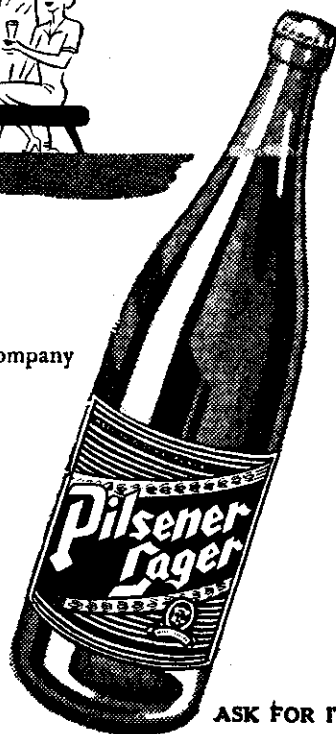


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PL 6-1

## BOOKS

# The Australian Myth

*SUCH IS LIFE*, by Tom Collins, Angus and Robertson, Australian price 25/-.

(Reviewed by David Hall)

THIS Australian classic has rightly earned itself a permanent place in the affections of readers on the wrong side of the Tasman, and has been once more reprinted. It dates from 1903 and reflects conditions of some twenty-five years earlier, as its whole context is pre-refrigeration.

It is a novel without a plot, though it is much more cohesive than at first sight appears. Its main character, the narrator, is a sort of chorus, tragic or comic as the case requires, who rides around a country district in the Riverina with unrealistic freedom and aimlessness. (He is some sort of government official, but the scope of his duties is left vague.) His comments on and interferences in the diffuse action of this sprawling, untidy book help to make it a unity, and at the same time give an even more direct expression of the author's opinions than the rest of it.

The life described is of literally pastoral simplicity, and the code of manners is based—incredibly enough—on the systematic refusal of hospitality by sheep farmers to the travelling bullock teams, which none the less were vital to the well-being of sheep farmers. Collins—whose real name was Joseph Furphy—as an ex-bullock-driver has an irritant, unpurged grievance and his book is in every way an exaltation of the under-dog. Getting grazing and water for their bullocks as they travel to and fro is the great preoccupation of these men, and their subterfuges, triumphs and disasters in the quest stud these pages with gems of prankish wit and much characteristic humour.

But it is not a light-hearted book. The philosophic outlook implicit in the title comes out all through, whether the reflection is upon something quite trivial, such as the habits of a half-wild dog, or an anecdotal meditation on the six courses open to the man who uncovers his wife's infidelity.

Two elements in the novel argue a highly-developed sense of inferiority—the dislike of Englishmen and the out-of-hand condemnation of the wealthy, to whom all manner of snobbery, meanness and trickery is attributed as a matter of course: "He was as bad as an Australian judge, passing mitigated sentence on some well-connected criminal." The attractive ne'er-do-weel, Willoughby, in an early chapter might seem to argue that Collins can be fair to the English. Many other allusions build up a contrary impression: he seems to envy them most the assurance based on education—perhaps an essential element of the 1903 Australian outlook.

Collins is a more accomplished stylist than we always realise. His artlessness is deliberate and his digressions as ruthlessly contrived as those of Sterne. His vocabulary and mode of writing are in any case highly literary. He can create a new word—*equiponderated*—with care-free zest. He can wax facetious and speak of someone "grasping the situation and a long-handled shovel." And he remains self-conscious, referring, with a certain complacency, to "the peculiar scythe sweep of my style." He constantly calls in Shakespeare, and hardly a page is innocent of literary allusion. We cannot find any especially Australian quality

in the writing itself, which owes nearly everything to the England he despises.

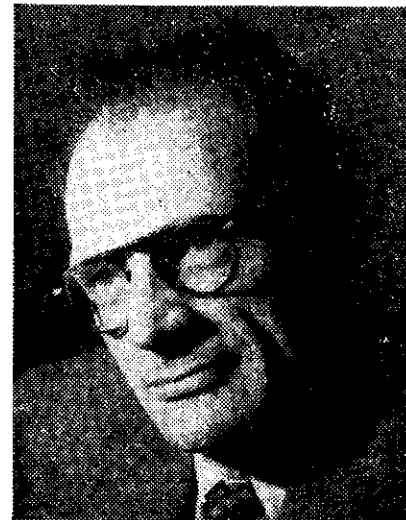
What is Australian and richly so is the procession of forlorn characters who crop up in this rather narrow world of his. These people he draws firmly, with love and insight.

*Such Is Life* is instinct with its own crotchety maturity. It has no real equivalent in New Zealand writing. Some of its qualities can be found in *Poenamo*, in Maning's *Old New Zealand* and in Chamier's *Philosopher Dick*. The ripe humour of the two former and the high spirits of the latter have their place too in Collins's novel. But its salty ironies and overdone, flyblown courtliness—half-sincere, half take-off—make up a flavour we can envy but cannot imitate. Nor shall we ever do so. *Such Is Life* is an epitome of an epoch, a day that has vanished, a world of hard-bitten mounted men, virile, self-reliant, coarse, good-hearted and essentially lonely.

## CHASING THE DEVIL

*THE CRUCIBLE*, a play by Arthur Miller; The Cresset Press, English price 12/6.

ARTHUR MILLER'S fine play was first produced in New York several years ago; since then it has been produced many times in America and England, and once in New Zealand by Wellington's Unity Theatre, last year. My



ARTHUR MILLER

His dialogue is solid, clean, satisfying

feelings about the play, when I saw it, were that the first act was clumsy, the second splendid, and the third, very fine. I am inclined now to think that the

(continued on next page)

## ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND ART SOCIETIES

### NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP IN ARCHITECTURE, 1957

Entries for the 1957 Award close on Monday, 1st April, 1957. Applications will be received from Architects who will have attained the age of 23 on that date. The Fellowship is for £500, and is tenable either overseas or in New Zealand, but prior overseas experience is required of a candidate before an award will be made for work in New Zealand.

Copies of the conditions governing the award may be obtained from Mr. B. Hocking, Secretary, Association of New Zealand Art Societies, P.O. Box 2440, Wellington, C.I.