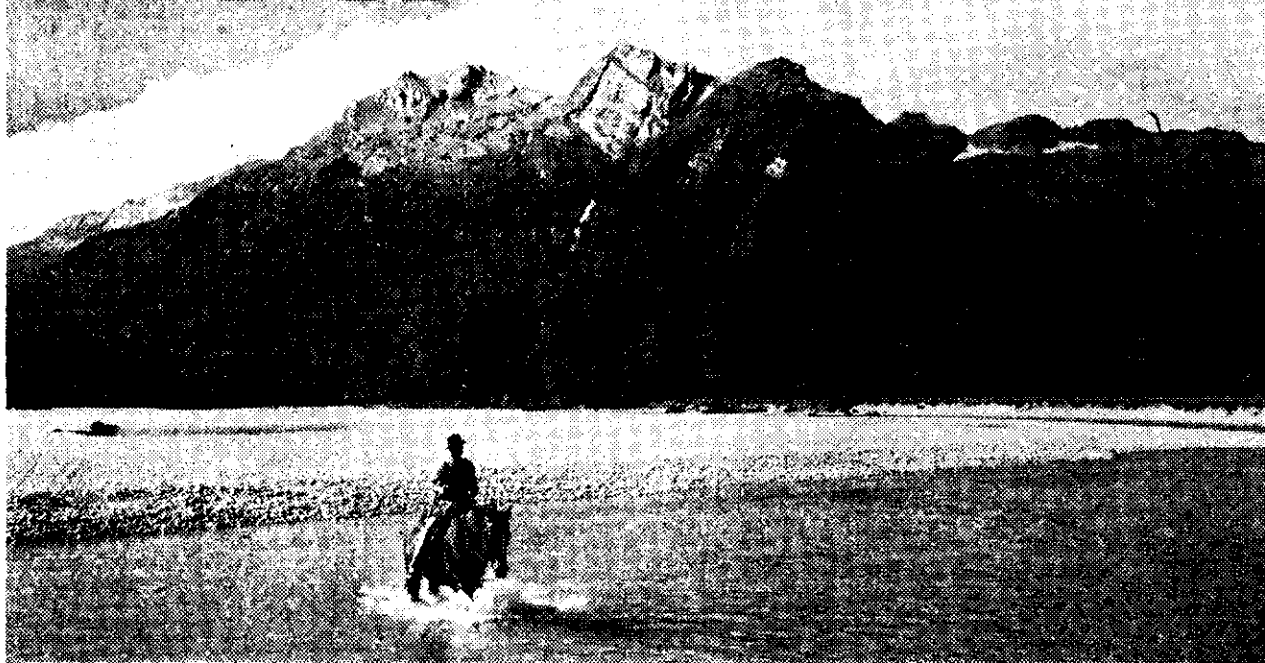


ARAWATA BILL



WHEN a party of climbers from the Canterbury Mountaineering Club was making a high-level journey from the Matukituki Valley, Lake Wanaka, to Jackson's Bay, South Westland, a few months ago, they found themselves on the tracks of Arawata Bill, a prospector who spent many years in that mountainous country looking for gold. John Pascoe was a member of the party, and on his way back to Wellington he met Denis Glover in Christchurch and talked to him about Arawata Bill. Back home, Pascoe was moved by his experience in the mountains to write some verses about this almost legendary character, and, moved by what Pascoe had told him, Glover also wrote some verses about Arawata Bill. Both sets of verses were later published for the first time in the NZBS verse programme. *First Hearing*, but as many people will know the matter didn't end there. Arawata Bill had captured the imagination of Glover, one of the best and most down-to-earth poets this country has produced, and seeing him as the symbol of all prospectors in the lonely hills he went on writing about him. The result was *Arawata Bill*, a verse sequence which has already been published in book form, and is now to be heard as a reading for four voices from YC stations of the NZBS.

In his opening verses Glover sets the scene:

Mountains nuzzle mountains
White-bearded rock-fronted
In perpetual drizzle.

Then his character is introduced:

With his weapon a shovel
To test the river gravel
His heart was as big as his boots
As he headed over the tops
In blue dungarees and a sunset hat.

The sequence continues with "The Search." Then, of special interest to those who didn't like Glover's prayer of a sailor (and, for the record, he has himself been a sailor), there is this prospector's prayer:

Mother of God, in this brazen sun
Lead me down from the arid heights
Before my strength is done.
Give me the rain
That not long since I cursed in vain.
Lead me to the river, the life-giver.

Listeners will wait with the old prospector at the river crossing, travel with him in the bush, laugh over "The Incident":

When Cashmore saw two legs
Sticking out of a tent
With no camp smoke,
He dragged at them heavy-hearted...

