

about it that is very much more than village gossip. And the Waitahuna volume, though less ambitious, is equally remarkable. Waitahuna Gully is credited, in its liveliest days, with 2000 inhabitants; for a brief period with 5000, though that is questionable; but its population to-day is two or three families, and it can hardly have had a hundred people at any time during the last 50 years. But here is its story for 87 years, beginning with Gabriel Read, and not omitting even "Cranky Joe."

Mr. Webster's effort is, of course, the more ambitious of the two, and all in all the more important. He has a wider field to cover, and the life of his community has never at any stage died down. It is in fact a more diversified life to-day, more vigorous, and more forward-looking, than it was when the Molyneux valley echoed with the voices of gold-miners. Necessarily some of the chapters are of local interest only, and one or two mere catalogues of names and changes in school, church, or public life. The introduction must be one of the most daring attempts ever made to interest a rural community in its own history—a paraphrase, in far from popular language, of a soil survey made by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. But the book is so good on the whole that these dreary patches will not affect its sale. One especially valuable section is Mr. Webster's tribute to the early wagoners, who have not had justice before.

Mr. Skinner set himself a more modest task, but carried it through with quiet determination and sympathy. Some readers will have looked for fuller portraits of the pioneers, especially of the "characters" among them, but it is not easy to be sure of one's facts in cases like those, and it may have been wiser to be silent. Mr. Skinner has, however, put two of the most picturesque Gully figures on his cover, and preserved others in reproductions of photographs scattered through his text. If the separate tributes to his parents and grandparents seem a little out of proportion, they were the four people he knew best, and each of them played a creditable part in Otago's early history.

## COUNTY FOLK

*PEACE BREAKS OUT.* By Angela Thirkell. Hamish Hamilton: Australian Edition, 1947.

ANGELA THIRKELL infuriates some people. "She's so terribly snobbish." She might reply that this doesn't follow from her pre-occupation with "the county"; she simply writes of life as she sees it, as she believes it exists. "You might say Thackeray was a dreadful snob if you didn't know that he wrote *The Book of Snobs*. It is certain, however, that Angela Thirkell puts the gentry into a kindly limelight, and leaves "the lovers loving and the parents signing cheques," though no one knows better that the cheques are not what they were, and that from the next line, "in endless English comfort by county folk caressed," two wars have struck out the "endless." The fact that she does not sound the depths, and gives us so much of the chatter of a society in which manners are stars and ideas super-numeraries, may obscure her real gifts to some. She has a keen eye for oddities of character, a considerable gift for social satire, and a very pretty wit, touched with what a critic calls "gay malice." *Peace Breaks Out*, a story of her recreated Barsetshire, is not a vintage

Thirkell. It lacks the sustained interest of *The Headmistress*. But it is good fun pleasantly flavoured with charm.

## BIOLOGY FOR BEGINNERS

*STORIES OF BIRDS AND BEASTS.* By Bryan O'Brien, with illustrations by Joan Smith. Paul's Book Arcade, Hamilton.

*RICHARD BIRD AT SEA.* By Mollie Miller Atkinson. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington.

THESE two books were written for children in different age-groups and by authors with different aims. Mr. O'Brien's aim, it is necessary to suppose, was entertainment only. Mrs. Atkinson's was clearly instruction, as well as entertainment. In one case, therefore, the birds and beasts come from popular magazines and have nothing at all to do with New Zealand. In the other neither the stories nor the illustrations leave our own coasts. Every bird and bush, every fish, crab, and cockle-shell could be found in any New Zealand harbour, and all have been faithfully presented in line and colour. There can be no doubt at all that children (of the appropriate ages) will enjoy both, but Mr. O'Brien supplies one paragraph that must leave all his rivals speechless. A pellet from a shotgun strikes a snow-goose in the head, "injuring that part of the brain that gave her sight. Without her sight she could not go out to seek her food, and Wanda knew what that meant—she would starve to death." But was this godly goose down-hearted? Listen:

"Most of her winged companions would have given way to a terrible despair, but the gentle bird thought of all the good things God had given her in the past. She had seen the sun rise in blazing magnificence over mountain and meadow; she had looked down on the beauty of the pine forests, and thrilled to the ecstasy of flight as she skimmed over hilltops and glided down to settle on river and lake. Wanda remembered all this and thanked God for His goodness. She would not complain now that these things had been taken from her. She would wait in quiet resignation until her pangs of hunger were soothed in a merciful death."

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