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Old Man with a Whistle. Pen drawing by Clem Millward.

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AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE IN OUR UNIVERSITIES

*By T. Inglis Moore**

ACADEMICALLY our writers have had scant honor in their own country. Now it looks as if, at long last, a movement towards their recognition by our universities has begun to gather some momentum. Canberra University College, as the University teaching institution in the national capital, fittingly led the way in 1954 by conducting the first full year's lecturing course in the national literature. In 1955 it had the course established as a full degree course for the B.A. degree, and created the first university teaching post in Australian Literature. This development was followed by the recent approval by the University of Sydney of the establishment of a Chair in the subject.

It is true that the University only agreed in principle to the Chair, and its actual establishment must await the raising of funds outside the University by public or private benefactions. This modified approval represents, however, a definite step forward.

The establishment of a Chair of Australian Literature will come belatedly, as we may see from the opinions expressed by visiting Americans who have come here as Fulbright Research Fellows. "It seems incredible to me," said Professor S. C. McCulloch, of Rutgers University, New Jersey, "that no university here has a chair in either Australian history or Australian literature as such." Dr. Martin C. Carroll, from the University of Iowa, pointed out: "If Australian authors wish to be specifically Australian in their work they must read and study Australian literature; yet no Australian university has a chair or professorship in such literature."

It is significant, indeed, that American scholars who have done research here in our literature, and can thus give an expert as well as impartial outside opinion, commonly are surprised at our own lack of appreciation. Professor Grove Day, for example, Professor of English, University of Hawaii and author of **Australian Fiction, the First Hundred Years**, stated last year: "Australians generally don't appreciate their national literature. Really, you know, you have something to be proud of." Another interesting example of outside appreciation has just come to me in a personal letter from a Ukrainian writer and journalist, living in Sydney, who tells me that he has translated about 50 poems by Australian poets: "It was a great pleasure to me to present Australian poetry in my translations to Ukrainian readers in U.S.A., Canada, Germany, Argentina (and Australia in the first place!)" We might add that the favorable reception given to translations of our novels, short stories, and poetry in Russian and many European languages indicates that a literature which is being increasingly known abroad should now get further appreciation at home.

It is high time, therefore, that this appreciation be given in terms of teaching and study at the university level. Australian literature demands to be so studied, it seems to me, both as Australian and as literature. Our writing is the expression of ourselves, an important mirror of our society reflecting our history and our distinctive way of life, a treasure house of our national traditions. As Australians we should have outgrown the anachronistic inferiority complex of old colonial days and take a special national interest in our own independent writing. It is one of the marks of a free and mature people that it takes a legitimate pride, without any crude jingoism, in its own achievements in the arts, especially in the most popular of the arts, literature.

Furthermore, Australian literature is well worth studying for its own literary quality, in addition to its national and social values. It contains a number of excellent works in both prose and poetry which merit close reading and study. In poetry, for example, the finest poems of Brennan, Fitzgerald, and Judith Wright are superior to the works of minor English poets now studied in ordinary English courses. Henry Lawson is a first-rate artist in the short story. There is fine work in the novels of Clarke, Boldrewood, Richardson, and Prichard, for instance, which should be known and appreciated by all Australians. There is also a solid body of good writing in a number of literary fields, comparable to writing studied in various literatures at the universities—since a university course covers minor as well as major figures. Finally, it is a fascinating process to trace the development of a whole national literature from its beginnings down to contemporary writers. After experience of teaching Australian literature for several years, I can vouch for the fact that there is plenty of interesting and worthwhile material to fill up a year's course of lectures and tutorials.

The establishment of posts in Australian literature in all Australian universities should come now as a natural and logical development of the various forms of teaching and study in the subject which the universities already have. As one who has battled for recognition of our writers over many years, I have found nothing more encouraging than the transformation which has taken place in the outlook of our professors and lecturers. In the old days they were usually either indifferent or supercilious when Australian literature was mentioned. Since the war they have altered their stance completely. Only a few academic diehards still sniff at our writers. When questioned closely, they are generally found to be almost completely ignorant of our writing. They are, luckily, now rare. The great majority of the English staffs now have a sympathetic interest in our literature, and most of them have written or broadcast or lectured on it. Some of them, notably R. G. Howarth, at Sydney, and Brian Elliott, at Adelaide, were enthusiasts who made valuable contributions to our literature and literary activity.

This treatment was pioneered by the Commonwealth Literary Fund Lectures in Australian Literature, which began in 1940 and have been running regularly ever since. This annual series of ten lectures, on which the C.L.F. spends over £700 each year, has accustomed both staff and students to a serious study of our writers. University lecturers have given other lectures in the ordinary English courses. Australian writers have been set for study as texts. In general, therefore, under the encouragement of the Professors of English there has been an increasing amount of time devoted to our writing. The students, in turn, have turned more and more to Australian literature as subjects for research in their English theses for both honors and postgraduate work.

Both university staffs and students, therefore, have proved beyond doubt the suitability of our literature as a subject for study at a university level. Once the movement for full recognition of it gets under way, it must advance. I suggest that within the next five or ten years every Australian university will have its Chair of Australian Literature as a matter of inevitable national development. After all, you can't keep a good literature down.

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ROTHBURY 1929

by Jim Comerford

WE are soon back on the main road running alongside the mine fence. A young, very white-faced policeman steps cautiously out of a clump of bush and gazes wonderingly at us. How must we look to him? This long line of men marches four abreast; in the main clad in the grim, dark clothes we wear in the underground and marching with the wild Scots music of the pipe band leading us on.

There is no sound from us as we gaze back. Here is the first of those who will stand between us and the scabs. What will they do?

Down in the floor of the hollow, behind the fence, three lines of empty coal trucks are drawn up on the lines leading down to the surface buildings from which grows the pig's snout of the smoke stack: ugly and alien to our eyes.

The three lines of trucks form two narrow laneways. Sheridan turns right at this spot. As he moves to the fence another young policeman comes forward. "You can't come in here, boys," he cries. Like his mate farther back, he is white-faced and obviously agitated. The band has stopped playing and a great hush falls over us.

"Look," Sheridan says, "we don't want any trouble with you fellows. We only want to talk to the scabs to ask them to leave here, so's there won't be any trouble."

I doubt if the policeman has even heard what was said. He keeps repeating "You can't come in here, boys." A couple of others are now standing behind him gazing in fascination at us and listening to his repeated "You can't come in here, boys" as if it was some magic incantation which should have the effect of turnng us back and disintegrating our mass.

But we have come too far now. Sheridan goes over the fence and the pipers go with him. The police try to push them back, but they break and run as a mass of men swarms over the fence behind Sheridan and those who have gone before.

It isn't long before we are running down between the lines of trucks. The air is full of the shouting and yelling of men urging each other on. The area of our movement is too narrow. We are hemmed in by the trucks and the slopes of the bush-fringed gully.

I look up. The sky is egg-shell blue. A great black crow flies deliberately, heavily away over the trees.

There is a change in the tenor of the shouting. Police are swarming out of the bush towards us. I see one of them swing his baton aloft. It arcs down. A high, keen scream is followed by the baton rising again and another scream.

The police are attacking at all points now, but they are not getting it all their own way. Some of the miners have dared the batons and grappled with them. They are rolling around on the ground fighting for the batons. All the time the noises of running feet, the shouts of men and the screams of the batoned and the trampled are indescribable.

On the outside of the right hand line of trucks a policeman has forced an old, grey-haired miner to the ground. He holds the old bloke down on his knees with one hand on his shoulder while the other rises rhythmically up and down with the baton. At first the miner struggles to get up, but he is soon knocked unconscious by the terrible blows falling on his head. The policeman holds on to his limp form and blood from his victim spatters over his uniform. His face writhes with passion as he continues to work on the old man.

Behind him a young miner comes with a big, curved piece of tree branch. He swings it and in one mighty blow brings the copper to the ground dead unconscious. A couple of his mates dart in and drag the old one outside the fence.

Two more police attack the young miner and, the last I saw of him, he was going down in a flurry of savage blows, while some of our men ran up to help him.

The police attack has not been able to hold us. About a couple of hundred have got through and run towards the end of the truck lines.

As I run I see a miner and a policeman fighting desperately between two trucks. They are spread all over the buffer boards. The copper has lost his cap and his baton.

There are more fighting and struggling around us. But I cannot stop. I am being forced on by the pressure of those around me. I don't know where Les is. Neither is it possible to see Sheridan and the others who are out in front.

Ahead of me I can see a drum tossed above the heads of the crowd. One of the drummers must have clashed with a policeman.

Again a great shout goes up. Mounted police have appeared at the end of the truck lanes. They stand up in their stirrups to bring batons crashing down on the men in front. For the first time there is a withdrawal as the miners give way before the pressure of the horses. Some of them jump up to the buffers. One of them leaps out and grapples with a mounted policeman and they both fall heavily to the ground. The whinnying of horses is added to the rest of the pandemonium.

Then we hear the most dreaful sound of all: the crack of revolvers and the singing whine of flying bullets.

The men in front are falling back rapidly now and the cry goes up: "They're shooting at us. The bastards are shooting at us."

The whole weakness contained in our lack of real organisation now comes into full play against us. Panic sets in. I turn in the stampede back to the fence.

It is impossible to deny that fear grips one in a situation like this. Fear grips what remains of consciousness; fear springing from empty hands and backs exposed to the singing, whining menace darting through the air.

From somewhere in the roar of our flight there comes a scream, short and high pitched. Another deeper and hoarser comes from nearby. We are flung back against the fence. I see Les again. He grabs my arm and we go through together.

We sprint across the road and up the bank and on to the open paddock. As we move up the slope Les cries out and falls down. I drop beside him. "What's the matter?" I pant.

He holds my arm. "I've been hit. In the leg." He pulls the leg of his trousers up. A bullet has scraped the bone near his knee. I can see where it has carried away a small, triangular piece of cloth.

Jim Comerford is Vice-President of the Miners' Federation of Australia and President of the Northern District. He was present at Rothbury, at the age of 16, and this is the first published account of the incident by one who took part. It is an extract from a novel in progress.

Men are running all around us to get away from the firing. It's a possibility that we could get trampled to death here.

"Can you get up?" I yell at Les.

"Yeah. I think so. But I'm pretty stiff."

He rises and holding my right arm he limps a few steps and goes down again. "It's too stiff," he cries, "you go for your life."

I shake my head. We are lying behind a knoll of ground no bigger than an ant heap. If we press down it can protect us from the bullets. There is dust in my mouth. The sun is hot now and sweat trickles down my face and down my back. But along my spine it is cold sweat. If I rise the least bit my back is again exposed to the police fire.

I can't raise my head, but I can see hundreds of pairs of legs rushing past and feel the ground vibrating beneath them. By turning my neck to right and left and peering through the rising screen of dust I can see other forms lying on the ground as we are lying. Some of the bullets have found targets.

Les is being sick beside me. The sound of firing does not cease and rises sharply above the thunder of men in flight. Now and again someone calls out in pain.

My eyes sting. I feel dizzy. There is nothing wrong with me, but the reality of what is going on seems so unreal that my brain teeters on the verge of ceasing to apprehend this reality and go over the edge of hysteria. Strange animal sounds hammer at my throat for release, but sink away to bubble up again. I am afraid of the deadly, singing bullets and of the crushing feet flying past and jumping over me. I am terrified by the pain-racked cries. I fight my throat and press closer to Les seeking in him the only comfort there can be on this bullet-swept field.

And then it stopped. The last man had been driven out of the compound and over the road and across the open paddock as far as they could go out of range of the guns.

For a while the noise dropped away to silence. Quietly the dust rose to become a golden mist merging into the strong early morning sunlight. I stand and help Les up. We look around as everyone else is doing.

Down on the road a miner is struggling to his knees, but the effort is too great and he falls back again. For a brief moment I see the crimson stain below him on the road gravel. I see it but find it hard to believe. Already three others are dodging down the slope, bent over double to get to him. The police cannot be seen, but they are in the bush. They do not fire at the three rescuers.

Others like us are rising out of hollows in the ground where they have dropped for protection. But there are some like the man on the road who try to rise but cannot. And then the silence breaks. A long drawn shout goes up and the crowd gives full cry to its hatred of the police and their work. There is frenzy, frustration and grief in that cry. It is fed by the sight of the men lying around on the ground.

But there is no defeat yet in this cry, for as they shout the crowd moves again, back down the slope towards the fence. On the other side some blue clad figures are also lying on the ground and other police run from the bush to hustle them away to the colliery surface buildings. A triumphant cheer rings out at the sight of the police gathering up their wounded.

Near me a man holds his two arms in the air. "Oh Christ," he sobs, "Oh Christ: you murdering bastards. You low, rotten, foul, murdering bastards."

And on the other side of him, one of the returned soldiers is screaming, "Give us guns. We want guns. Guns—guns. Give us guns and we'll root the bastards out—every one of them."

All over the field and the road men are shouting out their collective and individual hatreds. And it is no mere passing emotion. It is deep. It is there for all time. The same intensity and grief lies over this field that comes with disaster underground.

Not far up the slope a miner is kneeling and holding a boy about my age in his arms. The boy whimpers. There are two bullets lodged in the loose skin beneath his jaw bone. The miner croons and croons like a mother trying to comfort her child in pain and the boy whimpers and whimpers in unappeased pain and bewilderment. He holds his head away over so the bullets won't hurt. But they must hurt, all right, and he whimpers while his companion croons.

Les moves down the slope. "I'll be all right," he says. There is a dribble of vomit on his chin.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I think so. I'll be right now."

He lifts his trouser leg up. It looks red and angry, but the blood is drying. And then Les starts in to swear. Lads of our age shouldn't use words like that. But it had to come out somehow, so Les and I both set in to shouting and cursing with the rest.

Buller runs up and points to our right. "There's a man dying down there," he yells. "Got one in the guts. They won't let us near him."

Looking across we see a close packed group of men. We walk down. Everyone is chalk-white but quiet. In the middle of the group someone is groaning. They are terrible sounds. The men won't let us any nearer.

"You better stay away son," one of the men says to me. "They've sent for the doctor. But he won't do much good. He's done for."

First Cage Up

In the grey of the morn with your soul's alarms
  You travel a path by a muddy stream;
The ti-trees signal with shrouded arms,
  Like warning ghosts in a drunkard's dream.
The poppet-head is a guillotine;
  The starting whistle's menacing sound
Is a crocodile's bellow and just as mean
  As you sink with your mates to the underground.

The tunnel is long and the air is rank,
  Stuffy and hot as a flue in hell;
You spit at the dust going down the bank,
  For your head is sore and your heart as well.
The roof is sagging where timber rots,
  And black are the ribs as funeral plaques—
You punch your cut in, and bore your shots,
  While hoses hiss like a thousand snakes.

"Ho, there, mate, did you read the news
  You can't stop now for a water swill,
Blast and hammer and brace your thews,
  You've only got twenty-odd tons to fill;
You'd strike for a safety stowage scheme,
  Eh, mate? what's safety without a job?
It's more cheap coal or an oil regime—
  Ha, oil is the 'gas' that'll make you throb."

You grab your shirt and your picks at last,
  And carry your aching head out-bye;
You catch first cage if you travel fast,
  Then up, up, up to the glorious sky,
The flowering bush and the birds that teem
  Their wild sweet notes from the green and blue—
How fair is the path by the shining stream;
  How dear is the woman who waits for you.

You want to get married but homes are dear,
  A family's got to be clothed and fed,
They talk of closing the pit next year,
  So how in the heck can a man get wed?
You raise your chin and you bare your wrist—
  The miners are meeting tonight in town
"We're all in this," and you shake your fist,
  "You can't keep a man in a union down."

JOCK GRAHAM.

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BUSH BRED

The wind comes in at the door,
The rain down the chimney falls,
The drips, blown under the eaves,
Flip through cracks in the walls.

Once in the city I lived,
With bricks and mortar and stone;
But here I'm back in the bush,
And at home to the bone.

Let mortar and stone and brick,
Unchanged, their centuries span!
But, in age, an old bark hut
Turns grey, like a man.

MARY GILMORE.

Gerry Grant

"JEDDA"

"JEDDA" is a thoroughly bad film. It peddles the worst kind of racist nonsense. It is technically and artistically third-rate. Because of its palpable unreality it fails even as an exciting yarn. Even the glimpses of our wonderful country and its people, suggesting as they do the exciting possibilities of Australian film making, merely emphasize "Jedda's" disappointing failure to use them properly.

And when you think of the part films play in Australians' lives, the few Australian films produced, and the publicity this one received—it's a pity about "Jedda".

For Australians spend more time at the cinema on average than the citizens of any other country. Yet Australia produces fewer films than almost any other country.

This is mainly because the important distributing networks are controlled by foreign capital and it is all but impossible for would-be Australian film producers to find the guarantee of release, either here or abroad, necessary to ensure financial backing.

Apart from "Jedda", the only Australian main feature film released in 1955, "Captain Thunderbolt", directed by Cecil Holmes, was unable to penetrate the Melbourne city cinemas and was forced out to the suburbs for its Victorian premiere, though it far surpasses in technique, interest and integrity all but a few of the hundreds of films imported each year.

"Jedda", however, by virtue of its distribution by Columbia Pictures Pty. Ltd., an American-controlled company, has not only done the rounds of the main city, suburban and country theatres throughout Australia, but is also spreading a name for our films and an idea of our country and its people overseas.

It has moreover been favored with the most expensive and thorough-going publicity build-up of any film exhibited here in 1955, following a carefully-planned program begun more than two years before its release.

Much of the publicity stressed the authenticity of the film and the careful research that went into it.

The story, briefly, is that Jedda, an Aboriginal girl, is brought up from birth by a white Australian woman Sarah McMann, living with her husband Douglas on their station in the Northern Territory. Sarah treats Jedda as her own child. At the age of 16 she is abducted, half-willingly, by an Aboriginal called Marbuck. The head stockman at the station, Joe, who intends to marry Jedda, takes off after them with a gun. A policeman joins the chase since, it appears, Marbuck is an escaped murderer.

Marbuck's tribe will not permit his union with Jedda for it infringes their marriage laws, and when Marbuck defies their ruling they point the bone at him.

Believing he is dying as a result, Marbuck tries to save himself (just as Joe and the policeman are about to catch up with him) by killing Jedda, but in the general flurry Marbuck and Jedda both fall over a cliff and are killed.

The slender framework of this melodramatic plot is loaded with a ponderous pretence at a social study which claims, implicitly though none the less with self-assurance, to reveal the main features of the relations between white and Aboriginal Australians, and to give a fair account of Aboriginal ways of life.

