



BOOKS

ART AND HAPPINESS

ARTIST AND BOTANIST. Edited by John L. Moore (A. H. & A. W. Reed).

THE most striking thing about this short biography of an artist for many years well-known in Wellington is that its subject, Esmond Atkinson, apparently enjoyed a singularly happy life. His ambitions were solely artistic. He found a rich contentment in his minutely careful studies of plants, and

the attempts he made, in his landscapes, to capture the broader aspects of nature, even though they did not always satisfy him, at least did not create any distracting restlessness. It would not be quite fair to say that he achieved what he tried to do, because his aims were limited. But the moderation and sincerity of his approach to his work and to the flowers and plants which he loved seem to have armed him against most of the vulgar disappointments of life and given his work itself serenity as well as grace.

Esmond Atkinson stated his subjective approach to nature. "What the painter does is to record that image of the external which, whether he knows it or not, has been transmitted (transmuted?) by his own thoughts and feelings into something which should belong to him alone, and which is the 'nature' which he sees, but his work will ring true only so far as he is true to himself." Atkinson was certainly true to himself.

Although this is not a characteristic which is at all emphasised in this book, he shared with his aunt, Miss D. K. Richmond, a tendency to understate the colour of the New Zealand landscape, a tendency to drain it of the sharp, radiant light which, in most artists, is an obsession. This too is a question of temperament, of the seeing eye; it was perhaps a by-product of his integrity. On the other hand, in his popular water colours of native flowers, his colouring is exact; as in his drawings for scientific purposes, as part of his work in the Department of Agriculture, accuracy was apparently made the first consideration.

This handsome memorial volume reproduces a number of his paintings and drawings, many of them in colour. The biographical material, though never particularly intimate, does make abundantly manifest the delight that Esmond Atkinson found in the New Zealand landscape and forest, whether as a boy in Otaki or on one of his holiday visits to many corners of the bush and mountains of both islands. The few letters printed (covering his experiences in the Navy in the 1914-18 war) are good enough to make one wish for more.

Some minor features of this book are handled a little clumsily: there are two different sub-titles, one on the dust jacket and the other on the title page; also the title of the book itself on the binding is different from the title on the title page.

—David Hall

SONG AND DANCE

FIFTY YEARS OF VAUDEVILLE. By Ernest Short. Eyre and Spottiswoode.

THIS book provokes the reflection that the present disappearance of artistic standards, the disintegration of our culture into an international eclecticism "without personality or traditions or beliefs," was not caused by the cinema but preceded it by many years. Perhaps it is rather portentous to deduce so much from so little, to make so essentially harmless a book the text for any such vision of eternal damnation. Pass on then to the book itself, a history of the lighter stage, the British entertainment industry consecrated to the task of amusing the tired business man.

(continued on next page)

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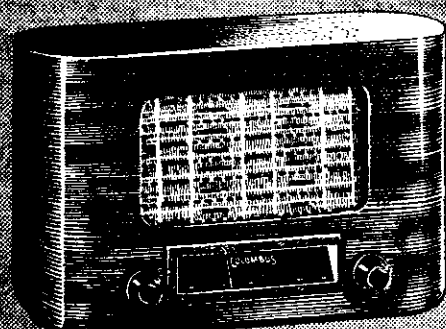
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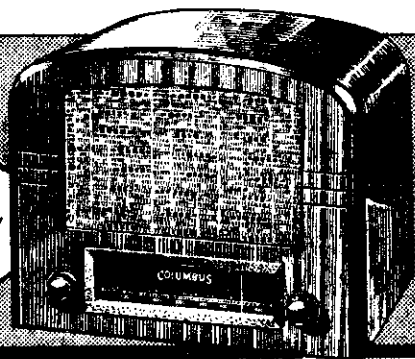
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