

NEWS REEL

MEANJIN PAPERS announces a competition for a lyric and a narrative poem, details of which are set out in the enclosed inset. The prizes have been generously donated by Mrs. A. H. Anders (E. M. England).

Miss E. Winifred Knight, Blackburn, Victoria, was awarded the first prize of five guineas in the recent competition conducted by the Queensland Authors and Artists' Association. The poem and judge's comments appear on pages 14-15.

Mr. Joseph O'Dwyer, formerly of the Rockhampton Grammar School, now residing in Melbourne, was awarded the £25 prize in the C. J. Dennis National Memorial Society's competition for his long abstract poem "The Trojan Doom." Several of Mr. O'Dwyer's poems appeared in No. 2 Meanjin Papers. This is the second occasion in three years that the award has gone to Queensland. In 1939 Mr. Brian Vrepoint won the competition with "The Miracle."

Entries for the Bread and Cheese Club's short story competition close on January 15. Particulars may be obtained from the Worthy Scribe, Box 1663 G.P.O., Melbourne.

Mr. Flexmore Hudson, of Hammond, South Australia, intends publishing "Poetry," a quarterly of Australian and New Zealand verse. The first issue will appear about December 1.

Mr. Shaw Neilson was the guest of honour at the October meeting of the Authors and Artists' Association, when three of his songs were sung for the first time—"The Green Singer," "As Far As My Heart Will Go," and "The Petticoat Plays" (music by F. C. Francis, arranged by Mrs. White, sung by Robert Thompson). Mr. C. B. Christesen gave an address entitled "Social Thought in the Literature of To-day." The annual general meeting of the Association will be held on November 18.

"Galmahra" for 1941 is a credit to those University of Queensland students responsible for its general excellence. Peter Miles' "Gee She Was Pretty," J. Hanson-Lowe's "Arctic Death," R. Mathews' "I'll Say," and E. Duncan's "Chalk Marks," are outstanding. Peter Miles' poem "Wind" stands significantly alone in quality. P. R. Stephenson gave the magazine its name when he was editor in 1921. Galmahra, claimed to be the aboriginal equivalent of the Greek Hermes, was the native name of Jacky-Jacky, the valiant guide of the ill-fated Kennedy expedition to Cape York.

"If I am asked what the art of the post-war period will be like, I become as vague as Mr. Churchill. I can only reply that it will be an expression of the society we then establish. If we go back to the Government of the Bank of England and the City, to preposterous monopolies exploiting the essentials of life, to a parliament of fools and an underworld of crime, then we shall go back to an art of convention, sentimentality and pride against which a few revolutionary protests will be more vain and ineffective than ever."—Herbert Read in "Horizon," No. 17, 1941.

The recent suicide of Virginia Woolf means more than the disappearance of a brilliant woman from English literature. It has a deep and symptomatic importance, as it throws light on our modern culture; this culture which began with the Renaissance and is now at a critical point of its development. This great woman's farewell letter to her husband, Leonard Woolf, appeared in the May issue of "Time."

Recommended:—"AUSTRALIAN POETRY, 1941" (edited by Douglas Stewart; A. & R.). JINDYWOROBAK ANTHOLOGY, 1941 (edited by Rex Ingamells, Adelaide). "EDUCATION FOR LIFE" (Henrietta Drake-Brockman; Fellowship of Australian Writers, W.A. Section).

AUSTRALIAN LITERARY HISTORY

LITERARY history—a blend of biography, bibliography, philosophy, sociology, criticism, flour, soda and cream o'tartar—follows in the wake of literature as inevitably as martial history in the wake of war. Moreover it far-reachingly affects the development of letters, imbuing the impressionable young with a prejudice in favour of such things as are selected to be recorded, applauded and permanently enrolled in the national archives. Hence the literary historian bears a high responsibility towards literature and the nation.

Now that a mighty geste of spade-work has been performed by Professor Morris Miller in marshalling in their battalions the pen-men of our first century and a quarter, not to mention Judge Ferguson's even more laborious researches into the less significant decades of that era, we can almost hear the historians pulling off their coats for a spot of the toil to which this wealth of assembled material beckons them. May we in this place with due humility indicate one or two canons which might with advantage be observed in the proper presentation of the rising fabric of a stately literature?