But it appears, on the evidence of "Jedda", that Charles and Elsa Chauvel, who between them share responsibility for the script and direction, take absolutely for granted the essential inferiority of Aboriginals, and the complementary myth that white Australian station owners are fighting a game but largely hopeless battle in redeeming them from their state of savagery. So it is useless to bring up any Aboriginal at all in the ways of "civilisation" for he or she will always "slip back."

Their insistence on these absurdities and the importance of the reality makes it necessary to analyse their work in far greater detail than such a crude piece of film-making deserves.

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A long sequence of the film is devoted to explicit statement, in the form of a discussion between Sarah and Douglas McMann.

Sarah backs the loser, claiming that she can "do something" with Jedda, who is then three years old.

Douglas, however, has no illusions about Aboriginals. "They don't tame, only on the surface" he points out. "You can't wipe out the deep-rooted tribal instincts of a thousand years in one small lifetime."

Sarah McMann despises Aboriginals in general as much as Douglas, but she needs a child badly enough to take a risk with Jedda. She speaks of Aboriginals as "naked monkeys' but contrasts them with Jedda who is "no more like them than night is to day." But she believes her servant girls so stupid that she must tell them not to leave their babies too near crocodile-infested waters!

And Mrs. McMann, says the film, is one of the few women who "understand these people." The purveyor of this profound truth, the drover Felix Romeo, demonstrates his own understanding when, after deciding entirely on his own to dispose of the motherless Jedda by presenting her to Mrs. McMann, he sends to inform Jedda's father Bulu of his will. This is the full extent of Bulu's participation in the decision.

Sarah wins a temporary concession from her husband and is allowed to continue educating Jedda although, as Joe says (supplying a commentary to, and interpretation of, the film), Jedda has "a tough time learning the A.B.C. of a white child!"

Jedda even learns to play the piano, though here too she apparently has a "tough time," for no sooner has she started to tinkle off a piece by Mozart than her "native mind" takes control and, as the camera dwells on a brilliantly colored Aboriginal shield, she begins to bang her hands up and down on the keys, making a cacophonous row while she pants for breath. This is supposed to be "corroboree" music, played with "primitive" abandon, though it sounds for all the world like modern twelve-tone music played by a novice.

Finally of course, as soon as Marbuck gives her the eye, together with some of his tried (and trusty) love music, she chucks civilisation overboard, A.B.C. and all, and becomes for the rest of the film just a whimpering mess whose sporadic feeble struggles to free herself merely emphasize her real helplessness.

It is left for Joe as commentator to hammer home the moral, telling us with an echo of Douglas McMann that we cannot expect a member of "a race so mystic and ancient" to become "one of us" in one small lifetime.

This is staggering impertinence enough from any human being about another. But for Joe to associate himself with master race doctrine heightens the absurdity, for his mother is an Aboriginal woman, and his father an Afghan.

Joe had to be cast as at least half Aboriginal—for as a white Australian he could not have wanted to marry Jedda. And Joe's father had to be an Afghan, for native-born white Australians do not sleep with Aboriginal women!

It is worth looking briefly at the lovemaking and other forms of emotional expression by the different racial types, for it is a commonplace of film technique that action, emotionally charged, carries an impact far transcending that of the mere words of discussion or commentary.

The white Australians are played with conscientious flatness, so that for example the full force of Sarah McMann's very real grief at the loss of her child is for the most part repressed, while Douglas could pass very well as callous.

The relations between Joe and Jedda are freer, though their love scene by the water has a restraint that one might mistake for good taste on the part of the director were it not for the rest of the film.

The contrast is pointed of course by Marbuck's seizure of Jedda, followed by a love making that is intended to be not far short of animal, with all the connotations of male supremacy and female submission, and more than a hint of outright rape.

This corresponds to the old, exploded, anthropological view of Aboriginal sexual life of "savage male wreaking his lust on chattel women" to quote Colin Simpson, who points out the absurdity of this theory.

It is also worth noting the producer's very real ignorance (disguised to a certain extent by the casual slovenliness of his presentation) of some elementary facts about the tribal customs of Aboriginals.

We are told for example that Marbuck and Jedda cannot marry because she has the wrong "skin," though "skin" is a pidgin word which in no way corresponds to the highly complicated tribal marriage laws. When speaking this bastard dialect, Aboriginals use the word "skin" because white Australians taught it to them. It would have been easy enough to contribute to our understanding of Aboriginals by including in the film's commentary a short and simple explanation of the genetic reasons for their marriage laws.

Nor are these laws as rigid as the film pretends, so that to present Marbuck's execution by his tribe as the inevitable consequence of breaking the marriage laws is nonsensical.

But it is nonsensical anyway, for neither his "madness" while he is dying nor his attempt to avoid death by sacrificing Jedda correspond even indirectly to anything in Aboriginal lore.

And we are not even spared the hoary legend that Aboriginals send complicated messages by smoke signal!

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It is easy to demonstrate "Jedda's" technical poverty by taking many sequences apart, to show their feeble dialogue, continuity and direction, and the unnatural spasms of the contrived plot.

Even the color suffers faults of continuity and consistency. In successive shots towards the end the sky changes twice from deep to light blue.

In the face of all this, the actors have a hard time of it and some of them do extremely well in the circumstances. George Simpson-Lyttle is mostly convincing as Douglas McMann. Betty Suttor as Sarah has to fight her script harder and is correspondingly less successful. Paul Reynell has a hopeless job playing Joe.

Ngarla Kunoth, Jedda herself, has little enough chance to act, but she comes through, at least in the first half of the film, as a natural, warm-hearted and intelligent girl. Robert Tudawali, partly because he is not tied down to unspeakable dialogue, gives a splendid performance as Marbuck—a fine man and a great hunter with knife, spear and gun. We can at least congratulate the producer on his choice of these two first-class people.

But it is a bitter commentary on the reality behind "Jedda" that Robert Tudawali has been relegated to manual labor in Darwin while Ngarla Kunoth has been sent back from Sydney against her will to the mission school where she will resume her training as a second-class citizen.

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Behind "Jedda" is the reality of the squatters and the Aboriginals they have dispossessed and virtually enslaved, the reality of a people whose way of life has been savagely degraded.

Because people degenerate with the destruction of their culture it is possible for the film to emphasize details which (carefully selected and where necessary distorted) superficially have a basis of truth, though the interpretation placed on them is false.

But the basic idea of "Jedda", an isolated individual brought up as a white Australian, in no way reflects the real problem of the Aboriginal peoples or its solution, though it lends just enough credibility to Jedda's legitimate curiosity about her people, with whom she is in continual contact, and about the survivals of their culture, deep based as it is in the land around her, to color the fiction of her "reversion to type".

The real problem is one of a whole people, living in a variety of social forms, more or less unified and self-contained. No solution can pretend to be valid that does not recognise and make use of existing Aboriginal culture.

However these subtleties are hardly likely to bother a film maker prepared to violate the plainest anthropological and historical truth that an Aboriginal (or anyone else) brought up from birth as a white Australian will act in every way like a white Australian, and (of course) vice versa.

And what, behind the fictional paternalism of the McMann's, is the reality of Aboriginal life on the stations of the Northern Territory?

An Aboriginal worker in the Northern Territory commonly achieves a wage of £1 a week after three years' service. His wife is entitled to 7/6. As for his children, when Native Affairs Commissioner Middleton refused Mr. Donald McLeod his request for a State School teacher for the Aboriginal children on the co-operative on Yandyarra station, he gave as the reason that not one of the other 45 stations in the district provided educational facilities for Aboriginals.

We had a sharp enough reminder of these things recently in the conviction of three white Australians for whipping and beating Aboriginals back to their jobs at Eva Downs, and while many people living in the South were surprised at the lightness of the sentences, those nearer the crime were surprised, with more reason, that the case ever came to court. And Eva Downs had its licence to employ Aboriginals renewed a few days after the convictions!

But there is another side to the reality of the Aboriginal peoples and of their life. It is the reality of Albert Namatjira, of Douglas Grant, of Harold Blair, men who have overcome immense obstacles to make their mark in a white man's world. It is the reality of the Aboriginal actors of "Jedda" whose talent, charm and intelligence belie the parts they are permitted to play. It is the reality of the "Pilbarra Blue"—the strike of 800 Pilbarra tribesmen in 1948 for better working conditions and democratic rights, and their formation of a co-operative in the teeth of legal and physical obstruction. It is the reality of the decent majority of the Australian people.

The Price of a Car

by Lance Loughrey

WHEN Mervyn looked back long afterwards he was never quite sure who first suggested buying the new car. It might have been Lorna for he was generally guided by her. The main thing was they both took up the idea enthusiastically. And nothing else would do them but a brand new Holdmoor.

There were those who expressed misgiving. Like Lorna's mother.

"I should have thought Lorna," she said after being told about the plan on a visit one afternoon, "after all the hard struggling you've gone through to get this home, you wouldn't want to build more worries. The place isn't even paid for yet."

"We'll have it paid in a few years," Lorna said as she folded some washing she'd just brought in.

"But look at all the other things you need," persisted her mother eyeing a couple of threadbare sheets among the washing. "Most of your linen's the same you had when you first got married."

"Nine years—that's not so long. Anyway, they can always be patched."

"But what about the children? They're really quite shabby. And now they're both going to school it will cost you a lot more."

"I'm finding that out already," Lorna said. "Thank heavens we've only got two."

"I don't see why you want a car though. You live handy to the station and it's not far to the city."

"Look Mum," said Lorna with a note of finality, "other people have cars round here. I don't see why we shouldn't. And besides, you need a car with children."

When Mervyn told his father about it the old man said, "But why don't you get a secondhand job if you must have one?"

Mervyn gave a superior smile.

"That's only buying other people's troubles," he said in a matter-of-fact tone as though he had only that moment coined the phrase.

"You oughta wait'll you're a bit more on your feet son. I'd put me money into an electric saw, something like that."

For a moment Mervyn's eyes showed interest, for it had been his ambition to do this as soon as he was in a home where he could have a workshop of his own. But he shook his head.

"Look Dad, I've set me mind on a car. We've got some of the money saved and I've told a lot a people I'm getting it. And having a car like the Holdmoor will give a man a kind of prestige, confidence."

"Then there's your sewerage to think of," said his father as though he hadn't heard his son, "and your paths."

But Mervyn's enthusiasm for the car grew with each new day and lifted him as in a dream above all barriers. He'd put in his order for the Holdmoor and figured the fourteen months wait would give him time to save the rest of the deposit. As he continued to save he became possessed with expectancy. He thought of the car at night when he'd go to bed, in the morning when he awoke and during the day at work. He prided himself when he and Lorna would think out some new way of saving another shilling. For instance, going to bed early and reading on cold nights instead of making a fire, or discovering a way to make use of cabbage water.

In moments of childish triumph he had let some of these things slip out at the Railway Workshops where he was employed as a coach painter. Because of this odd naivety in his make-up and the lack of a sense of humor, Mervyn was made the butt of many jokes in the car shop. For a long time his plans to buy the Holdmoor was the theme for endless banter and practical jokes.

One day Larry, an elderly laborer who swept the cars out, said to Mervyn:

"Look mate, are you awake the fellas are making a joke of you and your car?"

"I know," Mervyn said and tried to appear amused. "I've put up with it for ten years. They think I'm a bit dull cos I don't gamble and talk sport all day."

Larry frowned and shook his head.

"I wouldn't say that exactly. They're not a bad bunch of blokes. Help each other a fair bit I reckon."

"I know that," Mervyn admitted. "A few helped me when my house was being built. But they still make fun of a man."

"They're not crook on you Merv. for actually buying a car. A man's entitled to one if he can get it. They just seem to reckon you live a bit beyond your pocket."

"That's all right about that Larry. I know. They think I'm a no-hoper. But I've got a house, ain't I?—and some of them haven't. Wait'll I get the Holdmoor—they'll see something then."

One particular wag in the shop known as Bully worked alongside Mervyn. Bully knew Mervyn's circumstances and had some idea of the stinting he and his family would have to do in saving. For this reason and the fact that Mervyn was putting on side about getting a Holdmoor, Bully took a special delight in drawing him out on the subject. He would then relay the news to the other men and they would laugh and joke about it.

"It must be a battle Merv," Bully said one day in an attempt to glean fresh information, "saving that dough for the Holdmoor."

Mervyn looked at Bully with some caution. Although he was half aware of being ridiculed he always made an effort to justify himself.

"It's just a matter of budgeting yourself properly."

"See what y'mean," Bully said narrowing his eyes thoughtfully. "Never thought of it that way." He paused and gave a little fraternal smile. "I wish you'd gimme a few hints for my missus."

"My wife helps a lot by cutting down on the unessentials."

"People gotta have good food though Merv—butter an' eggs especially."

Mervyn looked amused.

"Not necessarily. Chinese coolies can live without such things. The Malayan native lives on one small bowl of rice a day. Did you know that?"

"Yeah, but that don't mean that it's right," said Bully forgetting for a moment his role of calm inquisitor.

"I still think people spend too much on food," Mervyn went on airily. "We use margarine instead of butter for one thing. It's real nutritious, too."

"What about cake and sweets and nuts and things like that?" Bully said.

"All that stuff is bad for you—especially kids."

"Don't do my nippers any harm," said Bully. "Still, you could be right. But what about clobber? That's something you can't do without."

Mervyn noticed a mocking light in the other's eyes and he said to himself: "You won't laugh when you see me riding around in my Holdmoor."

"As for clobber Bully, people buy too many clothes." Mervyn's tone had the assurance of an evangelist. "I'm still wearing the suit I got married in."

"Fair dinkum?" said Bully forcing a smile back but gleefully recording the statement to tell the other men later. "Different with kids though, ain't it?"

"All depends what you mean. Kids don't have to be dressed up like little Lord Fauntleroys. People only do that to show off."

Despite this attitude Mervyn found certain aspects of the budgeting plan worrying. When others would talk about "the nice spread the missus had on Sunday" or "the party the kids had after the pictures on Saturday" he would often feel the loss of not being able to exchange gossip. He had hardly any social life at all. He couldn't even bring the family out for a walk in the park because he sought all the overtime he could, including all day Saturday. By Sunday he was too tired to go anywhere, especially after he had done a bit of necessary work about the house.

But when, by chance, he would come by some free entertainment such as the film night at the local church hall, or the time his wife got some free theatre tickets, he would be talking about the event for days after. He had, in fact, acquired a miser's pride in getting something on the cheap. Like the time he came in after the Easter holidays talking about the four days he had his family in the country at a cost of only two shillings and fourpence.

"We used the free rail pass everywhere of course. Stayed at the uncle's little farm for nothing. I did a bit of work for the old coot. But it was all right I tell you."

"What was the two and fourpence for?" Bully asked.

"A pound of apples and four buns. We bought them at the station night we left. We'd missed out on tea."

★

One day during a discussion with Larry he spoke about his children being in bad health. John, the elder child, he said, was breaking out in sores.

"But Mary's the worst," he went on. "She suffers a lot from sore throats. They think it's tonsillitis."

"They think?" said Larry. "What do y'mean—think? Don't they know?"

"The wife went to see about it," Mervyn said, "and the doctor—twelve and six, the visit cost—he reckoned it was the same as tonsillitis."

"Well, what are y' waiting for?" Larry said.

"Fifteen quid it costs to take 'em out. That's a lot of dough Larry. It's about time, y' know, the unions fought for these things free."

Larry's eyes flashed with scorn as he looked at Mervyn.

"I don't know why I talk to you—fair dinkum," he said. "You fellas who never attend union meetings and always behind in dues—you only go crook when something hits your mingy pocket."

"I always vote Labor," Mervyn said defensively.

"That costs you exactly nothing. Anyway, forget about that. What are y' gunna do about this kid of yours?"

Mervyn frowned in thought for a moment, then lightly he said: "Of course it mightn't be anything serious."

"Don't give me that," Larry snapped. "Fool yourself if y' like, but don't fool me."

"I still say the unions oughta . . ." Mervyn began.

"Look," interrupted Larry, "I agree. But in the meantime there's a sick little girl to think about. Pay the money man."

Mervyn was affected by this discussion more than he admitted to Larry. When he got home that night the first thing he said to Lorna was: "How's Mary?"

"She's as good as gold today," Lorna said. "Mum brought over some lemon-and-honey—the old-fashioned cures are often the best—and I gave her a dose."

At that moment the two children came in from the back and Mervyn looked at them for a long moment.

"John still looks a bit off color, doesn't he?" he said.

Lorna eyed her husband, almost suspiciously, as though she doubted his sobriety. It wasn't like him to come home concerned and worried like this. No matter what her moods were like he was generally cheerful and fairly easy-going. To Lorna it was his chief attraction.

"John's all right," she said in a careful quiet tone, then more cheerfully: "Takes after his skinny old man, that's all."

"I don't know," Mervyn said. "I was pretty hefty as a kid."

"What's come over you tonight?" said Lorna. "You're very disagreeable."

Mervyn rested his elbow on the table and stared vacantly at the floor.

"I dunno," he said. "I—well, I sometimes think we shouldn't be buying a car."

Lorna didn't show the alarm he had expected. It was almost as though she anticipated him for when she spoke her tone was cool and reasoning.

"Don't talk silly dear. The car will give us a new life and the children too. You just wait and see."

The words had a soothing effect on Mervyn and thereafter the incident was forgotten.

★

It was a Friday evening in early summer when Mervyn brought the car home. He felt proud driving it up the street, although he frowned with annoyance as, for the first time, he became really aware of the bad state of the roads. He pulled up outside his gate and tooted the horn. Lorna and the children rushed excitedly out of the house.

"Oh Merv, isn't it just beautiful," Lorna cried throwing her arms out joyfully. "Quick, quick, open the door. I want to get the feel of it."

"Isn't it lovely and creamy and shiny Daddy," John said.

When they were all in the car, Lorna in front and the two children behind, Lorna said:

"Let's go for a drive right away."

"All right," Mervyn said smiling proudly and they started off down the road.

They drove a mile along the North Road, then turned and went around the ocean highway. For awhile the excitement of driving in their own car filled them all with silent wonder. Now and then Mervyn would point out to Lorna the quality of certain fitments and she would nod her head with proprietorial interest. The children would remark passing objects of interest and Mervyn would say: "It's marvellous what you see from a car."

After awhile they stopped and parked opposite a beach resort to watch the sun go down on the water. They had only been there a few minutes when John said:

"When are we going home Mummy—I'm hungry."

