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BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

The atmosphere of an Otago Calvinist household, strictly sabbatarian, founded almost literally on the Bible, is firmly established. The idiom of the older generation is rendered faithfully, rising at times to almost oracular heights. The appearance of this book shows the place that exists for the regional novel in New Zealand; it shows it is possible to recreate the local historical epoch with dignity and yet without dullness and make of it something which has a distinction independent of the charm of the local echo and familiar incident.

—David Hall

DEEP PLOUGHING

PLOUGHMAN'S WISDOM, by Norman Carew; Faber and Faber.

THIS book is an answer to Edward Faulkner's much discussed *Ploughman's Folly*; but it is much more than that. The author is a field superintendent of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in Fiji, of whose history, holdings, operations and methods he first gives a short but adequate account. His field experience convinces him that soil aeration is a first essential to successful plant growth; and therefore he advocates all cultural operations that make for aeration, and among them ploughing—deep ploughing—as of prime importance. In his enthusiasm he even hopes to see atomic energy harnessed for his purpose, and used for shattering the lower subsoil, a type of sub-surface cultivation that by simpler methods was tried in New Zealand years ago.

But why is aeration so important? Here Mr. Carew breaks new ground indeed. He is convinced of the significance of "deep water"—the water from the permanent water-table—in nourishing plants. But how is it lifted? He scouts current explanations of the upward rise of water in soils. Some simple experiments, elaborately described, with columns of soil in glass tubes satisfy him

that the carbon dioxide gas dissolved in the soil water under pressure supplies the explanation—the explanation also of that problem baffling to botanists of how water from the plant rootlets rises to the leaves of the highest trees. Thence he is led, and leads the reader, to his novel theory that plants derive the carbon dioxide used in the synthesis of carbohydrates not from the air but, with all the rest of their nutriment, from the soil water.

The book is written, not in the sedate manner of the scientist, but with all the zest, and the irrelevancies and the colloquialisms of a popular tale of adventure. But it is worth reading. Anyone interested in the soil will find it stimulating; the serious student, provocative.

—L. J. Wild

AMONG THE CORONETS

LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE, by Nancy Mitford; Hamish Hamilton. English price, 8.6.

THIS novel has been named "book of the month" by three societies which devote themselves to that high literary function; and in the face of such authority it may seem presumptuous to cast a dissenting vote. Yet one New Zealander responded coolly to what has been described on the dust jacket as "a riotously funny chronicle of family life among the coronets." The people who come together in stately homes for sophisticated talk about the intrigues of their friends and relations seem to be pathetic rather than funny. Polly, the beautiful daughter of Lady Montdore, loiters so palely in the foreground that there is scarcely a sign of life in her; and her marriage to her mother's elderly lover can be explained and tolerated only by the most artificial laws of comedy. Similarly, the fifteen-year-old girls who talk naughtily of Freud are so much in need of a spanking that the humorous element in their precocity—if it exists at all—passes unnoticed. And the unctuous Cedric, who becomes a sort of second daughter to the frustrated Lady Montdore, belongs to a type of fiction which some of us thought had become happily extinct before the recent war.

—M.H.H.

TROLLOPE DE LUXE

THE OXFORD TROLLOPE: Crown Edition. "Can You Forgive Her?" Two volumes. Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press. English Price, 30/-.

THERE is a widespread idea that the boom in Anthony Trollope began in the second world war. The Spectator seemed to think so recently. The boom dates to the first war, as this reviewer can testify, for he was one of those who discovered Trollope as a refuge in those critical times. Wartime *Punch* paid him a tribute in verse. That Trollope was so long coming into new favour was due largely to his own frank disclosure of his methods of composition. The incurably romantic English public could not believe that a man who wrote for set hours every day, and if the time was not up started another chapter (even, one seems to remember, beginning another book), could call up the necessary inspiration. They were shocked by such a matter-of-fact approach to art. The first war provided conditions favourable for a revival. Men and women found in him, and especially in the Barsetshire series, a means of escape to a peaceful and stable world.

Trollope did not lose this position, and a second war enhanced it. The boom has spread to America, where scholarship is busy with his novels, and



THE Autobiography of Neville Cardus (above) will be reviewed by Martin Cook in the ZB Book Review session on Sunday evening, December 18. O. A. Gillespie will chair the session and other works for review are: "Day After Day," by Odd Nansen (reviewer, Jim Henderson); "Intruder in the Dust," by W. Faulkner (Frank Sargeson); and "Katherine Mansfield and Other Portraits," by J. Middleton Murry (Prof. S. Musgrove).