

NEW WORLDS, NEW WORDS

(Written for "The Listener" by C.J.L.)

IT is a strange thing that, in this age of speed, when most things are being cut short, the words we use seem almost daily to be becoming longer.

It was bad enough when we had only the complicated language of the food-conscious and of the fireside psychologist to contend with, but added to these, we now have in daily use all those long and ungainly words which have been inflicted upon us since the war.

(continued from previous page)

M. H. Holcroft in his two excellent studies, *The Deepening Stream* and *The Waiting Hills*—in the Depression the poets had time to think. But unfortunately it sometimes seems as if one or two of them have never thought since. At the present day one gets a little weary of the Depression sketches that continue to be produced.

Still, there are signs of a change. A few years ago, R. A. K. Mason, who is one of the finest writers of lyrics in the country to-day, could write of his poetry in these terms:

*For my bitter verses are
Sponges steeped in vinegar
Useless to the happy eyed
But handy for the crucified.*

"Handy for the crucified"—that was in 1934. But in his most recent verse published in 1941 and especially in a lyric entitled *Flow at Full Moon*, Mason has moved into a world that bears all the appearances of being a happier one. A. R. D. Fairburn, too, has never lost a lyric grace that he has always possessed even in his most satiric moments. The two are beautifully combined in recent poems like *To Daphnis* and *Chloe in the Park*.

But the poet who has made the greatest strides in recent years is Allen Curnow. Starting like most of the others with verses that were mainly undergraduate rebellion against the established order, he has matured both in outlook and in technique. Those of you who heard him read a few weeks ago from 3YA his poem on the Tasman celebrations, had an opportunity of judging how well he surmounted that most difficult of all tasks, the poem written to order. Curnow's most recent volume, published in 1941 and called *Island and Time*, is an attempt to see New Zealand against a background not merely of its own history but that of time itself. Time for Curnow has become a sort of symbol of the living past and the living present. In his poem called *Time*, he gathers all that symbolism together.

And finally, just to illustrate the wheel coming full circle, look at his *House and Land*, a beautiful elegy for the passing of an old order by a poet who a few years back was attacking the past with sardonic vigour.

These are a few samples to show you that poetry in New Zealand is a very real thing, living and developing among us, looking forward as well as looking back. A few years ago, Day Lewis wrote in England a book called *A Hope for Poetry*. I think the time has arrived when a volume might well be written called *A Hope for New Zealand Poetry*.

As each war has had such an effect upon the literature of the period immediately following it, one wonders what changes this one will bring about.

Perhaps the children of the post-war years will lisp something like this:

"Pease pudding hot, pease pudding cold

Dehydrated légumes, nine days old."

Or this:

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the Heavy Tanks and the
Whole personnel of the Royal Tank
Corps couldn't recondition poor
Humpty Dumpty again."*

One can imagine some mother of the future telling her offspring the story of the three little pigs.

"But the third piggie said: 'No sticks or straw for me. I shall assemble my house from prefabricated materials!'"

The time may even come when the plays of Shakespeare will be acted in modern language as well as in modern dress. If so, we could perhaps expect to hear Lady Macbeth declaim something like this:

"All the synthetic products of coal-tar could not de-contaminate this little hand."

It sounds better as Shakespeare wrote it, I admit. But after all, do words matter so very much? Even if words change, the emotions they express will always remain the same.

Even the father of the Prodigal Son could not have felt greater joy than does any father of to-day who is able to say:

"For this, my son, who was lost, is now repatriated."

BOOK REVIEWS

TRAVELLING VICARIOUSLY

FAR HORIZONS. By Elsie K. Morton. Oswald Sealy (N.Z.) Ltd., Auckland.

THIS is a pleasant book of travel-talks, beautifully illustrated by the author's own camera. Most of it has been heard over the air, but those who enjoyed it spoken will be glad to have it written, and many of those who come to it fresh will feel that it solves a Christmas gift problem. Miss Morton is frankly sentimental about the places she has seen, but she is sensible, and she knows exactly when she has said enough.

"ENGLISHED" POEMS

TWELVE ECHOES FROM FRANCE: French Poems Englished by Arthur Barker. The Progressive Publishing Society.

THIS is actually the description given on the title page although, immediately opposite, the word "translated" is used in reference to an earlier volume of verse from the same hand. However, the poems themselves do not read as if Mr. Barker's pursuit of early French literature is an affectation. Though occasional awkwardnesses have resulted from the care taken to preserve the form and rhythms of the originals, these rondeaus, sonnets, and other fragments from French poets of the 14th to 17th centuries are enjoyable playthings, and the book is an honest bit of work—the old French is on the left page for all to see, the new English on the right—and the Caxton Press has printed it well.



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