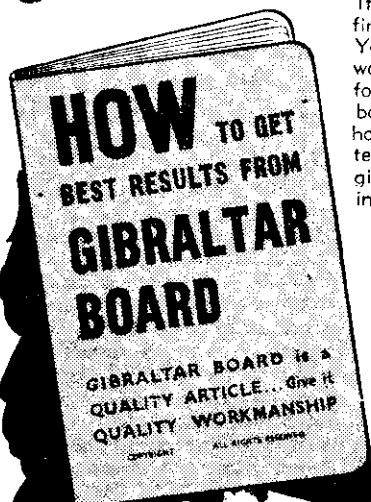


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BOOKS

A PROFESSOR REVEALS HIMSELF

FRAGMENTA ANIMI, by Richard Lawson, Whitcombe & Tombs, Dunedin.

THE products of nearly half a century of authorship (1894-1941) are gathered together in this volume of prose and verse by Professor Richard Lawson, who holds the chair of education at the University of Otago. That Professor Lawson is a scholar there can be no doubt, for every section of his work is imbued with his deep reverence for the masterpieces of ancient and modern thought, and his writing is enriched with many an apt allusion or quotation from the authors he loves.

The prose writings are for the most part evoked by specific occasions. There is, for example, the graduation address delivered in 1932 to the students of the University of Otago, a talk on Philosophy and Education to the Association for the Advancement of Science, Auckland, an address to citizens and parents on the Bible in Schools movement. And we may well marvel that such work as this, written to fill the need of a passing hour, should show such wealth of thought and expression as makes it worthy this less fleeting memorial. But the fact that such work does pass the test of publication is surely proof that Professor Lawson has the thoroughness and depth that characterise the true scholar, who is faithful over small things. And through all his writings there beats the conviction that science, economics, or humanism alone is not sufficient. "My own faith is that the universe has a meaning, that history has a meaning, that working to a better life will make that meaning less obscure, that the gospel of efficiency taken alone is false, that man has a soul, that there is no practical life before the world comparable to that presented in the New Testament, and that a constant direction of thought towards the soul will bring a gradual illumination." Education, for Professor Lawson, is "philosophy in action," and education without philosophy is meaningless.

A number of the shorter essays deal with aspects of religious history and

criticism. The rational approach which Professor Lawson uses in his essays on such topics as The Church and Modernism, Spiritualism, Early Christians, the Re-discovery of the Bible, does nothing to detract from the sense of deep moral fervour which pervades them.

Among the verse portions of "Fragmenta Animi" are some particularly workmanlike translations, for example, the Hymn of Cleonthes (referred to in Acts 17, 28), Hell's Portals (from Dante), and Schiller's *Die Teilung der Erde*. Although Professor Lawson is completely at home in the lyric form, his particular genius finds a more suitable vehicle in the weightier classic measures or in ordinary blank verse. The most arresting poem in the whole collection is his "Cor Inquietum." In this the author tries to crystallise in poetic form the personal doubts and spiritual wrappings which hinder his soul in its progress towards the ultimate good. The conflict between intellectual doubt and ultimate truth is finally resolved by the poet's acceptance of the words of Augustine: "Fecisti nos ad Te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec in Te requiescat." (Thou hast made us for Thyself, and unquiet is our heart till it find rest in Thee) and the poem ends on a note of quiet triumph.

Professor Lawson reaches his highest poetic level in this poem, in which sympathetic readers will find traces of Milton:

"Mysterious God, half-hidden, half-revealed,
Containing all and yet excluding all;
Mysterious gulf between ourselves and thee,
So wide, so dark, so deep no human eye
Hath bridged it, no nor human light illumined
it,
Nor human wisdom plumbed it—wide, dark,
deep,
With silence that no mortal voice has broken—
Whence nothing comes in voice or light or
motion
Save from Thee only"

Fragmenta Animi is not a book that will appeal to the disciples of iconoclasm. A lifetime spent, as Professor Lawson's has been, in close association with the classics, must tend to mould not only the outward form of a man's thoughts but even the thoughts themselves, and there is a clogging conservatism about

(Continued on next page)



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