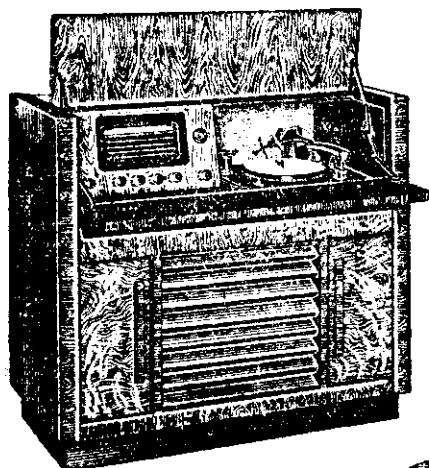


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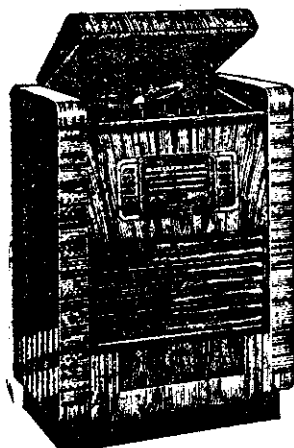


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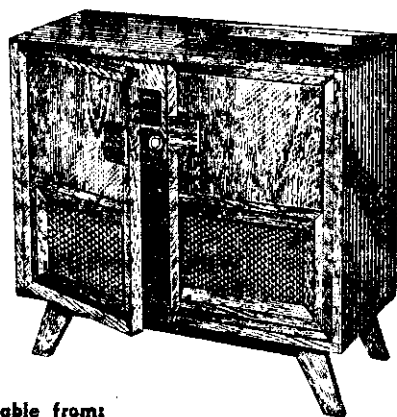
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BOOKS

WILD COLONIAL BOYS

THE KELLY HUNTERS, by Frank Clune; Angus and Robertson, Australian price 25/-.
THE NOR-WESTERS, by Ion L. Idriess; Angus and Robertson, Australian price 18/-.
(Reviewed by A.M.)

NED KELLY, says Frank Clune, is perhaps the only Australian whose name is "universally known." He does not say whether this is among Australians or abroad as well, but if a New Zealander applies the term Kelly Gang figuratively, he assumes the allusion will be recognised. In the seventy-odd years since Ned Kelly was hanged, shelves of books about the gang have been published, and Frank Clune has a thousand additional items. There was room, however, for a careful, all-embracing and corrective study. Legend started at the source of one of the world's most amazing crime stories, for the statement of the Royal Commission of 1881 that Ned's father had been transported to Ireland "for an agrarian outrage, stated to have been shooting at a landlord with intent to murder," was accepted, with the inference that Ned inherited a spirit of political rebellion, whereas the truth, established in 1951 by the author, partly through visits to Ireland, was that Kelly senior was transported for stealing two pigs from a farmer. He had a good record as a convict, and as a free man was industrious and honest.

The whole story is set out, critical and well documented, in 360 pages. Though Frank Clune does not palliate Ned Kelly's "detestable" crimes, he contends, with a mass of evidence, that Ned and his brother were largely victims of circumstance. The book gives a detailed picture of the times. In that primitive society there was war between squatters, who controlled politics, and the small holders. Encouraged by the unfenced runs, cattle and horse thieves were notoriously busy. Justice was harsh and sometimes biased. One of the things that pushed Ned Kelly into bushranging was his mother's imprisonment. Frank Clune is convinced that the constable concerned perjured himself, and it is a fact that he was dismissed for misconduct and neglect of duty, and offici-

ally described as "a liar and a larrikin." The sympathy and help given the outlaws sprang partly from a feeling that the police were protecting the interests of the ruling class. The battle of Glenrowan was staged by a man half-crazed with a sense of injustice and the long strain of being on the run. The use of body armour, which has done so much to keep the Kelly story alive, was a very stupid move, for it deprived the gang of their greatest asset, mobility.

The Kelly Hunters is a full and lively record, but the writing could be better. Frank Clune is inclined to moralise and dramatise unnecessarily. It is cheap to call a judge "the man in the Big Wig," and I groan to meet again that hoary *Elegant Variation*, "the Emerald Isle." But he is to be congratulated on doing a fine job of research and writing what is likely to be for long the authoritative work on an historic theme of crime and sociology.

From Frank Clune's 40th book to Ion Idriess's 32nd, is a move to a more pleasant Australian world. In *The Nor-Westers*, Ion Idriess has collected a great many odds and ends from his travel and work on the wild rim of Australia. The title is taken from part of Western Australia, but he ranges to York Peninsula and the "Dead Heart." Writing "whatever comes into my head," he gives us a varied collection of Australianisms; aboriginal ways, life on stations, gold-mining, mail travels, nursing, love romance, pearl fishing, and mysteries of animal migration. Though perhaps the most amazing story is that of three native gaol-breakers who stowed away by clinging to the rudder of a steamer, one of them surviving several hours of steaming, there is little crime. I get a fresh impression of the extraordinary wealth and variety of human experience in these out-lands, and particularly of the courage, fortitude and good nature of their people.

THOUGHTS TAKING SHAPE

LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS, selected by Frederick Page; *The World's Classics*, Oxford University Press; Geoffrey Cumberlege, English price 8/6.

THE correspondence of literary men is commonly dull. In Wordsworth's letters one finds hardly a fragment of that



Turnbull Library Archives

THE CAPTURE OF NED KELLY, from a contemporary drawing in the "Australian Illustrated News"

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 18, 1955.