"And I want a drink of water," Mary said in a sickly voice.

Mervyn and Lorna looked at each other, one waiting for the other's decision.

"I suppose we better go back," Lorna said.

As they drove back Mervyn stared glumly ahead. After a prolonged silence he asked Lorna about Mary's throat.

"She looks very feverish dear," he said.

Lorna looked back at Mary who was sitting quietly in the corner of the seat.

"She'll be all right. I'll put her to bed early. By the way, I got a note from the school today. It almost ordered me to have her tonsils out immediately. I think we'll have to see about it on Monday."

They arrived home and were alighting from the car when a neighbor stopped by to talk to them. It was Charley Cappit who worked in the head office of the Railways. Mervyn was always polite to him because of the inside information he got about railway administration, but he thought the man an insufferable bore.

"You'll be sorry," Charley said eyeing the car with cynical appraisal. He also owned a Holdmoor.

"How's that?" Mervyn said disinterestedly.

"Now your troubles begin I mean—with that." He pointed at the car for emphasis rather than indication. "Sorry I ever got one."

"That so?" Mervyn said lightly but his eyebrows came together as a worrying thought passed through his mind. "I got it worked out to about eight pounds a week for everything."

Charley gave a laugh that sounded like a grunt.

"That's what I thought. Wait'll you get going. Everything going up all the time. You set aside so much, then bang bang—up goes food, rent, rates and where are you? I ask eh? Still got to fork out that eight smackers for the car and its keep. Then someone gets sick. Eh? And the news—did you see yesterday's paper? Third Party Insurance going up."

Mervyn stared unbelievingly at Charley.

"I didn't notice that," he said.

"Buried in the back page," Charley said. "It'll be law in a matter of weeks. As if it's not a big enough racket now—the car companies' premiums. Ever study that move? You ought to. Eh? Registration is the next to go up, then tyres and petrol . . . And I almost forgot to tell you—they'll be cutting out all overtime at the workshops. It's official, but you won't hear till next week. That's the way it goes . . ."

When they got inside Lorna went about getting the dinner ready while Mervyn sat at the table in silence. And he remained silent throughout the meal despite attempts by Lorna to make conversation. He said nothing even when John appealed to him against Lorna's refusal to give him more stew.

"What's left is for your father's lunch at work tomorrow," she said firmly.

After dinner Lorna put the children to bed, then came into the kitchen to clear the dishes away. Once she frowned at a dinted saucepan and as though speaking her thoughts aloud she said:

"We'll just have to get some new pots."

Mervyn was standing at the open doorway looking out at the gathering dusk.

"New pots?" he repeated in a loud voice. "New paths, new clothes, new food, operations, medicine . . ."

The ... family party ... night.

ABORIGINAL GETS GAOL

An aboriginal First World War veteran, who played a gumleaf in Swanston Street yesterday, was charged in the City Court today with having begged alms.

Constable J. Pink said he saw Joseph Gotch, of Collaroy, playing the gumleaf with a hat between his feet.

"He asked me to give him a go," the constable added. "He said, 'I'm only an aboriginal. You whites have taken over my country.'"

Gotch was sentenced to seven days' imprisonment by Mr Mohr, SM. He had a long list of convictions.

Liner arrives ... e days la...

Melbourne Herald, Jan. 31, 1956.

NAMATJIRA

The dark Arunta,
Outlawed, outcast,
Seizes in pigment
The land he has lost.

Whiteman, arrogant,
Standing apart,
Masters the landscape
With guilt in his heart.

Prisoner and trooper
While we remain,
Each wears a handcuff,
Each drags a chain.

B.J.M.

Lorna looked at him with an expression near to alarm.

"Mervyn. I've never seen you like this before."

Mervyn glanced at his wife with nervous impatience.

"Didn't you hear what that fella told us?" he said.

Lorna shrugged her shoulders.

"Who'd take any notice of that bore?"

"Bore or not, he was telling the truth. And on top of everything else I'm going to lose the overtime. Don't you know what that means?"

Lorna forced a smile in an effort to placate him.

"It may be only a rumor. Come on Merv, you should be happy tonight. The car and everything."

Mervyn closed the back door with a slam.

"The car—and nothing, you mean. Larry said I was fooling myself. Maybe he was right. Anyway, I'm goin' to lie down. I must think. If a miracle doesn't happen we'll have to sell the car—or what we own of it."

As he left the kitchen Lorna stood silent and confused. She didn't quite understand it all at that moment but she began to feel a strange emptiness—as though she'd lost something forever.

RACHEL

by Win Callaghan

RACHEL is only four, but when she found a toy gun in the long grass in the paddock, she knew exactly what to do with it; she came straight up to the house and riddled her mother with bullets, and later shot the postman.

When her father came home, he spoke to her quite severely about it. "Have you a licence for that firearm?" he asked her. Rachel confessed she had not, whereupon her father gave her good advice. "Never," he said, "point a gun, loaded or otherwise, at any human being. It is far worse," he told her, "than eating off your knife at Government House."

Rachel appeared to be quite overawed by the gravity of her crimes. She went to bed quite chastened, with her gun under her pillow, and slept heavily, obviously determined to behave with circumspection in future. She deviated from her resolve only once, and that was first thing next morning, when she potted the milkman.

She told her mother about it at six o'clock, a little too late for her mother to be of any help to the milkman. "I got up at barf barf two," she announced, "and went outside and saw four tigers in the silky oak, so I shot them, but one bullet missed, and hit the milkman."

She had a sugar-bag with her, and she showed us the bodies of the tigers inside. They were very interesting, and we admired them for some time. We asked her about the milkman, whose body did not appear to be with the tiger-corpses, and were quite relieved to hear he had got away. It seems she had only winged him, and he had escaped in the long grass.

She had with her a pair of red cotton shorts, split up the back, and a strip of Christmas paper well decorated with Santa Clauses. This, she told us, was to be her hunting costume, and very well she looked in it. The paper she had us tie around her head with a strip of bandage, in a very plain style rather like a chef's cap, but it suited her never the less. The shorts she put on over her pyjamas, saying that there were tigers all about, and she had no time to change. And then she dashed off to what now appeared to be an arsenal or shooting-box, but which yesterday was a cubby-house. She sat there fiercely intent, surrounded by packing-cases and staring alertly around her, her nostrils quivering and her gun held at the ready.

The tigers came thick and fast. By breakfast time she had bagged another six, and was depositing them in the wash-tub, having run out of sugar-bags. Seven more tigers and three gold-fish from the drain were added to the total by ten o'clock in the morning, and our hunter was beginning to look tired. She rallied after cocoa, however, and began to clean her gun, ready for the next batch of tigers, who, it seemed, had retired for cocoa simultaneously with her. The gun-cleaning process seemed a trifle unusual, but effective for all that, judging by the number of tigers shot after the operation. Rachel merely scrubbed her weapon with brown boot polish, taking care, however, to use a clean rag. It came out looking prettily translucent, and she regarded it with great pride.

She was still admiring it when she suddenly quivered. "Did you," she asked me, "hear a growl?" I listened intently, and heard a distinct growl; but I had no need to tell Rachel, for she was already dashing to the doorway, shooting as she went. She caught the tiger in the nick of time, just as it was disappearing round the side of the rubbish bin. We put this one in the rubbish tin, but foolishly left the lid off, so that it escaped again. Of all the tigers we caught that day, this was the most troublesome—it got away to a neighbor's place, and caused no end of bother before it was properly caught. However, we killed it in the end.

It was just as we had captured this one for the last time that we heard the postman's whistle again, coming on his morning round. Rachel, who really was quite upset at having shot him the day before, ran down to apologise. He was quite nice about it, she told me, and even pointed out a covey of lions behind a gum tree. But Rachel missed these; she was busy shooting at her own feet, on which, she told me later, some birds had alighted. She said she didn't mind the birds, but they were laying eggs there.

Matters progressed nicely until lunch time. The tigers seemed to have disappeared, but cammibulls had appeared instead in Mary's sugar-cane, and were meddling with it. Rachel, whose aim had improved immensely with the morning's practice, shot their head feathers off, and came up with these objects as souvenirs. She was a trifle anxious at having shot at human beings, but forgot her anxiety in a flash as she stood by the wash-tub. Once again her nostrils dilated, and she sniffed anxiously. "Those tigers," she announced, "are going bad in the heat. I think we'd better put them in the refrigerator." With a great display of energy she began to remove the bodies from the wash-tub and stuff them into her sugar-bag, "I think it will needy forty-four trips," she said, as she calculated her catch. She put them all in the refrigerator, and laid the goldfish beside them. When I went to get some milk a long while later, they were all arrayed there neatly on a magazine. Rachel has been reasonably well brought up, and knows that it is not the correct thing to put sugar-bags in the refrigerator.

There they lie still, nicely cold—we have to put our hands in, every time we pass the refrigerator, to make sure. They are to go to the butcher up the road, our mighty hunter has told us, where the bullets will be disembedded and the bodies cut up for cats' meat.

In the meantime our hunter is asleep, with her hunting hat, her split pants and her gun lying under her pillow. Side by side with them lies a fife and a music-book open at Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. She is going to teach herself to play the fife tomorrow, she tells us, because she has shot all the tigers in Australia.

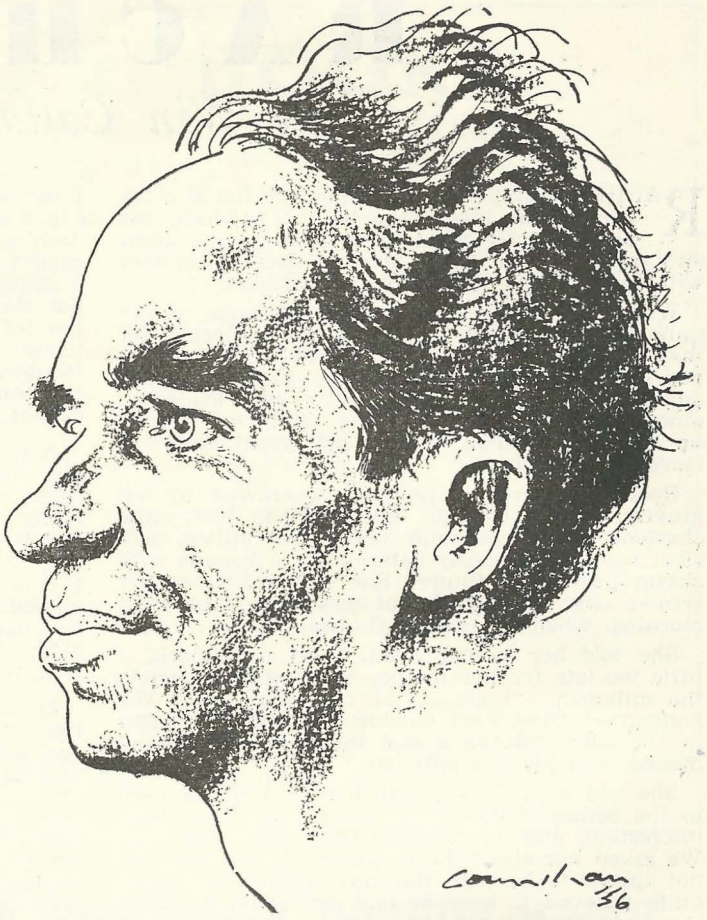
★

"Set the draughtsmanship and text of Norman Lindsay's **The Magic Pudding** beside the work of Beatrix Potter, and you have the differences between the Australian and English temperaments neatly epitomised."

—A. A. Phillips.

Our Writers—II.

RALPH de BOISSIERE



I CANNOT remember my first meeting with Ralph de Boissiere. I feel that I have known him the best part of my adult life. And yet he has lived less than ten years in this country, having come to Australia from Trinidad, via the United States, in 1948.

Ralph is a quiet man, and an exceptionally modest one, and not given to talking freely about himself. But I have had the good fortune to work with him over many months and that, I think, is probably the best way to really begin to know a man.

I had long yarns with Ralph in between attending to the affairs of the then infant Australasian Book Society. I was amazed at his determination, his patience, his courage. It takes courage in any writer to get up on wintry mornings at 4.30 a.m. while the rest of Melbourne is snugly asleep, and start pounding out another few pages of a chapter on the typewriter before getting ready to go to the daily job.

It takes even greater courage to write three drafts of a novel before being satisfied that it is ready to submit to others for full criticism.

More than any other writer of whom I know, Ralph de Boissiere has that tremendous capacity for single-minded absorption in his work, that infinite capacity for taking pains, that marks the stayer in the literary field.

No better example need be given than this recent feat in writing the libretto of the play 'Calypso Isle," writing and setting the music to that play, producing the play and acting the most difficult part in it himself.

The soft West Indies cadences and lilt to his voice, so much a part of the man, were a memorable feature of that production, and leave a lasting impression of gentleness and determination on those who have heard him speak.

Ralph has courage in good measure. He is a true writer who is prepared to make many sacrifices for his craft.

I clearly remember the first occasions when Ralph went out among workers on the job to speak about his newly published book, "Crown Jewel." Nervous, as most of us are when we get up to talk in public for the first time, Ralph soon had his listeners—seamen, building workers, wharfies, storemen—giving him friendly encouragement. They saw in him a man simple and straight, sometimes groping for words, yet eloquent.

He spoke of far-away Trinidad and of the West Indian struggles for liberty; and yet his audience always had the feeling that he was one of them, not a stranger who had no interest in their own lives and problems.

Since coming to Australia, de Boissiere has written two novels and a play each based on his deep understanding of the ways of living and the aspirations of the West Indian people. These works needed to be written and only a man of Ralph's maturity of outlook and keenness of vision could have written them so adequately. They have the universal qualities that all honest and important writing must possess.

The two novels have already had a wide circulation in Europe. "Crown Jewel" has been translated into Czech, Rumanian, Polish and German; its sequel, "Rum and Coca Cola," into Polish and German. Australians will shortly have an opportunity of reading an A.B.S. edition of "Rum and Coca Cola."

For a time when he came to Australia, Ralph worked as a clerk. Now he is occupied full-time as a writer. He tells me he has just completed a play called "The Dove's Nest," based on some of the characters and incidents in the new novel on which he is working.

This novel reflects a new and important trend in his writing, dealing as it does with the lives of Australian industrial workers.

The outward directness and simplicity, and the inner strength, of Ralph de Boissiere are ably portrayed in Noel Counihan's drawing.

—Bill Wannan.

Australasian Book Society

4th FLOOR, 17 ELIZABETH STREET, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.

'PHONE: MB 2292.

MANY Overland readers are already subscribers to the Australasian Book Society, or readers of ABS books, but for those who are not, a brief introduction. Like Overland, ABS is an entirely non-profit organisation which exists solely to help Australian writers and to further Australian literature. Already, in our three years, we have published fifteen books by Australian writers, and these fifteen included seven new and important writers. All our books go to ABS members and subscribers at special privilege prices (see details below).

Every reader who enjoys Overland will enjoy the books of the ABS. If you have not joined already, you can use the form below. If you are a member, then please help us by: Using the form below to get a new member; renewing your subscription or paying your account **promptly.**

ALAN NICHOLLS, literary critic of the Melbourne Age, in his Christmas survey of Australian literature of 1955 named as the three best works of fiction: F. B. Vickers' "The Mirage," John Morrison's "Black Cargo" (both ABS selections), and Mary Durack's "Keep Him My Country." Of Vickers, Mr. Nicholls said: "It is a tribute to him that he has revived the terrible lineaments of the tragedy of the half-caste, made it live again as a reproach and a challenge to Australia." Of Morrison: "This writer must now be numbered in the first rank of living Australian writers. He is in the great tradition of Australians who have . . . told the strong, deep-rooted story of the 'ordinary' man."

★

OTHER PRESS COMMENTS on John Morrison's "Black Cargo" included: "Morrison arrives among the most finished short-story-writers in Australia, and as the most accurate literary representative of the Australian worker" (Sydney Bulletin). "One of the big events of the year" (Melbourne Age). "Some sinister steward at the Union Club might introduce a copy of 'Black Cargo' into the library and gloat as the oldest and richest member drops dead from shock and apoplexy" (Sydney Morning Herald). "Morrison writes with great strength and simplicity" (Sydney Telegraph).

★

ALAN MARSHALL, author of the recently-published "I Can Jump Puddles" (19/9 post free), a delightful and heart-warming story of his childhood struggles against the crippling affliction of polio, recently spent a week in Sydney on behalf of ABS. He spoke to the Sydney Polio Society, the N.S.W. Teachers' Federation, and the Waterside Workers' Federation, as well as at meetings organised by the Society. Sydney reports speak warmly of Mr. Marshall's popularity with all who met him and heard him speak.

★

JUDAH WATEN, author of "Alien Son" (13/6 post free) and "The Unbending" (ABS—now out of print), is to visit Sydney this month, and will lecture on "Australian Literature Today" at the Fellowship of Australian Writers' rooms in Sydney on March 26. Writers John Morrison, Stephen Murray-Smith (Editor Overland) and Ian Turner (Manager ABS) will visit Sydney, possibly Brisbane, during April.

NEW BOOKS listed for early publication by ABS include: Ralph de Boissiere's "Rum and Coca Cola" (already published in German and Polish editions). This book carries through the story begun in his fine first novel, "Crown Jewel," to the war years in his homeland, Trinidad . . . Frank Hardy's "The Hard Way," an autobiographical account of his experiences during the writing of "Power Without Glory," and the legal and popular struggles which followed its publication . . . A collection of Henry Lawson's little-known stories and poems, together with his autobiography, entitled "Early Days" . . . "The Tracks We Travel, Series 2"—an anthology of the best of contemporary Australian writing, together with a special supplement of writing from our neighbors in South-East Asia.

★

ALL BOOKS reviewed or mentioned in Overland, if still in print, are available through ABS. Additional recommendations to Overland readers: Dymphna Cusack's "Come In Spinner" (13/6); Frank Hardy's "Power Without Glory" (23/6 and 16/-); Eric Lambert's "The Veterans" (16/6); "American Century" (an anthology of contemporary American stories), 8/6; "The Octopus," by Frank Norris (an American classic), 8/6.

I desire to become a SUBSCRIBER to the Australasian Book Society, paying:

£2/10/- in advance for a series of five books, soft bound, and four issues of the Society's quarterly magazine, Overland.

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Please send as my first book:

( ) THE AUSTRALIAN, Bill Wannan.
( ) THE FIVE BRIGHT STARS, Eric Lambert
( ) THE MIRAGE, F. B. Vickers.
( ) BLACK CARGO, John Morrison.

