

His earliest memories are common to my generation: Zeppelins, comics, Charlie Chaplin, Punch and Judy. For me there is particular poignancy in a shared background: first London, and then France. But the poignancy would fall flat if the writing lacked power and subtlety to evoke rather than just recall. Autobiography is so easy that almost every writer attempts it, but so difficult that very few achieve a universal statement. I believe Maclaren-Ross does succeed, both artistically and historically. By selection of incidents which seemed important to the child he was, and recording them through the eyes of the man he is, he avoids the common errors of childhood biography: on the one hand sophistication or smugness, on the other banality.

Childhood incident is normally banal to the sophisticated adult, so that attempts to record it in childish fashion are usually unreadable. But it is equally true that what seemed important to the child is the essence of the child's biography, no matter how much more important other incidents may appear on mature reflection (if, indeed, mature reflection can discount anything that made a deep impression when the psyche was most malleable). Memory and insight, as Katherine Mansfield showed us, are important; but they are not enough. To show the child to the man, the writer must be more than historian and psychologist. He must be an artist.

Maclaren-Ross is like Katherine Mansfield in this respect, and for some of the same reasons. Sensitive, intelligent, intuitive, and devoted to his craft, he comes to autobiography in his full maturity. Concerned primarily with his childhood vision, he is too concerned with language to write childishly and too honest for adult affectation. The result is a book that rings true, not only because its incidents are true, but because the writing is superb. It is no accident that we are back in the great tradition of English prose: a flexible precision-instrument, which has outmoded the flat understatement just as it has outlasted an ornate romanticism. I now know Maclaren-Ross's childhood almost as well as my own, and I know my own better for it. That is my measure of the book's success.

—Anton Vogt

MEN AT WAR

PROUD ECHO, by Ronald McKie; Angus and Robertson. Australian price, 17 6.

IN the first hour of the month of March, 1942, the Australian light cruiser Perth and the American heavy cruiser Houston were sunk by units of the Japanese Navy in Sunda Strait, the narrow western entrance to the Java Sea. Ten years later, Ronald McKie persuaded 10 survivors to tell the story of Perth's last action, and of subsequent attempts to escape capture by



THE SINKING of H.M.A.S. Perth, an illustration by Frank Norton from "Proud Echo," the story of the Perth's last fight in the Battle of Sunda Strait

ORMOND WILSON, whose picture appears below, is to review "I Still Haven't Unpacked," by William Holt, in ZB Book Review on Sunday evening, July 19. Three other non-fiction works will be discussed in the same session. They are:



"Picture," by Lillian Ross (reviewer, Ray Copland); "Late and Early Joys at the Players' Theatre," by Paul Sheridan (Mrs. Norma van't Woudt); and "The English Circus," by Ruth Manning-Sanders (Mary Seddon).

the Japanese. The result is a fragmentary account of the action itself, and a graphic story of the reactions of men under the stresses of shellfire and defeat and the struggle for survival in a hell of fuel-oil and water. It is the expected mixture of strength and weakness: of men who surrender their places on rafts to those more badly injured, and of those who fend off helpless comrades struggling in the water. But there is also the blessed humorist who abandons ship with a heavy pair of binoculars about his neck and the comment that they will "make a good hock when I get back to Sydney."

The story loses in coherence by the method of telling, but it gains in realism by the spare, objective reporting of the individuals involved. It is not good history, but it is a gripping story of men at war. Appended to the book are official RAN and unofficial USN reports of the battle, as well as a roll of honour of the 353 men who died in battle and the 100 who perished in Japanese hands.

—A.S.F.

PROUST'S FRIEND

PROUST'S ORIANE, by Princess Marthe Bibesco; the Falcon Press. English price, 12 6.

PROUST is for many people an esoteric writer, and this volume is even more esoteric than Proust. It is more likely, I fancy, to appeal to the inhabitants of the *Almanach de Gotha* than to the literary students of *Remembrance of Things Past*, that vast and influential novel of middle and upper class France. The book is a study of the Comtesse de Chévalier, who was the model for Proust's Duchesse de Guermantes. Princess Bibesco knew the Comtesse as an elderly woman and tries to recreate from her letters and remembered witticisms some of the brilliance of her youth. But alas for the difference between lame biography and the creative imagination of a great novelist! Proust's Duchesse is a dazzling creature created by a man who could

fuse pity with adoration and tenderness with satire. Princess Bibesco does no more than sketch an elderly aristocratic war-horse whose hauteur is well-documented but whose charm has long evaporated. The only photograph of the lady shows her in old age. Surely if she had to be shown in the flesh she should have appeared as Proust knew her, the lovely and unattainable *princesse lointaine*. There is a good case for keeping our (continued on next page)

NEWEST of the NEW is the PLEATED SHOE . . .



Trufit brings you pleats . . . fashion's latest and loveliest feature in fine footwear. In all the very smartest shades that will tone so beautifully with your frocks and suits. Styled in a range of Measured Fittings, and exclusive to Trufit Stockists.

Available
only in . . .

Trufit

Measured FITTINGS

"For the comfort you need with the smartness you want"



THE BUILDER

built a house of brick,
'Twas as sound as sound could be,
But the builder himself was out of
repair,
And a ragged cough coughed he.
"Tis a wooden suit I'll be wearing
soon,"
Said he, and his face was dour,
But he beat the old Reaper in just
two hours
With Woods' Great
Peppermint Cure!

The Family preparation for Colds and Coughs

W. E. Woods Ltd., 326 Lambton Quay, Wellington.