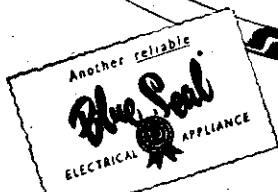
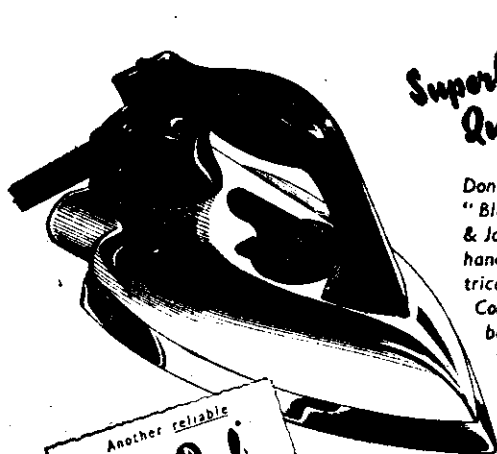
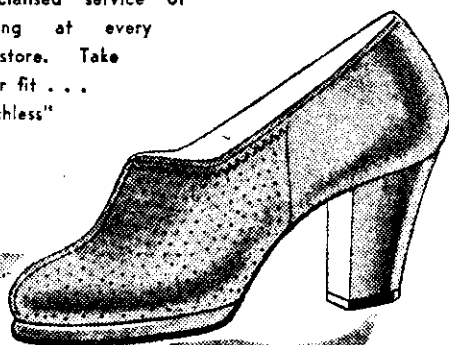




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BOOKS

SOLDIER ESCAPING

DARE TO BE FREE, by W. B. Thomas;
Allan Wingate. English price, 12 6.

(Reviewed by Guthrie Wilson)

THE qualities demanded from the writer of personal reminiscences — of most factual documents — are of a different order from those required in the creative writer. Whereas the latter must fashion the illusion of reality from the power of his imagination, the variety of his experience and his private well of sympathy, perception and understanding, all that is required of the autobiographer is that he, as a writer, should prove adequate to the events he wishes to relate.

Dare to be Free is part of the personal story of Major W. B. Thomas, D.S.O., M.C. and bar, U.S.A. Silver Star, a battalion commander in the New Zealand Division during the last war. No New Zealander who served in the Middle East will disagree with the contention made by Geoffrey Cox in *The Road to Trieste* that "Thomas was probably the New Zealand soldier of this war who most closely resembled the Freyberg of the last war." It would be difficult to devise higher commendation.

And what a tale Thomas has to tell! The book opens with the German airborne invasion of Crete. The reader fights beside Thomas in attack and in frustrating retreat. In the end comes the suicidal affair at Galatos in which the author receives severe wounds. Captured by the enemy, he is removed to a German military hospital in Athens, where his frequent attempts to escape — despite an unhealed thigh wound — result in his being sent to a camp for incorrigibles at Salonika. But Salonika's wire cannot contain Thomas, who breaks out and strikes south for the razor-back

peninsula dominated by Mt. Athos. Here for nearly a year he lives among the monks who populate the 21 monasteries of the Holy Mountain, a theocracy of ten thousand, where no woman, no female animal, is allowed to dwell. But all the time Thomas is seeking the means to rejoin the division. . .

Throughout the pages of his book the author displays a personality that is immensely attractive. Courageous, honourable, quick with laughter, he reveals at times an appealing ingenuousness. But the book is not all Thomas. Far from it. One meets with Yannos, Gregorio (and Gregorio's lovely daughter), Costos Momorgos, Chrystosomos, Trudi and many others — Greeks of goodwill, men and women — who extended the author aid without hope of repayment, and with peril to themselves.

Major Thomas has a true story to tell which is almost bizarre in its improbability. Has he, as a writer, proved adequate to the task of telling it?

The reading public has consumed avidly escape tales which have not been well written. Thomas is an unpretentious writer. But his style is simple and lucid, his dialogue is colloquial, his humour comes over to the reader. I enjoyed *Dare to be Free* more than any other escape story of World War II. I have read, not only because this book surpasses others in the variety and interest of the adventures which befell its author, but also because it is well and satisfyingly written.

THE COGHILL CHAUCER

THE CANTERBURY TALES, by Geoffrey Chaucer, translated into modern English by Nevill Coghill; the Penguin Classics. English price, 3 6.

NO volume in this excellent series has had better advance publicity, none is more sure of its welcome, than Mr. Coghill's modern version of Chaucer's masterpiece. The BBC broadcasts of the Tales must have won them many new friends: now the whole series (with the exception of *Melibee* and *The Parson's Sermon*, the two long prose "tales" that even Chaucerians seldom finish, which are here brilliantly summarised) is made available in unboydlerised form and in bold, legible type for the price, in England at least, of a packet of cigarettes. If the thing was to be done at all, it could hardly have been done better.

To anyone who missed the broadcasts, it need only be said that this is a faithfully rhymed, idiomatic and supremely readable modern rendering: if it does not give us all of Chaucer the poet, it gives us most of the humorist, satirist, and author of the first and greatest of human comedies in English. In a brief introduction Mr. Coghill outlines the life and work of Chaucer, and sturdily justifies his own daring experiment against all comers. Even the entrenched batteries of Chaucerian scholarship may be disarmed by the notes, a model of donnish conciseness: here is a sample:—"Chichevache. In an old French fable there were two cows called Chichevache and Bicornie. Bicornie was fat because she made her diet on patient husbands who



THE REV. D. MCKENZIE, who will review Leo Silberman's "Analysis of Society" in the ZB Book Review session on February 10. Other books and reviewers will be: "Ride East, Ride West," and "No Wall So High," both by Anne Powers (Marie Bullock); "From Europe to New Zealand," by Dr. R. A. Lochore (Harry J. Benda); and "Congo Eden," by Mary Akeley (Beryl I. Martin)

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 1, 1952.