement of a child at the unfamiliar joy of dining out. One guessed that this might be a first holiday in Sydney for them. She was proud and glowing, but her husband showed impatience with her; first by walking ahead of her to the table, then by snapping at her to hurry as she had rather proudly started to read the menu. The joy in the old face turned to near-tears. She chose hastily and without thought and, looking at her ill-tempered husband, an infinite sadness filled her face.

Mary Gilmore said, "You know, someday we may think it the greatest crime—to kill love."

With what little wisdom life has brought me, I would agree with her. She is one of the few persons I have known who perhaps truly value love. It is her own capacity to love that makes her work so beautiful. For her work and for being herself, I hope that she will accept the enduring love and gratitude of one of her countrywomen.

—Dorothy Cottrell.

'RODEO' THEY CALL IT

Quite simply, it's the local sports.
Holdens rub hubs with old four-wheelers;
So do the amsters and their shielas
With bunnies walking country sorts.

Bulsh'd by the lairy spruikers' rorts,
Resentful dills surround the spielers
Whilst, unregarded but by dealers,
Within the ring a horse cavorts.

Buck on, you beaut! I'd give a fiver
To see you smash snakeheaded through
Palings, poons, illywhack and guyver,

And jerk all eyes away to you
Sunfishing, arching like a diver
In fierce great curves against the blue.

J. S. MANIFOLD.

★

FOUR IN A MARCH

Quietly they come, four men and a flag,
Lonely as a beach after storm.
Around them the banners, the floats and the dancers;
The four and their flag—alone.

From the Trades Hall into Russell Street,
The tramp of sixteen thousand feet,
And the trucks, and the slogans, and the bands . . .
Peace to the workers of all lands!
Behind their flag, on which one word alone:

Anarchy.

A flag and four men, they walk along, alone,
What was a mountain has become a stone.

(There was an army once, and it marched behind a dream,
And when the morning came, the dream was fulfilled.
But the army marched on, neither seeing nor hearing,
Until it melted away.)

Quietly, quietly, four men and a flag.
But our flags are many, we have a hope and a song.
The road is not long, let them join our march,
And let us salute them in the name of the dream
Which Sacco dreamt.

DAVID MARTIN.

Don McLeod

THE NORTH WEST—

BACK-GROUND TO A BOOK •

Australians can look with tremendous pride at the rapid growth and development achieved since the first faltering steps of the struggling penal settlement at "Botany Bay."

Today we take for granted the continued expansion and broadening of the base of industrial development which is proceeding in geometrical progression. Few people stop to think back and see the source of this rapid advance.

During the early pioneering days the accumulation of the substantial sums of capital required to initiate and establish secondary industry was made possible only by the complete and utter exploitation of the indigenous Aboriginal labor, and the Aboriginals' land.

Proud and dignified as these people were, they could only suffer in silence as league by league the fortune hunters penetrated deeper into the untapped fertile flats and plains, to spread over wider areas their rapidly increasing flocks and herds.

As news of the apparently boundless areas available for settlement filtered towards the coastal settlements, more and more pioneers, bent on establishing flourishing pastoral properties on the hunting grounds of the friendly and defenceless native peoples, joined this movement.

Unused to commercial bargaining in any form, their property rights ignored by all, unwilling to leave their tribal and ceremonial preserves, the native peoples fell early victims to this ceaseless, everwidening scramble for pastoral wealth.

Unpaid and often unfed, whole clans were taken over by the settlers who, if they felt inclined, despoiled and exhausted both the lands and the people, without compensation.

To justify this callous and unfair behavior, quite early in the settlement of Australia the policy of slandering the Aboriginal owners and establishing their inferior status in order to continue with the policy of rape and murder, where it was felt necessary, was adopted. In pursuit of this policy, both the pastoralists and their representatives in the newly formed parliaments met on common ground.

It is almost beyond belief that the extinction of the great majority of such a splendid people as the Aboriginals could have been accomplished at such a rapid rate, and yet have been, to a large extent, unnoticed by the majority of the Australian people.

It is beyond doubt that the success of the consistent campaign of disparagement and degradation has been the root cause of this lack of concern.

Without thought, people in Australia have accepted the view that, being inferior in some unexplained way, the Aboriginals really have no right to embarrass us by their continued presence; however some use may well be made of what capacity they have in the pastoral industry in the frontier provinces as they painlessly die away.

It will be a shocking surprise to those who have given no thought to these matters to be confronted by Mr. F. B. Vickers' **The Mirage** (Australasian Book Society, 18/6 and 12/6).

An authentic picture is presented by this book, which deals firstly with the problem of the remnant of the tribalised people of the Pilbara district in North Western Australia, and their conditions of employment in the pastoral industry of that area. It then follows the struggle of Freddie Adams, the half-caste, in his vain search for justice and security.

Although there may be some question of the authentic drawing of the character of Freddie's father, Adams the overseer, with his superstitous weakness towards Freddie, it is allowable licence and it makes possible one explanation of the frequent instances in which pastoralists and their employees father half-caste children whose existence they then ignore.

It will come as a shock to many to be brought face to face so intimately with the problems of two such forlorn pieces of human wreckage as Freddie Adams and his wife Nona, castaways on the sea of life. We come to realise just how hopeless is the future of all the Freddies and Nonas, who, but for a fortunate accident of birth, might have been you or me.

It is not through any lack of ability, but merely because of the utter indifference of the majority of the population that Aboriginals and other colored people are allowed to remain the victims of unscrupulous, greedy whites.

The Mirage should serve a very useful purpose in bringing home to a wide section of readers how terrible is the plight of the underprivileged victims of our economic system, which pays dividends to greed while the untrained, forgotten minority is ignored—merely because their forebears were too dignified to protest at our uncivilised habits and we as a people were unmindful of their sufferings.

Vickers' book will be a valuable contribution which will enable many people throughout Australia to understand that they have a duty towards this unhappy minority; while they continue to exist in squalor and despair, their very existence is a threat to the freedom of us all.

It only needs to be added that between 1889 and 1897 the Western Australian Aboriginals had, by virtue of the 70th Section of the Constitution, the right to one per cent. of the gross revenue of the State, which would now amount to about £400,000 a year.

This obligation of the State was unobtrusively withdrawn in 1897, and the Aboriginals were enslaved in the name of "the unanimous desire of the people of the Colony." No opportunity was ever given to the people of Western Australia to express their views on this vital issue.

Mr. Vickers' book will help to awaken in the people of Australia the constant danger that lies in such injustices and the inevitable consequences which are bound to follow from them if ignored.

Mr. Don McLeod has achieved recognition throughout Australia as the founder and leader of the first mining and cattle station co-operative run successfully and entirely by Aboriginals.

Swag

Erich Kleiber and Bruno Walter, incontestably Germany's greatest living conductors, are now barred from conducting in Western Germany because they work in East Germany. This was reported recently by the London **Observer**, which says that the Bonn Government has also refused to allow a West German film company to co-operate with an East German film company to make a joint film of Thomas Mann's classic novel, **Buddenbrooks**. The West German fusillade of hate against Mann, the Grand Old Man of German letters (80 on June 6), has reached a new height since he undertook to deliver the same address at the two great Schiller anniversary celebrations this year, at Stuttgart (West Germany) and Weimar (East Germany). "This hysterical and vicious spite," says the **Observer** article, is because "a world-famous man of letters refuses to boycott one part of his divided country in favor of another." Mann is at present working on a book on Schiller.

★

Brisbane Realist Writer's Group has run another successful class on the short-story. Discussions were led by Jim Henderson, Arthur Davies, Jack Penberthy and John Manifold. Stories by Boris Polevoi, Richard Garnett, Howard Fast and members of the group were analysed and discussed. Preparations are afoot for a well-planned Lawson Night in Brisbane to be followed by a birthday party for Dame Mary Gilmore—in her absence, alas! Preliminary discussions are being held in Brisbane for the formation of an amateur musicians' body on similar lines to the R.W.G.

★

The Sydney Realist Writers' Group had one of its best meetings for the year recently, when Joan Clarke and John Meredith read two scenes from their recently concluded musical play about the Wild Colonial Boy. All those present felt that this is a play that is going to be "something out of the box."

★

Australian writers represented in the recent collection of Australian short stories published in Poland are: Marcus Clark, Price Warung, Joseph Furphy, Henry Lawson, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Vance Palmer, Gavin Casey, Alan Marshall, Frank Hardy, Allyn Vaisey, Mona Brand, John Morrison, Judah Waten, Frank Dalby Davison, Walter Kaufmann and Eric Lambert. Polish publishers are anxious for short stories and novels suitable for translation and dealing with Australian life. MSS. and enquiries to Mr. Stan Robe, 74 Leopold Street, South Yarra, Victoria.

Sydney dramatist Mona Brand, who has just finished a new play with an Australian theme, has heard that her play "Strangers in the Land" has been presented at the Ermalova Theatre in Moscow. This play has now been performed in Australia, Britain, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. Preparations for presenting it have also been taken in Poland and Hungary.

★

Dymphna Cusack's new novel, **The Sun in Exile**, published in England in June, has received a Book Society recommendation, state London reports.