(mark which book or books required)

NAME.....

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How to Get the Game by the Throat—I.

HOW TO BE A RETURNED SOLDIER

by Eric Lambert

This course is difficult in the extreme. Don't undertake it unless you are prepared to make tremendous sacrifices.

First, become a soldier. This is done by joining the Army. Some sods join the Navy and Air Force and call themselves returned soldiers, but they are imposters.

A returned soldier is a soldier who didn't get knocked off. Therefore, don't get knocked off. This is the most difficult part of the course. Many aspiring returned soldiers have failed here.

One theory asserts that the best way not to get knocked off is not to join the Army, but if you don't join the Army you can't be a soldier, and if you're not a soldier you can't be a returned soldier. I think I have successfully demolished that theory.

As soon as you get your soldier's equipment look in the knapsack. There may be a field marshal's baton in it. If so, it is the one I lost.

Once it is clear you are not going to get knocked off and you get slung out, you join the returned soldiers' league. Make sure you join a branch with a booze licence, a billiard table, and as few members who know your war record as possible. These last are liable to make a nuisance of themselves when going over old campaigns. Your greatest privilege as a returned soldier is every Anzac Day being able to play swy, unmolested, under the very noses of the coppers.

If not prepared to make the above sacrifices, stay a civilian and get into the black market.

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Compiled by Eric la Motte

"Smoko" is a new department in **Overland**, designed to record in print the many fine—and funny—stories that are told by workers on jobs and in pubs all over Australia.

Most stories that are worth telling more than once are worth setting down in type, so contributions are invited from any reader who reckons that that story he's been telling to his mates every Monday to Friday at 5.15 for the last ten years is all right.

Contributions may be printed as they come in, or they may be worked over by our editorial staff. It is suggested that contributors sign their stories with initials, or a pen-name.

Items in this issue's "Smoko" are based on stories from John Morrison, Merv Lilley, Norm Trembath, Eric La Motte.

Mate of mine once worked in a department of GMH where there were 50 foremen, 48 of whom had ulcers. The managing director sacked the other two—reckoned they must be bludging.

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The day was blazing hot, and, to make matters worse, the refrigeration system at the pub over the road from the Quay was on the blink. A wharfie, who had obviously been working hard all morning, entered perspiring. He order a schooner, shuddered at the first mouthful, and spat it out on the floor. He beckoned politely to the barman: "Hey, mate! I thought you'd like to know—your beer's just gone off the boil."

★

"I see there's a bloke who claims to be a thirty-third cousin of the Tsar, and says he's an authority on Russia, writing his memoirs for the Jim Gerald," says Snow.

It's lunch-time at the foundry. Snow takes a deep swig from his billy (he says only weaklings use cups) and continues: "I see this bloke says that under the present set-up in Russia people are like they come out of a mould—what's that word . . .?"

"Stereotyped," I says.

"That's it." Down go a few more mouthfuls of tea. "Stereotyped . . ." Snow muses. "That would be a change for me."

I look up enquiringly.

Snow continues: "Now, take me under this set-up, right here in Aussie. I do the same job every day. I start the same time every day, I finish the same time every day, I go to the pictures every Friday night, I do me dough regularly at the nags (when I get dough), I get cheese sandwiches for lunch three days a week, and the other two days I get egg, and I live in a housing camp where you can't tell one hut from the other."

Snow finishes his last cheese sandwich, washes it down with the last of his tea.

"Yes," he says, "being stereotyped would certainly be a change."

Comment of Jim the brickie, standing well back from under as the hoist jammed and several hundredweight of cement, plus barrow, thundered down from above and buried itself in the earth: "If it'd been a bottle, I'd have caught it."

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Capacity of Australian workers for tagging a new arrival on the job with a label appropriate to his individual idiosyncrazies is well known.

There is, for instance, a certain Melbourne building worker known as "Hydraulic Jack," so called because his mates reckon he'll hoist anything.

One of the branches of the wharfies' union once had a vigilance officer who was renowned on the water-front for never doing anything. The men called him "The Mirror," because his sole response to any and every complaint was: "I'll look into that."

We've heard, too, of the bloke on the Sydney waterfront known as the "London Fog"—he hardly ever lifts.

The job of a trimmer aboard ship is to move the coal from the bunkers to a point where the firemen can get at it to shovel it into the fire-boxes. One such trimmer on the Australian coast was known as Von Nida—he never got into a bunker.

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It was nearly knock-off time, and the wharfie wanted to shoot through early. The foreman watched him down the gang-plank, and, as his foot hit the wharf, yelled:

"Hey! Where are you off? It's only nine to five."

The wharfie didn't stop. "Is it now? Well, let me know when it blows to twos and I'll have a quid each way."

Swag

"You didn't have any appeal for donations in the last issue" was a bar-side remark passed in an accusing tone recently. We promised to rectify the matter this issue, and well we might. In that rare item, **Overland** No. 1, Clive Turnbull remarked that: "I hope it is now economically possible to publish an intelligent magazine without continual monetary transfusions from sympathisers." Well it just isn't, particularly if you are quite determined —as the Editorial Board is—that there shall be no increase in the price of the magazine. Cost of production of each copy of the last issue was 1/2½, and, since quite a number are sold at discounts, those who share our conviction that the magazine must reach the greatest possible circle of readers have to help us close the gap.

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DONATIONS: We acknowledge with thanks, S.M.S. (proceeds of barbecue) £25/18/8, K.S.P. £5, J.R.L. £2/2/-, M.L. £2, J.M.D. £2, J.S. £1/10/-, M.G. £1/1/-, B.W. £1/1/-, L.O. £1, V.L. £1, E.W.I. £1, Lazy Harry £1, S.G. £1, G.B.W. 15/-, E.W. 15/-, M.M. 15/-, J.D. 10/-, S.R. 10/-, M.W. 10/-, B.R. 10/-, M.J. 5/-, A.G.S. 5/-, B.C. 5/-, J.G. 5/-, J.D. 5/-, L.W. 5/-, E.G.R. 5/-, B.H. 5/-, B.M. 5/-, A.N. 5/-, A.H. 5/-, S.B. 5/-, J.M. 5/-, B.M. 5/-, K.M. 5/-, B.H. 5/-, R.M. 5/-, J.R.L. 5/-, D.W. 4/-, J.McN. 2/6, J.C. 2/-, E.T. 1/-.

★

We want subs. very badly. We have a ridiculously low number of subscribers considering our subscription is only five bob a year. To bump the subs. up we propose a new scheme to our readers: get in touch with a few friends and ask them if they would allow you to send their names in for a sub., a copy of the magazine plus an invoice to be sent them. They can cancel the sub. if they wish after receiving the magazine. This method will have the advantage of relieving our well-wishers from having to bother with the details of handling the actual money.

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Many renewals for **Overland** are now falling due. May we suggest to readers that it's easier to slip a ten bob note for two years' sub. (or a year's sub. plus a donation) into an envelope than it is to go to all the bother of buying a postal note for five bob?

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Main needs of **Overland**, in the way of contributions, are for more satire and humor (humor has always played a great part in Australian life and literature); more drawings; more songs and poems; and more about local traditions and history, even "pars" if necessary. Will those who kindly send comments and encouragement from time to time please understand that their letters are immensely valuable, but that it is not always possible to acknowledge each one personally.

"To say that in Australia 'there is no large and prosperous educated class and no intelligentsia' is as incorrect in fact as it is preposterous in implication. A generation of vital, young Australians is coming along en masse. They have intellectual integrity, ability for creation and absorption, and imagination in a charming matter-of-fact sort of way. They also have modesty and humility and could well serve as shining examples to those European pseudo-intellectuals of whom your patronizing correspondent is such an adequate example." This was stated in a recent letter in the **Times Literary Supplement** by Dr. Andrew Fabinyi, well known Melbourne bookseller and literateur, in reply to an anonymous review of the Australian literary scene in a recent issue of the T.L.S. Dr. Fabinyi also pointed out that Australians buy more British books than any other country in the world, as well as consuming "phenomenal quantities" of Australian literature produced by local publishers.

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Since the War the following works by members of the Society of Realist Writers in Melbourne have been published or performed. It would be interesting to know what comparable results other Australian writers' groups have had. Katharine Susannah Prichard (Life Member): **The Roaring Nineties, Golden Miles, Winged Seeds**; Ralph de Boissiere: **Crown Jewel, Rum and Coca-cola, Calypso Isle**; Mona Brand: **Lass in Love, Strangers in the Land**; Max Brown: **Australian Son**; Laurence Collinson: **Poet's Dozen, The Schultz Affair**; Frank Hardy: **Power Without Glory, Journey into the Future, The Man from Clinkapella**; Walter Kaufmann: **Voices in the Storm**; Eric Lambert: **The Twenty Thousand Thieves, The Veterans, The Five Bright Stars, Watermen**; Nance McMillan: **The Bridge**; David Martin: **From Life, New World New Song** (ed.); John Morrison: **Sailors Belong Ships, Creeping City, Port of Call, The Judge and the Shipowner, Black Cargo**; S. Murray-Smith: **The Tracks We Travel** (ed.); Bill Wannan: **The Australian;** Elizabeth Vassilieff: **These Modern Writers, Peking-Moscow Letters**; Judah Waten: **Alien Son, The Unbending**; Spinifex: **Rob the Robber**. Numbers of these have appeared in several languages and many editions.

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Owing to no contributions of a high enough standards being received, the Editorial Board regrets to announce no award in our cover-drawing contest for a drawing entitled "Waterfront Strike 1956."

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It is surely fitting that the first "film book" to be photographed by the Red Cross for the use of hospital patients who cannot move is Alan Marshall's popular **I Can Jump Puddles**. Shortly after the publication of this book, late last year, Mr. Marshall lost his workroom and contents—and nearly his life—in a fire. Now Australian National Airways have made the nice gesture of offering Mr. Marshall an "all lines pass" on their Queensland and Territory airlines to replace some of his lost notes, films, etc. Mr. Marshall has also accepted an offer to visit China on a Cultural Delegation in May.

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Allan Morris' series, "The Big Rivers," will be continued in **Overland** No. 7.

Melbourne's second Australian Book Fair took place on March 13-17, during the City Council's Moomba Festival. Ten Melbourne literary organisations jointly sponsor the Fair through the Book Fair Council, of which they are all members. The Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund met in Melbourne during the Fair, and several Board members took part in the program. Special features of the Fair were its ship-board setting, displays of rare Australian books and of overseas translations of Australian writers. Ron Edwards, of the Ram's Skull Press, printed a daily newssheet at the Fair.

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Speaking on the opening night of Melbourne Moomba's Australian Book Fair, Commonwealth National Librarian, Harold White, announced last year's Australian book production figures: 552 publications, compared with 538 in 1954. Mr. White said that Australian publishing figures compared unfavorably with those of most other countries. Australia has one in three hundred of the world's people, publishes only one in six hundred of the world's books. Biggest book producers last year were the U.S.S.R. (50,000 titles), the United Kingdom (20,000) and the U.S.A. (10,000). Indonesia and Thailand each published between 2,000 and 4,000 books a year. Australia's figures can be compared only with those of such countries as Morocco and Monaco. Mr. White suggested that Australian book fairs should be held in other big cities, that public lending libraries should be greatly expanded and extended, that exports of Australian books to Asia should be increased, that a chair of Australian literature should be established at Melbourne University. These proposals, he said, would help to develop Australian publishing.

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The Sydney Realist Writers' Group reports that during 1955 one member completed a novel (Len Fox); seven members had work published in **Overland**, and many members had work published in other Australian publications; Marje Pizer completed a new collection for publication; many members had work published abroad, including a volume of Frank Hardy's short stories in the U.S.S.R.; Mona Brand had two new plays produced by New Theatre, Sydney, and has now had her plays translated and/or performed in the U.S.S.R., Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany, China, Belgium and India. At the annual meeting of the Sydney Realist Writers' Group late last year William Hatfield was re-elected President, Joan Clarke and Frank Hardy Vice-Presidents, Mona Brand Secretary and Joan Hendry Treasurer.

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Owing both to increasing circulation and increasing costs, advertising rates in **Overland** are now £12 page, £6 half page and £3/10/- a quarter page. We hope our readers will suggest advertisers to us, as the best way to produce a bigger magazine at the same price is to get more ads.

★

An arrangement that augurs extremely well for the future of **Overland** is the decision of the Australsian Book Society to include the magazine as a regular feature in its annual subscription. This will eventually mean about at least 2,000 extra subscribers to the magazine. The editorial direction of **Overland** remains, however, completely distinct from the Australasian Book Society, and the normal method of taking out and renewing subscriptions will remain in force for those of our readers who are not members of the Book Society.

NOTABLE BIRTHDAYS: Flora Eldershaw (March 16), William Hatfield (March 18), Xavier Herbert (May 15), Mrs. Aeneas Gunn (June 5). We also remember: Bernard O'Dowd's birth (April 11, 1866); A. G. Stephens' death (April 15, 1933).

★

Of tremendous significance in this year of atomic tests, about which Australian public opinion is so disturbed, is Dymphna Cusack's timely play, **Pacific Paradise**. Its impact was considerable when broadcast nationally by the A.B.C. earlier this year, and plans are afoot for its presentation on the stage in most States. Sydney New Theatre have already successfully staged the play. The play, incidentally, which deals with the determination of Pacific islanders not to be evacuated so their land can be used for atomic tests (and how they rouse world opinion) was rejected by the B.B.C. However, Independent Television in London have bought the rights of the play so the British public will experience it after all. Also of interest is that a Warsaw publishing house has bought the rights of **Come In, Spinner** (written with Florence James).

★

Meanjin, Summer 1955, contains the usual rich yield. John Morrison contributes a characteristic story which all admirers of **Black Cargo** will want to read. It is called "The Man on the 'Bidgee." Other valuable items are "Miles Franklin" by Marjorie Barnard, "Chekov and the English-speaking World" by Vance Palmer, and important reviews by Arthur Phillips, Manning Clark, A. D. Hope, Brian Elliott, Vance Palmer and many others. This first-class magazine costs 30/- yearly (four issues) from Editor, **Meanjin**, University, Melbourne, N.3.

★

Our London correspondent suggests that Australian writers negotiating contracts with English publishers should note that substantially better terms than the "standard" ten per cent. of net receipts are now obtainable under pressure. English publishers might bear in mind the greatly increased book export business (£17m. in 1954 as against £3m. in 1939) and that Australia continues to be the British book trade's largest overseas market.

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Some Melbourne notes . . . Persistent rumors state that balladist Ted Harrington is to return for a time to Melbourne from his retreat at Alice Springs. His many friends will be pleased to hear that he is in good shape . . . Leonard Mann has been awarded a C.L.F. Fellowship to write a novel of the period between the two world wars, set in a country town (other Fellowships went to Mr. Hal Porter and Mr. W. E. Fitzhenry) . . . Vance Palmer was honored last November by the Montague Grover Memorial Award for his book, **Legend of the Nineties** . . . Eric Lambert's new novel, set in Queenscliffe and dealing with fishermen, has appeared in England. It is called **Watermen** . . . Head teachers submitted a motion to the recent Teachers' Conference asking for "further revision of the primary curriculum in social studies and literature to give a definite Australian bias" . . . Congratulations are due to the Bread and Cheese Club, now 17 years old, and to the Australian Literature Society, now 56 years old . . . Winners of £100 prizes in the Sydney Playwrights' Advisory Board's 1955 competition were two Melbourne writers—Oriel Gray with "The Torrents" and Ray Lawler with "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll."

Swag

First prize of £250 and second prize of £50 is offered by the Sydney Journalists' Club for full-length plays written by persons living in Australia. Conditions from the Club's Secretary, 166 Phillip Street. The Club will put aside £300 a year as awards for Australian works of art, literature or music, the field varying from year to year.

★

Melbourne and Newcastle May Day Committees have jointly sponsored, with Dame Mary Gilmore's approval, an annual national literary competition, centred around May Day each year, to be known as the "Mary Gilmore Prize." These two Committees have asked Brisbane and Sydney May Day Committees to put up enough money to make an annual prize of £50.

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The Melbourne May Day Committee offers prizes of £5 for a short story and £3 for verse in this year's May Day Literary Competitions. The best three stories and the best three verses will be eligible for consideration for the Mary Gilmore prize of £50. The May Day Committees states: "The short story and verse most favored by the judges will be those best expressing the aspirations and democratic traditions of the Australian people." Conditions of entry may be obtained from Mr. Colin Willman, Secretary, May Day Committee, Box 46, Trades Hall, Melbourne. Closing date is March 31, late entries April 16. The Melbourne Committee will accept mss. from Tasmania, S.A. and W.A. as well as Victoria.

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The organisers of the Dame Mary Gilmore Portrait Fund, which is sponsored by the Australasian Book Society and the Trustees of which are Mrs. Dorothy M. Catts and Mr. C. R. McKerihan, President of the Rural Bank, are anxious to close the fund by the end of March. Unfortunately, owing to the organisational task involved in approaching all those individuals and organisations who would contribute, N.S.W. has been the only State adequately covered though the response there has been excellent. Mr. William Dobell has already begun work on the portrait, and provisions governing the destination of the portrait lay down that it becomes the inalienable property of the Australian people, and available to them in a suitable gallery or galleries. Donations should be sent to Mrs. Dorothy M. Catts, Care G.P.O. Box 3989, Sydney.

★

Overland's recent application for a Commonwealth Literary Fund grant was carefully considered by the Advisory Board, the Secretary of the Fund, Mr. W. R. Cumming, writes. The Board did not consider that, as at the date of application, **Overland** was sufficiently established to warrant consideration of a grant. **Overland** will, of course, make further application.

★

The latest **Southerly** (No. 4, 1955) contains a further delightful story in Norman Lindsay's disrespectful series of childhood recollections, an excellent evaluation of Vance Palmer's writing by A. D. Hope and many other good things. From next issue Mr. Kenneth Slessor takes over the editing from Mr. R. G. Howarth. Subscription one guinea for four numbers, to Angus and Robertson, Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

Brisbane Realist Writers' Group is at present examining the subject of "Comics and Juvenile Delinquency" in close liaison with the Queensland Trades and Labor Council. A course of lectures based on Fast's **Literature and Reality** is promised for later this quarter. Brisbane New Theatre is to stage John Meredith and Joan Clarke's **Wild Colonial Boy** in April and May. Much criticism has been aimed at the very theatrical identification of Doolan with Donahue, but (taken as theatre rather than as history) the show promises well. A recent social run in collaboration with the Realist Writers' mobile group proved a great success.

