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always to search for what lies behind the facade. We try to reach the man behind the phrase, or character or idea. Quite often we get a glimpse, a flash, but we are never certain just where the poet or the storyteller ends and where the individual begins. Although Alun Lewis's poems and stories hint at someone of more than average thought and sensitivity, it is from his letters that we are able to get a rounded portrait.

He hoped that his creative writing would be "an expression of all the conflict, all the faith and hope and despair and love that is humanity." There is nothing really new in this. It is the creed of most creative artists, but Lewis's manner of achievement has made him one of the best of contemporary writers. There is a lack of pretentiousness which so often becomes the limitation of his associates; there is a disregard for showmanship; there is no seeking after the tortured phrase, the obscured message. Everything is straightforward without being too simple, truthful without being naive. His is a balanced mind, devoid of illusion but devoid also of cynicism. He is as ready as most to abhor injustice, to despise sham, and he sees humanity through his own particular vision, accepting the pain as well as the wonder.

"Acceptance" is, I think, the operative word. Take, for instance, his description of a troopship: the "sweating hold," the piano accordion, the tiered bunks, the men "like maggots, playing housey-housey . . . . Hammocks, beer bottles, oranges, bare legs, sweat and smell and foetid breath." A lesser man, a more egotistical poet, would have railed against these circumstances; but he accepts them and surmounts them in his own way. He is at all times the participator as well as the observer, and as such keeps his sanity.

He has been generally assessed as a poet, but A. L. Rowse and Walter Allen have both put forward the suggestion that he might have veered more and more towards prose if he had lived, and although speculation along these lines is really more than useless, I am inclined, for what it is worth, to add my vote to theirs. I remember thinking when I first read *The Last Inspection* that here was a writer with all the attributes of sympathy, insight and integrity that are needed for "good" authorship. Lewis's death is yet another of those numberless and fatuous tragedies of war. He himself said after the publication of *Raider's Dawn* that as a writer he had just gone back to school. If this is so, then we have missed a lot. Yet he also speaks a little later on of the sudden maturing, under the influences of love and war, of his work from the winter of 1939 to the following autumn. So it might be that the gods who overlook the destinies of poet turned soldier decreed this sudden, perhaps too sudden, flowering, and that Alun Lewis attained some zenith before he died. His was a rare spirit—tolerant, wise, honest and often inspired.

—Isobel Andrews

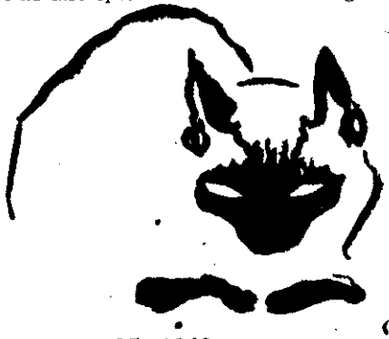
CATS IN THE HOUSE

THE CATS IN OUR LIVES, by Pamela and James Mason; Michael Joseph. English Price, 8/6.

IT may be well known to the film fans that James Mason and his wife Pamela have a family of assorted cats—and now, I believe, a daughter, though she does not appear in this book—that they spend a good deal of their non-film time writing books either together or separately, and that this happy state of affairs has been going on now for about a dozen years, before the war and through the war and out the other side of the war. All of this was fresh and new to me when I read their latest joint book, *The Cats in Our Lives*, written chapter about, fair's fair for space, and illustrated with line drawings by James Mason. The dust jacket is the first pleasant surprise, and certainly a jacket to remove for safe-keeping: it is embellished in front with a picture of the happy authors with two of the basic members of their cat family, the black Siamese (yes, Pamela Mason explains, this can really happen among purebred Siamese) Topboy of Addington, and the milkman's cat, Whitey. And that's not the end of the dust jacket's charms: it is covered all over the back with the faces and figures and eyes and ears and tails of the population of the book and perhaps of friends not mentioned. Cat drawings are often charming; I have never seen a more charming lot than the ones in and about this book.

James Mason begins the story, explaining how he came to own his first two cats, Topboy and Lady Leeds (he found her, a stray tabby kitten, on the railway station at Leeds, and gave her a home in his dressing-room at the theatre), after he had met Pamela Kellino at a party in 1936 and soon afterwards her pedigree Siamese, Gamma Moon of Tara. It was Pamela who encouraged him to go ahead and have Topboy live with him in his flat; but it was James himself, no encouragement from anyone, who adopted Lady Leeds, a person of great charm still living as a member of the family when the book was being written at Beverly Hills, California, in 1949.

Pamela then takes over and explains how she came to be a collector and family-builder of cats. When she was 14 and had an allowance she made a habit of spending the whole of it on buying all the kittens in Selfridge's pet department: the prices ranged from 6d to 2/-. and Pamela gave herself plenty of trouble, living in a London flat and searching for homes for her saved kittens. There were many cats, and there still are. In 1938 James Mason and Pamela Kellino were married and rented a house in Berkshire; with the house went a housekeeper called Violet Taylor and her cat



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