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BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

for the attempted murder of her unsatisfactory lover; the last with her imprisonment and its results.

The horrid mother, alas! is much more convincing than the decent, ineffectual father, more probable too than Caroline herself. The book's strength is in its detail, in its mastery of the knobbly, inconvenient and intractable fact. All the local allusions, to various parts of the South Island and to Wellington, ring true. The method of Zola, the reporting of facts almost for their own sake, is successfully applied to this local theme. The facts are all there, but then facts have the bad habit of answering back.

In some ways *The Gay Pretensions* might fairly be considered the raw material for a novel which was never written, never written because contradictions are left unresolved and the characterisation not taken far enough, and the view of the main character which the reader inevitably forms is—here the facts bite the hand that fed—confused and incoherent. On the facts (especially her violent behaviour in Borstal) Caroline is probably insane, but it is another fact that this seems to be denied in the novel. Again it is difficult to accept that a man brought up to believe Caroline is his daughter could, when he finds she was actually adopted, without apparent embarrassment turn round and marry her.

This novel deals with a serious theme seriously. It builds up a fabric of realistic incident which is almost always well-contrived. Its minor people are all well-drawn. It is impressive in the way in which all the facts—as in a good short story—contribute to the development of the theme; it is well-constructed. It perhaps is less satisfactory in its deeper insights into character, but it is still a welcome addition to the growing shelf of contemporary New Zealand novels.

—David Hall

GREAT FAMILIES

DONNE AND THE DRURIES, by R. C. Bald; Cambridge University Press. English price 30/-. *THE LORDS OF COBHAM*, by Esmé Wingfield-Stratford; Cassell, English price 50/.

THE biography which tells the life, not of an individual, but of a family or group, has recently become something of a feature of English historical writing, and when such books are backed by family archives and redeemed from family piety, they can be of first-rate interest. These two volumes are cases in point. Professor Bald commands something of that magic by which the musician transposes little black marks on paper into ravishing sound. His raw material is fragmentary, cryptic, illegible—the battered survivals from two chests of family documents. Out of them he conjures lively men and women of Elizabethan England. Many of them bear well known names—Bacon, Drury, Burley, Donne, Holles; and they are typical of a turbulent age. But each one is a sharply etched individual, his peculiarities (and his ordinariness) made convincing and understandable. All this

is achieved without waste of a word or straining of the evidence. It is achieved also, be it added, without much concession to those who like their reading padded or predigested. This is scholarship lean, athletic, graceful and uncompromising, conveying the subdued excitement of an intellectual task dexterously achieved.

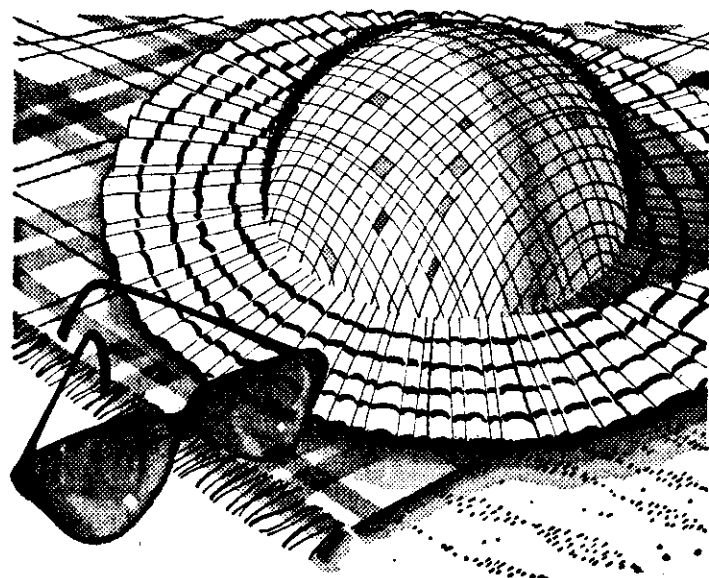
The Lords of Cobham, by contrast, springs lush and generous from the rich compost-heap of aristocratic England. Dr Wingfield-Stratford's learning has something of the engaging garrulity of an aged butler displaying family treasures. For half a century he has preached the merits of the aristocracy, and the villainy of those knaves and dupes who overthrew traditional values and gilded the devastation they had made with the deceptive words "democracy" and "progress." It is nowadays not a question of putting the clock back; but the old values are still represented in our community. With Dr Wingfield-Stratford's help they can be savoured like old wine by those whose palates are not spoiled by hypocrisy. Those born outside the purple can sometimes peep behind the veil, perhaps even indulge in a little vicarious wallowing in the company of a cultivated and opulent nobility. And the heavy artillery of dogmatic scorn directed at the gods of liberalism does something to correct the overwhelming whiggery of British historiography.

These two books, in diametrically different fashion, illuminate from the inside the history of the English ruling class—whose rise and self-adaptation to changing circumstances was one of the most important phenomena of the modern world.

—F. L. W. Wood

NEW PENGUINS

THE visual arts, drama and poetry, psychology and—almost a subject by itself—problems of adolescence are represented among new Penguin and Pelican Books. *A Dictionary of Art and Artists*, by Peter and Linda Murray (English price 5/-), covers the work of more than 700 painters, sculptors and engravers, the main movements, ideas and styles, and technical terms and processes. *Poets in a Landscape*, by Gilbert Highet (English price 6/-), recalls some of the greatest Roman poets by "describing the places where they lived, recreating their characters and evoking the essence of their work." There are 48 fine illustrations. *The Misanthrope and Other Plays*, by Molière (English price 3/6), is a new translation by John Wood of five Molière plays; with five already published in Penguin Classics, they include most of the works which retain their interest and significance. *The Psychology of Thinking*, by Robert Thomson (English price 3/6), is both a comprehensive account of the most recent work in the psychology of thinking and an attempt to evaluate its achievements and limitations. *Adolescence to Maturity*, by V. C. Chamberlain (English price 2/6), is intended for the older adolescent and the younger man and woman. It covers "the meaning of maturity," work and leisure, sex, love and marriage, attitudes to life, and hints on "the art of living."



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