



JESSIE MACKAY*
The competition bears her name

PRIZE-WINNING VERSE

Jessie Mackay Memorial: Award for 1945

"pull their poetic socks up," as one critic quaintly put it? They did. About 60 entries were received, a fair proportion of which were of quality.

The details are now announced for the first time. Also for the first time the winning poems are being given a national audience through *The Listener*.

The 1945 Award has been given to Miss Mary Stanley (Mrs. Mary Neal), of 137 Grafton Road, Auckland, for her group of three poems, "The New Philosopher," "Love by Candlelight," and "To the Atom."

The following were highly commended, the names being given in order of merit:

Mrs. Ruth France (Christchurch), for three poems submitted.

Miss Merval Connelly (Wellington), for her poem "Midas and his Daughter," which had already been placed first in a newspaper competition.

Miss F. Alexa Stevens (Wanganui), for her poem "Epitaph for the Future."

The winner was asked for biographical details. This is her modest reply:

"You ask for some biographical details. Here they are for what they are worth, though I'm afraid they are not very interesting. I am 26 years of age, was born in Christchurch, attended High School there, Auckland Teachers' Training College, and Auckland University College. At the moment I am teaching. I was married, but my husband was killed in the war. My married name is Neal, though I still use my maiden name for writing."



MARY STANLEY
The prize-winner for 1945

The Winning Poems

The three winning poems by Mary Stanley, grouped by the judges in order of merit, are given below:

The New Philosopher (1)

IT is small use now to bid us sit
With futile hands clasped like old men
Praying for rain in a dry season.
This is not what we have learned
As we rode eagle-winged dawn wind
Upon the tides of air. Reason
Prompts us now to hasten Time's
Imperative, take action, move
The deadened skin that hides new growth.
We shall not forget landfall
On foreign coasts, sea-grave by ice
Or coral white like bone; these both
The mind have jarred, the taut nerve
strung.

The new philosopher comes home to
farms
Sloping northward to the sun
To factory above the harbour
To the playground where gulls settle
At lunch-time and children run
To summer bays, young-moon-curved
Under fire-petalled trees. Of these
He dreamed half-world away or felt
Again for one heart-beat the cool
Of early morning streets, inland
In some small town, saw snow melt
Milky green on shingle, ere
The earth reeled over, washed him then
To unknown shores. Such hard-won prize
Will not be spent on sport for fools
Or crazy knaves who garner wealth
Out of our comrades' tears and cries.

*In Scholfield's Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Eileen Duggan pays this tribute to Jessie Mackay: "In 1935 her admirers here and overseas presented her with a testimonial of their esteem. In 1936 the State, acting on wise suggestions, raised literature to the status of a national service by granting her a pension and placing her on the Civil List . . . A year or two before her death she wrote passionately: 'How willingly I would give up my little bit of fame, if my causes might prosper.' To the very end she worked for Scottish Home Rule. She, foretelling world events, dubbed herself Cassandra, and indeed there was something vatic in her gift. Something native leapt into our literature at her coming. She represents the period of transition, when New Zealand first became country-conscious."

Love By Candlelight (2)

LIFT up your brown arms
And let fall your heavy hair.
Here no one may enter
None climb this stair.

BEND down your ripe mouth.
Love's fire-bright silence, this
Half-painful, shadow haunted
So-much-longed-for kiss.

OPEN your green eyes.
Pin-points of candleshine
In caverns of coolness gleam
Here, close to mine.

REST your dear head night-long
In its accustomed place.
I seek no other heav'n
Beyond your mortal face.

To The Atom (3)

THEY are not content to leave un-
stormed
This last citadel of substance. Lay bare
The infinite, probe the last secret
With scalpel-mind. The heart goes unre-
formed.
The old passions still smoulder in forests
of stone
Girded and hedged with steel, lit by
strange suns.
Death is the same—so fine a cut can
pierce
This pitiful small armour of flesh over
bone.
Do we bow down and worship you, god
Of a new order, head crowned by winds
and stars?
Our feet still follow ancient paths, our
eyes
See only where the blind worm breaks
the sod.
All men must wake before this latest
cloud
Weaves all about us now its stifling
shroud.

JUDGES' REPORT

THE report of the judges, Isobel Andrews and O. N. Gillespie, is as follows:

"Out of the 57 entries we found few which could be called poems in the true sense of the word. Too many entrants did not seem to be able to distinguish free verse from prose, many of the sentiments were banal, and although on the whole there were more poems of idea than formerly, these were not often carried out with any sense of form. A number of poems could quite easily find publication in the columns of the weekly or monthly magazines, as they are quite slick and well put together, but this type is not, we feel, what the P.E.N. has in mind for its annual award.

"After a series of weedings-out, the possibilities were finally brought down to the following: Group 36-38, Group 44-46, and numbers 57 and 40.

"Of these, we think that the first group has our vote for first place, particularly the 'New Philosopher' (No. 38). We would suggest that if the terms of the award allow, the prize be awarded to the author of the first group of poems rather than to one particular poem, as this work shows promise and a good sense of words, although none of the individual poems are, perhaps, long enough to warrant a prize on their own. The second place would then go to Group 44-46. This author has a good sense of imagery, although preoccupation with the one theme—ships and the sea—tends to monotony and certain clichés spoil the general effect. 'Midas and His Daughter' (57) and 'Epitaph for the Future' (40) have also certain things to recommend them."

SHORTLY after the death of Miss Jessie Mackay in 1938, the New Zealand Centre of the P.E.N. decided on the establishment of an annual award for the best poem written by a New Zealander, the competition to be known as the Jessie Mackay Memorial Award for Verse. Sufficient funds were collected to enable a prize of three guineas to be awarded to the successful entrant. Poems were solicited from New Zealand writers, and members of the P.E.N. throughout the Dominion were asked to submit for entry any worthy poems coming under their notice during the year. The following statement covering the award for 1945 comes to us from Pat Lawlor, secretary of the New Zealand Centre of P.E.N.:

THE first competition was held in 1940. Because it was the first National competition of its kind, and was well publicised, more than 400 entries came to hand. The judges, Professor Sewell, of Auckland University, and W. F. Alexander, of the Dunedin Star, took some months to sort out the huge piles of entries. The result was noteworthy in that the winner, Douglas Stewart, of Eltham, has since made a name for himself in Australia, where he is now established as a poet and playwright.

Subsequent Awards

Although no winner has since reached the celebrity of Mr. Stewart, the successful entries have justified, in a moderate degree, the importance of the award: except in one year—1944—when the judges, Isobel Andrews, and O. N. Gillespie, announced with painful brevity that, in their opinion, no entry received justified the awarding of a prize.

By this time the entries had considerably decreased in number, there being a marked and fortunate diminution in the volume of sniping rhymsters. It had also been found necessary to restrict each entrant to a maximum of three poems.

The Latest Award

As the same judges were appointed for the latest, 1945, Award, their decision was awaited with interest. Would the poets, smarting under disciplinary action,