

'T WAS EVER THUS.

Salute to Jindyworobak in its tenth year!

Survival of a publication of this nature during difficult and disturbed times suggests that it expresses ardent and purposeful writers. Literature, Australian in essence, is not yet past that incipient stage when inevitably it assumes the character of a movement as well as of art-cum-business. Literary path-making attracts people of determination, who, aware of their opportunities in a new environment, set about turning mere potentiality into achievement.

Imaginative writers are free to be either parochial or cosmopolitan in presenting any places or subjects that stir them, and some of the most enchanting literature is the outcome of writers' success in communicating their ecstacy in their own, their native lands. A great provincial literature of England has enabled many who have never seen that sceptred isle to revel in her ivied towers, her hedgerows, coppices, spinneys, wolds and woods, her brooks and rooks, cuckoos and owls, her every crocus, fritillary or daffodil. A similar desire to express an equivalent joy accumulating in this unsung continent would seem to be the non-self-seeking but sturdily self-expressing inspiration of Jindyworobak—Jindyism, as it is termed by those whom it irritates.

Why should Jindyworobak chortles about our land irritate, unless a reproach to the conformers to the conventional or outside commercial compulsions with regard to subject matter, or by arousing subconscious envy in those still suffering the nostalgic vapours of the exiled. The continuing power and significance of works of literature as manifestations of man's inner life depend on the unceasing mutation and extension, if not subversion, of established forms and overworked themes.

In kangarooing through the six Jindyworobak anthologies I possess, beginning with 1941, I recall disapproval, much of it recent:

"That going back to Abos is silly. It's not even intelligible."
And the blacks are gone, and we are not more than they,
Tonight as I make my camp by the rain-stilled sea.

And:

Didjeridoo—didjeridoo!
A blackfellow blows through a length of bamboo
To the regular beat of an ironwood stick,
Click-click, click-click-click

Didjeridoo—didjeridoo!
A nursery-rhyme and a history too.

Exactly! A delightful interpretation, seductively intelligible.

"But surely you don't encourage that restriction to Australian themes?"

"That is a misconception. Here is a humorous plea for Martha by one who expresses what has simmered in me since childhood about the one-sidedness of that Biblical story. Also the index to the anthologies lacks few of the names of our practising poets, major or minor. Jindyism, instead of confining writers to long-exploited fields, seeks to add something new and rich to literature in our tongue."

"Perhaps . . . but put that stuff against the classics and where would it be?"

Well,

It is a long time now
since Homer was a boy,
and Helen has forgotten
ancient Troy

In the beauty of this land there are subjects enough
to last a poet a lifetime . . .

Here is the expression of much wholesome and vigorous emotion which is not out of harmony with reverence for the classics.

"Admittedly you can pick out decent bits, but there's so much stuff—just stuff."

In standard collected works there is often more chaff than grain.

"I'm sick of this mouldy bleating about the gums and open spaces! It's time we got away from that now. Literature must be universal!"

"Isn't it snobbish or obtuse to exult 'universally' through generations when an Englishman, homesick in Italy, longs

to be in England now that April's there, while the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough; and to lack of understanding of an Australian in Palestine suffering from a similar 'universal' nostalgia, when he aches to "hear the butcher chortle, and the jackass laugh again, in springtime on the Clarence when there's feather on the cane?"

"Surely you don't compare those two poems?!!!!!!?"

For the moment concern is merely with the 'universal' emotion evoked in both, and the aid its expression gives to psychological satisfaction in the soil of one's birth or permanent residence.

We are a great land's lovers, a land's wardens,
for whom her beauty is all her fame,
lights for us a vision that breaks and broadens,
burns to fiery wonder at her name.

Salvage of ancient artistry, the tattered
tapestry weave with a skilful thread and strong,
the broken melody, the notes far scattered
gather and fashion to enduring song.

Yet still the test of drought will come again,
and come the age-long blessing of the rain.

And in our hearts the singing swagman's song
shall echo from his ghostly billabong.

Thousands of miles of stern Australian coast
will front the main when it is angered most,
smash moving mountains when they thunder in,
and stand the sunlit conquerors of the din.

"That's merely rhetoric: it couldn't be called pure poetry."

"But such lines as these have the effect of poetry on me:"

And in the Bight

rollers will bring the stars ashore at night

And:

Love's parting is the black swan dying.

It is conceded that the spirit of Jindyworobak is fine, and in serious assessment the spirit of Australian—of any—poetry is vital. The responsibility of defining where verse or rhetoric merges into pure poetry, with other points of acceptable form, can be left to critical argument, so long as it is clearly remembered that the glorious ancient classics were written by persons once crudely alive, writing of

barbaric and tragic passions and activities in a robust and primitive environment, and that in later generations many a pundit and pedagogue has tried to break or ban poets whose work today is embalmed in dominies' textbooks and become the critics' measuring stick to exclude and condemn the concern of even later poets with scenes and themes, locutions and localities too raw and new for the anaemic or unadventurous.

Australia will be expressed:

She speaks in the surge of age-old song
from creek-bed firelight half-night long,
and, the camp all still, in a glint of spears
and the dream that is hers of a million years.

Jindyism, so long as it does not serve the menacing politics of isolationism or sovereign-state nationalism, is a focus for a fresh contribution to world literature, working from a new core outward to international recognition. That is Jindyorobak's justification. From attention to Australian themes has come its influence and original flavour.

In any case the battle is almost won for Australian writers to be as Australian as their inner urge dictates. Signs are that the noisiest "practising Australians," now that profit and renown can be won that way, will be those who so lately, in criticising or lecturing on Australian literature, denied its existence, or deprecated its quality, ridiculed its aspirations and derided its "drum-beaters."

"Twas ever thus, Jindyorobaks! "Twas ever thus!

MILES FRANKLIN.