

Foreword

The response to Australian New Writing has been exhilarating. From all over Australia, and New Zealand, letters came in, from battle areas and war plants, universities and coal-mines—an astonishing amount of written and spoken comment as critical as it was encouraging.

Indignation, praise, ridicule, popular support has shown us how necessary we were to stimulate a more lively interest in literary affairs. It appears that what our readers demand is new writing that is really new—in the sense of having something vital to say about present-day ideas, trends and problems. They have shown themselves less concerned with subtleties of style, highly-polished technique than material that gets down to fundamentals. Fresh winds blow strong; does it matter if a few sober hats get knocked off?

Yet one or two hyper-sensitive critics want to turn us into a magazine for the "intelligentzia," publishing sophisticated and eccentric material for their amusement. We aim at a broader appeal, recalling Bernard O'Dowd's declaration back in 1909 . . .

"Old castes may be disappearing, but coteries of the intellectually proud, the spiritually proud, the artistically proud, segregate themselves from the intellectually, spiritually, artistically hungry and thirsty masses of the people to whom they belong, and threaten to form a caste system more odious than ever."

"Today," we wrote in our first introduction; "the experience of the majority demands expression," and the amount of manuscript received is our justification. We can now present a short story by a Sydney railworker, another by a Melbourne wharf-laborer, and a critical article on modern literature by an aircraft worker. In addition, almost half our contributors are serving or have served with the armed forces, which points to one of the most interesting facts in the cultural revival now beginning to take shape in Australia—the amount of creative work being produced by soldiers.

We were taken to task for appearing to have given editorial endorsement to Noel Hutton's article, "Art and the Working Class," which called forth, among much

enthusiastic and hostile comment, a reply from John Reed, secretary of the Melbourne Contemporary Art Society (see page 43). This time we leave it to the readers to endorse the conflicting views of our three critical articles. V. G. O'Connor's analysis of Sir Lionel Lindsay's "Added Art" may seem to be flogging a dead horse. It is unfortunate we were unable to publish it earlier, but as the artist-opponents of William Dobell, in the Archibald Prize controversy have fallen back upon this book, it is still timely.

We welcome a well-known writer in William Hatfield, whose theme, we believe, would not have been acceptable to any other Australian publication. This is consistent with our policy, which is to present the work of both established writers and those struggling for print, providing they have something worth saying.

Ken Levis, whose short story "The Artist's Touch" was one of the most popular contributions, is represented with the story that won last year's Henry Lawson prize at Sydney University. This is the second year in succession he has pulled off this prize. Most of the critics seemed to miss the point of his first story, drawing attention only to his descriptive ability. Its implications were definitely modern, revealing a new factor in Australian country life—the effects of large-scale capitalist industry, which drives the bush craftsmen down into the ranks of unskilled labor. From a literary point of view, "Inbred" is possibly a better story. More important, it reflects another social tragedy, the subconscious conflict between bush and city dwellers, due to the cultural and economic frustration which alienates one from the other.

It was something of a shock to discover a poem of ours in Hansard. Replying to attacks on miners issuing from the comfortably-padded seats of the Opposition, Mr. Rowley James, M.H.R., found coal-miner Jock Graham's poem an effective defence. "Perhaps honorable members opposite may not be so ready to condemn the coal-miners," he declared, "when they have read that." This is by no means the first time poetry has shown its ability to crystallise an experience more effectively than any other medium.

This brings us to a charge that one critic made against

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us; that we are partisan. Certainly! It is a characteristic shared by most of the great artists in the past. Besides, when the mass of the people throughout the world is now taking up a partisan attitude to create a society worth living in, we would be very out of touch if we reflected nothing of it. Seldom has this been expressed better than in these words of the great French writer, Romain Rolland, who was murdered last year in a Nazi concentration camp for his "partisan" views:

"Art, in truth, is always involved in the battle of its age, even when it pretends to retire from the fight under the childish slogan of 'art for art's sake.' The very act of retiring from the battle, whether one realises it or not, means that, like Pilate, one is washing one's hands of social iniquity and tacitly consenting to the crushing of the oppressed."

We believe that the best tribute we can pay to the genius of Rolland, who long ago renounced his theory of remaining "above the battle," is to emulate his active opposition to the social cancer of Fascism.

—THE EDITORS.