

NEW QUARTET

BLOW, WIND OF FRUITFULNESS. By James K. Baxter. Caxton Press.
DISPUTED GROUND. By Charles Brasch. Caxton Press.
SELECTED POEMS. By John Crowe Ransom. Eyre and Spottiswoode.
POEMS 1920-1945. By Allen Tate. Eyre and Spottiswoode.

POETS of New Zealand, poets of America, neither need resent this juxtaposition. Baxter and Brasch are the second and third of the so-far admirable Caxton Poets series which delight equally in form and content. Ransom and Tate offer selections from their recent verse.

James Baxter has a depth of feeling for nature which varies between the apocalyptic—

Still the great symbols stand,
The mountains and the sky

and the merely graceful—

the bronze horses standing in a field
Lean on the wind and graze the hours away.

His images are sometimes eccentric or awry—

Sun clothe the naked shoulders like a grave—

which amounts to the abuse of surprise. Even

The wild lost city of a mother's love sounds well, but, if searched, is a weak thing. But I like the Yeatsian echo in the laconic diction of *High Country Weather*—

Upon the upland road
Ride easy, stranger:
Surrender to the sky
Your heart of anger.

His *University Song* testifies that Baxter can turn out the occasional or public poem. He can also compass satire, though it is not his characteristic mood, and in *Letter to Noel Ginn* he is Byronic without discomfiting the reader. Perhaps because they are still reacting against the parade of golden kowhais and clamorous tuis in some New Zealand verse a few years ago, both Baxter and Brasch generally avoid the specific

and the identifiable New Zealand detail. Indeed in Baxter the chief reason for thinking he writes of a younger country than England is the emptiness of many of his poems of the precise and detailed; but the whole body of his work, in spite of this grandiose vagueness, speaks of a natural world whose mood is at once more austere and more generous than Europe. But a poem like *The Bay* is unequivocally local, and has many fine lines—

The carved cliffs and the great outlying surf . . .

Charles Brasch wields a more sweeping brush and the line he traces is more

sinuous and flowing than Baxter's work. He has eloquence rather than the pressed potency of Baxter, not a verbal felicity merely, but a more sophisticated and experienced handling of words. Occasionally the word is overdone, overwritten,

unassimilated — "archetypal sway"; "the enfranchising hour." Usually it is both gracious and exact—launches are "cuffed by pert waves"; hearts are "narrow like alleys"; and grasses fly "motionless pennants." Brasch's title phrase appears in two poems, in *In Memory of Robin Hyde* (which I like but think I ought not to), and in the profound final poem. Brasch's taste is better than Baxter's, but he has less certainty of purpose, less of self-appointed, self-intoxicated divinity. Such lines as these on the expression on a child's face who

Has the air of one looking back by death set free,

Who sees the strangeness of life, and what things are trying to be

mark his maturity, his skill, and his strong interest in what can be described only as spiritual insight.

MANY of Ransom's poems are partially narrative, ballads with an ironic twist such as *Captain Carpenter*. He has a certain wry wantonness half-way between a serious irony and a bedevilling humour. He is a robust writer who

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together and have experienced a measure of success in such work. The individual attention provided in our Cottage Homes is aimed at approximating as closely as possible to the position in the regular family home. Families are kept together except in the case of boys over 10 who have separate accommodation in the same vicinity. The question of discipline is closely watched, and, as a matter of policy, no corporal punishment is administered. No special uniform is worn.

I was so disturbed at "D.M.M.'s" article that I approached the Headmaster of the Anderson's Bay School who, after reading the article, was emphatic that such conditions as are suggested do not apply to our Homes, and authorised me to quote him as making this statement.

It is well-known that all Children's Homes in New Zealand are inspected

regularly by Officers of the Child Welfare Department who report on their inspection and where necessary insist on conditions being such as are approved by their Department. In addition, the plans for all buildings must be submitted and passed by the Department before the buildings are erected. It is an unfortunate omission that no reference to the Child Welfare Department is made in "D.M.M.'s" article. The last report received by my Association from the Child Welfare Department was as follows:

All buildings at Anderson's Bay are in a good state of repair. They are brick, clean, and well looked after inside and out. There is a maximum amount of fresh air and sunlight. The grounds are excellent. A new Manager and his wife as Matron are about to be appointed. The general tone is excellent. The staff are all interested in the children. This is as good an Institution as will be found anywhere.

A. M. ELLIFFE (Superintendent
Otago Presbyterian Social Service Assn.)

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