

BOOKS

Argonauts in Harbour

LANDFALL No. 3 (September). The Caxton Press.

LANDFALL has made a good passage. The first issue, appearing last March, was good but perhaps suggested the sort of shining promise which youth is rather apt to exhibit as the natural overflow of its own vitality. Though it is perhaps premature to accuse the third number of maturity (which is both a vice and a virtue and often betokens a dangerous and cynical self-confidence, I am eager to take that grave risk. *Landfall* has not only sighted the promised land; it is tied up alongside and is delivering the goods as fast as the tempo of our emotional life will let it unload them. The promised land, I need hardly say, is God's Own Country, and the goods may be defined as our vision of ourselves as we are.

The role of *Landfall* as critic is still far more important than its role as creator. The same proportion of original work to commentary as obtained in the March issue appears in the third issue, so it is fair to assume that this is a deliberate policy rather than a reflection of the volume of work which happens to be offering. I do not wish to be thought ungrateful either for R. M. Burdon's excellent article on Samuel Butler (in the first number), or for Professor Musgrove's charting of the rise and fall of the appreciation of the verse of Donne in the opinions of academic critics; far less to appear unperceptive of the high and consistent quality of the reviews of recent books of New Zealand interest which are a substantial portion of achievement. But I feel that in the long run a periodical of this type must place a firmer emphasis on creative work than on criticism, no matter how clairvoyant or how brilliant.

These very grudging remarks almost place me in the position of underpraising the creative writing in this September issue. That is not what I intend. A fine short story by John Reece Cole raises to almost tragic significance one of those small everyday blunders we so easily fall into, and my only qualm about it is whether the situation need have been seen through the eyes of an old soak. (The puritan fallacy?) *Landfall* is also lucky in its poets. Kendrick Smithyman's abilities shine out more clearly with every highly-charged and seeming-modest line that he writes. Ruth Dallas writes a quiet deliberative verse and uses nature to illustrate human nature. Hubert Witherford seems to me a remove further from humanity (this is hardly discreditable), and his rather sombre eloquence relates quite explicitly that he finds in nature the reverberation of his own subjective experience: four pine trees standing in mist become

Pale emblems on the void
and shadows of the mind.

So frank an attitude should be cherished. I like Arthur Barker's translations from French poets, although I am sure I should turn up my nose at some of the originals from which he has chiselled these careful and elegant lines.

R. T. Robertson's *Letter from Japan* turns the living moment into art; it would diminish his work to call it "reportage."

Howard Wadman's note on "Theatre" (which is apparently something far more profound and moving than the theatre) with its excellent supporting photographs points out that we need tragedy and hints that the shallowness of our experience of life hinders the fullest vicarious understanding of the most soul-clutching of all the arts. This is a vigorous and suggestive essay. Personally, I like to think we have achieved relatively higher standards in stage productions in the last two years than in any of the other arts. I feel it is imperative for our self-realisation that we write our own plays, but our lives are too temperate and too regulated to produce the raw material of drama. Who can walk round this dilemma?

—David Hall

FIRE IN THE FERN

A PIONEER LOOKS BACK AGAIN. By W. K. Howitt. Oswald-Sealy (N.Z.) Ltd.

MR. W. K. HOWITT again casts his mind back to the frontier conditions of Taranaki in the 'seventies when the scarcely-pacified Maori menaced the peace of mind, if not the life and property, of the settler, fully engaged in any case with that other giant antagonist, the bush, and the poor communications which it imposed on him. He ends a book crammed with interesting titbits (if not with the massive facts) of history with a series of short memoirs, partly personal recollections, of the first 19 Prime Ministers of the Dominion. Mr. Howitt is one who looks for the good in all men, so that it is perhaps unfair not to accord him the same treatment, but I cannot let pass his description of Bryce as "the hero of Parihaka" without suggesting that this might well be misunderstood. This book, in part an expression of its author's very genuine public spirit, is an apt reminder that the name "pioneer" can be worn with good right not only by the men and women of 1840, but by many persons still vigorously alive.

—D.O.W.H.

WAR OVERTOOK HIM

JADE ENGRAVED. By E. G. Jansen. Presbyterian Book Room, Christchurch.

IF Mr. Jansen were a journalist he would have streamlined the earlier parts of this book a little and highlighted throughout what one reviewer has called his "almost incredible" adventures. Being, however, merely "poet and philosopher"—as the Introduction (without exaggeration) claims of him—he has produced a much more solidly real and "inside" account of life within Japan's war time "co-prosperity sphere" than any journalist, however acute, is likely to make. For his deliberate refusal to use journalism's yellow magic in order that he may set out the exact way in which everything happened (both in external details and in inner spirit) gradually accumulates in his reader a conviction that the man who is at such pains to convey events so truthfully must have experienced them in the first instance with similar thoughtful objectivity.

What happened to Mr. Jansen is *mutatis mutandis* what happened to the
(continued on next page)



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a song which
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