★

A casual census taken on the occasion of a visit from Glen Hamilton, of Wattle Recordings, Sydney, reveals that no fewer than ten amateur musical groups in Brisbane are devoting at least part of their energy to bush music. Queensland University Bush Music Club collaborated in the collection and scoring of a set of **Twelve Bush Tunes** for household instrumental performance, which has been accepted for publication by Palings Ltd. It seems likely that Brisbane musicians will shortly be appearing on Wattle discs. An article on "Music of the Queensland Coast" appearing in **The Arrow** —journal of Queensland University Arts and Commerce faculties—has led to the recrudescence of quite widespread interest in the zither as a folk-instrument. Several zithers, rescued from second-hand dealers' shops or from under the bed in the spare room, are now to be heard at singabouts in Brisbane. The Moreton Bay Bushwhackers' Band entered a float for the Australia Day procession in Brisbane and won third prize. Later in the day they ran spontaneous concerts at the Regatta Hotel and at Davis Park, where the audience included spastic children from hospital, and Aboriginals from the Cherbourg Peninsula reserve.

★

A few years back Australian poetry, with very few exceptions, would not sell at any price. Largely due to the enthusiasm of poets themselves, this has been changed. We have news that **New World, New Song**, the little collection of 30 living "people's poets," edited by David Martin, was fully sold out within three months of the first editions (3,000 copies) being published. This should encourage the early appearance of similar booklets. We suggest that "Ironbark" (Rus Singleton), a true modern folk poet, is one author who deserves early consideration.

★

The Adult Education Movement is gaining strength, especially in Victoria. The C.A.E's. summer school at Albury started a gratifying number of controversies, some still reverberating. The Council has plans for encouraging choral societies in country centres, backed by a central sheet-music Lending Library. The Writers' Club of the Adult Education Association is doing consistently solid work, and this year there will be two parallel courses by David Martin, one on "applied" and the other on more exclusively "creative" writing, both of 20 weeks, beginning April 12.

★

The November 1955 issue of **Historical Studies** (annual sub. 21/- for two copies, University of Melbourne) contains interesting material on the origin of the caucus selection of Cabinet; the trade unions and labor parties 1890-94; the transportations from Ireland, and other original Australian and New Zealand research.

Claude Roy

FAMILY LIKENESS IN A SONG

WHOEVER studies man and his way of life is either enchanted or horrified by the discrepancy of his thoughts and the contradiction of his deeds. From one people to another, it seems that there is never the same taste for the same color, but that this is always the cause of endless bickering and even sometimes of fighting. In what they call their God, or their gods, how they cook their food, how they choose their judges or define the greatest good, nations and classes seem to be always in disagreement. There is nothing new in this observation. Montaigne drew from this a lesson.

For him "so many humors, sects, judgments, opinions, laws and customs teach us to judge our own good and teach our judgment to recognise its imperfections and its natural weakness." From the same observation, Pascal deduced nothing but recourse to faith: "A difference of three degrees in latitude upsets all jurisprudence, a meridian decides truth, strange justice that is bounded by a river!"

And when far-flung nations or adverse parties seem to agree over the choice of the same words and the use of the same ideas, we are filled with consternation at the different sense that can be given to the nomenclature and the principles we would have though synonymous or analogous.

If Herodotus or Montaigne, Pascal or Montesquieu drew from this great difference in humanity the conclusion of wisdom interwoven with cautiousness and benevolence, the feeling that other people are profoundly different often leads men to fearful extremes. One does not argue over taste or color, says the wisdom of the nations. But the folly of the nations invents castes whose name means color in Sanskrit and the ridiculous system where a cow is considered a sacred being while a man of the untouchable caste is considered as a nameless beast. In its contemporary form, slavery, colonialism, war, the iniquitous hierarchies that are claimed to be necessary to the life of various societies, the methodical persecution of minorities—all this melts into one in an attempt to justify the attitude that those people "there where we do not know what is going on in their heads, do not think like us, they have a strange mentality, and you can't imagine what they are thinking up." In a word, it is the conviction that some one else is an animal irremediably different, belonging to a strange species, a kind of wild game which holds some gross resemblance to man but which can neither think nor feel anything as man thinks or feels.

However, the very idea of **differences** which enables the lord to justify his stranglehold on the serf ("those people have not the same needs as we have"), the oppressor to hide his oppression ("without discipline society would be broken up"), the master to defend slavery ("those who work for me are part of my family"), falls to the ground when it comes up against a more accurate knowledge of peoples and races.

For many years I, in France, have collected proverbs and stories, songs and roundelays, weather sayings and stories, all of which, wreathed together, form **Le Tresor de la Poesie Populaire Francaise (Treasury of French Folk Poetry)**. Having glanced through **Les Clefs pour la Chine (Keys to China)**, and **La Chine dans un Miroir (China Seen Through a Mirror)** the essay and album which I brought

back with me from China, a reader wrote ironically to tell me that I probably mixed up my notes from Nivernais or Charente with those from Shensi and Hopei, because the Chinese texts that I had published and the French texts that I had collected, seem to have taken on a kind of "family resemblance."

I remarked to my mischievous and amusing correspondent that his teasing, which he limited to examples taken from France and China, could have been more widespread. For in reality, it is not only between Nivernais and Hopei, Shensi and Charente that poetry, man's daily bread, has this family resemblance, a family liking that has nothing to do with the translator or the collector, the publisher or the commentator.

For instance, once when I was in Spain I came across a Seguidilla in which the lover sighed:

"Tears from thine eyes
I would become,

Run down thy cheeks,
Slip in thy breast,

I would enter in thee
And in thy heart
Would find my home."

And the Bulgarian peasant sings:

"If you take the path,
The dusty path,
I will become the dew
Falling on track and path
So that your fine silk dress
Is neither tarnished nor soiled."

This is the theme of the "metamorphosis" which runs through all French songs from the twelfth century to Magali. And I found it in Shanghai where, to the tune Man Chiang Hung, the following words are sung:

"If I were thy looking-glass
I'd always reflect thy beauty.
If I were thy scarlet girdle
I'd always hold thee entwined.
Would I were thy bamboo flute
My lips ever joined to thy tongue
Would I were thy white and black-tailed cat
Always purring in the folds of thy skirt."

And if I open the Vienna manuscript which is entitled **Codex Manuscripus Theologias Graecus,** in which popular Greek songs of the fifteenth and sixteenth century are collected, I read:

"I would become a slender swallow to come into thy bed
And build my nest amid thy pillows,
Waking thee with my song, so that thou shalt not forget,
So that thou shalt think of me, my slender beauty, all the days of thy life."

In the Kantelar, a collection of Finnish songs published in 1840 by Lonnrot, I read:

"Had I the wings of a bird,
The great wings of the eaglet,
I would take the wings of the goose,
The feathers of the crane,
Then would I soar to the skies,
Flying, soaring upwards,
Swift to the land of my love
To the house of my darling."

And this is exactly the same song that I heard an old colored ministrel sing in a little bar of San Francisco harbor. It was a "blues." Although unfortunately I have forgotten most of the words, I do remember a verse, which goes like this:

"If I had wings like Noah's dove
I'd fly up the river to the man I love.
Fare thee well, O honey, fare thee well."

[In its English-Australian expression, the "If I had wings" theme was the practical expression of the convict's desire to be 12,000 miles away from "Botany Bay."

The English transportation ballad, "Here's Farewell to you Judges and Juries" has it:

If I had the wings of an eagle,
High through the air I would fly,
Straight to the arms of my Polly
And in her soft bosom I'd lie.

Burlesqued in "Little Jack Shepherd," Yardley and Stephens' comic extravaganza on the exploits of an 18th century English highwayman (which was first presented to enthusiastic Melbourne audiences in 1882), the nostalgic wish took on a slapstick appearance:

If I had the wings of a turtle-dove,
I'd soar on my pinions so high,
Slag-bang to the arms of my Polly-love,
And in her sweet presence I'd die.

—Ed.]

Probably there is no country in the world where, if you seek in its folk poetry, you would not find this "If I were" theme. This consistency of themes and images is not only to be seen in folk poetry. In his admirable work on **La Genese de l'Odyssee (The Genesis of the Odyssey)** Gabriel Germain showed recently the myths and the episodes which are common to Homer, and the Indian poets, and the extremely interesting analogies which exist between the Odyssey and the Mahabharata, between the Greek epic and the Ramayana. This continuation of the same dreams and the same fables which we find in such different climates and societies might be traced to some antidiluvian system which links all the peoples back to one primordial branch, and all poetry to one primitive, original poetry. Thus we might consider all the peoples of the earth as the descendants, perfected to a greater or a lesser degree (or degenerated), of a primordial race which sent forth to be obscured or magnified a tiny ancestral treasury of fables and idea. But experience leads us to consider that this view is an error.

It is quite clear that the great myths and the smaller themes of folk imagination are travelling elements which cross frontiers with the nomads or the merchants, that their charm is catching and their vivacity vagabond. It is sometimes possible to trace the itinerary of a metaphor or the road taken by a story across the map of the world. But we know also that man, at close grip with the earth, faced with Heaven, before oppression and before death, reinvents, without ever having learned them, the great reactions of defence and liberation. The fixed idea of all the lovers who, from Canton to Helsinki, from Arles to Chios, from Seville to Sofia, imagine their metamorphosis into a tear, a dove, a necklace, a zephyr or a star can be explained as an imitation of the great ancestral lover, the Indo-Aryan who, long before the flood, created this poetic idea which in turn inspires his obscure descendants. The theme of the metamorphosis can be traced like a thread through folk poetry, but we can also trace it through the "artistic" poetry of Apuleius and Eluard.

This does not mean that all the poets who use it merely copy each other like schoolboys. But it is much more likely that this theme and this song are only a common link in human society because men hold in common so many themes and feelings. It is not necessary to read "Cyrano de Bergerac" or "L'Histoire de l'Aviation" to dream in your sleep that you are walking on clouds or flying in the sky.

All that is necessary is to be a human being with this irrepressible need to break through your bonds, to shatter the shackles, with this fundamental need to be oneself and to be others, with this continual tension of imagination infinitely dilatable, to feel growing within you the old desire, always newly discovered and always born again, for **metamorphosis.**

Mythologies and poems, songs and fables are repeated so stubbornly only because men find themselves so constantly ready to break the bounds of their flesh and their society, to smash the pseudo-laws of nature or the false demands that economy imposes on their life.

That is why, working in the treasure house of my people and of the Chinese people, gleaning the refrains of my native provinces or collecting the far-off songs of China, I find myself listening, in the end, to the same man. The differences of the color of our skins, of our religions, of costumes or customs, of tradition and climate, become if not negligible, at least mere accessories. These pretexts, which were the venomous alibis of contempt, of exploitation or the annihilation of man by man are, suddenly, abolished and reason can measure their worth.

All that is left is men, so different and so brotherly.

Isn't it an eternal man that reveals to us this stubborn persistance for the same dreams and the same wisdom in the native poetry of each people? Perhaps there is not, surely there is not an eternal man. But what the profound song of the peoples reveals to us is that apart from the accidents of birth and the chance of geography, apart from the inequality of history and the lapse of time, there exists **a profound man**. It is he and he alone whom we must understand and love.

"The lives of all nations make up a single chord in human history, simply because each nation sounds its own particular note in that chord, for there can be no chord of identical sounds."

—Belinsky.

Edgar Waters

COLLECTING OUR FOLKSONGS

THE citizens are hearing quite a lot about folk songs lately: and what exactly, they often ask, is a folk song?

Folk songs are the songs made by the "folk," the workers, peasants, and so on. That is fundamental. Further, folk songs have been passed on by word of mouth (oral transmission), and have been changed in that process: "First of all one man sings a song, and then others sing it after him, changing what they do not like . . . In other words, the method of oral transmission is not merely one by which the folk song lives; it is a process by which it grows and by which it is created" (Cecil Sharp). In such a view a folk song might at some stage be transmitted by print, might even take as its beginning something in print.

One more point here: folk music makes use of technical devices not (commonly) used in the music of the "high culture." For example, irregular rhythms, pentatonic as well as diatonic scales, modes (forms of scale) other than the major and minor, "neutral" intervals.

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The first published collection containing Australian folk songs was Paterson's **Old Bush Songs:** first edition 1905; seventh and latest edition, 1930; out of print and not to be had secondhand these many years. Paterson was not interested in folk songs as such; nothing about **Old Bush Songs** indicates that he was aware of any difference in kind among the songs he printed. His motive in collecting the songs was a desire to preserve some relics of the bygone pastoral age to which he always looked back, saw as a kind of rough Utopia in the past.

"For the most part no attempt has been made to include any of the more ambitious literary productions of modern writers." Ambitious or not, a good many of the songs are literary productions. A good many also are folk songs. It is a great pity that Paterson does not give us the tunes to which they were sung. The more pity because Paterson in his introduction shows that he understood that the folk ballad lives fully only when it is sung and cannot be judged or enjoyed by its word in print alone. Of the many poets and literary gentlemen who have interested themselves in folk ballads, most seem almost unaware that these things were made to sing.

Paterson was not interested in folk songs which had their origin in the British Isles. Recent collecting indicates that the currency-born went on singing many such songs. Perhaps it was mainly the women who did so, though Paterson himself in a poem mentions the singing of the Irish ballad "Willy Reilly." At any rate, Paterson includes in his collection only two songs which came from the British Isles, "A Wild Rover No More" and "Bourke's Dream," and it may well be that he thought these to be native productions.

Most of Paterson's successors who have so far published their results have followed Paterson in this. It may be that they have not found any such songs, or it may be that they have not considered it worth while publishing them because they are not Australian in origin. It is to be regretted because many of these songs have very fine tunes, while a great many of the home-grown songs have pretty dull tunes.

It was forty years before another collection appeared, a small one, the words collected by Vance Palmer. It is called **Old Australian Bush Ballads,** a title reminiscent of Paterson's collection, and, like Paterson's collection, it was inspired by a desire to preserve relics of the past rather than by an interest in the songs as songs. Nevertheless the songs are set to tunes. Unfortunately for the student of Australian folk song, the tunes have been patched by the musical editor, Margaret Sutherland.

Dr. Percy Jones collected a number of folk songs during the 1930's and published an article about them. He spoke of the dullness of the tunes, and suggested that the tunes were not very important. A few years ago, when the American singer, Burl Ives, toured Australia, he recorded a number of the songs collected by Dr. Jones, and shortly afterwards Dr. Jones published a small collection. Despite his unkind words about Australian folk tunes, his collection included one of the finest tunes yet collected in Australia, that used for "The Station Cook." This tune is widely used for come-all-ye ballads. It is not a purely native product, but then very few of our tunes are.

The latest volume to deal with Australian folk songs is Hugh Anderson's **Colonial Ballads** (Ram's Skull Press, 29/6). This is a study of various forms of popular song in nineteenth century Australia, and the result of a great deal of serious, detailed research work. Perhaps the most valuable part of this work is the account of the professional entertainers of the Victorian gold fields, notably Charles Thatcher, "The Minstrel of the Goldfields." A great many songs illustrate this account. Many of them are very good examples of the art of the comic stage singer. They are mostly not of much value today as songs, but they are a valuable and fascinating record of the life and feelings of the diggers. To the student of our folk songs they are also valuable as examples of a kind of professional entertainment which undoubtedly influenced our folk songs (and also our literary ballads). At least one of Thatcher's songs, "Look Out Below," has passed into the tradition, and has been remoulded by two or three generations of singers into a folk song.

The second section of **Colonial Ballads** is concerned with "the old bush songs." Some of the songs quoted here are folk songs, but most are of a fairly self-conscious literary type. (Anderson has taken his words from printed collections, such as Paterson's, which often have no music, but name a tune; he has sought the tunes in printed collections of music. Sometimes he has assigned quite the wrong tune to a set of words, misled by the fact that different songs sometimes have the same title.) Anderson traces developments in the songs related to social changes, and argues very plausibly that these songs had a considerable influence on the purely literary bush ballad. Unfortunately he introduces an unnecessary confusion by assuming "bush songs" are all of the one type, and by trying to decide whether or not "bush songs" are folk songs.

In the course of this, Anderson gives a "definition" of folk songs which is not really a definition at all, and which would be accepted as a satisfactory statement about folk song by very few folklorists: ". . . a song that has been transmitted without the assistance of the written word." It is probably no accident that when discussing the question of the "communal origin" of folk songs, Anderson should show no acquaintance with the

perfectly intelligible views of the folk song collector Sharp, mentioned at the beginning of this article. Instead he quotes an absurd statement of the **literary** scholar Professor Kittredge ("phenomenon of a unanimous throng composing poetry with one voice"), and of course, bowls it over very easily.

The argument, as to whether or not "bush songs" are folk songs, meanders, and re-appears at intervals through the second section of **Colonial Ballads**, and never seems to reach a definite conclusion. On the whole Anderson seems to think that "bush songs" are not folk songs. If one accepts the point of view on the nature of folk songs that I have put forward, then all this discussion becomes rather pointless. Some of the "bush songs" are folk songs, others are not.

The point of view I have put forward would also dispose of Anderson's argument that a song is not an Australian folk song if it is modelled on, or derived from, a song originating outside Australia.

This does not mean that this section of **Colonial Ballads** is not valuable to the student of folk songs. Though there is no evidence that songs such as "The Stockman," "Paddy Malone" or "New Chum in the Country" ever passed into the oral tradition (i.e. became folk songs), they have points in common with the folk songs, and Anderson's book brings together a great deal of evidence which shows the relations and mutual influences of two kinds of song.

★

One other important, recently published book, takes up a question to which Anderson devotes much space. The book is Stewart and Keesing's **Australian Bush Ballads**, and the question is the relation of the literary bush ballad and an earlier "sub-soil" of folk ballads. In his introduction to this work Douglas Stewart suggests that two of the most important influences on the (literary) bush ballad were from the folk ballads current in Australia, and from writers such as Kipling and Bret Harte. I suppose everyone agrees with this generalisation. It seems to me a pity that instead of following up these matters in more detail, Stewart devotes the greater part of his introduction to comparisons between the bush ballads and the "Border Ballads." In talking about "Border Ballads" he mentions or quotes from quite a number of ballads which have nothing specifically to do with the Scottish Border—"Edward," "Lord Randal," "Chevy Chase," "Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford."

