



## WARM SHIRTS by MITCHBILT

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Sizes: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

# 26/2

PLUS 8d POSTAGE

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ONLY

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WARM SHIRT. Excellent value! In light grey.  
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# 24/2

PLUS 8d POSTAGE

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which I enclose.....

Description.....

Size..... Colour.....

Neck Measurement..... Second Choice.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

For Shirt Sizes 8 and 9 (Extra Large) Please Write for Particulars.

N.Z. Listener

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## Classics for the 21st Century

CRITICS sometimes amuse themselves by writing essays in which they name, with obvious satisfaction, the books they hope to avoid reading. This mood may come upon people who study the candidates for immortality mentioned in a special article on page 6. We do not suggest that the favoured authors are dull or unsuitable: our point here is that the quest for greatness must be made within the limits of personal experience. How many of us have read *all* the authors named in the lists? Might we not say that there are some books we have no intention of reading, or that there are others which somehow have never come our way? There are, of course, the giants known to everybody who reads seriously; but our critics are by no means certain that the few giants of to-day will be the classics of to-morrow. It is necessary to be cautious in reaching conclusions about the living or the recently dead, for the judgments of posterity are notoriously unpredictable. We simply do not know what the world will be like to live in when future generations turn over the yellowing leaves in their libraries. Yet if mankind does not revert too frequently to barbarism we may assume that great books will retain their capacity for survival. And it would be interesting to know what books would be thought worthy of protection if a twilight of the spirit came again upon the earth. We suspect that the older books would be cherished most carefully, that men would be anxious to save the Bible and Shakespeare, and that there would be less anxiety to save the prophets of our own generation. For we live in a time when genius seems to be less active in the arts than it has been in more favoured periods. In the middle and later years of the 19th Century the critics would have disagreed over a list of great writers; but there were names that all of them would have mentioned spontaneously, especially in poetry

and fiction. To-day we pause uncertainly, and many of the names that come finally into the open are known more to intellectual minorities than to the general reader. What, for instance, can we expect posterity to make of the later James Joyce while we, who are so close to him in time, are groping for his meanings? Are there writers whose novels could enable our great grandchildren to understand the sort of world in which we are living? We can return without much effort of the imagination to the environments of Trollope, Dickens, Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen. But if our descendants look into the pages of writers who have come under the influence of Kafka they will receive the impression that mankind in the 20th Century suffered a nervous breakdown. Perhaps they will feel more at home with men who, like John Buchan, could tell a straightforward story, and at the same time bring in enough of the outside world to make it recognisable. It is true that the creative mind has much to contend with in an age of science which has had two "global" wars. Everywhere in the arts there has been a breaking down of tradition, and perhaps the way is being prepared for a new advance out of chaos. But it may be found that the present phase of literature belongs more to competence than to genius. A great writer does not merely tell a story or expound a theory: he creates a little world of his own. Books which become classics could never be mistaken for the work of other writers; they have the imprint of minds which have been able to express a personal vision. And nowadays, in the midst of so much complexity, the vision tends to be narrow and private. It may be that, in looking for great writing, we think too much in terms of the novel, and assume too easily that it will continue to be the dominant literary form. If it is superseded, the laurels may well descend upon books which would now be regarded as outsiders.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 12, 1949