

BOOKS

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and so many of his contemporaries were to know on battlefields half a world away. But at least, a readiness to challenge injustice wherever it is met, a refusal to accept anything that wars against human dignity. This was a familiar attitude to John Mulgan's generation, and much in his own life was based on it. André Malraux has written that attitude into European literature, and it is not likely to be lost: this book is a continuing reminder, to New Zealanders, of its value.

A GOOD GOSSIP

REPORT TO SAINT PETER, by Hendrik Willem van Loon; Harrap. English price, 8/6.

VAN LOON is already something of a myth. His range of the widest kind of historical knowledge, his indefatigable industry, and his power as an expositor put him on the plane of the mildly extraordinary, where myths flourish. The academics cry him down as a mere popularizer; certainly he is simple enough to be read by children, and his judgments are a little too clear-cut to please the complex mind of the scientific historian, but a popularizer who does not lower his standards or deliberately write down to what he considers

is the level of public intelligence is a valuable member of the community. In this fragment of autobiography van Loon, besides digressing amiably on everything from childhood dreams to socially nice diseases, puts down some good sentences. The successful autobiography, he says, is not written by extroverts like the Greeks, "who carried their hearts on their sleeves and who kissed their girls right out on the steps of the Acropolis (but), by an introvert who lives molelike in the dark recesses of his own soul, and who kisses his girl on the sly and then makes himself believe he did it because it was good for her health." So he gossiped along, ponderously flippant at times, with a flavour of H. L. Mencken, genial, hopeful, undismayed; until the good of his own health left him, cutting short his autobiography. But not before he had written an epitaph which should please the most austere and retiring scholar. "The things I have thought belong to the world in general, but the life I have lived is the private property of myself and those who have shared my adventures with me."

—G. leF. Y.

TOUGH GOING

THE LONG SWIM, by Richard Angell; Eyre and Spottiswoode. English price, 7/6.

THIS American novel, unlike the feat of endurance it so graphically describes, is a *tour de force* which does not quite come off. It is really a long

short story rather than a novel, but not even its extension to only 136 pages can altogether protect its readers from the *longueurs* that arise from too constant a hammering on the one point. Richard Angell's young sailor sets out to swim seven miles across a Mediterranean strait and through misadventure swims forty. His whole life masses before his eyes—unfortunately not in one flash, but in a sputter of staccato excerpts, with time off, however, for the verse quotations to be identified by footnotes. There is a certain uneasy alliance in this book between literary invention and "reportage"; action and reflection get a little entangled.

—David Hall

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

TWO criticisms might be made of *The Practical Man's Book of Things to Make and Do* (Odhams Press, through Witcombe and Tombs Ltd., price 8/6). First, there is no systematic classification of information—an alphabetical index would double the value of the book for ready reference. Secondly, the value of some sections (such as "Notes on Building a House") is lost to the New Zealand reader because they have been written to U.K. specifications. But it's still a useful handbook for the family man.

ZB BOOK REVIEW



ANTON VOGT, who will review Roderrick Finlayson's "Tidal Creek" in the ZB Book Review session on September 4. Chairman for the evening will be F. L. Combs, and other books (and reviewers) will be: "Jubilee Road," by Frederick Willis (Nelle Scanlan); "Roads From Home," by Dan Davin (John Reece Cole); and "The Wooden Horse," by Eric Williams (Malcolm Mason)

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