It is not serious that Stewart gives something the wrong name. But it indicates that Stewart knows the Anglo-Scottish ballads only from literary collections, knows them as poems. He shows no awareness of the fact that they were meant to be sung, that they have been created by the constant remoudling of generations of singers; in other words that they are **folk** ballads, and different in **kind** from literary ballads. Unless this point is grasped, and kept constantly in mind, it does not seem to me that there is much use in the kind of comparisons that Stewart makes.

All the collecting that has been done indicates that the strongest influence on our folk songs and ballads has been Irish. Comparing our ballads, both folk and literary, with eighteenth and nineteenth century Irish balladry might well prove more fruitful than comparisons with an earlier Anglo-Scottish balladry.

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The study of our folk songs can throw much light on other aspects of our cultural and social history. To be of value such study must be close and detailed; study of this kind is really not yet possible; it must wait upon much more thorough and scientific collecting.

In most reasonably civilised countries the collecting and study of folk music is taken fairly seriously. Work is organised in a systematic way, often by formal academic institutions.

There are more or less accepted standards for the scientific collecting and publication of folk song material. The collector will go out and look for singers; he will note down words and melodies exactly as the singer gives them (and preferably make sound recordings); he will make detailed notes of any information the singer can give him about his songs, and also about the singer himself and so on. Then this material will be published with comments in some form that makes it accessible to other students.

Publication in this form is not of much interest to the general run of citizens, who want only a good singable version of the songs, together maybe with brief notes. The editor of a popular collection may take his melody from one singer, and his text from another, patch up his text out of several versions, maybe do a bit of re-writing. But he can do his work best when there is a lot of material available in the scholarly journals and collections, and when there is also available a lot of detailed and intelligent comment by experts.

There is no good, comprehensive, popular collection of Australian folk songs available; again, such a collection must wait upon much more thorough and scientific collecting.

★

Dr. Jones' work may be said to represent the beginnings of scientific collecting in Australia. There may very well be other important individual collectors working in the same way. The most promising thing about the present situation, however, is that over the past few years we have had the beginnings of more organised and systematic work.

A few years ago John Manifold, in Brisbane, began publishing his Bandicoot Ballads, a series of handsomely decorated broadsides. These have helped a good deal in creating the present interest in our folk songs. In Brisbane itself, largely under Manifold's impetus and guidance, there has grown up a group of people actively collecting and performing folk songs. These people are not formally organised, but they do seem to work as a group and share a common outlook; they have published very little, but they seem to be collecting a good deal. And Queensland may well prove to be a fruitful area for folk music.

In 1953 the academic world displayed an unexpected and welcome interest in our folklore; the National University appointed Russel Ward to a scholarship (in history) to study the reflection of our social history in song and ballad. Ward, of course, found that not much of the material he was to study had been collected. He publicised this fact, and went looking for singers. He found some very interesting singers, too.

Ward was chiefly interested in words, and in any case did not have the means easily to record the tunes. But by the end of 1953 a group in Sydney had formed the Australian Folk Lore Society ". . . to collect, record, publish and popularise the folk lore of Australia." Ward put members of this group, armed with tape recorders, in touch with the singers he found.

The Society is of considerable importance in several ways; chiefly because it represents the first attempt to organise collecting and study in a systematic and scientific way. And a great deal of collecting has been done, notably by John Meredith, but also by other members of the group. Meredith has now a collection of some hundreds of

items, recorded on tape "in the field," by the traditional players and singers. A good deal of the material has not been published in any of collections so far printed. It should be added (it is the common experience of folk song collectors) that only a small proportion of this material will be worth including in a popular collection.

The Society publishes a journal, **Speewa.** The value of its contributions has not been remarkable, and it has published only a small part of the material that has been collected by members of the Society. But it has already published a number of interesting songs not printed anywhere else, and plans for future publication are more ambitious. The next issue of the journal is to contain a large number of songs from Meredith's collection.

★

Clem Millward.

What is the purpose of all this work? What are the motives of the people who are doing the work?

A strong motive seems to be that compelling interest in our history that is so marked in much of our intellectual life today. Anderson, in **Colonial Ballads**, seems to regard Australian folk song as effectively dead; he is interested in gathering the facts about it from the nineteenth century documents and collecting them together for the record. Both Manifold and Meredith have a rather more romantic interest in old ways of life in Australia, which goes with an attachment to the bush. Meredith, for example, leads a group called "The Bushwhackers" who perform the more rough-and-rowdy folk songs in an entertaining fashion. The Bushwhackers dress themselves up for concerts in false beards and bright colored neckerchiefs, and such other things as might be considered a reasonable stage representation of the costume of a bushman of sixty or seventy years ago. Some of the songs they perform have little merit as songs, but are interesting comments on our history and performed for that reason.

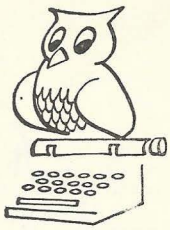
However, underlying this, and underlying most of the work on our folk music, is a strong belief that this music is of much more than historical interest. It is a belief that a healthy tradition of good popular music is a basic part of a nation's culture. Most of our popular music is imported, and in the eyes of those most interested in our folk music, it is not good music. We are concerned to see develop a popular music that is both Australian and better than that we now import. This popular music may perhaps not be folk music, in the sense in which I have defined folk music. But if it is to be distinctively Australian, then we are convinced that the most fruitful basis on which to build it is our tradition of folk music, the music "created by the common people."

If our old folk music is to carry out this fertilising function, then of course it must be spread in popular collections, and above all by performance. The collection and study of our folk music are the essential foundations. Only these things can lead to good popular collections of our songs and to high standards of performance. But all aspects of the work progress together. The basis for a good and fairly large collection of songs already exists, and we can expect to see one fairly soon. Indeed, Bandicoot Ballads might be considered as such a collection appearing in instalments. Singers and players of our folk music are becoming popular and building up larger repertoires. Groups such as "The Bushwhackers" are creating styles of their own, new styles, but with their roots in old traditions.

It is quite evident that there has been little development or creativity in our folk music over the last forty or fifty years. But the tradition is not dead. A generation still alive carries the living tradition, and is anxious to pass it on. It is well worth our while to pick up the tradition. In the words of Ralph Vaughan Williams, symphonist and folk song collector:

> "I am not telling you of something clownish and boorish, not even something inchoate, not of the half-forgotten reminiscences of fashionable music mouthed by toothless old men and women, not of something archaic, not of mere museum pieces, but of an art which grows straight out of the needs of a people and for which a fitting and perfect form, albeit on a small scale, has been found by those people; an art which is indigenous and owes nothing to anything outside itself, and above all an art which to us today has something to say—a true art which has beauty and vitality now in the twentieth century."

* COMMENT



Dame Mary Gilmore writes:

Idolatry is natural to humanity. It extends from worship of a flag to a leader, an idea, Royalty or anything else. It is individual and national, and sometimes a mixture of both.

A. A. Phillips' article "The Democratic Tradition" for me coalesced long-held impressions into thought. That thought is that most so-called patriotic verse is written to an idea and not to reality.

With us the old idea was to set Australia up as an implication and worship it. In this Bernard O'Dowd (quoted by Mr. Phillips) is as guilty as anyone. Take his "Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space." It is magnificent literature, but is it Australia?

When I first met Bernard O'Dowd I was young in thought if not in years, and I used to grieve that I could not "chant" patriotic verse like his. He shook the heavens with it, and surely that was to be sought, if it were to be adequate. Now I realise that, if you write what is in you, you write Australia, and that if you do not mention or even a kangaroo. We, the people, are Australia. It is the furrow, the plough, that expresses her, and not the gun.

Though I have said that O'Dowd followed convention in the idol-fashioning of his day, he was the greatest in dynamic power and influence of any of our poets. In spite of the hard monotony of his much-fused short-line stanzas he came as thunderclaps and fire to the newly awakening democratic thought of his day. In this he was a leader and not a poet. He wrote freedom and dressed her in Ned Kelly armor. But in writing freedom, cruel and all as his form was, he wrote himself, and in writing himself, he wrote Australia. He was part of her. This shows in the contrast between "Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time" and "The Bush."

In the same issue of **Overland** we have a short poem by J. S. Manifold called "The Map." There we have Australia and not an idol. It expresses a "being," and is not just beautiful words addressed to a plaque or some illusionary ideas.

It is not the Aboriginal or other names in "The Map" that make it Australia, but that in it a man sings his country.

Ian Turner writes:

As did his essays on Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy (**Meanjin**, No. 2, 1948, and No. 1, 1955), A. A. Phillips' stimulating analysis of the development of the democratic tradition in Australian literature (**Overland** 5) will surely spark new trains of thought and discussion among readers and writers in every part of Australia.

A national literature needs critics—for the sake both of those who read it and those who write it. Particularly it needs critics who have, like Mr. Phillips, at the same time knowledge, understanding and sympathy.

In this latest essay, Mr. Phillips describes admirably the process of growth of what we like to think of as the distinctively Australian literary tradition. This comment seeks to consider not what Mr. Phillips said, but what he left unsaid—what he relegated from the field of literary criticism to that of history.

It seems to me that this division between history and literary criticism cannot be sustained, because historical understanding adds a further dimension which is necessary to a satisfactory explanation of the growth of the Australian democratic tradition. In other words, history makes it possible to answer not only the question: how did that tradition develop? but also: why did it develop when and as it did? Mr. Phillips a number of times begins to suggest answers to this second question—but somehow, at a number of the crucial fences, he seems to jib.

In this comment, I want to try a hurried scramble over three of the fences.

First, why did the democratic tradition develop in Australia as early as it did?

Or, to put the question another way, why, when the convicts' families in England (or Scotland or Ireland) were singing:

> "**You'll** rue **your** transportation, lads.
> When you're bound for Botany Bay,"

did the convicts themselves, in Australia, sing:

> "**They'll** yet regret **they** sent Jim Jones
> in chains to Botany Bay?"

(Incidentally, it is probably the early convict songs and ballads that provide the literary origins of the democratic tradition. Similarly, the folk ballads and songs of the third wave of bushranging —say, from Ben Hall to the Kellys—may fill the gap [noted by Mr. Phillips] left by the absence of cocky-farmers in the formative period of Australian democratic literature. To what extent did these folk-heroes come from, and stand for, the poor selectors of the 1850s to the 1880s?)

Most convicts (or at least the most vocal of the convicts) came to Australia with a man-sized chip on their shoulders. And they wore their chips proudly:

> The hulks and the jails have some thousands in store,
> But out of the jails are ten thousand times more,
> Who live by fraud, cheating, vile tricks and foul play—
> Should all be sent over to Botany Bay.

That they were able to do so was, I suggest, due to these conditions: first, the yeoman-style subsistence economy planned for New South Wales by the colonial office foundered inevitably and rapidly because production could no longer serve primarily a local market, but had to serve a general and an international one (thus, the "Rum Rebellion"). Secondly, production at this level demanded efficient labor, and preferably free wage-labor, and there was a chronic shortage of all categories of labor in the Australian colonies. Thirdly, not only did social conditions make escape highly desirable for the convicts, but the local geography seemed to make it possible. Fourthly, both convict and free laborers usually adjusted better to the pioneering environment than did those for whom they toiled, thereby making the working Jack not only as good as, but usually better than his master.

From these social factors, new attitudes to life developed, and were expressed in the usually unwritten literature of the convicts—and it was these attitudes which grew into a tradition.

The second fence: why did a national school of writing, democratic in its spirit and proletarian in its origin and sympathy, come to dominate Australian literature in the 1890s? Why did Lawson write:

> I won't see this land crowded by each Yank and British cuss
> Who takes it in his head to come a-civilisin' us,

and why did most, and the most powerful of, his fellow writers agree with him?

My suggestions are: first, a national market both for labor and the products of labor had developed to replace the earlier colonial and British markets, and there was a much freer movement of both goods and workers between the Australian colonies. Secondly, the second half of the last century saw the birth and uniquely rapid growth of the organised labor movement—Eureka, the eight-hour day in 1856, the industrial organisation of miners and shearers, and their many victories over wages, working conditions, hours of labor and the right to organise; all these inspired Lawson's generation of working-men with confidence and optimism and the hope of a workers' commonwealth. Next, for the first time, the majority of Australia's adult population was native-born, and this majority was proletarian. Fourthly, these two factors had produced a consciousness of nation among Australian working men. Fifthly, it was the working people rather than the more highly educated upper and middle-classes whose past was deep-rooted in, and whose future was wholly committed to Australia.

It was because of these factors, allied to the compulsory education which provided the technical equipment, that the democratic tradition passed from unwritten to written literature, and that a national literature grew up that was at the same time predominantly proletarian.

(For its time, this proletarian predominance in the national literature was probably unique to Australia. Interesting and suggestive comparisons are the literatures of China following Lu Hsun and of India following Mulk Raj Anand.)

The third fence: why was the optimism of the men of the '90s lacking in the democratic writers of the first twenty-five or thirty years of this country? Why did O'Dowd and Wilmot and their generation question and doubt the earlier confidence of Lawson and his fellows?

Some more suggested answers: Firstly, "socialism in our time"—the slogan of Will Lane, and with him of Lawson and the others—instead of passing from Utopia to science had passed from the fighting platform of the mass labor movement to become a "pious objective" of the Labor Party; socialism was lost in the smoke thrown out by the smouldering ashes of Federal politics and "respectable" trade unionism, and had become the exclusive property of the socialist sects. Secondly, Australia's centre of gravity had moved from the bush to the cities, but militant industrial unionism had lagged behind, and in any case O'Dowd and Wilmot lacked the close, organic connection with the city proletarians and unionists that Lawson and the others had had with their bush forbears. Thirdly, labor's industrial defeats had not been avenged in its political victories, and political nationhood had not produced the expected national independence, and it was a time of despair for the middle-class adherents of the Socialist Republic of Australia.

There was a literature that remained close to the optimism of Lawson and the '90s, that stood close to the new proletariat of the cities. But it was not to be found in the "Bulletin," for by this time that journal was lost to the proletarians, or in any other literary journal. Rather, it was found in the columns of the **Worker**, or the **International Socialist**, or **Ross' Monthly**, or **Direct Action**—or it was sung at some meeting of the IWW or the battling Miners' Union. It took another generation of writers, and new political ideas and struggles and organisations, for Australian literature to emerge again at the Lawson level.

Perhaps Mr. Phillips will think that I am trying to jump imaginary fences—or even that I am on the wrong course. Perhap he recognised the existence of these fences, but wisely decided to skirt them, since the ground of knowledge of these matters from which we have to take off is so unfirm.

But my own view is that these are fences that we have to take, sooner or later, if we are to arrive at a full understanding of our democratic tradition, and its literary expression. And now perhaps there are other **Overland** readers who will have been sufficiently encouraged, inspired or annoyed by this comment to develop further this new and exciting territory, the frontier of which Mr. Phillips has so enticingly thrown open—for our exploration and closer settlement.

POINTS FROM LETTERS

". . . getting better all the time. The article on 'The Blackboard Jungle' is the best I've seen in any publication. Nothing one-twentieth as good appeared here. The author did such a penetrating job of analysis, it was a joy. The articles here were weak in showing the fraud of purpose." —(School Teacher, New York). "It is really most impressive and marvellous value for a shilling. It also contains a masterpiece, and I am not using the word lightly: Counihan's portrait of John Morrison. The 'Blackboard Jungle' review is the kind of thing which has long been needed. We are probably the most unsophisticated film-going public in the world, partly owing to the lack of analytical criticism of films. Palmer's article was charming. A newspaper sub to whom I sold **Overland** said: 'He writes like a young man." There was joy and freshness in the article, reflecting a rejuvenating experience. I felt that in Eric La Motte's story the writing technique is poor, old-fashioned and unsubtle, with the author's personality intrusive."—(E.W.I., Melbourne). "Thanks for the sample copy. An immediate examination of the contents has made me feel akin to the small boy who belatedly discovers that free ice-cream is available at the corner store."—(R.J.C., Brisbane). "Gerry Grant clearly proves the American classroom is not the steamy, impenetrable 'Jungle' the film suggests."—(Gwen G., Melbourne). ". . . tremendous—the best by far of its kind in Australia. It has something which other literary and cultural publications seem to lack, and this I call vitality . . . I only regret I didn't know of it sooner."—(G.W., Melbourne). ". . . a satisfying, but badly balanced issue . . . needs more material of a popular nature."—(J.G., Brisbane). "I found Gerry Grant's summing up of 'The Blackboard Jungle' a sloven and often incomprehensible piece of criticism. As with some other left-wing critics, much of his writing is devoted to setting up windmills in order to be able to tilt at them. The actual object to be criticised gives way to a fantastic approximation of the object; objectivity gives way to wish-fulfilment. In common with other school teachers I found that the positive features of the film, the most important of which is the statement that delinquency in American schools **is** a problem, far outweighed its many negative aspects."—(L.C., Melbourne). "'Blackboard Jungle' was an excellent review, but, despite the bad points of the film, we should remember the positive impact it would have on Australian audiences. The hero hated color and race prejudice and the animal degradation of his fellowmen. He fought what he hated, fought badly but he fought. At least the film warned Australians of the seriousness of the problems of young delinquents."—(Hugh Mason, Brisbane). "Despite the lack of climax, the dialogue, atmosphere and characterisation of la Motte's 'The Lunch Hour' are very lifelike and effective. 'The Birthday' has been widely praised also."—(J.M.S., Brisbane).

OLD MAID IN A LATE TRAM

O desolate evenings, along this route how often
have I faced parodies of my own image
sitting cool, too cool, and upright, too upright,
propped up too harshly by their self-deception,
dignity like a ringbarked gumtree seeming
always about to topple. O to give way,
be not forever the urbane unmarried
sister, the sympathetic poor old aunt,
the daughter bearing duty like a statue
bears an urn, to be for once less human
and in being so be more.

Opposite me
one sits, her face as if some tight-stretched web
of thread has been abruptly snatched away
leaving its gullied scars and puffs of hills
powdered, pallid, sordid all the more
for palely clashing with the edge of scarlet
that marks her sufferance lips. She sees my stare.
My dear, I want to take you in my arms
and hold you close, and kiss away the hurt
that surfaces in your eyes. But if I did
how you would spurn me, claim you need no pity,
despise me for extravagance, deny
that love as much as hunger taunts our thoughts
and if unsatisfied diverts
our platitudinous everyday into
poetry and evil, drives from the mind
the incomplete content these fickle times
afford, compels to acts beyond intent
or wish, stops resolution at its fiercest,
and makes pointless all our aspirations.

