

that attends a first night at The Lane. Moreover, for all his exuberance, Mr. Pope is firmly grounded in his subject. He was, we are told, "virtually reared within the walls of the historic house" and he is learned in its amazing history. The long Gargantuan rivalry with Covent Garden, the procession of stars, the rise of the actor-manager, the decline into unbridled spectacle and the return to high tragedy; all these phases in a rich and hazardous history are displayed with an exciting virtuosity. The section dealing with Kean, perhaps because of the extremes of tone inherent in the subject matter, is particularly successful. In fact, let us face it, Mr. Macqueen Pope's epic has both personality and atmosphere.

## ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

*THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH.* By I. A. GORDON. N.Z. Council for Educational Research.

IN his book on The Teaching of English, Professor I. A. Gordon, of Victoria College, sets himself to answer certain questions which every teacher of English has to face—questions relating to the general aim and scope of his teaching, and to certain details of organisation and method.

My only qualification for reviewing such a book is that for something like half-a-century I have been a student and a teacher of English. My reading in what is called, I believe, the "literature" of the subject—I mean books and pamphlets discussing methods of teaching—has been scanty, casual, reluctant, and, on the whole, unprofitable. I have muddled along in what seemed to me the best way for myself, if not for others, learning something, I hope, on the way, and achieving just about the average degree of failure. I do not therefore presume to offer any general criticism of Professor Gordon's more thorough and methodical treatment of the teacher's problems. I must confine myself to a few comments on some matters of detail.

It is a fact, as Professor Gordon says, that though in the last hundred years English has come to be a central subject in the school curriculum, the teacher in search of guidance can find no clear authoritative statement telling him what his subject is about. In his third chapter the Professor sets himself to supply this deficiency, "English is a threefold skill, the ability to express oneself in spoken or written speech . . . to understand the speech of another . . . and to feel or appreciate the appeal of literature."

All that is clear enough, but does it get us very far? I am grateful, however, for one word—the word "spoken"—because it gives me a chance of airing one of my own grievances. "Many women teachers are in despair over their pupils' New Zealand accent. Few men seem to worry about it." Well, at the risk of setting myself down as a snob or a pedant, I am with the women. I cannot easily reconcile myself to Professor Gordon's view that we should, and even must, accept the peculiar New Zealand modification of English vowel sounds. I am not objecting to dialect, but what I ask is that our speech should be manly on the lips of our men, and womanly on the lips of our women, and pleasant in the ears of all, and not a nasal whine or drawl or gabble. A man's speech, after all, is a pretty good index of his literary culture, of his sensibility to the beauty of words, and consequently of his appreciation of the music of poetry and of literature generally. The teacher who does not "worry" when his pupils turn

Blake's "Little lamb who made thee?" into "Little emm him ade thee?" ought to find some other job.

I am sorry that Professor Gordon has confined himself to the treatment of English as a school subject. I should have liked to hear his opinion of our syllabus for the University. Most of our teachers in schools have been through that syllabus or part of it, and have been required to spend more than half their time in the study of Old and Middle English texts. I hope the Professor is not one of those to whom *Beowulf* is "our great national epic." It has been part of my own destiny to read and re-read that work with generations of students, and I grow yearly more confirmed in the belief that for me and for them, that task means sheer waste of time. You may call *Beowulf* an epic if you like: but it is neither "great" nor "national," unless a poem can be national in which England and the English are never mentioned. No! I say that students are merely wasting on a third-rate poem which has no connection whatever with English literature the time they should be giving to Virgil and Dante and the great central stream of European literature. . . . But my allotted space is up. I have just room to offer Professor Gordon my congratulations and apologies.

—F. Sinclair

## FROM COW TO PLOUGH

*HOLDFAST.* By A. G. Street. Faber and Faber, Ltd.

MR. STREET writes with humanity as well as knowledge of the problems of war-time farming in England—that unspectacular but vital Battle of Britain which is still being fought out on more fields than the playing fields of Eton. Although *Holdfast* is a novel—and a competent one incidentally—I state the farming theme first as it is the core of the book.

Phoebe Carpenter, to cure herself of despair, carries on with the farm while her husband is away in the Army, with the cheerful advice of a veteran farmer friend. She makes the painful change from dairying to agriculture, and soon can farm better than her absent husband. (Farming in Britain is managerial, of course, and by our standards there is a great deal of labour employed.)

This modest but freshly told story of country people making out in the face of all sorts of difficulties—emotional as well as material—holds the attention firmly by its realism. But should such a realist as A. G. Street have blest his heroine with such pleasantly elastic capital resources?

## ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH-ME

*DAWN IS A SIGNAL.* By Anita Campbell. Currawong Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney.

AN embarrassing fantasy: Adam and Eve look out on the world through a "telescope-periscope instrument" (invented by the Serpent) which eliminates time and space. Eve gets around too on the earth where things are pretty lousy thanks to the machinations of Money Power. World War III comes along before the end. These fast-shifting glimpses of human wickedness manifest the writer's idealism and moral indignation, but these do not compensate for the triteness of her imagination.

—David Hall

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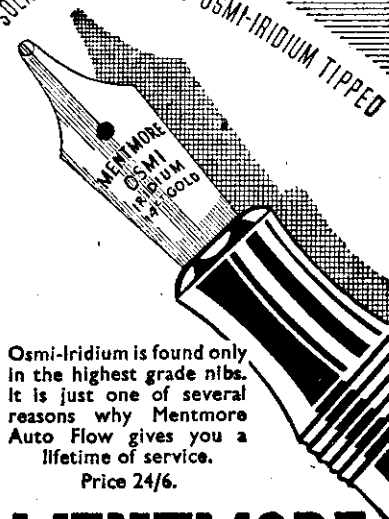
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