★

The British Government has refused an application by Professor C. Day Lewis, Mrs. Naomi Mitchison and Sir Herbert Read for the provision of visas to foreign writers for an International Conference, planned for Oxford this (English) spring. The Conference was under the sponsorship of the Authors' World Peace Appeal, which is backed by the greatest names in British letters. They include James Aldridge, Alexander Baron, Edmund Blunden, Christopher Fry, Laurence Housman, Marganita Laski, Compton Mackenzie, Andre Maurois, Cecil Roberts, Siegfried Sassoon, Alexander Werth and many dozens more.

★

"One of the questions on the agenda of our proposed conference," says a statement of the A.W.P.A., "was this: How can a writer get past the barriers of misunderstanding and distrust which obscure the human realities of other countries? The answer is that while the situation stands where it is now, he cannot even get into Britain to discuss the question." Other suggested conference themes included: What can writers do, through their writing to help create the conditions for peace? What sort of writing is conducive to peaceful thinking? Can we reconcile the writer's vocation to speak the truth as he sees it with a condemnation of writing liable to sharpen existing dangers and hatred? The technical problems facing the imaginative writer who wants his writing to serve the cause of peace.

★

In March, the first Interstate conference of the Fellowships of Australian Writers was held in Sydney, delegates meeting from Western Australia, Victoria, N.S.W. and Canberra to discuss such subjects as censorship, the Commonwealth Literary Fund, literary prizes and the establishment of the Commonwealth Council of the Fellowships. Conference expressed strong opposition to the passage of the amendments to the N.S.W. Obscene and Indecent Publications Act and, subject to endorsement of the various Fellowships, decided to establish the Henry Lawson Prize for Literature to be awarded annually.

★

"Your book was published last month by the Ogonyok publishers," writes Boris Polevoi, member of the Secretariat of the Union of Soviet Writers, to Frank Hardy in a recent letter. "I read it before I left for England. The story I liked best was 'The Load of Wood.' It is a little gem. How the devil do you manage to pack so much dynamic action into so few pages, and to create so many live characters in a story which has no plot to speak of? The book was put out in 150,000 copies. Not a bad edition, don't you think? But our readers know a good book when they see one, and I was unable to find a single copy in any of our Moscow bookshops, so I had to send you mine." The book contains short stories, articles and an extract from the forthcoming autobiography, **The Hard Way.**

Realist Writers in Brisbane have set up a mobile team to entertain at union meetings, comprising a reader (for prose), reciter/singer (for verse) and guitarist-handyman. The movement in favor of "Brighter Union Meetings" has practically transformed Brisbane Trades Hall already. John Manifold has sung to the B.W.I.U. and the Painters; a New Theatre troupe has been the rounds; films are being shown, particularly by the Waterside Workers; and the A.M.I.E.U. has produced startling talent from its own ranks. The movement is now extending to railway unions at Ipswich.

★

Over forty thousand Melbourne people visited the astoundingly successful Moomba Australian Book Fair held in the Melbourne Town Hall in March. Every Australian book in print was on sale, and in addition there was an exhibition of rare books, manuscripts, paintings and photographs of authors and similar items. Over 2,500 books were sold for £900, one-third of them being children's books, and poetry and fiction filling the next category. Special praise for their work associated with the fair, which lasted three and a half days, should go to Mrs. Lina Bryans, who planned the imaginative display and lay-out of the fair; Miss Jean Campbell, Chairman, Fellowship of Australian Writers (Melbourne); Dr. Andrew Fabinyi, of Cheshires; Dr. W. McRae Russell, President, Australian Literature Society; Miss Dot Jones; Mr. J. K. Moir, and the Melbourne City Council, which made many facilities available. The fair was organised by a committee including the Fellowship of Australian Writers, P.E.N., Bread and Cheese Club, the Australian Literature Society, Melbourne Writers' Club, Meet Your Writers, Authors Anonymous, the Henry Lawson Society, the Poetry Lovers' Society, and the Realist Writers' Society. Since the Fair these organisations have agreed to keep the Committee together, with the prospect of another book fair, or cultural activities associated with the Olympic Games, in mind.

★

Moomba Book Fair's success was followed by a successful one week Australian book fair at Williamstown (Vic.), early in June. Speakers at the opening of the Fair were Jean Campbell and Bill Wannan, and good sales of Australian books were reported.

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DONATIONS: In one swoop our printing costs have increased by nearly 50 per cent., which makes our position extremely precarious. We are fighting back by increasing this printing to 2,500 copies and by using better paper. This will be coupled with a new sales drive, particularly among trade unionists. Particular credit is due to writers and supporters in Queensland and N.S.W. for the winning of new subscribers, increased bulk orders and lots of good ideas. Help us to keep going by swelling the list of subscribers and donors! We acknowledge with many thanks: V.P. £2/2/-, F.R. 15/-, J.M.D. 15/-, N.O. 15/-, L.F. 10/-, J.G. 5/-, A.B. 5/-, N.C. 5/-, S.W. 5/-, E.W. 5/-, B.J.D. 5/-, C.H. 5/-, S.B. 5/-, Anon. 2/-.

★

"Australia's a big country," as Henry Lawson said, and it can well afford to support its three present literary magazines. No one with the interests of our literature at heart should be without **Meanjin** (Editor: C. B. Christesen), subscription 30/- yearly to the Editor at Melbourne University; and **Southerly** (Editor: R. G. Howarth), subscription £1/1/- from Angus and Robertson's Publications Department, 89 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

A series of old bush songs and modern work songs in the Australian tradition is being put out by the famous "Heathcote Bushwhackers" of Sydney, carefully duplicated, with embellishments, and selling at 3d. each or 2/- a dozen (2/6 posted). Songs issued to date are "The Rabbiter's Song," "The Old Bark Hut," "The Old Man Kangaroo," "Jim Jones at Botany Bay," "Hungry Jim the Miner," "Wally the Weatherman," and "Ho! Give a Fair Go," a shanty by Merv. Lilley. Obtainable from John Meredith, 5 Henry Street, Lewisham, N.S.W., singly or together in an attractive binding.

★

Our epigram competition was a disappointment. No-one quite hit the right satiric, pithy line. What we were thinking of was something like Ross Tracie's epigram in **Overland** No. 1, or Humbert Wolfe's:

You cannot hope to bribe or twist
—Thank God!—the British journalist;
But seeing what the man will do
Unbribed, there's no occasion to.

Or Bartlett Adamson's:

So long as one least coolie lies,
And in an Asian gutter dies,
There cannot be, beneath the sun,
Security for anyone.

Or his:

LABOR RENEGADE

He claims to be a democrat,
And all of us, his betters,
Are willing to concede him that—
Except the first five letters.

Although none of the entries, in the opinion of the three judges, are good enough to print, the prize has been awarded to Jack Ivanoff, of Brisbane, for the best effort. We are still anxious to get epigrams from contributors.

★

When poet W. Flexmore Hudson visited Perth recently, his duties as coach of the Adelaide Scotch College Eight kept him busy on the Swan. However at short notice President Bert Vickers and members of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (W.A. Section) were able to meet the poet at Tom Collins House on May 6 for an exchange of ideas and a reading of some of Flexmore Hudson's work.

★

Two unfortunate printing errors occurred in Ted Harrington's verse in the last **Overland**. On page 6, replace line 5 of "Insomnia" with "With nothing to think of or hear or see," and the middle line of verse 5 of "Nemesis" should read ". . . for I know God would not hear."

★

New President of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (Sydney) is Gavin Casey, and Secretary is Zoe O'Leary. The Fellowship has been active in campaigning against certain clauses of the N.S.W. Obscenity Bill.

★

NOTABLE BIRTHDAYS: Aeneas Gunn (June 5), Frank Dalby Davison (June 23), Dame Mary Gilmore (August 16), Marjorie Barnard (August 16), Nettie Palmer (August 18), Eleanor Dark (August 26), Vance Palmer (August 28), Will Lawson (September 2), Walter Murdoch (September 17), Ion Idriess (September 20), Frederick Macartney (September 27). We also remember: Victor Daley's birth (September 5, 1858), Joseph Furphy's birth (September 26, 1843) and his death (September 13, 1912), Francis Adams' birth (September 27, 1862), and his death (September 4, 1893), A. G. Stephens' birth (August 28, 1865), Henry Lawson's birth (June 17, 1867) and his death (September 2, 1922), Bernard O'Dowd's death (September 1, 1953), and Miles Franklin's death (September 19, 1954).

Swag

Novelist Eric Lambert, his wife Joyce, and poetess Nell Old left Australia recently for travels abroad, during which they have been asked by writers' groups to attend the World Peace Assembly at Helsinki. Walter Kaufmann, from Sydney, is to attend the World Youth Festival in Warsaw in August, as is Dick Diamond, of Melbourne, author of "Reedy River," and his wife, Lil. Vance Palmer, recently termed "the elder statesman of Australian letters" by Melbourne **Age** critic Alan Nicholls, sailed on May 19 to attend the Helsinki Peace Assembly. Before sailing he stated that since the war he had felt that a writer should cultivate his own garden, but now realised this was "treachery to the present and the future." Mr. Palmer said he was lending his support to those who were determined to reject the "diabolical fantasy" that war is inevitable.

★

In **Overland** No. 2 we reported that only 516 books were published in Australia in 1953, compared with a peak of 1228 in 1946. Figures for 1954, just released by the Commonwealth Librarian, Mr. H. L. White, show that 538 books were published. Works of imaginative literature fell from 106 to 83; Australian fiction fell from 42 to 28, and Australian poetry from 34 to 23. No works of drama were published. In Britain last year published books reached an all-time record at 19,188 titles.

