

BOOKS

Extended Frontiers

THE WINDS ARE STILL. By John Hetherington. Georgian House, Melbourne.

THIS novel about Australians, Englishmen, and New Zealanders escaping from Greece in 1941 is a straightforward adventure story. The general atmosphere is good, the nervous strains of waiting in hiding, the insatiable suspicion. The Greeks are well portrayed, their courage, stoicism, and boundless willingness to help the beaten friends of their country at great risk to themselves. But so far as the story has conscious art, it is bad art. The love affair between an Australian captain and a Greek farmer's daughter (who wears a "cerise skirt") is an unnecessary embellishment, distressingly sentimentalised (see the coy vagueness of its Big Moment on page 151, where whatever meaning the author may have intended is left to the cleanness, or otherwise, of the reader's own mind), and so much of an embarrassment to the novelist that he has to crawl out of it in the crudest possible way by killing off his heroine at the end of the book. Many men getting out of Greece had real-life adventures very similar to these adventures. But some details cause a certain uneasiness, for instance, the New Zealand soldier who in civil life is a "cattleman" and "had the capacity for silence of men accustomed to live most of their lives with animals." Then how a Greek caique casually picked up at pistol point had the fuel for a voyage to Egypt (and then apparently back to Greece again) is, one supposes, too trivial to warrant explanation.

The Winds Are Still won the Sydney Morning Herald's £1,000 war novel competition. You needn't hold this against it. Worse novels have been awarded bigger prizes.

This book has, perhaps, a moral for all of us. It points to the immense expansion of our national experience, and therefore of the raw material of literature and art, provided by participation in the war. The Middle East, Greece, Italy, Germany and many other countries have been annexed to the Antipodean literary empire and await their passionate colonists.

—David Hall

CHURCH SETTLEMENT TO PROVINCE

THE STORY OF THE OTAGO FREE CHURCH SETTLEMENT (1848-1948).

By the Very Rev. Professor Emeritus John Collie. Presbyterian Bookroom, Dunedin.

THIS book suffers technically from the fact that its author died before he had gathered up all the loose ends. He lived long enough to complete 12 of the 19 chapters, to write a foreword and an epilogue, and to provide "much material" for the chapters that remained. The task of interpretation was completed, and all the major personal estimates but one. (Time will place John Collie himself high among the devout scholars whose influence Presbyterians will feel for two or three generations, but he does his best to obliterate himself.) Unfortunately the book had to be finished not by one additional author, but

by three or four, and no writer can identify himself so completely with another that the substitution is not noticeable. There is the further difficulty for readers who are neither ministers nor Presbyterians that most of the actors in the story are both. Professor Collie decided wisely at the outset that he would not give indiscriminate praise. But the decision gave him a lot of anxiety. When he can't avoid criticism he gives it firmly; but he gives it with so much reluctance, and with so real a sense of his own unworthiness, that the judge is always trying to change places with the accused. There is hardly a chapter in which this anxiety does not show itself, until we find him almost wishing in the epilogue that he had abstained from criticism altogether. "As I have touched lightly, perhaps too lightly for serious history, on the weaknesses or oddities of some figures of the past, I have come, as I walked with them in memory, to feel their essential worth and how true they were in their main intention. I have felt that in certain periods there was lack of grip and of vital faith that called for decided criticism. But even then ineffective men may have been men of real goodness, faithful according to their dimmed lights."

There is not much trouble when he is dealing with outstanding figures: Dr. Burns, Dr. Stuart, Professor Salmond, Professor Dunlop, Dr. Waddell, Dr. Gibb, Professor Hewitson, and two or three others. Dr. Stuart's figure is perhaps a little blurred, but the estimates of the others are admirable—penetrating, vivid, and sympathetic, but never out of focus. If Professor Collie has a hero among preachers it is perhaps Dr. Waddell; if he has a warmer spot for one teacher than for others it is for Professor John Dunlop, whose dry and biting but kindly humour was so startlingly combined with his scholarship and piety. Professor Collie has a shy wit of his own that he does not often release, but he can't resist retelling some of the standard jokes in which Presbyterians take such delight. Most of them are too long to quote, and some of them are wise-cracks rather than jokes, but Presbyterians everywhere will appreciate this story about a Taieri elder who had the habit of "gi'en hints in his prayers," and one night in a prayer-meeting vented a grievance about the minister who drove about his parish like Jehu, the son of Nimshi: "O Lord, bless our minister and keep him humble, for they do not now travel on their feet as Ye did when on earth, but they ride in their boogies and pairs."

The book is well illustrated, and fully indexed, and carries in an appendix a complete register of all Otago and Southland Presbyteries. If it were a history of Presbyterians only it would still be a book of wide public importance. But it is the history of a settlement that began in a church and was finally enclosed in something bigger—the story, not of one congregation only, but of the province into which this congregation expanded. That gives it Dominion status and a very wide Dominion appeal.

—O.D.

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