How was the office today?
The table? The typewriter? The bench?
Did the still kiss-wet girl with Sunday eyes
relate additions to her phallic tally?
Or did the junior, breasting suburban sixteen,
insinuate as subtly as a headline
her engagement ring into the humdrum page
of the working day? And did you while you smiled
at the predicaments and panic of the young
encounter, somewhere soft where dreams are hidden,
so deep and sudden a stab of melancholy
that the room melted and turned black?

I know, my dear. That was how I felt too.

What made us like this? Well, I presume, for you
something different than for me. But
in general the world. And I daresay parents too
might have acquiesced a mite to the dilemma
with a convention here, a prejudice there, that told
of the eternal passivity of the female, how
it needs a prince (any male of normal
parts) to wake her from her sexless sleep
and transform her to a voluptuous princess.

So here you are, and here am I, wanting
that for which it may be now too late.
Straightbacked I sit in this stealthy growling tram
returning to my cushioned curtained room,
a bed and a bath within a lonely desert
which only I inhabit. Wanting, wanting
that for which it may be now too late.
You there, abashed girl, with your pretty lover
holding and stroking your hand. You, woman,
smiling at your husband while your child
splutters its incoherency upon
a neighbor's lap. Old lady paunched and padded,
wedding ring engulfed between two rings
of bubbling flesh. You know what I have missed,
and by that knowledge have, despite the faults
of self, and the circumstances of the world,
inside yourselves a stone's tranquility,
for you have enacted the harvest, the hunt, the dawn,
Christ, fire and cave, Michelangelo,
you have known man, and a consummation.
So I sit here in this rolling tram and envy
you, envy you, from the desperate tips
of my fingers to my suspicious hobbling soul.
Old maid, old maid, the rudimentary jest,
protagonist of a thousand meagre jokes,
butt of the unthinking, here I sit
going home on a late tram to nothing, nothing
but conversation with myself; fit scene
and dialogue for an irrelevant tragedy.

LAURENCE COLLINSON.

• Reviews •

Art for Life's Sake

Black Cargo, by John Morrison (16/6 and 12/6), which is modestly described on its back cover as a collection of "stories of Australian life . . . written from Mr. Morrison's own experiences as waterside, seaman, fruit-picker, gardener and bush-worker," is by far the best book yet published by the Australasian Book Society. It is a major contribution not only to Australian but to world literature.

It is a masterly work, in its depiction not only of certain conditions of life and labor in this particular region of the world, but of the human condition generally in commercial civilization. It bodies forth fundamental human relationships, between man and man, man and woman, man and groups of men, as they might form and function anywhere under the stresses and strains of the capitalist system.

In essence, the book is an assertion of faith in the dignity and worth of ordinary humankind, and a showing of how, within the framework of aquisitive society, and in spite of it, "human decency will always come to the top if its gets even the ghost of a chance."

The stories embody this attitude with an art so imaginative and skilful, so intense and convincing, that at first they seem not works of fiction at all, but transcripts of reality; as it were, artless, autobiographical, documentary. It is only after one reflects on their depth of meaning, propriety of feeling and perfection of form that one begins to grasp John Morrison's great accomplishment as an artist, and to appreciate the stories as imaginative recreations of a vision that "sees life steadily and sees it whole," through the instruments of a generous heart, a profound intellect and a high sensibility.

The book takes its title from one of two tales, out of the sixteen, which have not been published before. "Black Cargo" is the story of inter-union and international solidarity in defence of labor principle that was shown in the dramatic refusal of Melbourne rank-and-file unionists, even against tremendous pressure from a right-wing union executive and Trades Hall Council and a hostile press and Government, to handle the cargo of a Canadian collier manned by a crew of strike-breaking scabs.

This story is of special interest for its brilliant portraits of several classical types of reactionary Labor leaders.

The drama of political struggle expressed in terms of human behavior is here represented by John Morrison with an artistic power comparable to the power of Ehrenburg when he writes as he does, for example, in **The Storm**, on the same theme.

"Going Through," a first-person account of the ceremony of admission to the Waterside Workers' Union, evokes and subtly reconciles the complex and sometimes discordant feelings of a new recruit in his experience of becoming part of this great fraternal organization.

One wretched candidate for membership is recognised by the meeting as a man who has been known in the past to have scabbed and sniped.

> " 'Throw the bastard out!' . . . The rising wave of noise suddenly breaks . . . The violence of it horrifies me. God pity the man . . . I suffer from a sense of revulsion . . . Men I have worked with, eaten with, drunk with, warm-hearted men . . . were part of the beast that rose up and snarled at the man . . ."

But,

> "Bitter experience has taught them that they assemble here in defence of all that they have . . . How good it is! . . . We feel suddenly rich. And not because of bigger pay envelopes to come . . . We've got ourselves three thousand mates . . . We're Federation men."

"The Compound" is a powerful and moving account of the experience of being engaged as a waterside worker at the Piggott Street Labor Bureau in the bad old days of the thirties, when, under a pick-up system comparable in savagery to the "bull" system represented in the film "Waterfront," precedence in employment and the better jobs were gained by force and by graft, and men looking for work were picked over by foremen like cattle.

The situation is conceived, appropriately, in terms of metaphors of animal life in conditions of degradation.

And the newcomer among the veterans of the struggle for jobs cannot press forward with the others, waving his licence and clamoring for the foreman's attention and favor. He is prevented by the feeling that "there is a point beyond which human dignity refuses to be driven. A sickening of the heart. A shame that makes you want to run away and hide yourself."

"The Pick-Up" shows us the nature of better times, after the introduction of the Rotary Gang system, ballotted for in the teeth of fierce right-wing opposition, which guarantees every man a job in rotation, without favoritism or graft.

Two thousand wharfies wile away the time, waiting for broadcast announcements of their turns for work, no longer in torment and on their toes for every fiddling job, but hoping for this job rather than that and hoping most of all to be able to go home. This because now nearly all of them have "an interest," a private enthusiasm, the anxiety to get away and pursue which, be it pigeons, greyhounds, dahlias, boats, sports, charity, or even something as reprehensible as beer or women, "gives the lie so completely to the charge that human nature is inherently aquisitive."

"The Sleeping Doll" is a little classic of comic art.

Bill Boyd, swagman, was "the dreariest, weariest thing I'd ever clapped eyes on." Bill was, as it were, the quintessence of the Australian worker's supposed vices of "indifference," "apathy," "laziness."

But, "he had my sympathy."

Because Bill was a master of the art of resisting pressures of every kind by techniques of non-resistance, and in this his own extraordinary way Bill affected other people, as the owner of humility, real courtesy and a kind of dignity.

And as the story shows he could work, dexterously and fast, when he chose to, for his satisfaction and amusement, and to avenge this dignity.

The same sentiment of sympathy with men who stand up for their dignity against arbitrary and inconsiderate treatment is expressed in quite direct form in "Nine O'Clock Finish."

"A Coat for a Sailor" is a story of profound simplicity which succeeds in being both charming and touching without falling into sentimental excess.

This tale of mateship struck up between an Italian-born Australian wharfie and a Javanese sea-

man gives flesh and blood meaning to the concept of international brotherhood, and symbolises particularly the nature of the relationship that is necessary between Australian and Asian working men.

Incidentally, the hero, Piotta, who gives his military overcoat to the freezing Javanese sailor, is "a big man," as is often the case with the heroes of Morrison's stories, as though physical size symbolises spiritual bigness.

"The Incense-Burner" and "Man in the Night" are especially remarkable as instances of John Morrison's almost Proustian delicacy and skill in depicting sentiments of nostalgic remembrance of other times and places. And it is notable that nostalgia is never represented in his stories for its own sake, and merely to exhibit his skill in representing it. It is always introduced as a means to illuminate the Here and Now.

All John Morrison's stories are of similar artistic quality and purpose in that they are concerned not with imitating appearances but with envisioning essences, in character, situation, ideas, sensations and emotions. Some of his stories, however, embody these essences in terms of imagery which is of direct and limited reference and others in imagery of indirect and unlimited significance.

The peculiar value, for example, of the waterfront stories lies, just as it appears to do, in their representation specificially of conditions of life on the Australian waterfront.

But there is another category of stories whose peculiar value lies in their being conceived in terms of imagery which stands for a meaning beyond and larger than its own immediate meaning; that is to say, symbolical stories. Belonging to this category, in greater or less degree, are "Coat for a Sailor," "The Sleeping Doll," "The Door," "Rory O'Mahony," "Man in the Night" and "The Fugitive."

And pre-eminent in this group is the second of the previously unpublished stories, the long, remarkable, delightful and terrible story, "The Battle of Flowers."

Its manifest theme, as the title suggests, is the tragic-comic rivalry between middle-aged twin sisters who grimly strive to outdo each other in the development of their suburban gardens and who carry hostilities to the point of their mutual annihilation. It is at this level of meaning, in its sensibilty and knowledgability as to gardens and their making, that the story has its comic and its delightful aspects.

But it is a parable, whose deeper meaning is as a warning vision of the fate that must overtake all those, whether individuals or societies, whose relationships with each other are based on "the frigid harmony of a mutual selfishness"; those who view the outside world "from the shelter of an adequate independence, without interest and without pity"; those who live, however proudly or sedately, "to themselves," taking in no newspaper, receiving no visitors, caring only to cultivate their own gardens; those who live, however charmingly or artistically, "as in a fairy tale"; or "as if the other half of the garden didn't exist."

It is a parable which, like all good parables, is capable of various interpretations. It might be a description of the inevitable course of the relationship between self-centred individuals, or between rival enterprises within a capitalist system, or between rival enterprises of different capitalist systems, or indeed it might be a prophetic description of the course of the Cold War if it were to be conducted by both sides systematically and relentlessly from the theory of "Positions of Strength."

And perhaps the chief moral of this story for the common reader is to be drawn from the roles played, not by the twin sisters who are the makers of policy, but by the two gardeners, their employees, who are the implementers of policy in this deadly competition. They are, by turns and in different aspects of their work, hired laborers, skilled workers, part-time capitalists and small profiteers, scientists, artists, paid hacks and mercenary soldiers.

"Lena" is a story which gives us with the utmost economy and intensity three brilliant portraits of certain types of characters commonly found in the labor movement. "The Door" is a classically simple, brief, devastating comedy of manners. "The Busting of Rory O'Mahony," which depicts working men's spirit of freedom and independence in conflict with his sense of duty and self-control, expresses the deepest compassion for the lot of Rory and for that of his wife, both of whom are conceived as souls very properly in search of their dignity, each in his own way, and as victims of a way of life that is deadening to the soul.

And finally, there is the brief tale "Man in the Night," which, like "Coat for a Sailor," for all its brevity is a work of major importance. It is a little masterpiece of delicacy in thought and feeling and of strength in its artistic impact.

The event of the coming of the milkman every night is envisioned through the acute, heightened sensibility of a sick child. The unseen milkman, at first a mystery, becomes the imagined hero of a nightly adventure, the object of fantasy and idealisation, being the one constant thing in an uncertain world, and far more satisfying, in his constancy and reliability, than Santa Claus or fairies.

And on the memorable day when the milkman came in broad daylight and was actually seen in the flesh, "He didn't disappoint me. He **was** a big man—and young, and hatless, and fairheaded, and active and smiling. He was everything . . . Everything was just right . . . **That was the day I learned for all time that the creatures of fable and fantasy are never half as nice as the creatures of real life.**"

"Man in the Night" is an enchanting and moving epitome of the imaginative yet realistic apprehension of life and of people and their labors which is the life-giving source of John Morrison's sensitive and powerful art.

Black Cargo is a book to be studied, an achievement to be emulated, by our young story-writers, the more especially by those young of such large and liberal views that their stories are committed to no values at all or those of such ineffable refinement that their stories have no guts at all. It is an object lesson as to the inspiring prospects for art that is engaged and committed to specific causes in the everyday struggles of ordinary people for peace in the world, independence for the nations and a better life for the peoples everywhere.

And for readers of every order **Black Cargo** is a book simply to be enjoyed.

ELIZABETH VASSILIEFF.

★

New World, New Song

Often pretentious titles, calculated to lure the hands of buyers, sit uneasily on the covers of slim volumes. **New World, New Song** (30 poets of the left, edited by David Martin (Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1955, 1/-) is an imposing title for a booklet of thirty-two pages; yet this is a title which conveys the essence of the book. The poems it contains deal in a vital way with the world of today.

In 1871 Walt Whitman, the far-seeing American poet, called for "a program of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlor or lecture rooms, but with an eye to practical life, the West, the working-men, the facts of farms and pack-planes and engineers . . ." For Australia this was first achieved by "poets of the left"—by Daley and O'Dowd, by Lawson and Paterson. The poetic muse learned to hump her bluey and shared many a camp with striking shearers; poetry inspired by the common folk and their deeds became the property of the people.

Unhappily, in the years that followed, poetry returned to the sterility of the lecture room and the imitators of Eliot practised their obscure craft in the corners of well-cushioned drawing-rooms.

To those who are inclined to shake sorrowful heads over the lost glories of the Nineties, **New World, New Song** provides sturdy consolation. Here are writers whose book is life, whose language and feeling are honest and comprehensible. They write with vigor and conviction: and each has something worth saying. Mingling with writers of known stature are others whose names are new. Though not all reach the same standard of technical competence all have character and freshness.

It is of little value, perhaps, for a reviewer to indicate his own preferences. It may suffice to say that Collinson's "Promenade," and John Manifold's "Literature-selling in Raby Bay" most repay repeated readings, while "Organised" by Ironbark is deservedly popular when recited aloud.

After this pioneer demonstration of the strength of post-war poets it is to be hoped that similar collections will follow—to stimulate writers and delight readers.

—JAGGER.

★

Coolness and Heat

Douglas Stewart's latest collection of poems, **The Birdsville Track** (Angus & Robertson, 15/-) might have been called "Coolness and Heat." The first half of the book deals mainly with snow, flowers, and rivers; the second half, the "Track" sequence, with sun, drought, and perishers. Mr. Stewart, who has made the east coast with its wild flowers, the snowfields and trout-streams of the Monaro his own province, here reacts to an entirely different landscape, a "fierce country" of stones and red-hot sand.

The prevailing color is red—perhaps too much red, too much emphasis on iron and fire. The traveller coming from the green coastal belt seems to be shocked into seeing the inland at first as redder than it is; thus we get Roland Robinson's "blood-deep deserts" and Laurence Daws' lurid paintings, while Douglas Stewart compares even the galahs to red flame and smoke. Yet the stones are often rose-madder, the sands a warm salmon pink; the late Dr. Madigan wrote of the Simpson Desert as "The Pink Gridiron."

Still, it makes an artistic contrast with the silver and green of the first section. And as one who spent an enforced week once in Marree, I can confirm that he has depicted the place with a painful accuracy: the bare stones, the tin shanties, the steely glare of the sky above the "red-hot iron plain." He has also a touch of sardonic humor that suits the country:

> In the pubs, on the plains,
> In the sun's white blink,
> Some died of too much drink,
> And some of not enough . . .

"Mirage," the longest poem in this book, is notable for the loose, flexible lines in which the pentameter is almost and yet never quite lost, the easy colloquial speech-rhythms, and the mounting drama; it is a poem of dramatic intensity. It begins with a lonely wanderer still in confident mood: "Not that for him!" he thinks, scorning the raw new-chum who pulls off his clothes and dies raving, bathing in imaginary water. And then gradually, insidiously, the heat and thirst and the beckoning mirage begin to affect his brain. "And indeed . . . it had some look of water," and

> "You had to watch it for its trick of sneaking
> Between the bushes there while you weren't looking . . ."

Then he has admitted to himself that it **is** water, and we know that he is doomed; and with him we feel the water flow over us, that "had not water's coolness, water's taste," and die at last in a dream of drowning in a tide of flame. Douglas Stewart has already shown us death from cold and exhaustion, death in snow and ice. Here he gives an unforgettable picture of death from thirst and heat.

After this it is a relief to turn to the first section again, and cool one's senses with the lovely "Brindabella":

> The magpie lifting his beak by the frozen fern
> Sent out one ray of a carol, softened and silvery,
> Strange through the trees as sunlight's pale return . . .

to the delicate imagery of "Spider Gums," or the mystical, musical "Snow-Gum," with its masterly but not obvious technique.

There is far more variety in this first section, also lightness and humor, as in "Christmas Bells," the merry "Loud Sing Cicada," and "Crab and Cicada," which has a neat touch of philosophy too. Most poets have a favorite color word, partly symbolic; and if D. H. Lawrence's is "white" and Judith Wright's "gold," Douglas Stewart's is "silver," a combination of both—richness and delicacy in one.

NANCY CATO.

★

Early Broken Hill

Anyone who reads Donald McLean's **No Man is an Island** (Heinemann, 13/3) hoping to get the full and colorful story of the rise of Broken Hill as one of Australia's most distinctive communities will be disappointed. For this is an episodic, picaresque book, with the same relation to a novel that a sketch has to a short story. It is held together more by the threads of humor and humanity that run through it than by any artifices of the practised writer.

Yet it is a well-balanced book for all that, and despite its brevity—the book seems to be shorter than it really is—and scrappiness, something like a picture of the extraordinary times does emerge—the mingled types that shaped the early labor traditions of Broken Hill being particularly effectively drawn.

The chief intended contrast in the book is between the narrator and his brother Ted. They ride into the town from the bush together, but over the years they drift apart. Ted invests money, becomes one of the bosses in a big way, and quar-

rels with Austin for the company he keeps. But Austin is not as convincing a character as his rascally brother, and the reader comes to feel that he is "studying" rather than identifying himself with the mates he associates with.

But if you want the story of the shooting-up of the picnic train; the near-lynching of the mine-manager; the assassination of the M.P.; the anti-conscription demonstrations; the old-timer whose bible was the "Bullyteen," and other authentic types of the times, this is the book to read without expecting too much.

Some day great novels will be written of these days, these people; in the meantime we may be thankful for Donald McLean's glimpses of a part of Australia in the making and for his interest in and warm feelings towards people. These are traits which distinguish him sharply from the morbidity fashionable today, and which make his book Australian.

—A.P.L.

★

Out-back Novel

Keep Him My Country by Mary Durack (Constable, 13/6) really thrilled me. I was thrilled because the novel gives such a true and vivid picture of life on an out-back station in the Nor'-West of Western Australia.

It is saturated with the country and spirit of the people: authentic in feeling and interpretation, as it should be, since Mary Durack was brought-up and lived for many years on the Argyle and Ord River stations owned by her family.