Rule 1. GET RID OF THE INFERIORITY COMPLEX. And first listen to our two pioneers in the business of literary history. Barton (1866): "We are too young to possess a national literature of our own"; Sutherland (1898): "Australian literature is still of utter immaturity." It would be better to remain silent than make such admissions. A New Zealand practitioner (Smith, 1939) has the temerity to commence: "No honest critic, however enthusiastic and anxious to praise New Zealand, can pretend that the country has yet produced writings qualifying as literature." Shades of Jessie Mackay, Katherine Mansfield and Robin Hyde! Why wasn't he lynched? Memorable poetry is 10 per cent. poetry and 90 per cent. memorable. There are lines and stanzas in trans-Tasman literature, and still more in our own, which are of such gossamer grace and exquisite melody that when the historians point them out, and the schoolmasters teach them, and the whole population soaks them up, they will be seen (and felt) to rank with any achievement of any poet, any time, anywhere.

Rule 2. GET IT CLEAR THAT OURS IS A LITERATURE, NOT A BRANCH LITERATURE. Let's quote some more historians. Green (1930): "Australian literature is a branch of English literature and however great it may become it will remain a branch." With respect, I disagree. According to Nettie Palmer (1924) "the chief possession of Australian writers in the year 1901 was a consciousness of nationhood." Zora Cross (1922) declared: "Australia is a singing land." So it is, and it happens to sing in English. The Canadian and South African historians labour under no such incidental handicaps. Lorne Pierce (1927) speaks of Canadian literature with its diverse French, English and Indian strains as "the fine flower of an organized, self-conscious society"; Nathan (1925) of the necessity for indiscriminate treatment of South African writers, without regard to origin or language, because of the interwoven influences of English and Dutch. Why must our literature be regarded as an infant, a beginner, a little sister? Our young men are just as young, and our old men live to be just as old, as Englishmen do, or ever did. Australian writers of 1941 start off from exactly the same mark as English writers of 1941—same international past to inspire them, same opportunity of assimilating it, same capabilities of developing it, identical prospects of striking gold.

Rule 3. TO OBTAIN "NATIONAL" RESULTS, DON'T HARP ON THE "NATIONAL." A few further quotations. John Buchan (1933): "You have confidence, good humour, courage and perhaps a little sensitive-

ness." Tall thanks, noble sir. You are doubtless right. All the qualities you mention may be detected amid the multitudinous billows of our literature. And likewise others—comradeship, craftsmanship, coherence, colour, crispness, conciseness, concreteness, creativeness, clarity and conviviality—to name only some that begin with "C." And every other literature has them too. Saillens (1938): "La plupart des poètes du Bush se ressemblent par leur mélancolie, parfois coupée d'humeur macabre." What about our finesse? our franchise? our romantisme? our attendrissement? Even homegrown historians are not free from the habit of hunting out national features as though they were special merits. Anchen (1940): "The Australian novel is steadily evolving characteristics of its own." If so, I wonder whether we should be pleased about it. Ford Madox Ford asked a French child whom he found reading "Crusoe" if she knew who wrote it. Her reply indicated that she believed the author was French—about the highest compliment, thinks Ford, that could have been paid to Defoe.

Philosophers teach us that if we desire happiness, we must be careful not to make its pursuit our conscious object. And so it seems to me that if we desire a worthy national literature we had better forget about the national aspect and strive after their timeless, universal outlook which will make itself at home in distant regions and among generations yet unborn.

I can name many Australian creators of literature. Let not our historians depress them with proofs that they are merely creators of Australian literature.

—W. A. AMIET.

PACIFIC MOON

THE boom of the surf again in rising wind . . .

For a long while now I have been remembering
That stark sweet music in continuous
Crescendo on the lonely beach, deep leit-motif
Of something old, old as wandering
Rack-misted moon—

So, aged ghost, you come again with pale
Uncomment, haunting? You remember
When the live sea swelled and you,
Perpetually clouded, strained
Those rhythms into protoplasm even now I feel
In my brief consciousness, drowned memory
Emerging: here
Is the vast beginning of things, the empty theatre.

We are not strangers, you and I, old
Murmurer: I hear your thundering
Through cities and the superficial chatter, hear
Plain statements and the high strong manifesto sung
In sea winds.

—PETER MILES.