

BOOK RECORD

Conducted by ANTAR

IMAGINATION—AND N.Z. HISTORY

A Book About Cook
Strait That Carries
The Punch Of
Enthusiasm

LATEST addition to the growing literature of New Zealand history is Stephen Gerard's "Strait of Adventure," published this month by Reed. It tells the tale of Cook Strait and the lands and people about it.

For some years now a trickle of books on local tradition has been coming steadily from various Dominion publishing houses. All, or nearly all, have been sincere, slightly dull, and completely typical specimens of "historical journalism."

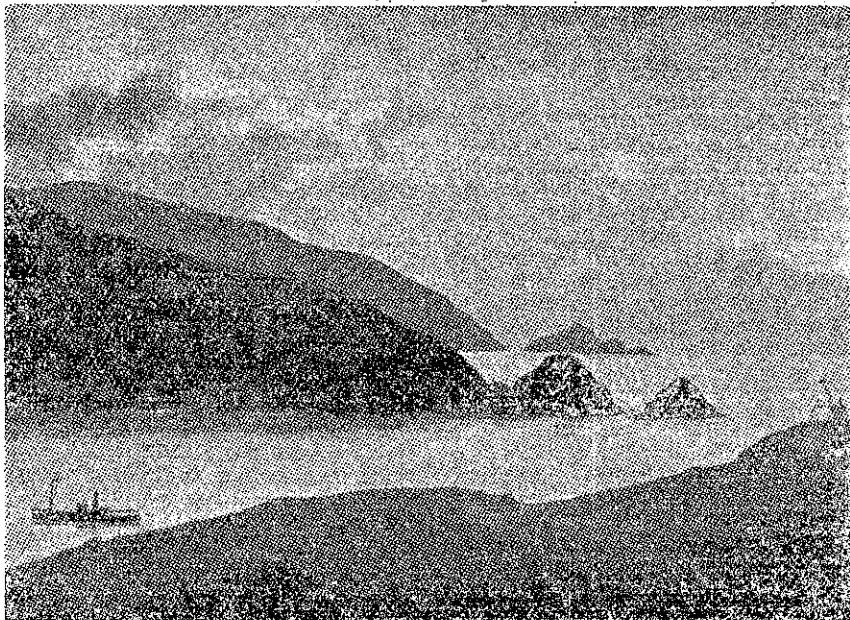
"Strait of Adventure" is different. In its mass of fact there is that vital spark of imagination in treatment which justifies the title and makes it excellent entertainment by any standards. You might "hate history," yet read it avidly. The same virtue has been only too notably absent in other books of the sort.

THE author of "Strait of Adventure" is mighty fond of words—a profitable fault. He has never permitted his enthusiasm for subject matter to squeeze out for want of space a wild and woolly piece of descriptive writing. Not, mark you, that the facts are lacking. There are, to tell the truth, so many facts that much—too much—of significance is lost. For its frequent excitements, the book depends on the baldest and most cavalierly treated sensations—battle, bloodshed, labour and sudden death drawn liberally from the pages of more orthodox histories. Any one of a score of the stories told within Mr. Gerard's modest 175 pages might well have provided the plot of a thriller replete in every page with action and disaster.

FROM all this the reader may have gathered that I think well of "Strait of Adventure." I do; but not without qualification. The book's virtues are its fast pace, its excellent descriptive work—particularly descriptions of the sea—and its keen conviction that New Zealand's history is an adventurous and romantic history judged by whatever standards. Its faults are, frankly, literary faults that detract from the reader's conviction and prevent him completely losing himself among the stirring people and stirring events with which his pages are crowded to overflowing.

There is a certain monotony of approach to each tale. "Now," in effect, says Mr. Gerard, "I will take you to a lookout—fine view, isn't it?—and there's a story behind it... Listen..."

Adequate, this device, but I do not see technicians like Morton and Curle using it.



STRAIT OF ADVENTURE.—Tory Channel.

In Mr. Gerard's style there is, too, a lack of restraint that lowers his highlights. Deletion of several thousand preliminary adjectives would have heightened my enjoyment of those juicy passages in which he really let himself go.

"Strait of Adventure" will make its way in New Zealand when people get to know it, because it is an excellent gift book as well as being an amusing companion for the railway carriage. Such books must find their market in time. In this case I hope the author will write another—and for the market of the great wide world. He has the enthusiasm and, I believe, the pen to convince others about our romantic homeland, even if a second Rider Haggard would not shake us in the conviction it really is a dull little backwater!

BEST ONE-ACT PLAYS
HAVE PURPOSE

SIDE by side with the growth of amateur dramatic societies has advanced the popularity of one-act plays, once as despised in literary circles as a punster among men of wit.

Even now, it is doubtful whether the one-act play contributes much of lasting worth—limiting are the demands of the amateur societies alone, which require casts with plenty of women, and situations and dialogue that can be handled effectively by novices. Nevertheless, as the output of plays increases, it is encouraging that the best of them strive for something more than the mere fulfilment of amateur society needs.

In the latest of J. W. Marriott's selections—which have come to be as looked-for as American digests—this general improvement, of theme rather more than technique, is particularly noticeable. Of the twelve plays in

the book, at least half carry a positive message—whether by a trumpet call or in a whisper.

Most powerful is probably Sydney Box's indictment against war, "Bring Me My Bow;" with Avrom Greenbaum's "The Bread of Affliction," a slightly melodramatic plea for the Jews, running it a close second.

Of the remaining plays, Marc Connelly's "Little David," unpublished excerpt from "Green Pastures" needs no comment. "The Holy Crown" by Elise Aylen has an atmosphere and wistful beauty all its own. But "The Bears Nest" by Patricia M. Donahue and "Blessed Above Women," by Vincent Godefroy, are perhaps the finest of all. The former is a comedy of charming simplicity, and the second goes back to the Biblical story of Jael and Sisera for its theme (amateur societies, beware of elocutionary sing-songs when you come to this lyric dialogue).

On the whole, the new Marriott selection may be criticised from the viewpoint of stage performance for a rather too sombre tone. But as dramatic literature it is a hopeful augury for the development and influence of the one-act form.

"The Best One-Act Plays of 1937," selected by J. W. Marriott. (Harrap, London). Our copy from the publishers.

LOVE STORY READS
LIKE SCENARIO

FOR circulating library readers who, like Alice, prefer their books with "plenty of conversation," Countess Barcynska's latest novel, "Hearts for Gold," will be a safe and pleasant choice. It is a lightsome trifle, skilfully built round the wholesome, if rather impossible, tale of a world's champion boxer turned evangeli-