

ART OR CRAFT?

Reviewed by J. C. Beaglehole

PRINTING TYPES: A Second Specimen Book. The Caxton Press, Christchurch, 1948. Price 15/-.

HOW charming is divine typography! And when the Caxton Press really lets itself go (if any may refer to that excellent mingling of technical accomplishment and ingenious wit as "it"), as it has done in this second of its specimen books, how beguiling, how eminently satisfactory is the result! Not uniform perfection, certainly because uniform perfection eludes humanity. But nevertheless very eminently satisfactory. This must indeed be one of the pleasantest picture-books issued anywhere in 1948. For it is a picture-book, though a useful picture-book—a series of very charming pictures of what can be done with bits of metal and different coloured inks if the doer has accomplishment and wit. It is something else, however—it is, also, a very cheering sign of maturity, somewhere in New Zealand, in the practice of a very complicated and exacting craft.

Let us call printing a craft rather than an art, and keep away from the high-falutin'. Let us think of it as functional, conveying somebody's meaning as efficiently and clearly to the reader as possible; and yet one will see from this book how essential to efficient functioning is grace and right proportion and even what may seem a bit of supererogatory finish. One can see, also, here and there, how inessential and even disturbing is ornament, how right proportion and harmonious grace, the nice balance of white and black, carries its own ornament triumphantly, to the routing of the adventitious. Consider, for confirmation of this, the two conjoint pages 10 and 11; consider the noble effect of a few lines of Perpetua capitals against the comic 19th Century decorated Tuscan and that ilk. In the end perhaps it is the chaste that has the most lasting effect, the least mannered, is also the best mannered. Anyhow in prose; verse may be a different matter; verse, like the Donne Sonnet on page 52, can take the Blado italic and the Bensemann heading, and be adorned. (In parenthesis, this reviewer may perhaps say that he wishes more use were made in this country of Mr. Bensemann's magnificent handwriting.)

Mr. Glover, of the Caxton Press, has done what other printers ought to do, he has assembled enough type in a number of handsome faces to keep on turning out interesting (and therefore functional) jobbing work, and to keep his books lively. His Caslon Old Face, and Poliphilus and Perpetua are really godsend to the eye wearied with the usual New Zealand routine. But all the type in the world won't do much good without a sense of proportion, without a feeling for space, without balance; and for those things one must admire the work of the Press, as well as for Mr. Glover's tact and discrimination in assembling his bits of metal. There is a good deal more one could say—it would be interesting, if only to oneself to give a detailed critique page by page, but one



would produce a long article full of technicalities, and the book itself deliberately avoids technicalities. Let the modest blurb on the dust jacket therefore be quoted, the book is "an anthology of agreeable quotations just as much as a parade of printing types," and it is very successfully agreeable.

Anybody who cares for printing, by the way, should get hold of a four page folder which advertises this book, its first page, Caslon roman and italic, in black and red, is as good a piece of work as the world has seen in this generation.

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

AFTERMATH. By Hans Habe. Harrap. English price, 10/6.

THIS is the sort of novel it is difficult to take very seriously. Superficially it is realistic, does not sentimentalise love too grossly, although it does sentimentalise national aspirations, and unwinds an interesting though tenuous, spool of plot. It is about an ex-German writer and an American lawyer serving in the American army in Germany at the end of the war and afterwards and chronicles their friendship and loves. Its incidental observations, on the continuance of Nazi ideology in Germany, if true, are horrifying. But it remains the sort of book which corresponds to the short stories published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, a commercial product, deftly turned out, which it would be naive to consider as art.

VOICES

SAINT JOAN OF ARC. By V. Sackville-West. Michael Joseph. English price, 12/6

THE reprinting of this 12-year-old appraisal of Saint Joan of Arc and her brief and magnificent appearance in history is timely. Saint Joan served in the forefront of a resistance movement as memorable as that of 1940 to 1944 and was opposed most venomously by collaborationist elements in her own country. She was to the French a sort of talisman, or even a mascot; to herself a divinely-ordained instrument. It was her claim to mystical powers which kindled the suspicions of the orthodox and helped to bring about a martyrdom which was also, in her enemies' view, a political necessity. Miss Sackville-West's biography is full, closely documented, scholarly, fair, and intensely moving.

—David Hall

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