

POETRY SCHOOL

A Glance from Earth to Heaven

IT was announced precisely enough as a four-day School devoted to the study of poetry with special emphasis on the speaking of verse. In the opening passage of his first lecture on the Bases of Poetry, Professor S. Musgrove, of Auckland University College, was equally precise, if in less formal language.

"I am sure only," he said, "that I know nothing about poetry; what is its fundamental basis or what makes it tick." Coming from a Professor of English this was a good beginning; a fair indication that the members of the School were not there to display the size of their intellectual muscles, but to exchange experience, and learn whatever they could from each other.

This was also the beginning and end of rational precision. It is possible to be mathematical about poetry, to put down rhyme schemes as algebraical formulae, and even plot graphs, say, of the number

of times Housman used the word *lad* in each year he was writing poetry, comparing that curve with the one obtained by a similar plotting of the word *death*. This would be an interesting and precise exercise, but it hasn't much to do with poetry.

The School, which was held at Victoria University College under the auspices of the Wellington Regional Council of Adult Education, concerned itself with poetry, which, Professor Musgrove said, "Does not deal with the rational area. Whereas the rational view of the universe assumes a world of inanimate objects. Outside and separate from the person," Professor Musgrove continued, "the poet sees an animate world of externals, which by incantation attains a kind of unity with the person. The excitement of poetry is a religious excitement, that of being one with a living universe."

"Poetry was therefore a public occasion used naturally when people were gathered together to observe a religious



PROFESSOR S. MUSGROVE



JAMES BAXTER

"The excitement of poetry is a religious excitement"

rite. They were inspired by the voice of the god speaking through the poet. Poetry *should* express something common to everybody, and up to the 19th Century it was the normal thing for poetry to be publicly spoken. The retreat of poetry into private symbolism

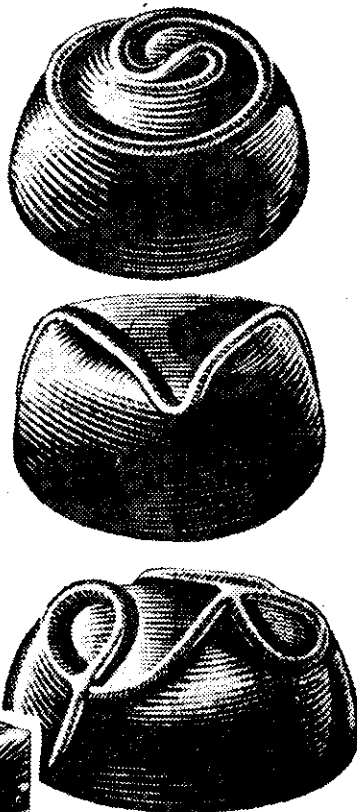
is an unwelcome development which may be a symptom of the muse drying up."

Growth of an Idea

THE existence of the School was an indication that at least forty people in New Zealand do not want to retreat

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