★

The centenary of the great South African writer and humanist, Olive Schreiner, has been widely celebrated this year. In Britain exhibitions, radio talks and articles have marked the occasion, as well as the publication of a biography and the republication of **The Story of an African Farm.**

★

Walter Stone, editor of **Biblionews**, is following his **Lawson Bulletin Checklist**, reviewed in our last issue, with a full scale bibliography of the books and writings of Joseph Furphy. Through extensive annotations the story of that writer's emergence from obscurity is told. Walter Stone believes that there is a great amount of bibliographical research being carried out in Australia and will continue the projected "Studies in Australian Bibliography." No. 3 will deal with John Shaw Neilson, and is being compiled by Hugh Anderson. Anyone with checklists which may be of general interest should contact Walter Stone at 64 Young Street, Cremorne, N.S.W. Short lists of the work of writers of small output should not be disregarded as it may be possible to include them in a volume given over to a number of writers.

★

Mick Lawson, of the Coalfields Writers' Group, carried off first prizes in the Short Story and the Sketch sections of the Newcastle May Day literary competitions, and took minor prizes in the Short Story and Poetry sections as well. First prize in the poetry section went to Jock Graham.

★

A great diversity of subjects, ranging from nineteenth century colonial society to the S.E.A.T.O. Defence Treaty, will be discussed at the History Section of the Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, to be held at Melbourne University between August 18-August 24. Further details from the Melbourne University History School.

Among Australian cultural figures who have signed the appeal against preparations for atomic war, now being circulated throughout the world, are Vance Palmer, Nettie Palmer, Dame Mary Gilmore, Frank Dalby Davison, Clem Christesen, Gavin Casey, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Sir Lewis Casson, Professor Walter Murdoch, Professor Ian Maxwell, Leonard Mann, Alan Marshall, Arthur Boyd, Katharine Susannah Prichard. A recent Sydney showing of the Japanese film "Children of Hiroshima," sponsored by Gavin Casey, was attended by 90 people. After the film a large number signed the appeal.

★

It is understood that the appeal has not yet been fully circulated among literary and art circles in Australia. The Appeal reads: "To-day, certain governments are preparing to let loose atomic war. They are trying to make the peoples accept it as inevitable. The use of atomic weapons would result in a war of extermination. We declare that any government that lets loose atomic war will forfeit the trust of its people and find itself condemned by every people of the world. Now and in the future, we shall oppose those who organise atomic war. We demand the destruction of all stocks of atomic weapons wherever they may be and the immediate stopping of their manufacture."

★

Internationally famous persons who have signed the appeal include: Arnold Zweig, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Aragon, Pablo Picasso, David Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, Anna Seghers, Edward Herriot and Vercors.

★

Shortly before they recently died, artists Max Meldrum and "Jimmy" Minogue also signed the appeal. Their deaths will be widely mourned; they both contributed with all their strength to Australian cultural life, as did Brian Vrepont and Mollie Skinner, who also died recently.

★

In a recent issue of the **West Australian** Henrietta Drake-Brockman and Olive Pell pay tribute to Mollie Skinner, who was 78 when she died. "Mollie Skinner was an Australian with a great heart," wrote Henrietta Drake-Brockman, "and she has left her own undaunted courage and cheerfulness in the face of discouragement, lack of due recognition and funds, near-blindness and advancing age, as an undying inspiration to those who value the art of writing." Mollie Skinner is perhaps best known as collaborator with D. H. Lawrence in the writing of **The Boy in the Bush.**

★

A limited number of prints of Herbert McClintock's fine study of Dame Mary Gilmore, on the cover of this issue, printed on good paper and signed by the artist, are available at 7/6 each. Proceeds to this magazine.

★

"The organisation of a Congress for coexistence of literature and the arts in which writers and artists of all shades of opinion should take part" was one of the practical recommendations of the Cultural Commission of the recent Helsinki Peace Assembly. The Commission, which included Vance Palmer and Eric Lambert, stated that the proposed Congress "would have as its main aim the exchange of different points of view on the nature and purpose of art and the study of different systems of organising the publication and distribution of works of art."

Death of a Unionist

Frank Hardy

Even when the strike started, thoughts of the baby growing in her remained uppermost in Mary Skinnider's mind. She dreaded the discomfort of the last three weeks of carrying and the confinement, but the glow of expectation, the dream of holding her baby in her arms, overshadowed every other consideration—except Bill's stubborn suggestion that if the baby was another boy they should give it to Mick and Norma Gerran.

He had said in bed one night as calm as you like: "If it's a boy we ought to give it to Mick and Norma. They love kids and can never have any. And we've got three boys . . ."

Mary hadn't known what on earth to say. She knew Bill wouldn't joke about a thing like that. She knew how upset Norma and Mick were since the Doctor said they could never have a child, but —give her baby away!

"But, Bill, I couldn't. I just couldn't . . . If you loved children . . . you . . ."

Sensing her deep concern, he felt for her hand and said: "Struth, Shorty, I love kids, you know that. You don't understand."

Yes, he loved his children, she knew that and, in his own undemonstrative way, was a good father to them.

"Mick and Norma," he continued. "They love kids, too. You know what Mick said to me the other night? He said: 'It's breaking Norma's heart, she's pining away and our life has lost its spark'."

She knew what lay behind his, to her, unreal and inhuman request: his mateship with Mick. Sometimes she wondered did Mick, in a different way, mean more to Bill than she did.

"I couldn't do it, Bill. I couldn't do it. You don't know what you are asking."

Stubbornly he evaded the definite finality of her attitude. "If it's a girl, I want to keep it, too, but I thought, like and all that, if it was another boy . . ." He chuckled uncomfortably. "Maybe it will be a girl and then there'll be no problem."

Mary began to pray that the baby would be a girl, but deep in her heart she knew it would make no difference. Boy or girl, it was her baby, hers, and on one could have it, no one—not even Mick and Norma!

★

Starting-price bookmakers in Wollongong and Port Kembla found business quiet last Melbourne Cup Day, for that morning the wharf strike began. Many a wharfie in the district would normally invest a few shillings or a few pounds on Cup Day, but this year few did so, because a man didn't know when his next pay might come. Workers in other industries and even some small business people began to count their savings, for this industrial district, dominated by the B.H.P., had seen many long and bitter strike struggles in its time.

News of the strike fell softly into the Skinnider household. There was no argument and little discussion about it. Yet Bill wouldn't have been surprised had Mary complained, for a woman can be very nervy in the last weeks with a baby alive in her, and others kids to look after. Bill and Tim were a handful, goodness knows; not to mention "Tiger Kelly," Pat, the youngest, aged two and a half. At least he had expected her to discuss the likely financial difficulties.

Yet she had made no comment. They had discussed the issues with Mick and Norma and decided the strike was just and unavoidable, so he presumed Mary accepted it because she was convinced it must be won. The argument about his idea of giving the baby to Mick and Norma had faded from his mind, or rather he had decided to let the matter rest until the baby was born and Mary home from hospital—then if it was a girl, no argument was necessary.

Bill Skinnider did not realise that Mary was brooding over his suggestion about the baby, that she was sullen and resentful about it.

"Don't worry, Shorty," he said to her on the afternoon the strike began. "I've got twenty-five quid in the bank. We'll get by. I'm going down to the pub to see if Mick's there and I won't spend much."

Mick was at the pub with a few of the boys when Eddie got there.

"Have a drink," Mick said. He was a lean, freckled man, in his thirties.

"Didn't expect to get into a big school," Bill replied. "The strike . . ."

"Ar, come on," Mick said with a sudden chuckle entering his voice and a twinkle in his eye which was his main mannerism. "Might as well have a few each day early in the piece as have a pony a day for a month. It's two bob in and I'm in the chair."

"You've got my arm up me back," Bill capitulated, passing over two shillings.

Bill Skinnider and Mick Gerran had been in Australia nine years now and had lost their Scotch accent except for that clipped suggestion of gutturalness that falls pleasantly on the Australian ear.

Talk was of the Melbourne Cup, then of the strike. A suggestion of an argument developed about whether Rising Fast was the best horse since Phar Lap. Bill didn't gamble much, fishing was his game; but he had thought of backing the Cup favourite and now felt a slight pang of gambler's regret. He sipped his beer on the fringe of the school, did not enter the conversation—he rarely had much to say except when alone with his wife or with Mick. The others talked about the ship owners and the Government, about the method of recruiting labor for the waterfront around which the strike nominally revolved, about the report given to the mass meeting that morning by Bill Harkness, Secretary of the Wollongong-Kembla Branch of the Union.

"It's a plot to smash the Union like in New Zealand, but this is not New Zealand," Stan Beeton, a short, stockily-built man said. "It's like Billy Harkness said, the ship owners and the Menzies Government got their heads together to try to smash the Union."

"They're trying to bring back the 'bull system' and have men scramblin' for a job, pleadin' with the 'bulls' to earn a quid, linin' up like cattle to be picked out for the slaughter," Long Tommy Smith said, his adam's apple bobbing up and down as it did when he talked excitedly.

"The A.C.T.U. have endorsed the strike," someone else said. "We're not alone this time."

