

his "Hymn of Peace" gives a fairly good idea of his mood throughout the collection;

"Go, bind the daffodillies in your hair,
And dance, ye maidens, dance, and cast off
care!
Peace reigns; with one accord
Nations renounce the sword
And meet as brothers
(All but the Big Three, and some forty
others).

Well, that is not very original, and "Sagittarius" has done the same kind of thing better in *The New Statesman*, but the cynicism is at least genial. There are line-cuts by Robert Brett, and the agreeable typography which we now take for granted from the Caxton Press.

In *How to Ride a Bicycle* (in Seventeen Lovely Colours), Mr. Fairburn gets right off the chain. So does his printer, who gives the impression of having enjoyed the romp even more than the author. They toss together many varieties of text, type, colour and illustration (ancient and modern), without rhyme and with no apparent reason—except perhaps that of pulling everybody's leg. The joke becomes a little forced towards the end; it is, on the other hand, remarkable that it remains funny as long as it does.

If what is said about a little nonsense now and then still remains true, the purchasing of these two publications could perhaps be regarded as a test of wisdom.

AMONG THE POETS

THANKS BEFORE GOING. By John Masfield. (William Heinemann, Ltd., London).

THE poems of D. G. Rossetti were once as ardently admired and acclaimed as the paintings which made him the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite school. But for some reason they have fallen out of favour, and are now seldom read or even (except for "The Blessed Damozel") represented in anthologies. This small book by the Poet Laureate may do something to re-awaken the attention they undoubtedly deserve. It takes the form of a commentary, warmly appreciative but by no means uncritical, of some of Rossetti's original poems, and is imbued with the reverent affection of one fine poet for another whose romantic personality first won his hero-worship and whose art became an inspiration.

"With Rossetti," says Masfield, "the mind is a person; some of the thoughts met by the mind may seem to be persons, living in a world of symbols, which can be so painted that those who brood upon them may understand." This is particularly true of his sonnet-and-song sequence *The House of Life*, which contains the most beautiful and poignant of his personal utterances. It is not easy poetry. In spite of the Pre-Raphaelite principle permitting nothing vague or indefinite, in spite of Rossetti's own "honest habit of precise thought," there is a strange veiled elusiveness about it. The thought is subtle, unusual, and even in the finest passages the sense is not always caught at first reading. But an age disciplined to the understanding of Eliot and Pound, George Barker and Dylan Thomas, should not grudge Rossetti a little effort. For truly he is too good to miss. Though he can be luscious and rhetorical, at his best he rivals Shelley and Bridges as the poet of love, human and divine, love triumphant, and love under the shadow of death. His verse is full of tender and exquisite lines, and charged with the deep emotion of one whose Beatrice (Elizabeth

Siddal) made of his life a *Vita Nuova*, then dying left him desolate, but still courageous and hopeful.

Thanks Before Going is not only a touching tribute to the character but a fine appraisal of the art of one who was (in Masfield's words) "an unusual, inspired, and kindling being from whom love brought much, in whom anguish of mind checked much, whose work and spirit went out against the anguish and left an inspiration to us."

—Basil Dowling

VERSE

POETRY: *The Australian International Quarterly of Verse*. No. 19, June 30, 1946. (Economy Press, Adelaide).

THE best one can say of this issue as a whole is that the poems in it reach a fair level of competence. Some are rather trivial, some are marred with looseness of texture, some by self-conscious diction, and most by lack of that "fundamental brainwork" which is an ingredient of all good poetry. There are, however, a number of praiseworthy pieces; those, for example, by Judith Wright, Roland E. Robinson, and Ingborg Kayko; and one, "Love and Death" by Jean McIntyre, which is memorable for its simplicity and strength.

NEAR TO PERFECTION

A BOOK OF WOOD ENGRAVINGS. By E. Mervyn Taylor. Caxton Press, Christchurch.

THIS must be the most beautiful book so far produced in New Zealand. The engravings are in fact so flawless, and the printing so near perfection, that the reviewer is reduced to complaining of the fact that the paper has been used too economically. It is not the fault of the artist nor in present world conditions of the printer, but the complaining habit dies hard in reviewers, and there is nothing else to criticise. It is one of those rare cases in book-production in which the artist has compelled the printer to do his best and the printer's response would have exposed the smallest weakness in the artist. But there are no weaknesses; certainly no technical ones. If Mervyn Taylor ever gets nearer to perfection than he is now it will be almost indecent. Meanwhile it would be indecent to ask—no other question will be asked by anybody—why such uncannily competent work leaves the admirer less excited than he ought to be. Is it, as Browning suggested, that the nearer we approach perfection the farther we pass from life?

LEGEND OF THE CAMPBELLS

LADY OF THE HEATHER. By Will Lawson. Oswald-Sealy, N.Z. Ltd., Auckland.

THIS story is written round the legend of the exile to the Campbell Islands, early last century, of a granddaughter of Bonnie Prince Charlie, suspected of treachery to the Jacobite cause. The author has used all the stage scenery required for such a drama—ships of all sizes and sails, high seas breaking monotonously on lonely South Sea islands, whalers, smugglers, and ex-convicts. It makes fascinating reading of a kind, but only an elastic imagination can accept this unsullied, pious woman who is able to subdue fierce characters like Kelly the Whaler and Jules Tonquin the runaway felon. Through the worst lashings of any storm the notes of the angelus ring triumphantly and, in fact, the author would almost have us believe that Bishop Pompallier was responsible for the Treaty of Waitangi.

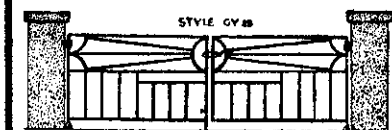


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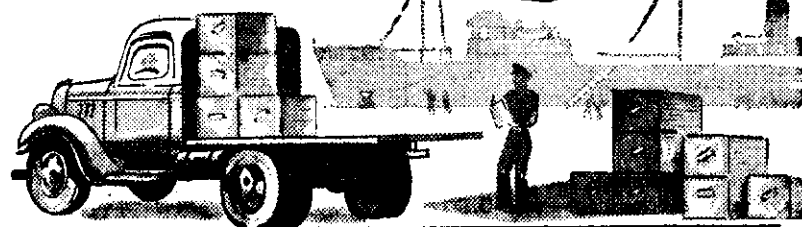
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