She reveals fine qualities as a writer: breadth and depth of understanding, vigor and simplicity of style. There is quiet humor in her character sketches, descriptions of every day happenings, although the dark weavings of Aboriginal superstition overshadow all with a sense of tragedy.

The story of Stan Rolt and his resolve to leave the country he feared would claim him: of the love magic put on him by an Aboriginal girl: of the men and women he served and who served him, winning his loyalty and devotion, are best told by Mary Durack. It is enough for me to say, in paying this tribute to her work, that every one of her people lives—from Liddy the wise sly old Aboriginal woman who pulls strings behind the scenes of station management, to Darch, the saddler, who "gave any love he had to his tools and the leather he stitched as lightly and easily as though it had been silk."

Not only is the effect of the white man's way of life on the native people accounted for, but the effect of native ways and ideas on the white man has been made clear. The value of the Aboriginals to Australia becomes apparent, and the changed attitude towards them, in recent years, of men who know them well.

From "shooting the breeders," cattlemen have come to think, as Matt Carmody does, that neither white nor black man can afford to dodge the problems of life these days.

> "Do you believe they ever really will?" Rolt asks.
>
> Carmody says: "Not in my time, maybe. Probably in yours. You see a blackfellow striking for a quid a week when he's already getting thirty bob. Another gives a pound note for a packet of cigarettes. It's just a piece of paper he doesn't want for something he does, but mighty soon he's going to learn what money represents. He's not going to die, and he's not going to be the white man's humble servant. He'll be an individual with things to starve and crave and fight for."

Dalgerie sings to Stan Rolt:

> I talk to my country in the night,
> I talk to my lover . . .
> I cry to my country for she is a woman,
> The water and the soil of life,
> That her voice shall sing in his blood
> And her strong loins hold him . . .

The native girl's song—a song to the great Earth Mother—symbolizes Mary Durack's plea for the Aboriginals.

I rejoice in this book by a young Australian, so truly Australian in its realism, thought and emotion.

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD.

★

Furphiana

"The age produces the man" and side-by-side with the dramatic developments in Australian writing and the appreciation of Australian literature in recent years (not equalled, alas, by the development of Australian publishing) has been the devoted work of a few bibliographers.

Bibliographers concern themselves with fossicking out the most exact possible details on the history of writing, especially the writing of important individuals. We in Australia have been well served, on a general and academic level, by such distinguished figures as Ferguson and Morris Miller, and on a rather more popular level by Hugh Anderson and Walter Stone.

Joseph Furphy, an Annotated Bibliography by Walter W. Stone (64 Young Street, Cremorne, N.S.W.), as well as providing fascinating details concerning the editions and publishing of **Such Is Life**, and Furphy's other books, also digs up new and important facts concerning Furphy's short stories, **Bulletin** pars and other emphemera, and provides a valuable list of published articles on Furphy.

Those who like Furphy tend to love him passionately. As one of that category I can say that reading this bibliography is a labor of love and interest.

The kind of work Stone and Anderson are doing gets scant publicity. But they may draw consolation from the certainty that future Australians, like me, will want to say "Thank you!" to them.

—S.M.S.

★

No Villain Bligh

John Macarthur is prominent on the stage for the great part of the first forty years of Australia's history, always acting in the grand manner—a leader of the monopolist trading-ring set up by the officers of the N.S.W. Corps, arrested for duelling with his superior officer, instigator of the "Rum Rebellion," sheep-breeder and prophet of pastoral Australia.

At last his biographer has been found in M. H. Ellis, well-known for his biographies of Governor Macquarie and Francis Greenway. Mr. Ellis is a writer with considerable virtues and considerable failings. His general knowledge of the period is encyclopaedic, his industry deserves all praise and, despite his irritating quirks of style, he can tell a

story with gusto and vivid color. He has clarified many important problems and has presented a cohesive and impressive general interpretation of the great "Perturbator" and his wife and children.

But Mr. Ellis so often can only see history in black and white, he has a fatal tendency to dramatic exaggeration. One of his major purposes in **John Macarthur** (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1955, 50/-) has been to reinterpret the "Rum Rebellion" and if not to justify it, at least to strip all sympathy from Governor Bligh. His method is to paint Bligh and his associates as despicable villains of the blackest hue. But Mr. Ellis goes so far that he verges on the ludicrous; any reader, simply from his human experience, finds it impossible to believe that such a set of ruffians, with hardly a single spark of virtue amongst the lot of them, could ever have existed. Bligh may have been a bad-tempered lout and an arbitrary despot, but Mr. Ellis has not succeeded in shaking Dr. H. V. Evatt's general conclusion in his **Rum Rebellion** that Bligh was doing his duty according to instructions in defending the emancipist settlers against the extortionate monopolistic commercial activities of the officers of the Rum Corps; and that those officers treasonably overthrew the lawful government.

GEOFFREY SERLE.

★

Disappointing Poetry

If the reader of **Australian Poetry, 1955** (Angus and Robertson, 10/6) is in search of verse which in some way expresses Australia today, the struggle, the humor and the satire of everyday life, he will indeed be disappointed. In only a few of the poems is there any suggestion that they were written here and not in London, Toronto, Manchester or Belfast; in fact many have a placelessness that is apparently delightful to the ear of James Macauley, the book's author, but is insipid to those to whom poetry is a really significant and vital part of contemporary life.

There are too many poems of the intensely personal, over-descriptive kind echoing Eliot and Hopkins, too many poems of nature with little to distinguish them from thousands of their kind.

However, there are some poems which will please the reader, including one from that ever young and well loved writer, Mary Gilmore.

Roland Robinson and Michael Thwaites both deal with the subject of the Aboriginals, the former in a vivid, tight-knit description of "The Dancers," the latter in a moving lament and accusation, "The Extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines," recallng some of the earlier work of Mary Gilmore:

> How shall we mask the measure of our disgrace?
> They were foredoomed and fatal, do we aver?
> Not felled, not murdered? Let it be so: they were
> Manslaughtered children, they were a ringbarked race.

Satire, if we can judge from this volume, is on the wane, but Marie Reay's biting "Portrait-Sketch of an American Anthropologist" gives hope that this necessary branch of poetic art may yet revive.

"The Red Koran" by Mena Kashmiri Abdullah whets one's appetite for more work by this Australian Indian, while poems by Rosemary Dobson, Nancy Cato, Ronald McCuaig, Mary Finnin and John Manifold are charming in their simplicity and originality.

MARJORIE PIZER.

Palmer's Short Stories

A publisher's blurb recently referred to "the four or five most popular short-story writers in Australia today," and placed E. O. Schlunke among them. Quite possible. Schlunke is good. But who are these four or five, and what are the standards on which we assess them? In making such a list, authorities would probably disagree wildly; but they would all have to include Vance Palmer.

Your reviewer feels it to be his misfortune that he had never met a volume of Vance Palmer's short stories before reading this one, **Let The Birds Fly** (Angus & Robertson, 16/-), but this volume alone is evidence of its author's rare gifts.

His characters are living beings. They people the reader's mind with easy conviction. Almost at once, your reviewer found himself saying, "Ah, yes, Mathieson's wife . . . I remember her." Morrison taught me at school. He had a black eye once which was spoken of sotto voce, mostly in guarded hisses. And Quinlan, hell, Quinlan lives next door to me. I knew Donnelly. I understood him, long before the grown-ups ever did.

Which brings us to another rare gift of the author—his ability to see life through the eyes of children, and of both sexes! Children occupy a large part of **Let The Birds Fly**, with conviction, particularly in "The Catch."

All ages, all sexes, they come from Mr. Palmer's pen with assurance. They are not creatures harshly or boldly drawn in black and white. They are my Australian people, in rich variations of shade, yet overlaid with an elusiveness, leaving the reader, as in life, knowing that there is more to the character of a human being than is revealed. This elusiveness, which from Vance Palmer I take to be deliberate, stamps his creations with authenticity.

Only Charlie, of "Trochus Island," left your reviewer unsatisfied. As happens, either the short story form is inadequate to handle the idea, or the author has failed to do justice to his material. The latter, I fancy, applies to Charlie.

Elusive, too, is the Australian background. It is there. Cane-fields . . . gum trees . . . cities . . . country towns . . . the surf. It is there, without any emphasis. The reader is aware of it, accepts it, and feels thoroughly in harmony.

These, then, are the author's achievements. He has induced your reviewer to say, "These are my people. This is my land."

Was this the extent of Mr. Palmer's intentions? Having no other work of his for comparison, I can't say. But I do know that in my reading of **Let The Birds Fly** the richness of character and background drew me to expect more from a story than it finally gave me. "Stories" evaporated into "character-sketches."

This is not true of all of them. "Home Front" is a minor masterpiece, and "The Silky Oak" only slightly less so. "The Catch," equally fine, I have already mentioned, but in other stories my initial elation was cancelled by later disappointment. It might be important to ask: What does Vance Palmer set out to do to his readers?

Disappointment and all, **Let The Birds Fly** is to be recommended to that surprisingly large part of the reading public which seeks "an authentic Australian atmosphere." Recommended, too, to writers and apprentice-writers like myself who visualise a goal deeper and more vital than that attained by this volume, and who are beginning to struggle toward that end. I don't wish to be taken dogmatically about this. That we may modify our aims is a possibility I readily concede.

Quite frankly, I propose to read more of Vance Palmer's work.

—D.F.

Helen Palmer

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK FIELD

INTEREST in children's books has grown in Australia recently. So it should, for children's reading is not a field for uncontrolled laissez-faire. Those who say smugly, "I let my child read anything," are thinking in terms of an illusion fostered by biographies describing infant bookworms having "the run of the library" and being none the worse for it. In fact, homes with a library for a child to have the run of are rare. The child's reading world is severely prescribed. It is limited to the school library and municipal children's library—excellent, probably, if they exist; to friends' bookshelves; to books given at Christmas and birthdays; and to what he can buy out of pocket money at the local newsagent's. Adults, not children, buy books; and adults don't read children's books, except aloud to young children. Hence the adult is fair game for the pitfalls of the children's reading world—the comic, because it will keep Junior quiet for two hours straight, and the "gift" book that, being printed on thick puffy paper with most of the air left in, looks good Christmas value.

These days, fortunately, advice is available. In New South Wales, Children's Book Week is growing in influence; a Book List is published; the "Herald" publishes, two or three times a year, a page of children's book reviews; children's librarians, experts who really know their job, circulate book reviews to their members. In Victoria, the new Children's Book Council last year published a well-arranged Christmas book list.

Some of this activity has been aroused by the recognition of the influence of the comic "book," the B-class radio serial and the bookstall paperback. Almost the last word has been said on this by Wertham's **Seduction of the Innocent**, which, though it deals with American material the worst of which never reaches us, nevertheless says many things that apply universally. The worst feature of the seduction in Australia is not the likelihood that junior will learn the art of razor-slashing and try it on his neighbors, but the general coarsening of taste and sensitivity, the complete absence of genuine creative adventure and normal human relationships. Many Australians still can't see the danger of such reading because all they see of it is "books" of the Donald Duck type, or comic strips in their dailies. Surely they are harmless enough? they ask. What's all the fuss about?

Recently in Sydney two new ventures in publishing for young people were launched; the Junior Telegraph, ostensibly for children; Week-end, ostensibly for late teen-agers. In my experience the Junior Telegraph (now disappeared) was read without great interest by the very young only, while everyone within cooee of their teens became immersed in Week-end—which is still going. Secondary school children don't buy Donald Duck when they spend their eternal ninepence at the local newsagent's; they buy Spaceman and Carter Brown. If you don't happen to know Carter Brown (an Australian-produced, American sex-and-private-eye series), it's probably because the copies passed round at school and in the gang never reach home.

The other side of the picture is that world children's book production has developed strikingly in recent years, and Australian books with it. Indeed some Australian children's books compare very comfortably with good overseas material. To mention only a few now in print: Leslie Rees' Digit Dick series for young children; on the Aboriginals, Davison's **Children of the Dark People**, Parker's **Australian Legendary Tales**, McKeown's **Land of Byamee**, Ingamell's **Aranda Boy**; animal novels like Patchett's **Wild Brother** and Davison's **Man-shy** and (for younger children) Senior's **Bush Haven Animals**; country holiday and adventure stories like Nan Chauncey's **A Fortune for the Brace** (about Tasmania), Lister's "Starlight" books, Phipson's books about horses, Leslie Rees' **Danger Patrol** (on New Guinea). Smart and Boker's "story of the film" **Bush Christmas**, Handford's **Carcoola Holiday**, Harris' **The Adventures of Turmey**. As to history, Pownall's **The Australia Book** interests children of many ages; and in the story field, there are Williams' **Verity of Sydney Town**, Fitzmaurice Hill's **Southward Ho with the Hentys**, Tindale and Lindsay's **The First Walkabout**, Kiddle's **West of Sunset**, Samuel's **A Saddle at Bontharambo**. [Also Helen Palmer's **Beneath the Southern Cross** and Helen Palmer and Jessie McLeod's **The First Hundred Years**.—Ed.]

These are recent books; librarians know them, but parents will not unless they happen to follow current publications. One's conceptions are necessarily affected by what one knew as a child. Fifteen years ago the most popular children's books were the Ethel Turner series and Pedler's **Dot and the Kangaroo**. Ethel Turner is now little heard of, and even Mary Grant Bruce no longer holds

absolute sway. The success of two modern publishing phenomena—the Biggles boys' adventure stories and Enid Blyton who writes everything from the Bible for children to girls' school stories—reinforces the view that children can't with impunity be left entirely to their own choice with books; for above all they like to follow an author, on the theory that having liked one they'll like the rest, and both these authors will consume at least three years of their lives—years when they should above all be getting demands of their imagination and expands their horizons.

The main problem arises when they no longer read as children, absorbed in a good yarn; when they are no longer interested in children's books or children's sections of libraries, but in the adult world. I don't know of any figures, but observation suggests that this tends to happen (particularly in the case of boys) in early adolescence, and earlier than one thinks. Films, adult social life, the gang and the street become much more interesting than the offerings of the children's library. If the book-reading habit is not firmly set, it disappears; only the paperbacks provide fare these youngsters accept. As librarians know, there is a miserable shortage of books that can bridge this gap until adult reading starts; often it does not start. Teenagers who read, read adult books; they are avid consumers, for instance, of "the book of the film," simply because the film breaks a book down into its most primitive elements and does the work of the imagination. There are few writers who have anything to say to young people of this age, probably because they find it impossible to keep in touch with tastes, fashions and attitudes that change overnight, and because though they can imagine themselves back into the innocence of childhood, they regard their adolescence as something well left behind. There are few books today the equivalent of **Little Women** and **Good Wives.**

The classics among children's books were not self-consciously written for children; they were written by experienced authors on their own merits. Even **Tom Sawyer** was conceived first as an adult book about children, until somebody talked Mark Twain into slanting it differently. There is something rather gruesome about self-conscious writing for children. There are strict formulae: parents must be replaced by fond aunts and convenient uncles; child characters must be such that the reader can identify himself with them; there must be ponies, or smugglers' caves, or recognisable "baddies," but otherwise not too much ordinary humdrum workaday life, no family unhappiness, no real conflicts.

Probably this approach, which is organised escapism, has already gone too far. If literature ever has a social function, it has it for young people; and if so, Australian young people don't get much help in fitting into an urban Australian community in the atomic age. Australian children's literature is in fact rather in the stage our literature as a whole used to be accused of: the sliprail stage. There has been a necessary and good working over of the historical, outback, natural history field; but though this must be done (and it isn't finished by any means), perhaps Australian writers will be tempted to deal with contemporary Australian life—the city school; national enterprises like the Snowy Mountains scheme; the impact of migrants on our life; the everyday world of the urban working family; family relationships. Any argument for the deliberate encouragement of Australian literature applies with more force than ever to the conscious encouragement of writing for the present-day needs of Australian young people.

The Other Map

When the native names are mentioned
With a throb in the old throat,
Seems to me it's time for striking
A more realistic note.
'Gerringong' is nice for rhyming,
'Illalangi,' 'Burradoo:'
Having killed the rightful owner
Must you pinch his handle too?

All around the outer suburbs
Murdered tribes still act the host,
'Werrigulla,' 'Niawanda'—
Septic sewers and a ghost.
'Corryong' and 'Birambiral,'
'Koorali' and 'Dandaloo:'
Does it matter none can tell me
Which is which and who is who?

Up the street stands 'Mia-Mia,'
Looking down on 'Warrawee.'
'Murambeen' is round the corner . . .
God preserve the bourgeoisie!
'Millimgimbi' is my neighbor—
Might as well be kangaroo.
'Wannawong' is up for auction;
Takes all sorts to make a zoo.

From the monstrous hills at sunset,
When the lonely bunyip stirs,
And the lamps are lit at 'Braebrook,'
'Hiawatha' and 'The Firs,'
Comes a whisper to 'Yarringa,'
'Terrigal' and 'Coomaloo:'
"Thanks for nothing. Men aren't judged by
What they say but what they do."

DAVID MARTIN.

OVERLAND

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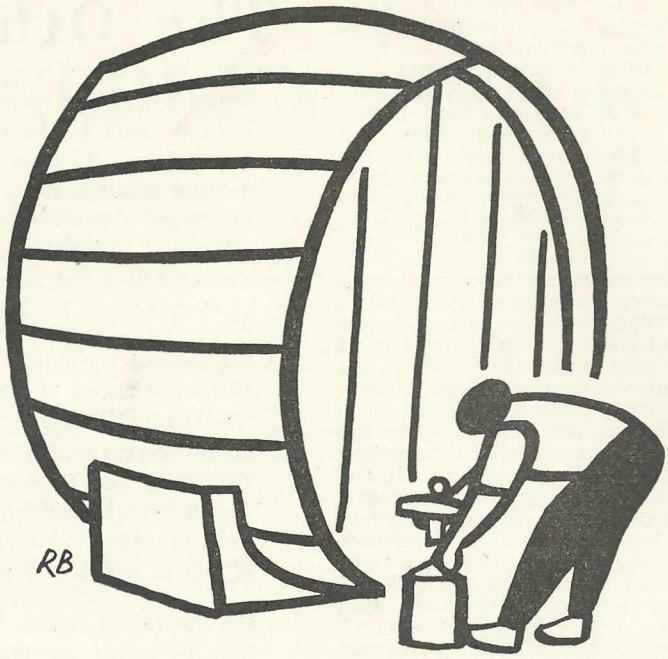

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