"Bloody near time they backed something," Mick said. "Every other Union in the shipping industry, even the skippers and mates, have the right to recruit their own members, how can Menzies and Holt take it from us? The A.C.T.U. had to back us."

"The boys seem solid," Mick said. "There'll be no scabs."

"Scabs went out of fashion in this Union in 1928," Long Tommy snapped, with a hint of resentment that a "foreigner" should suggest the remotest possibility of Australian wharfies scabbing.

"What about 1938 in the Pig Iron dispute?" Mick replied, grinning mischievously.

"They were the last four and we did a bit of sign-writing in their honor," Long Tommy came back. He was referring to the fact that the names of the four scabs in the 1938 "Pig Iron" dispute are still written large on the Southern breakwater.

"How long do you reckon she'll last, Bill?" Mick asked, changing the subject.

Bill pondered as he always did before speaking. "Might be a long one, I think. They've set up committees for propaganda, entertainment, relief, and so on. They wouldn't do that for nothing. Might be a long strike, if you ask me."

The closest of friends since childhood, in Australia they soon realised they were more than that; they were mates. They'd worked in the shipyards on the Clyde as had their fathers and grandfathers. Yet they were daring lads and so, when conscripted into the Army early in the war, they had savored the adventure of it. They'd got off Greece somehow with the remnants of their unit only to be sunk in the Mediterranean not far off shore. After a desperate time in the water Mick was rescued and taken back to Scotland, and Bill got ashore in Greece and fought with the guerillas till the end of the war.

The end of the war sent them back to the Clyde, but life there seemed tame and so they went to sea—as firemen on a coal burning freighter bound for Sydney town. Working conditions on the English ship were harsh, so they paid off and joined the Australian Seamen's Union. For a year they wielded the banjo in more hospitable stokeholds with those gusty, matey men, the Australian coastal seamen. Romance found each of them and this meant leaving the sea. Both the girls were Wollongong locals and firm friends, so Wollongong, or rather Port Kembla, became the home town of the two roving lads from the Clyde.

There were two great jokes amongst them and their wives. The first concerned Mick's nationality; he was actually an Irishman born in Scotland and for some perverse reason would, when a little tight at a small family Saturday night party, sing "Kevin Barry" and "The Irish Soldier Boy" to which Bill would respond with "Roaming in the Gloaming" and "A Man's a Man for all that." The other concerned children and this was really not a joke. Two years had passed since Mick and Norma had consulted the doctor. She could never have a child, he told them after a careful examination. They all treated it as a joke on the surface ("You're gettin' old, me son," Bill used to say to Mick) and as a joke had begun Mick's request that the fourth child of Bill's and Mary's should be adopted by him. But Bill couldn't treat a thing like that as a joke so he had talked it over with Mary.

When on the following day he had told Mick about his conversation with Mary, Mick had exclaimed: "Hey, listen mate. I was only jokin', fair dinkum, I was. We'd give anything to have a kid to call our own, but we don't expect . . ."

He observed the intense glow of sincere feeling in Bill's eyes.

Embarrassed Mick said: "Get out, you silly old bastard."

★

Less than a hundred yards off the headland is Stony Island—and there's good fishing there. Just beyond it is Rabbit Island, bigger, perhaps fifty yards by twenty—and there's good fishing there. Beyond Rabbit Island again lies a jagged rock jutting out of the treacherous sea called Gap Island —and there is the best fishing in the whole district. You can get a chaff bag full of bream in a couple of hours, but no one ever fishes there these days. It's too dangerous; there have been tragedies at holiday times when visiting fishermen venture onto the rock.

Keen and all as he was on fishing, Bill Skinnider had never even contemplated fishing off Gap Island —until he was put in charge of fishing operations for the Strike Welfare Committee.

During the first week of the strike, the Government and employers were even more than usually busy in their efforts to break the men's determination; the press and radio more than usually biassed against the strikers—but to no avail.

Wharf laborers stood on street corners handing out leaflets; men, many of whom had never before made a speech, spoke daily at factory gates; car loads went bush to put the Union's case to the farmers; large deputations waited on newspaper proprietors, politicians and radio commentators. The various committees met daily in all ports. Unity was reflected in forthright support in Parliament from Labor Party politicians. Eddie Ward produced at Canberra a letter which had fallen into the hands of the Union proving conclusively that the attack of the Government had been planned months before by the overseas shipping monopolies.

These matters interested Bill Skinnider—but above all he was interested in fish. He had volunteered his prawn net and services as a prawner at the meeting, but Bill Harkness had suggested he loan the net and take charge of the fishing. Harkness himself was an expert bream fisherman and knew Bill's reputation as the best fisherman in the district. Mick Gerran was put in charge of the rabbiting team.

There were two hundred families to be fed in the Kembla area alone and there could be no strike pay. There were something like twenty-five thousand members of the Waterside Workers' Federation in Australia and even two pounds a week for each member would cost £50,000—and where would a trade union get that kind of money?

So it meant "biting" shopkeepers, it meant collection lists and raffles, fishing and rabbiting.

"I'd rather be in the team of speakers for the Propaganda Committee going round the factories," Bill had said to Mick as they walked home. "Fishing's my hobby; it's a pleasure for me, not a job. I'd rather . . ."

Mick chuckled that rather villainous chuckle of his. "What? You on the soap box? Turn it up!"

They had stood on the corner yarning then, as they drifted off, Mick turned as a mate will at time of parting to say some unneeded thing as though clinging to his friend's nearness. "How's the missus," he shouted. He knew how she was; he'd seen her the night before.

"Oh, she's OK." Bill came back to Mick's side. "Listen, about the baby . . ."

"Ah, forget it, mate . . ."

After the strike had been going eight days they met at the Strike Committee's headquarters, a little hall on the outskirts of Port Kembla, instead of the pub.

"We only got three dozen rabbits," Mick said disconsolately. "A lot of families went without. The strike is beginning to hit and nearly everyone is looking for relief . . ."

"Trust the bloody fish to be off the bite," Bill replied. "We only got a few and they didn't hit the deck. This relief work is very important to the strike. There must be fish for all tomorrow, as they say in the classics."

After a pause, he concluded. "We're going out on Gap Island in the morning."

"Don't be a bloody fool!" Mick protested.

"But we'll get a chaff bag full of bream there in the morning—there'll be fresh fish for all tomorrow!"

"What, do you want to commit suicide, yer dope."

Once he'd made up his mind Bill Skinnider was a difficult man to argue with, Mick Gerran knew that, but he began arguing this time until they were interrupted by the entry of Bill Harkness, who'd just returned from a strike conference in Sydney.

The men in the hall, including Bill and Mick, clustered around their leader. A trade union worker all his life, Harkness was a tall man. He'd been elected because he was, at one and the same time, a trained Communist and "one of the boys." You might get a man to run a Union office better than Billy, but you wouldn't get a better organiser or a more fair-dinkum fellow. Standing there, tieless and coatless, he was one of them. He told them excitedly about news of united action coming in from all ports. There were serious matters to discuss and they discussed them gravely. The strike had emptied the pockets of every man present, including Harkness, for the wages of officials of the Waterside Workers' Federation cease with those of the rank and file when a strike starts—but Australian workers find humor in any situation.

So Bill Harkness began telling a yarn. That morning, he told them, two thousand wharfies had marched through the streets of Sydney to the offices of the Daily Telegraph to demand the withdrawal of slanderous statements made against the Union in its columns.

"They occupied the whole building, held meetings in the offices and printery, explained their case quietly to every one they met," Harkness concluded. "There were coppers everywhere, needless to say. The coppers didn't know what to do so at last a few of them grabbed a big bloke and tried to throw him out. This bloke put up a terrific fight and kept saying: 'You can't throw me out of here!' Of course, they threw him out, right enough. He got up, dusted his clothes and went to walk back into the building. 'You can't put me out of here!' he said again. 'Why can't we?' a big detective asked him. 'Because I've been workin' here for twenty years!' "

At the corner near Bill Skinnider's house, Mick Gerran tried to produce some new arguments that might convince his mate not to fish off Gap Island, but he felt helpless in the face of his mate's stubbornness.

As they parted, Bill felt the need to shout to his mate. "Hey Mick," he called. "Save me the tenderest pair of rabbits you get tomorrow."

"I will if you'll save me the biggest bream you catch off the Gap."

"That's a deal. See you at the strike centre, tomorrow afternoon."

Then Mick called Bill back, "Listen mate," he said urgently. "Forget about Gap Island. You . . ."

But Bill was adamant. "There's more fish off Gap Island than anywhere else. The men who marched on the Telegraph took the risk of arrest and a kicking off the police, didn't they? Well, it's up to me to take risks too."

Mick shrugged. How could you argue against such a man? But he was no sooner home than he told Norma about it. "Do you think it would do any good if you saw Mary?"

Before the evening meal, Bill Skinnider went to the inlet where his boat was moored to make a last minute check up. He and Mary had done some scrimping and saving to get the boat and now it was his proudest possession.

Mick's arguments had shaken Bill more than he admitted. There was a risk involved, more risk than a married man with three young kids had a right to take perhaps. But he thought of the men and women at the strike centre seeking relief.

It had been difficult to get three men to go to the Gap with him, he mused. Stan Beeton had agreed readily enough, but Long Tommy had laughed and said: "I'll fish in the boat near the Island. I'm no hero," and Des had exclaimed: "To Gap Island, you're crazy."

