

A tiring day—
clean
forgotten...



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BOOKS

THREE BOOKS ABOUT WAR

UNWILLING GUESTS. By J. D. Gerard. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington.
CORINTH AND ALL THAT. By Fred Woollams. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington.
THEY WILL ARISE. By Martyn Uren. Collins, Auckland.

(Reviewed by Frank Sargeson)

THE first of these books is a straightforward piece of reporting, and it is quite well done. It begins with the author's being captured in Libya, and ends with his escaping from a P.O.W. camp in the north of Italy, and eventually crossing over to the British lines quite a long way south. Mr. Gerard is concerned mostly to report only what happened on the surface, but, even apart from a few open hints, his literary skill is such that the reader is continually aware that a great deal more is going on underneath. His literary skill is, indeed, outstanding. He seldom comes across with a cliché, and seldom fails to find the right word. His persistent wagishness may perhaps at times be somewhat over-persistent, but his ironic approach to his situation seems to me

exactly right. And his occasional tributes to the enemy are fine and generous. (Such as the occasion when prisoners were transferred to another camp; they had to leave behind an accumulation of food supplied through the Red Cross; but the Italian commandant undertook to send it on; and he did; and it arrived.)

MR. WOOLLAMS very obviously feels that he has a tremendous tale to tell, and so he has—he was left behind in Greece and took to the hills, evading capture for 18 months or so; and the ship he was transferred to Italy on was torpedoed. Telling your tale in the pages of a book, however, is no easy matter; and when it is as terrible as it is tremendous, the difficulties are increased. I am sorry to say so, but I wish Mr. Woollams had been more successful; the initiative that distinguished him as a soldier apparently deserted him almost completely when he turned to authorship; hence his many borrowed forms of expression—and he has to borrow even to say that he is unable

to express himself: "My heart was heavy and my innermost feelings could never be committed to paper." Nevertheless, there are times when his language, instead of being an obstruction, really does bring us into touch with him—such as when he says simply and directly that he was a six-foot skeleton covered with parched skin. And in any case I feel rather at a disadvantage in saying anything about the book at all. Mr. Woollams says: "I pray that in the years to come it will never be possible for anyone who has not been to war to pass judgment in any way whatsoever on the actions and affairs of a returned soldier."

[FIND it quite impossible to say anything good of Mr. Uren's novel; and as it would be quite wrong to say anything bad without giving adequate reasons (which lack of space makes impossible)—well, I prefer to say nothing at all. The story is about a New Zealand soldier who gets left behind in Greece, and the Greek girl he gets in tow with. And will those who feel like objecting to my "in tow with," kindly refer to Page 56 where Mr. Uren writes of "Anthony and Cleopatra in their Mediterranean love-nest."

MODERN SHORT STORIES

SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES. Edited by Frank Sargeson. The Caxton Press.

(Reviewed by H. Winston Rhodes)

IT is reasonable to suggest that like any other form of literary expression the short story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end; but this does not necessarily imply that it must have a plot. E. M. Forster is not the only novelist who has complained of the way in which the reading public's demand for a swiftly-moving, dramatic, and skillfully-constructed story hampers the writer and forces him to tie up threads which he would sooner leave untied, to introduce situations and characters in which he is little interested, and to pay attention to the mechanics of tale-telling when he would prefer to explore the tangled forests of human relationships. Some novelists have attempted to achieve form with the minimum amount of action, but many writers of modern short stories have succeeded in completely emancipating themselves from the tyranny of the plot.

To-day the slightest incident or experience, a fleeting emotion, a casual conversation can provide the material for what is offered to the public as a short story, and the stress is placed upon the significance of an authentic fragment of life rather than upon the excitement or surprise produced by a dramatic theme. The short story has become less artificial and more human. This is well exemplified in Frank Sargeson's recent collection, *Speaking For Ourselves*, which shows scarcely a sign of the formal, slightly pretentious manner of writing, the manufactured situations, the stock characters, and the romantic Homesickness of the exile which used to be so typical of many earlier stories written in New Zealand. Nevertheless the

modern cult of literary psychology provides a form of pretentiousness which is likely to appeal only to the few. In one or two of the sketches, in "Notes on an Abstract Arachnid," by Maurice Duggan, and in "The Papeye and the Molacca," by Max Harris, the intricate pattern of words is wasted on psychological ruminations capable of producing neither pleasure nor, I fancy, much profit.

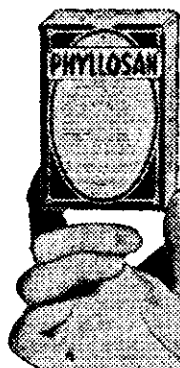
For the most part, however, a pleasing informality characterises these sketches. The glimpses of life presented, glimpses of servicemen and their wives and sweethearts, glimpses of children at school and at play, glimpses of human beings in familiar surroundings, are in a sense fragmentary and unfinished, but either in passages or in whole stories they are convincing because there is little straining after effects. They are as ordinary and as informal as the out-house in the cover design, but they contain within them something of the flavour of New Zealand, something, and this is far more important, of the flavour of life.

It is true that in "The Everlasting Miracle," by Roderick Finlayson, whose Maoris are always credible human beings and not museum exhibits, and in G. R. Gilbert's fantastic and satirical sketch "Mrs. Pornog's Afternoon," there is some pretence at constructing a plot, but even in these the meaning of the writers is to be found rather in the sympathetic or satirical treatment than in the development of the story, and the artificial balance of Lyndahl Chapple Gee's "Double Unit" hinders more than it helps her description of the return of the two soldiers from the war.

The most successful stories in the collection, ones like E. M. Lyders' "On the

(continued on next page)

Pale?
Languid?
Anæmic?



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