They will hear about Bill's horse and what Lizzie, the big blonde barmaid, thought of Bill, how he lived on the land and talked to a friend, how he travelled to the Coast and what his soliloquies were about. And they will be with him at the end when the Little Sisters of the Poor take him in. This is verse that everyone can understand and enjoy.

Arawata Bill, or William O'Leary to give him his real name, is not one of those long-dead legendary characters. He was born at Wetherstones, not far from Lawrence, Central Otago, in 1864, but he lived to be 83 and died at Anderson's Bay, Dunedin, in November, 1947. According to an obituary note in the *Canterbury Mountaineer* he earned his nickname when he cared for the 37-mile track between Martin's Bay and Jackson's Bay, but Mrs. Peter Mackenzie, in her *Pioneers of Martin's Bay*, says he was known as Arawata Bill because of the many years he spent prospecting in the Arawata Valley.

Mrs. Mackenzie says that O'Leary ran away from school and home when he

was about 12 with a companion a little older than himself, who wanted to be a bushranger, and took his father's gun. However, the glare of their fire as they sat in a cliff-side cave discussing their plans gave them away and they were captured and put to work.

Arawata Bill, says Mrs. Mackenzie, always travelled alone, without even a dog for company, and he never smoked. "He carried the usual prospector's outfit—a tent, a tea billy and a supply of tea, sugar and flour—and his favourite hard ship's biscuits. When he could he would catch a fish or a wild bird, and when, after some months, his provisions were done, he would return to civilisation to earn a few pounds for more." He thought nothing of an 80-pound swag on his back, but would buy an old horse to take out bigger supplies if he were going where a horse could be taken.

Mrs. Mackenzie mentions that he visited Martin's Bay in 1898 and among his notable trips speaks of one with a horse through the Hollyford Valley and around the coast to Jackson's Bay, and another from the head of the Arawata Valley over the mountains to the Dart Valley at the head of Lake Wakatipu. "It was a journey (she says) few would attempt, and I doubt if it had ever been done before. We can expect that he has examined every nook and cranny, every stream and hillside, behind Jackson's Bay, in the hope of finding his fortune, but success always eluded him."

Arawata Bill was produced by William Austin, who is also one of the readers. Others taking part are Briton Chadwick, Norman Griffiths and Peggy Walker. *Arawata Bill* will be heard from 3YC at 9.15

LEFT: In remote South Westland a deerstalker rides up the river valley that gave Arawata Bill his nickname

p.m. on Sunday, July 26, and from 4YC on August 6, and again on August 9.

Readings by Barbara Jefford

A second outstanding poetry programme to be broadcast for the first time next week is a series of three readings by Barbara Jefford of the work of New Zealand women poets. Barbara Jefford was, of course, leading lady in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company which recently visited New Zealand, and these recordings were made while the company was here.

The series starts with readings from Eileen Duggan, probably our best-known woman poet. These are "The Legend of the Cuckoo" and "The First Night," from *New Zealand Bird Songs*; and "A New Zealand Christmas," "Pilgrimage," "After the Annunciation," "The Name" and "Nationality," from *Poems*, published in 1937.

Readings from Robin Hyde include four poems from *Houses by the Sea*, written during the poet's last two years and described recently in *The Listener* as her most complete achievement—"a subtle and varied treatment of some of the most persistent things in our literary landscape—childhood and family, the sea-beach, driftwood and sand, the piano playing in the back street at evening." There are readings also from Robin Hyde's earlier books, *The Conquerors* and *Persephone in Winter*.

The third poet represented in the series is Ursula Bethell, considered by some critics to be the most outstanding woman poet who has written in this country. (D'Arcy Cresswell said that New Zealand wasn't truly discovered until Miss Bethell, "very earnestly digging," raised her head to look at the mountains.) The poems read by Miss Jefford are all from the three collections published during Ursula Bethell's lifetime—*From a Garden in the Antipodes* (1929), *Time and Place* (1936), and *Day and Night* (1939). They include, from the second of these books, one of her best-known poems, "The Long Harbour."

Barbara Jefford's readings from New Zealand women poets will be heard from 4YC on July 23, 26 and 30, from 3YC on July 24, 25 and 26, and from 2YC on August 3, 4 and 6.

A critical appreciation by Alan Mulgan of the work of Eileen Duggan, with readings from Miss Duggan's poems, will be broadcast from 2YC at 8.0 p.m. on Sunday, July 26.



BBC photo
Barbara Jefford

DEATH OF A DICTATOR

THAT night the salvage ship was wrecked,
And a fire-engine burst into flames.
There was riot and commotion at the police station,
With the police taking each other's names.
Unearthly laughter ran round the cathedral vaulting,
And all the angels and gargoyles were exulting.

—D.G.