"Get a chaff bag full of bream there. There's two hundred families to be fed."

"Jees, I'd be in it, Bill, but Gap Island . . ."

"Well, I'll tell you what. You're a handy man with a boat. You know how hard it is to land a man there. You land me and Stan on the Island and you and Long Tommy can fish from the boat in the gap near Rabbit Island."

"Good, I'll be in it, Bill."

"We meet at the boat at four o'clock in the morning."

Norma had been and gone before Bill got back to the house and, preoccupied with his thoughts, he didn't notice Mary's tension during their meal.

After tea, he sat in the living room and read the strike news in the Maritime Worker and the Tribune. When he had finished he passed the papers to Mary who sat at the other side of the table knitting for the baby.

"There's strike news in those papers," he said pointing out the articles. "Would you like to read it?"

Mary read the articles distractedly. But the strike had been banished from her mind by the news Norma had brought; even her resentment against Bill about the baby was forgotten.

"We're going fishing again in the morning for the strike," he said. "I'll set the alarm."

"You wouldn't go off Gap Island, would you, Bill?"

He had decided not to tell her. "Gap Island?" he evaded. "How do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, Bill. Don't do it, Bill."

"But, Shorty, there's people short of money. There's kids to be fed. You should have seen the people at the strike centre. People you know."

"People I know," she repeated, close to hysteria. "What about me? What about the kids. What about the baby in me you want to give away?"

She flinched at her own words. He came round the table to her. He put his left arm gently round her shoulder and his right hand right round her left breast. "Don't make it any harder for me, Shorty. I'm scared, but I can't go back on my word now."

She clung to him weeping. Knowing his stubborn nature, she sought desperately for an argument to shatter it for once.

"Bill, if you don't go to the Gap, Norma and Mick can have the baby if it's a boy. There you are! They can have it, if you promise not to go on Gap Island tomorrow!"

"Don't put it that way to me, Shorty, for God's sake," he said. And they kissed, her tears salty on his lips.

When the alarm clock rang stridently, Mary stirred; she slept lightly now with the baby active in her. As she came slowly to wakefulness, she thought: somehow I must stop him.

She heard him get up in the darkness, dress and prepare a light breakfast.

"Daddy," she heard little Pat call.

"Yes, son."

"Pat wants liddlest fish . . ."

"Yes, young Tiger Kelly, you can have the littlest, all for yourself. But you must go back to sleep. It's still night time."

"And I want the second littlest fish," Mary heard Tim say.

"Yes, Tim you can have the second littlest."

"And I want the third littlest," Bill junior called to his father.

"All right son, but I'm fishing for the strike; everyone must get some fish."

"Yes, Dad, we know," she heard Tim reply. "But we only want the very little ones."

Before Bill left the house, he came to Mary's bedside. She switched on the bed lamp and blinked at its beam, pertly snubbing her nose. She saw him there dressed in rubber thigh boots, a big-collared leather jacket with lambswool lining and his old green fishing hat, tall and strong, and she felt the need of him then more than ever before.

Impetuously she reached out, grasped his hand and said urgently: "Don't fish off Gap Island! Please Bill, for me, say you won't fish off the Gap!"

"Don't worry, Shorty," he said, self-possession strong in him again. "We'll be right. See you for tea tonight."

All the fishermen arrived at four o'clock sharp and soon the boat was pushed out in the darkness.

They went out through the gap past Stony Island and, skirting Rabbit Island, came alongside Gap Island.

"There's a strong undertow," Long Tommy Smith said. "I still think no one should go onto the Gap."

Bill Skinnider snapped in stubbornly, shouting: "There's a strike on, yer know. Listen, Des, I'll take her in and drop Stan. Then you take her in and drop me. Right?"

He took Tom Smith's oar and manoeuvred the boat into the tides that hit the island in a kind of pincer movement, came alongside and Stan Beeton jumped clear.

Then Des took the oar from Bill and brought her in again. First time the tide took him off side so he swung her again and Bill jumped clear onto the rock island, carrying his own and Stan's rod and gear, plus the chaff bag. With difficulty, Des cleared her and he and Tommy rowed away out of sight to fish from the boat in the gap.

"Watch those sudden waves from the swell," Des shouted as they went.

While Bill Skinnider and Stan Beeton fished from Gap Island the sea revealed treachery; occasionally it threw up a savage wave swamping them with foaming water. Stan climbed higher onto the craggy, slimy rocks after the second wave and shouted above the roar of the sea: "Come up here. You'll get washed off."

But Bill was landing big bream as quick as he could bait the line and his fisherman's soul was stirred.

By sunrise they had a quarter of a chaff bag of bream, all good size.

"There'll be fish for all today," Bill shouted gleefully.

Then it happened.

Stan Beeton said afterwards the wave got Bill as it rebounded off the rocks above his head. He disappeared quicker than the eye could see and silently, without crying out. Stan Beeton dropped his rod which was whisked away like a feather into the sea. He ran to the edge shouting like a man berserk. His eyes searched the seething, foaming waters but he could not see Bill. He climbed, the jagged rocks cutting him. He could not see the boat, nor did Des and Tommy hear his distraught shouting.

Des and Long Tommy found a frenzied man on Gap Island an hour later when they came into view looking for a better fishing spot. In answer to Stan's cries they came alongside.

"Bill's gone," he kept shouting. "Bill's gone, I tell yer! Washed off!"

They got Stan off with the chaff bag, all of them in a daze of unbelief.

For three hours they searched like starving men rummaging for food; then they carried the news ashore to Billy Harkness. Well-equipped divers were summoned and they searched for the body until exhausted, but in vain.

When they told Mary she stared at them from the threshold then rushed to Long Tommy screaming. "Go back. Bill's a strong swimmer. Go back, I tell you." Long Tommy Smith put his arm round her shoulders. "It's five hours ago, Mary. No man could survive in those waters."

★

At four o'clock that afternoon, Mick Gerran entered the strike centre. "Where's Billy Skinnider?" he asked. "I've got a pair of rabbits for the old bastard and he'd better have some fish for me." When they told him he placed the rabbits on a table and walked slowly out, shoulders hunched.

Three weeks later, two fishermen found the mutilated body washed up on the beach.

They buried Bill Skinnider like that, and the Union buried its dead with dignity and piety. A pipe band played old Scottish tunes. Hundreds of wharfies marched up the main street of Wollongong and the Returned Soldiers' League, of which Bill had been a respected member, also marched. And the local people lined the streets in mourning for a quiet man whom everyone knew had brought nothing but kindness and goodness across the seas with him.

After the priest had read the funeral service, Mary broke down, weeping without restraint. Mick and Norma thought that was a good thing—you cannot bottle up a grief as deep as hers.

From the very day of the tragedy the Union and its members, led by Bill Harkness and Mick, started a fund for Mary and the kids, and they ran raffles and a levy was placed on all members of the Union throughout Australia.

A fortnight after the funeral Mary went into hospital to have her fourth baby. Mick and Norma came to her bedside next day with flowers and friendship.

Mary was weak and pale with that beautiful pallor of a new mother. As they were ready to depart, she grasped Norma's hand and said in a voice little above a whisper. "I want you to take the baby. Adopt it as your own. 'If it's a boy, its yours,' that's what Bill said. Well, it's a boy and it's yours, Norma, yours and Mick's. I haven't seen it. Take it as soon as they'll let you, for Bill's sake."

Impetuous tears came to Norma's eyes. She took out her handkerchief and began to bite a corner of it, but she could think of nothing to say.

Mick's jaws showed rigid in the dull light. "But Mary," he began. "It was just a joke, like . . ."

"Mick," Mary interrupted him. "I want you to have him. More than anything else in the world, I want you to have my baby!"

When they had gone, Mary Skinnide rturned her face hard into the pillow and great sobs convulsed her body. "I love you, Bill," she said aloud. "Mick was your mate, and I've given him my baby."

When the adoption was legally arranged, Mick said to Norma: "We'll call him Bill. And when he's old enough we'll tell him about his father. We'll tell him his father lived and died for the Union and the working class."

There are many things the wharfies of the South Coast will remember about this struggle; and one of them will be the death of Bill Skinnider.

And when they think of this, echoing in their ears will be the angry words of Bill Harkness to the shipowners, after the strike had been won: "Your plot murdered Bill Skinnider." ●

• Reviews •

Parihaka Story

To those nurtured on the pap of cowboy and Indian war films, Howard Fast's **Last Frontier** came as a shock and a revelation. On those familiar with the conventional interpretation of New Zealand history, Dick Scott's **The Parihaka Story** (Southern Cross Books, Auckland, 14/6 or 9/6) has a comparable effect.

During the 19th century the history of New Zealand is the story of how by wars and later by laws the Maoris were dispossessed of their land. They fought back stubbornly. Despite the superior weapons and organisation of the British, the Maori wars were protracted. The history books record their close in the sixties, but conceal the savagery of Her Majesty's troops. [The **Nelson Examiner** commented on one campaign: "There were no prisoners made at these late engagements as General Chute . . . does not care to encumber himself with such costly luxuries." In Taranaki the troops even became head-hunters—£10 a head for chiefs and £5 for ordinary men!]

