

Man of the Mountains

ARAWATA BILL. A SEQUENCE OF POEMS, by Denis Glover, the Pegasus Press, Christchurch: 12 6.

(Reviewed by P.J.W.)

THERE is little doubt that this sequence of poems about the life of a legendary West Coast prospector contains the best work Denis Glover has done, if only because he has found here and treated at length a theme admirably suited to his poetic temperament. His long interest in such a subject is apparent from a reading of "Not on Record," a five-line epitaph published 12 years ago in *Recent Poems*, which is practically Arawata Bill's story in microcosm. Bill is seen by the poet as a kind of folk hero, and is intended to personify, he says in a note on the jacket of this book, "all the unknown prospectors who essayed tough and wicked country that is not yet fully explored."

Denis Glover's imagination is essentially a pictorial one, and the first section contains magnificent images of the mountains, followed immediately by a portrait of astonishing vividness of the bearded old sundowner whose bright

eye will not forsake its vision of a lode in the hills, his heart "as big as his boots" as he heads over the tops "in blue dungarees and a sunset hat." So the poem continues through the episodes of Arawata's story—"The Search," "A Prayer," "The River Crossing," "The Bush," "Soliloquies," and "The Crystallised Waves" with its characteristic lines:

What are the mountains on high
But the crystallised waves of the sea,
And what is the white-topped wave
But a mountain that liquidly weaves?

Arawata Bill is more than anything else a folk poem, and its skilful technique is disguised in a simplicity of diction and directness of feeling, in the slangy syntax of a still primitive society. This folk quality comes out in the ballad rhythms and lamenting tone of "Conversation Piece":

But why are you leaving, Bill,
When you've just fetched up?
Stay for a bite and a sup
Or a few square meals . . .

Bill, what will you do
When you strike it?
. . . Buy a billycock hat and maybe
Go on the bash.

Obviously there is something of Arawata Bill in all of us. He is the rebel of our society, one of the last of the



pioneers, the outcast, the nonconformist, and the seeker. This volume marks a new awareness of our frontier heritage, stripped of the romantic frills which spoil similar poems by Domett, Reeves or Jessie Mackay in the Nineties. It is perhaps an unusual subject for the man who once satirised in *The Arraignment of Paris* those poets who wrote about the "dark and ferny bush" and "looked for Maori ghosts in Manners Street." But it indicates that his point of view has matured and shows his deeper consciousness of his task as an interpreter of the New Zealand scene. Above all, this book speaks in the New Zealand idiom. These are rugged, lean and

laconic poems, and if he had written or done nothing else Denis Glover's place in New Zealand letters would now be indisputably assured.

THE GODWIN LEGEND

GODWIN'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY, by D. H. Monro, Oxford University Press: Geoffrey Cumberlege. English price, 15 -.

FEW worthwhile books by contemporary moral philosophers are likely to have a general appeal. It is refreshing, therefore, that such a book should have been written by D. H. Monro, lecturer at Otago University. We have all heard rumours enough about the amorality of Godwin's circle, culminating, so the wildest tale would have it, in Godwin's return to the accepted standards after the poet Shelley had run off with his daughter. Perhaps we have even accepted the cynical glimpses which Peacock treats us to; but Peacock's novels were written after the hey-day of Godwinism, when it had become fashionable to denounce the new morality.

Mr. Monro's attempt to dispel "the Godwin legend" (and in particular that "Godwin rejected emotion in all its forms in favour of a bloodless abstraction he called reason") is based primarily on his vindication of Godwin's distrust of generalisations. Since one instance of a generalisation seldom mirrors another, generalisations are usually untrustworthy. Reliance on accepted social conventions hides humanity from us, encouraging that lack of insight into

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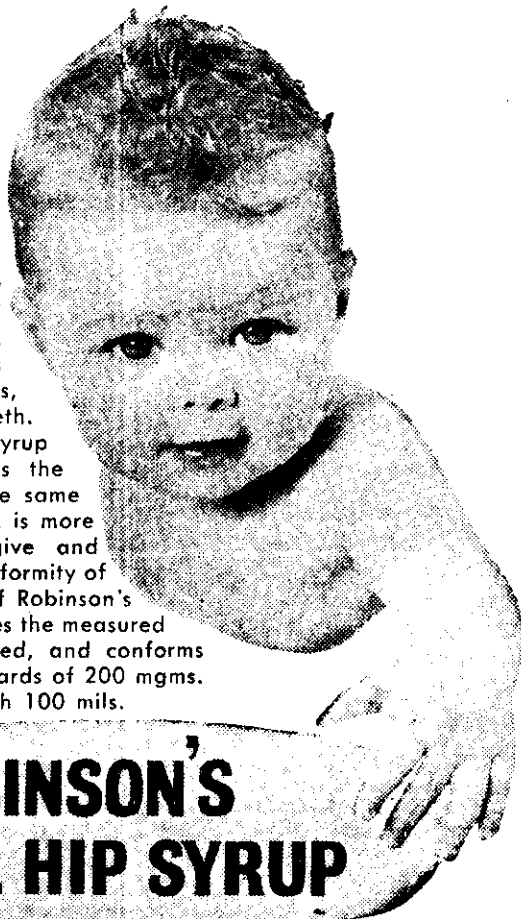
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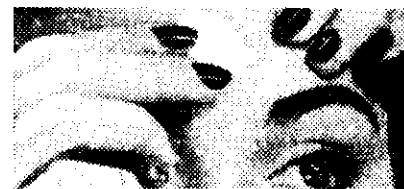
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