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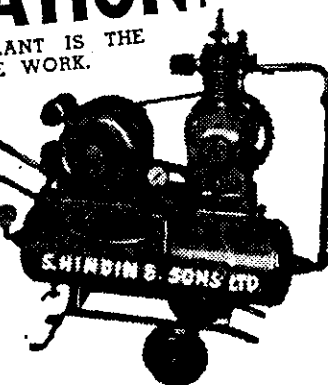
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Books

"DEAREST GOODY"

THOMAS CARLYLE: LETTERS TO HIS WIFE, edited by Trudy Bliss; Victor Gollancz. English price, 25s.

(Reviewed by M.H.H.)

IT is strange to find that many thousands of words by Carlyle can still be printed for the first time. These letters have been taken from the full collection—more than 700—in the National Library of Scotland. Some were used by Froude, and others have appeared elsewhere; but they have not previously been published as a sequence. The gaps have been filled by editorial notes which explain how the different groups of letters came to be written. And the result is a vivid portrayal of Carlyle's married life.

True, it is one-sided, not to be understood unless read in conjunction with Jane Carlyle's letters, which have been available for many years. But Carlyle was better able to express his true feelings for his wife when he was away from her: he could not easily speak the soft word in Cheyne Row. And the letters prove beyond doubt that, whatever his behaviour may have been (and we know that Jane was sorely tried, though she also was difficult), this man loved his wife. He was always full of complaints; he was critical to the point of meanness when he spoke of people who were kind to him; and he could not be shaken from his platonic devotion to Lady Ashburton. But he spoke to his "dearest goody" with unwavering tenderness. Even when he was getting to be an old man he could behave like a young and anxious lover if her letters were delayed, or if he knew her to be angry.

Carlyle did himself some harm in his *Reminiscences*. The remorseful tone of that book, and the morbid preoccupation with his own shortcomings, have filled out too easily the impression given by biographers, and especially by Froude. The man who preached *Silence* could never be silent, but must always be pouring out words; and he had a fatal habit of inflation. He exaggerated everything, so that even the state of his bowels provoked tragic or cosmic reflection. With such a man, the minor difficulties of marriage could scarcely fail to be magnified.

This does not mean that life at 5 Cheyne Row was more pleasant than either he or Jane could make it appear, though even after generations of visitors

the house has quiet and friendly ghosts—or seemed to have, when I came down from the soundproof room into an autumn dusk a few years ago. But these letters will influence future appraisals. They are much more revealing than the biographies; and if they were not valuable for what they tell us of Carlyle's marriage they would be worth reading for their vivid descriptions of people and places. This will undoubtedly become one of the great collections of letters in English literature.

FUN ON THE FARM

MORE ME AND GUS, by Frank S. Anthony and Francis Jackson; illustrated by Neville Lodge. A. H. and A. W. Reed, 9s.

THE strange thing about this three-man humorous team is that it really is a team in spite of physical separation in time and place. As everyone probably knows, Frank Anthony wrote the original about a quarter of a century ago, fetlock deep in Taranaki mud; Francis Jackson re-wrote, altered slightly and added slightly, in the midst of Wellington's 1952 wind and busy noise. And Neville Lodge fitted in with his drawings of mud, cows, old men, young men, ploughs and pigs.

I know by test that old men find these absurd goings-on of Mark and Gus in Mossy Road wildly funny—Gus falling through the borer-eaten floor, Mark beginning his speech but never finishing, Gus water-divining, Gus having trouble with a plough, a hedge, a dog, lots of pigs, all grand hilarious stuff to bring back the bad, wet, muddy, but good old days. I wonder how it appeals to young men up there in the mud today.

One thing is clear—the two modern cooks, Francis Jackson and Neville Lodge, have had great fun cooking up what the publishers call "the mixture as before." No doubt the time will come when another modern cook, that gifted reader, will turn these sketches into radio entertainment in a new series. Many listeners will look forward to that time with pleasure.

—J.

SECOND BASINFUL

FRED BASON'S 2nd DIARY, edited by L. A. G. Strong; Wingate. English price, 9s.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM and I were walking down the Old Kent Road when suddenly I saw this Myrtle. She made me blush remembering the last time we met. Mr. Maugham said, "Do you know that girl, Fred?" "A gent never tells, Mr. Maugham," I said, hoping to carry it off. He just smiled in that dreamy, sarcastic way you see in his photos. A nice gentleman all the same, even though a writer, and we laughed and laughed at the female impersonator number in Jack Willis's old-style music hall. Someone in the gods dropped an iccream on my bald patch. I wished I'd kept my hat on.



JANE CARLYLE

At the age of 25 . . . and at 54

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