Conventional texts pervert the story of Parihaka by portraying the chief Te Whiti as a futile or comic religious fanatic. Scott makes it clear that Te Whiti was a leader of genius whose tactics challenge comparison with those of Gandhi. Indeed it is Gandhi who suffers most by the comparison: "Gandhi placed reliance on individual acts of protest, on the personal 'purity' of thought of himself and picked followers and shrank from, throttled, and denied the power of a mass movement. All Te Whiti's efforts were bent in the reverse direction."

Te Whiti's followers, like the English Diggers of the 17th century, asserted their right to the land by working it. They took up the plough in defence of their right to live. They struggled for their land with a vigor and determination shared, it would seem, by "backward peoples" the world over.

Technically the book is pleasing. The economical and often vivid prose is salted with frequent direct quotations which testify to painstaking research. Ten pages of illustrations help the reader to envisage the scenes and people. The writer does not labor to hide his sympathy; but his enthusiasm is contagious rather than offensive.

In all, a very readable book, a valuable reassessment of New Zealand history, and a fine tribute to the Maori people.

—J. A. Gale.

★

Colonial Tapestry

Reflecting the resurgence of interest in the Australian heritage, Marnie Bassett, with devotion and sincerity of purpose, has collected a quite fantastic amount of material on the Henty family. (**The Hentys: A Colonial Tapestry**, Oxford University Press, £3/3/-.)

One can only admire her industry and research. We embark on the journeys from England, follow the menus, and sympathise with the buffetings of the pedigreed stock; are given an account of one of the earliest Australian botanical collections; are told how the ladies of Hobart formed a committee to distribute the services of immigrant females, much to the rage of the ladies of Launceston, who only got the no-hopers; shudder at the trip from Launceston to Portland that took 30 days; read that the Henty furrows were ploughed so deep that even today they can be seen; learn how snooty the Hentys were in their attitude to Batman and Fawkner—in short, we emerge from the book knowing many interesting things.

Through it all, we trace the Henty saga. We are under no illusion that they were starry-eyed nation-builders. James Henty, in a letter, says the family have "decided on employing our capital (£10,000) in a New Quarter of the World where we hope to do it to much greater advantage." Elsewhere, "and immediately we get there we shall be placed in the First Rank in Society."

Unfortunately, they arrived in Van Diemen's Land just too late for the free land grants. So little to the north lay the virgin luxuriance of as yet unfounded Victoria, a tantalising prospect to men of enterprise. It was too much for our heroes. Pillars of society as they were, church builders, public school founders, bank directors and ladies' auxiliary presidents—the Hentys sniffed at the law and squatted, and quite right too. History was on their side. Mrs. Bassett gives an excellently documented picture of the drama of the land grab, in the time when the squatters, by defying Her Majesty, acted in the best interests of Australia.

The Hentys were avid journal keepers and letter writers. Through these personal papers, we get glimpses of character which surely weren't just family idiosyncracies. The letter from James to a friend in N.S.W. in 1836, for instance, which asks: "How does your Governor stand in the estimation of the respectable part of the Colonists—is he really an impartial good man, or does his zeal for equality and fair play lead him into the opposite extreme of strong partiality for the Emancipists?"

Self-righteous words from a law breaker, yet how many of the squatters must have said them. After all, from have-nots they were rapidly becoming haves; as individuals they were emerging into a squattocracy, with a common attitude to life and a common relationship with the rest of the community. From this point of view, the Henty family documents are a delight—so that's what a squatter was like!

In spite of all this, the book tends to be a disappointment. That Mrs. Bassett is an enthusiast there is no doubt whatever: that she is an enthusiast overwhelmed by her material there is very little.

We wouldn't for worlds have missed reading how Maura's preserves exploded in the mail, it's true. But by the time we've plodded through the English background, assisted James to assess Brazil, spent 15 terribly irritating chapters at the Swan River settlement, and witnessed practically every birth, death and marriage of anyone who ever caught sight of a Henty, we're exhausted as we stagger with them on to the shores of Portland and to the events that, after all, have tempted us to read about them.

It's not simply a matter of personal taste in what is considered an interesting detail. The problem arises—for whom was the book written? The aver-

age Australian probably doesn't care greatly who beat what in a cricket match one of the Hentys happened to drop in on during a trip to England, or that he didn't see the end of it, and equally probably isn't much concerned that Mrs. Whatley, a neighbor at the Swan River, called her second daughter, born after her husband died, after the schooner "Kate."

Perhaps these things do interest that "first Rank of Society," whose pride lies in the respectable, non-convict character of the family tree, but oh! how frustrating these myriad details are to the reader who hasn't got one, and, what's more, doesn't care.

Further, Mrs. Bassett, in her conventionally "objective" presentation, doesn't so arrange material as to lead us in the direction of fundamental conclusions. This method may have advantages, but they escape us. If, within the framework of a tapestry, she allows herself a surmise that one Henty wife had an "evident nostalgia for the more irresponsible days of single bliss," or a suspicion that the somewhat bearish behaviour of a younger son was due to the demon drink, then we are entitled to ask her assistance in the highlighting of significant points in the material she gives us. As it is, we wander rather unhappily through the avalanche of detail, trying to find out what it all means, and, while it may be very good for our initiative, it's not the best recipe for enjoyment.

The Hentys is an interesting, if often frustrating book, its strength and its weakness lying in the mass of material it presents. If Mrs. Bassett had had a **very** firm editor, and perhaps as warm a feeling for the little people who built our nation as she has for the more spectacular pioneers, the tapestry would have been a truer reflection of the period it's woven around, and in infinitely brighter colors.

—Rivkah Mathews.

★

Writing for Peace

On the whole, contemporary writing avoids the major themes. We write about adultery rather than love, crime rather than suffering, and folly rather than evil. (We hardly ever write about God at all.) It is almost true to say that when we set out to write about peace, we succeed in writing about pacifism, and when we say "this is a peace book," we mean only that it is an anti-war book, a negative cry against envisaged horror. We can all say that we do not like war; to suggest a way of avoiding or supplanting it in fiction or on the stage is quite a different matter, like saying what we mean by peace.

In the past two years, four Authors' World Peace Appeal signatories have made notable attempts to overcome the difficulties. In **Escapade** (Wm. Heinemann, 10/9), Roger Macdougall wrote frankly about pacifism rather than peace, and set the determination of a couple of schoolboys above the intrigues and wranglings of an adult peace group (in many ways sadly like A.W.P.A.), and above the fumblings of international statesmen. **Escapade** is comedy; all doors open to the heroes. There is no point in saying that the journey of the two boys to U.N. headquarters would not have made a whit of difference to the peace of the world; the play does not say that it would. It does say that courage and sincerity matter more than conferences and speeches and party badges. Being comedy, it cannot add that, even for courage and sincerity, the doors will not open.

Escapade has the great merit of being entertainment; as everyone knows, people will swallow an awful lot if only they can laugh while they are doing it. They will also swallow a great deal if they can be thrilled while they are doing it, as Nicholas Blake proved delightfully in **The Whisper in the Gloom** (Collins, 10/6 stlg.), which assumes, without having to say so, that everyone wants peace. This is a crime story; the crime is an attempt to break up a peace conference. It is right and proper that the villains should be defeated, and peace—negotiated, political peace—prevail. This is entertainment on a high level, and the breath-taking simplicity of the propaganda should serve as a model for anyone's work in progress.

The Whisper in the Gloom is built on the conviction that peace is right; the slightly less valuable conviction that war is wrong throbs through Edith Pargeter's **The Soldier at the Door** (Wm. Heinemann, 15/6). Every character feels the touch of it, though the book never escapes its imposed limits. It is a book about conscription; it has some magnificent passages and some brave statements; yet one feels it might have been a much bigger book. The hero's decision—that he will accept prison rather than conscription—comes almost as an anti-climax. An undergraduate gesture of defiance can hardly be the summing up of all that has gone before.

The peace of Christopher Fry's **The Dark is Light Enough** (Oxford U.P., 14/3) is the peace of God rather than of nations. The play's great achievement lies in representing goodness as neither priggish nor comic. What matters here is life itself, its multiplicity and its wonder. The Countess shelters the renegade not because war is wrong, or because she likes the color of his shirt, or because he may die an uncomfortable death in the snow, but because he lives, he is her kind, and life has a right to protection. She knows peace, it is within her. To bring it to the lives of others, even though she may cause pain in the process, is her fulfilment.

In **The Dark is Light Enough**, and in Edith Pargeter's novel, there are glimpses of what writing for peace might be like. The really great work of the imagination with a peace theme has yet to be written; Christopher Fry and Edith Pargeter seem to suggest that it must arise above comment on political and social life and speak to the condition of Man himself.

—Frank Carpenter.

[This review is reprinted from the Bulletin of the Authors' World Peace Appeal (U.K.). Comment is invited.—Ed.]

★

"This Day's Concern"

Australian Poetry 1954 (Angus & Robertson, 10/6) one of the liveliest collections of current verse to appear for some years, is a credit to its editor, Ronald McCuaig, himself author of a number of intelligent entertainments, including the sparkling **Tales Out of Bed.**

According to a recent statement in the Sydney Bulletin, Mr. McCuaig's editorial efforts were prompted by a desire to fossick out examples of a "simple folk poetry" and "humor." Admirable objectives! Admittedly folk poetry threatens to become something of a cult, and already there is some counterfeit balladry in circulation. Poets like J. Gunn (unless he is a quaint Malley of the 'fifties) should remember that folk poetry is in no way related to literary slumming or a tired displaying of worn-out devices:

> I'm on the track a-drovin'
> With the horse-bells ringin' clear,
> And I ask meself a-rovin',
> Where do I go from 'ere?

