

lecturer was my own father, who must have been 65—it gives me a shock to establish—when the lectures were delivered. Mark Twain and Dickens were the only two writers I ever heard him say he had seen in the flesh, and I can't decide which must have given him most pleasure. Dickens was 18 years older than he was, Mark Twain five years younger, and they were, I suspect, the only two writers of his own generation he ever read.

I AM beginning to feel like the former Home Secretary who told the House of Commons recently that he was now afraid he had sent an innocent man to the gallows. I have been killing opossums as often as I can, not because they are a menace to New Zealand, but because I have been blaming them for breaking the branches of my apple trees and eating the fruit.

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The case against them certainly looks black:

branches stripped and broken on windless nights, apples half eaten by teeth capable of more than nibbling, leaves and fruit spurs scattered on the ground, hissing and chattering up the trees after dark. But I have not yet succeeded in finding a recognisable piece of apple in an opossum's stomach. The explanation may be that the few I trap are caught before the eating has begun, the successful eaters going free. The innocent have often suffered for the guilty at every zoological level since the earth was first populated; and if it happens above and below them it must happen to marsupials, too. But every opossum's stomach I have opened has been filled, or partly filled, with well-chewed leaves, and contained nothing else but digestive juices and mucus. I hope there will be no opossums near when I try to sneak into Heaven.

My crime is not only killing them without proof of guilt, but killing them with the aid of steel traps. Poisoning them is too dangerous to other frequenters of the orchard. Shooting them means getting out of bed in the middle of the night, finding them in a tree where shooting is safe, getting them in the beam of a spotlight, and hitting them infallibly in the head. Trapping them means getting up, too, if I hear them, but I don't always hear the commotion when they are first caught, and after that they are silent. When daylight comes they look at me with such a combination of hostility and misery that I see myself as I am and think of it all day. If I thought they were innocent, too—as biologically they are—I would have to cut down my trees and give up eating apples.

(To be continued)

Yeats: Man and Poet

"It is not easy to love great poets," says the New Zealand poet Alistair Campbell. "They tend to inspire with awe while keeping us at a distance. For this reason, their letters are especially valuable to us, for by increasing our knowledge of the man they enable us to approach the poet and his work with deeper understanding and affection." It's the man and the poet W. B. Yeats whom Mr. Campbell sees through his recently-published letters in *These Characters Remain*, a programme about Yeats to be heard from 1YC at 7.59 p.m. on Monday, April 18, and later from other YC stations. In the same programme listeners will hear William Austin read a slightly abridged version of *Staying at Ballisodare*, a poem by the New Zealander Pat Wilson about his visit to the home of Yeats in Ireland.

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 15, 1955.



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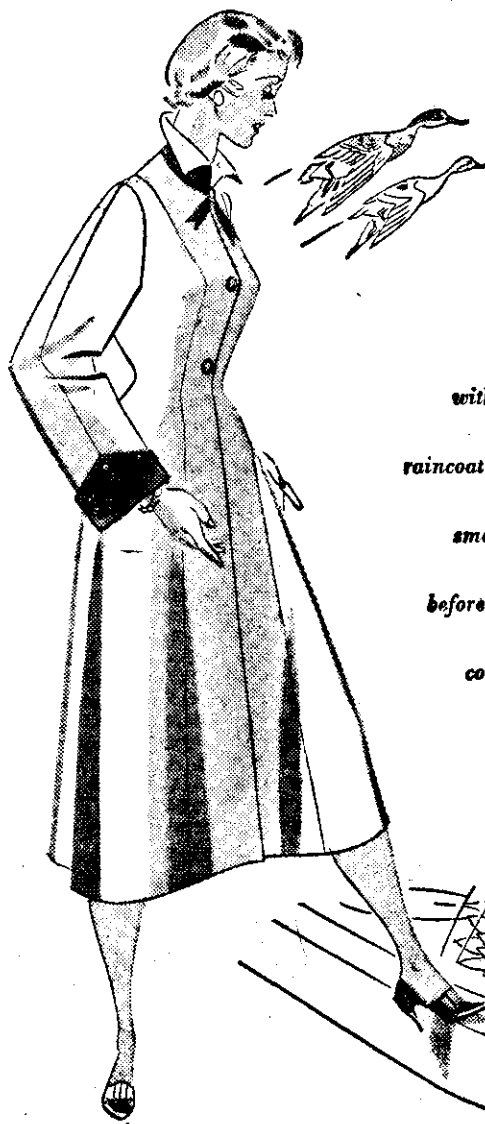
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