

claims made by the combatant air forces, including the R.A.F., this individual score was chalked with such care and restraint that it is probably close to correct. His reference, early in this book, to Kingsford-Smith's Fokker tri-motor as a tri-plane need not cast serious doubts on his ability to recognise aircraft of German make. His capacity to seek out and destroy, his "luck" in bringing damaged aircraft to earth, his mere survival of four years' fighter operations (700 hours) mark him as a pilot of unusual skill.

From his eighth year, when a small biplane landed on the beach near his home at Westport, Alan Deere's ambition was to be an aviator. He achieved it in time to serve briefly in the R.A.F. before war broke out. (His arrival in England after a sea voyage which took him between Cristobal and Colon, and into Tilbury by way of the Pool of London, make it evident that his destiny was as a pilot and not a navigator.) He took part in the air-cover of Dunkirk—from which he returned by boat—before making his mark as one of the famous Few of No. 11 Group in the Battle of Britain, and ending his active career at what must have been the summit of a fighter pilot's ambition, command of a wing at Biggin Hill.

For a man of action, the commission of this distinguished war record to paper must have seemed as "dicey" an undertaking as his descent by parachute—with the ripcord jammed. Equipped only with a long experience of writing operation-reports and a line of dialogue straight from the Mess at Biggin Hill, Deere ploughs into these superior odds as determinedly as ever his Spitfire, Kiwi I, did into the Luftwaffe. If the result is not exactly a kill, for readers of war memoirs it can at least be classed as a probable.

—A.S.F.

THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

HEROES AND CLERKS, poems by Philip Mincher; Handcraft Press, 6/-.

IT is part of the professional critic's repertoire to refer to a new poet as a poet of "promise"; yet these exuberant and untrimmed poems are perhaps most impressive on account of the load of strong feeling and half-forged insights which they carry—feeling and insight which establish Mr Mincher's right to speak, but hardly yet enable him to reach a mature balance. They promise more than they achieve. Reversing Roy Campbell's dictum—the horse is undeniably present, a healthy bucking bronco, but the snaffle and the bit are inclined to slip off. The ballad of Barlow, "the man from Mahoanui," is a first-rate poem flawed to second-rate by lack of emotional and formal balance—

Till hot by Finch's stable wall
The sniper's venom squibs
Called the matter plain and stitched
The waistcoat to his ribs.
Stark in the web of history
With the blood of his mother's name,
And handled by the border cops
As so much shame . . .

The first stanza quoted should serve to illustrate Mr Mincher's superb, ferocious gift of metaphor (the one certain mark of genuine poetic powers); the second stanza illustrates the unfortunate florid language into which the poem too readily collapses. At the same time, I have no fault at all to find with Mr Mincher's traditional sentiments. Consider the "working man's wife" whom he sees at the cinema—

With flash of child's eyes on a cut-glass gem
Imbibe the powdered pranks of slits in mink
Unfit to touch your garment's faded hem.

Sophisticated readers may find the statement naive; but others will recognise the thud of the bullet in the middle

of the target. None of the twenty-three poems is trivial, and some have as much to say as Basil Dowling, but with a racier movement. The Handcraft Press is to be congratulated on this necessary publication.

—James K. Baxter

LITTLE GIRL LOST

THE GAY PRETENSIONS, by Florence Preston; Cassell, English price 15/-.

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(continued on next page)

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