Where indeed?

Granted, too, that humor is not necessarily an element of great poetry, yet how refreshing and revealing it is when poetry can really tap the vigor of common speech and walk hand in hand with laughter! Both of these things happen in David Campbell's John O'Brienish "The Miracle of Mullion Hill," a tall yarn expounded with much vivacity, e.g. an elderly up-country priest contemplates morning devotions:

> The Lord who fashioned flesh and frost
> And died that man might not be lost,
> Would surely not expect his heirs
> To catch their death while saying prayers.

Though neither so sophisticated nor so hilarious, Bill Harney's rollicking "West of Alice" also catches the "folk" mood, while the late Kenneth Mackenzie's "An Old Inmate" suggests a labored attempt to write in the popular idiom. Just the same, there are some good lines:

Wireless, motorbikes, all this American talk
And the pitchers and atom-bombs. O' course it follers
Soon you'll forget 'ow to read or think or walk—
And there won't be one o' you sleeps at night on your pillers!

There are also the clearest echoes of the Spencer-Goodge **Bulletin Reciter** "humorous" ballads in Peter Bladen's "Coronation Day at Melrose":

So they toasted her, the Princess, who was born to be their ruler,
(And a few went toasting near enough to land them in the cooler).

Most of the best writing in this book, however, makes no effort to pose as "folk poetry." It has, on the other hand, that beautiful simplicity of diction and lucidity of feeling which can make poetry accessible to any folk, regardless of external form. Outstanding is the work of Mona Brand, Nancy Keesing, Dame Mary Gilmore, Roland Robinson, Ian Mudie, Ray Mathew and David Rowbotham—a newcomer of high promise.

There is plenty of quiet humor too, in Judith Wright's "Request to a Year," Douglas Stewart's "Crow's Nest":

Five roads leaping to kill at the traffic-cop's hand
And ten glossy undertakers eager to deal with the rest
Prove there are crows enough still if you look at Crow's Nest,

and Robert Fitzgerald, musing on Hargrave of Stanwell Park, and regretting he has missed—

> . . . some bright
> Morning in the salty, stiff
> North-easter, a crank with a kite—
> Steadied above the cliff.

The anthology contains a modicum of reminiscent stuff. There is Vivian Smith's "I am an old man in a narrow hut," J. McAuley's oddly Georgian whimsy on a pallid cuckoo's song, Inglis Moore's chronically "startled" passers-by. (Why are "passers-by" always so given to fright?)

E. O. Schlunke's "Benelong Returns to Heaven" deserves special mention. It amusingly enunciates an Aboriginal **theory** of the 1790's:

". . . When there's a mass immigration
By a frugal and industrious people of another race or nation,
It inevitably lowers the living standard of the indigenous population."

Benelong, anxious for the survival of his people:

Tried to get the present Governor to listen to me
But he's hedged in by a thing called democracy.

Democracy? At "Botany Bay?" Even a witty poet must have some respect for historical fact!

These are minor criticisms. **Australian Poetry 1954** is a book of lasting value, indicating as it does that so many Australian poets are writing with beauty and authority for their own people and, despite so many temptations to do otherwise, choosing (in words stolen from Robert Fitzgerald) "this day's concern."

—Muir Holburn.

★

Meanjin

The latest issue of **Meanjin** (Editor: C. B. Christesen; Autumn 1955; 30/- a year) contains some exceptionally fine contributions. There is a short story by John Morrison in his best manner and the poems by Ian Mudie, Judith Wright and David Martin are of high quality. Then there are a number of articles of broad social interest by Dr. Victor Purcell, J. F. Cairns, Brian Fitzpatrick and the Editor himself, who continues his gallant campaign against the growing restrictions on the freedom of thought in this country.

Perhaps the most outstanding essay in this issue is Arthur Phillips' "The Craftsmanship of Joseph Furphy." Mr. Phillips, who is widely esteemed as a deep and original critic of letters, effectively disposes of the view that Furphy was not a craftsman or conscious artist. "That verdict," says Mr. Phillips, "is almost startlingly unjust to the purposiveness, the skill and the originality with which Joseph Furphy organised his material . . ." He reaches the conclusion that Furphy has "something of his own to say, and he must find the right way of saying it. So with an amazing self reliance, he strikes into virgin country, trusting to his native bushmanship to see him through . . . Furphy's technical achievement no less than his subject matter, is entirely characteristic of the time, the place, and the man."

Unfortunately there are no contributions in this issue of **Meanjin** on contemporary Australian writing. There is next to nothing about current novels or poetry. There is no evaluation of the current literary scene. Therefore we do not know what **Meanjin** thinks about it. The latest issue is neither a mirror nor a guide.

Yet what we badly need is a carefully considered evaluation of present day writing and trends in Australian literature. There is precious little serious detailed criticism of current work nowadays. What passes for criticism in academic circles and in most newspapers is nothing more nor less than a systematic decrying of Australian writers who are constantly depicted as inferior to the English and American writers. Even the dead Australian writers are not spared.

There are exceptions to these critics. Vance Palmer, Gavin Casey and Douglas Stewart, from different standpoints, continue to encourage the development of Australian letters by constructive criticism. But they are very much in the minority.

Any literary magazine in Australia today, if it is to hold the support of writers and readers, must make a constant attempt to deal with the problem of contemporary Australian literature. It must be a source of information and a guide. Without a body of creative literary criticism Australian literature cannot advance.

Meanjin has undoubtedly attempted to supply this need in the past. A recent example of serious criticism was the essay by Marjorie Barnard on the work of Kenneth Mackenzie. I wish **Meanjin** could persuade critics such as Miss Barnard to write a series of articles on present day writing in Australia.

—Judah Waten.

Linocut by Ron Edwards.

THE BIG RIVERS

by Allan Morris

It embarrasses me now to remember that for nearly five years I lived and worked in Echuca, on the Murray, without having the faintest idea of the importance of Echuca's or the Murray's colorful history. I confess, what is more, that during that time I was in charge of history at the High School. And, when I did become interested, it was certainly from no determination to remove my own ignorance, nor from the wish to introduce into the school curriculum even the barest outline of the district's past.

In September 1948 I met Mr. Frank Williams, the new manager of Echuca's daily, the **Riverine Herald**. He asked me if I could help him because his editor and a reporter had taken ill; I therefore found myself writing the editorials for one month. One question that came up during that time was whether Echuca should have a tourist bureau or not, and, encouraged thoroughly by Frank Williams, I began to examine the tourist possibilities for Echuca.

One thing led to another and before long I was being harangued by Harry Freeman, whose family had been in the area since 1858, in the great river days. Where previously I had been impressed with the grandeur of the Murray, now I began to think of it as a broad highway, its network linking Southern Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. My education was beginning. It improved further late one night when Harry Bartlett, a retired business man of my acquaintance, spoke to me in High Street. I asked him where he was off to, to be told that he was going down to the wharf to see the Murrumbidgee, a pleasure steamer, arrive. Curious, I asked him was he to meet someone from it. Not at all. Instead, he held me by telling me how he used to fire the Trafalgar when he was a youth, of his trips to Bourke, of Chinese cooks, and of river lore generally. Like Harry Freeman, he infected me with the river virus; I was impressed.

At the end of my month as a leader writer I remember saying to Frank Williams that someone ought to do some research and write the story of the river and Echuca. He could not have been heartier in agreement, suggesting forthwith that I start immediately. I was properly shocked, and remember declaring that I was far too busy. Brutally he told me that his old boss had once adjured him to work 26 hours a day, eight days a week; and, before I was fully conscious of it, I had agreed to commence that very week the first of a series of 20 full-page articles, one for each Saturday, on Echuca and the Murray.

Then, I admit, I was busy. The files of the **Riverine Herald**, founded in 1863, were put at my disposal; each Sunday I read them assiduously, also on Monday and Tuesday nights. On the Wednesday I began the article, finished it on Thursday night and proofed it on Friday night for the Saturday's issue. Then on Sunday I began again. It was a new world for me, and fascinating. People started to drop into the newspaper office with scraps of evidence, a newspaper cutting here, an old diary there, which gave me the idea of appealing to the Echuca public for any documents extant. Furthermore, I was told that I must call on this old resident and that, and before long, armed with portable typewriter, I began quite a series of interviews, most of them yielding rich personal material apart from leads given to outstanding events.

The appeal for documents produced nothing really substantial until another friend of mine, Mr. Ossie Johansen, took what was to be decisive action. The son of a river man, he has an abiding affection for the Murray. One Saturday morning in November, 1948, I was buying tobacco—he manages a chain store at Echuca—when he raised the question of documents. Surprised at the lack of any substantial body of records, he began telling me ruefully that all he could think of was that he and other schoolboys had come across a heap of old ledgers in the town tip some thirty years previously. We both laughed at this hot tip. He went on to talk about the fine copper-plate writing, and how some of the boys had taken a ledger or two along to school for waste paper.

Suddenly he began to take off his dust coat, and with a glint of excitement in his eyes exclaimed that he had a suspicion the old ledgers had come from the Chaff Store, near the wharf, when the first garage in the town was being set up. By this

time I was following him into the street. Directly opposite was Maddick's Garage. Mr. Maddick, so I was informed over one shoulder, owned the Chaff Store at that time. In no time we were talking to Mr. Garry Maddick, who more than confirmed Ossie's story. He told us an astounding yarn, how, when adjustments were being made to the high ceiling, part of it collapsed, cascading a big pile of "rubbish," old books and papers, on to the floor amidst a cloud of dust. There was great excitement, not because of the books and papers, but because a workman was left hanging to a rafter, about 20 feet above floor level. (Incidentally, when I was buying petrol in Footscray about three years ago, I met this rafter-hanger in a kerb-side gossip. He was managing the garage and confirmed the details of this incident.) With difficulty, the rescue was effected; then a dray was hired and the books, two loads, went promptly to the town tip. Mr. Maddicks declared that he had no idea what they were, but that far more than two dray loads were left by him in the ceiling. That was enough for us.

Back to the shop we went to ring up the then owner of the Chaff Store, Mr. Haydn Berryman. Yes, he said, there was a stack of material in the ceiling, "a mountain of books," which he had never inspected but which we were at liberty to examine, and if they were of any value to me I could have them.

That Saturday afternoon, armed with a long ladder and an extension light, Ossie Johansen and I climbed through the manhole of the Chaff Store —and there in actual fact was the "mountain," covered with inches of the finest, blackest dust. Attacking from different sides we burrowed in, and after about three hours of oppressive heat, we emerged looking like nothing so much as old-time chimney-sweeps. But we were jubilant; we had struck historical oil in the form of the working records of the biggest shipping company that worked the Murray and tributaries in the hey-day of the river trade. Apart from the two dray loads dispatched to the tip thirty years previously, we had discovered, as subsequent investigation proved, the Wm. McCulloch & Co. records, dating from 1866 to 1883 inclusive.

Of course we could not realise the full significance of the find on that one Saturday afternoon, but we had a rather good idea. What to do with them was the immediate problem. The following Saturday and Sunday, three of us lowered them to the ground and packed the records indiscriminately—there was no order when they were found—into chaff bags conveniently at hand. What then? I took them round to the **Riverine Herald**, stacking them outside under roofing iron until space could be made available. For a time I worked on one bag at a time, something like taking a penny dip. That was hopeless, and so I looked unsuccessfully for new quarters until I was invited to return to the Chaff Store itself where Mr. Berryman made available a small room. In this, Captain H. Hogg, skipper of the Murrumbidgee, built a series of shelves; the records we jammed in stacked almost to the ceiling. There was just room for a small table and chair for me. There for five months I spent long hours reading through the material, summarising in particular the Outward Letters (25,000 of them in bound volumes of 1,000 each). These key documents were the most easily accessible.

In May, 1949, I took a broad sample of the records down to Melbourne to Professor R. M. Crawford, asking his help in having them catalogued. He not only agreed, but in June brought to Echuca Professor Manning Clark, Mr. Feely of the Melbourne Public Library, a lecturer in history, and two research workers for a two-day visit. Civic receptions were given them at Echuca and Moama, and Professor Crawford strongly recommended that Echuca should set up a museum for the collection of records from the whole river network; he also insisted that research facilities for visiting students should be made available, so that the material could be studied in its own environment.

Nothing came of this plan for decentralisation, partly because there was objection, not publicly stated, but definitely held, that there were already too many public servants in the land, and that Echuca would be badly served by the creation of "another Government department." There was far more interest shown outside of Echuca than in it. On one occasion, for instance, Professor Ward, of Sydney, came to Echuca especially to inspect the documents. A number of other scholars and interested "foreigners" from South Australia arrived, but local interest was never considerable enough to justify leaving the documents at Echuca. However, I precede my story.

The Echuca Council granted me the use of the biggest pavilion at the Showgrounds for the cataloguing of the McCulloch Records; they were already set out there when the professorial party arrived. And there they stayed from July to November, 1949, while Miss Patricia Ingham, subsequently archivist at the Melbourne Public Library, catalogued them, working from 9 a.m. until 10 or 11 p.m., Monday to Friday inclusive. It was only then that their value was confirmed.

I have already mentioned the Outward Letters, the 25,000 of them, the key documents. These give the whole pulse of the trade, including its secrets, and are in my opinion a compulsory study for anyone who wants a command, not only of the main outlines, but also of the detail of the hey-day of the river trade. A large collection of Inward Letters, unbound, make complementary reading. Apart from these there were 104 skippers' log books, about 50 pay sheets for boats and saw mills, innumerable invoices for customs goods, customs books, etc., large quantities of bills of lading, about 30 volumes of manifests, quantities of railway waybills, passenger tickets for boats, skippers' letters reporting to headquarters from all parts of the network, insurance material, bank books, horse and bullock wagon waybills, cargo books and account books. Concerning these latter, a Government auditor who visited me declared that a balance could be struck from them at any time.

For the first five years I was custodian of those documents; they kept me very busy, except for 1953 when I was secretary of the Echuca Centenary Committee. That year I was far too occupied to do any further research on them, and, at the end of 1953, I was moved to Mildura High School. Since the discovery I had had to shift the records —a truck load—eight times, from the Chaff Store to the **Riverine Herald**, back to the Chaff Store, thence to the Showgrounds for cataloguing and back once more. When the Chaff Store was sold "over my head," a local banker took the records into store, after which the Echuca Council set me up in the concrete water tower basement, an excellent summer residence, but a deplorable winter one. Then I married, and my tolerant wife suggested that I bring the documents home, which I did. They occupied three rooms.

In December, 1953, I reluctantly bade them farewell when they were sent down to the Melbourne Public Library archives. My reluctance was for two reasons—I had become personally attached to them, and I would have liked them to have stayed permanently in Echuca. Of one thing I am sure—they are of immense value, there being nothing similar extant concerning the Murray River steamboat trade.

(To be continued)

The Disciple

(A legend of Ned Kelly and Joe Byrne)

Ned Kelly, with blood money on his head,
New victim of the squatters' rising hate
And forced to flee his family and friends,
Rode out to see Joe Byrne, his boyhood mate.

"The traps are out to get me, I must ride
Deep into the Wombat Ranges and lie low.
Dan's coming with me—Dan and Stevey Hart.
Will you be in it? How about it, Joe?"

Joe turned to Ned and looked into his face;
He paused—then said, "I'll tell you what I'll do;
I'll hit the earth one blow with this dead stick,
And if it breaks, by cripes I'll come with you."

He lifted up a dead branch from the ground
And smashed it to the rocks beside his feet—
Stood silent, staring at the shattered stump
For a moment in the quiet midday heat.

Then, head thrown back he stood with easy grace:
Brown throat stretched taut, and laughed aloud at fate
With white teeth flashing to a cloudless sky,
And turned toward the hills—to join his mate.

JOHN MEREDITH.

June, 1955, is the centenary of the birth of Ned Kelly.

UNCLE TOM

(Continued from Page 5)

They walked along the street talking loudly as boys will. They talked about the future. They were going to be league footballers, not soldiers.

"I reckon I'd like to play for Footscray," Dick said.

"Collingwood for me," Wingy said. He was silent for a moment. "Do you think they'd have me, Dick. Me with me gammy hand."

"Of course they'll have you," Dick said. "My Dad was telling me of a rover with one hand who used to play for Northcote. He was a champion, too."

The boys were rather pleased with themselves as they approached the tram stop. It was a clear warm day. The sun shone down benevolently and its rays silvered the grey street and brought a warm glow to the dark faces of the houses.

OVERLAND

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I Had it in my Head

I had it in my head—
Fair dinkum it was there—
Right underneath my hair—
Story! Plot! Denouement!
All clear as the pages in a printed book.

I meant to write it down right then and there—
But you know how it is
The Boss wanted those invoices for fairy floss
We'd sent to Mukinbudin Fair—
But still it didn't matter . . .
I had it in my head.

All day I dreamed upon
And all that week—
It narked the Boss—
He said I was half asleep—
But there it was, all tearing at my stomach
An agitated ache—a trembling in my veins—
You know—something like a prayer
You've got to say because it's there—
You've got it in your head.

I had it in my head!
It was as good as written down.
I meant to tell it to the wife
When I got home that night—
But you know how it is—
No wood, she said,
And the lawn's all dry as chips
And I can't do it all, she said.
But still what matter—
I had it in my head.

I lay with it all night—
And the wife knew nought of she and me
On a hillside with the setting sun crushing
Its colors on the face of night.
Beatrice and I—
I must have sighed because
The wife said: "Can't you sleep?"
———Sleep?
Good heavens No!
Sleep with all that beneath my hair
A tapestry of words
Each stitch a picture in itself
And I the weaver
Weaving the pages of a book?
Sleep? Don't make me laugh—
I had it in my head.

It was there when Saturday came—
And hurried I to chop the wood, and mow the lawn,
And mend Johnnie's shoes—
And then to do the other jobs
A wife can beckon up to still,
To tantalise, delay, confound the blossoming of a will!

And then at last I sneaked away—
Still with it there
A tune, a pain.
I lifted the lid of my machine
And put the paper in—
One clean sheet, white as the soul of she
Who was to step down from my mind
And dance on the pages of my book.

I had it in my head!
Fair dinkum it was there
Until I lifted this digit
To tap a key—
And then it was gone.

BERT VICKERS.