

## FOREWORD:—

We believe it is high time Australian writers faced up to the present day.

In the past the best of them have done so. We have a fine literary tradition. To-day it is repressed, half-forgotten, for writers and poets may no longer speak of social realities and be published. All but a few, who have battled through to a precarious reputation, restrict themselves—or are restricted by the commercial press—to the retailing of sentimental falsehoods, the tedious adventures of detectives and murderers, love-lorn but socially useless peroxides, and upper-class unemployed. Bedtime stories for grown-ups!

Under the present scheme of things where Profit is dictator, it would be utopian to expect the daily press to see its daily bread in anything better than material which panders to the most cheaply aroused emotions. In the same way Hollywood's millions are made, not by deepening man's cultural achievements, but by stupefying audiences with visions of eternal bliss, half-naked women or a pair of lips thirty feet wide upon a screen.

Writers cannot be developed without freedom to express themselves, dealing with the real problems of society, the hopes, passions, beliefs and sufferings of humanity. Occasionally journals have appeared with this intention, only to be starved to death, or quietly garrotted behind board-room doors. Others, struggling on with a courageous disregard for the profit motive, have had their policies limited by a national parochialism, academic narrowness or "intellectualistic" posturing.

Hence Australian New Writing.

Art is a means of coming to grips with reality, of understanding the processes of society and the human heart and mind. By throwing a searchlight on everyday experience, revealing truthfully how people act and why, what is false in our way of living, what is constructive, the artist has as important a role to play as the scientist, teacher or the politician. The most valuable contribution he can make to-day is to bring his talents to bear upon the vast array of problems troubling the world in general and Australia in particular. We have reached

a crisis in the history of civilisation. We are confronted with the most brutish, despicable and destructive force mankind has ever known—fascism. We have been plunged into the most devastating of all wars—and let us determine it shall be the last; a war that has to be fought with every weapon we possess, both material and intellectual, so that fascism may be destroyed.

A war effort in this struggle does not mean only the production and use of guns, collecting waste rubber, Austerity campaigns. It means a new approach to life, a devotion to democratic principles, a responsible examination of social trends, forces and ideas, greater sympathy with the struggles of the people.

The war is a clash of two irreconcilable ideologies: fascist against democratic, barbaric against civilised, hysterical brutality against reason. It is no mere war for markets and possession, but a People's War such as Abraham Lincoln spoke of during the American Revolution:

"It is for us, the living, to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us . . . that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Writers, then, should also dedicate themselves to the task of freedom, as the greatest of their predecessors have done, from Shakespeares to Lawson, Euripides to Gorki. They vigorously asserted man's right to freedom, to determine his own destiny and destroy those who would oppress him and foist their narrow, money-grubbing dictatorships upon the people.

Australia's essentially democratic literature was itself born of the great political and intellectual ferment of the 'Nineties. In the words of Hartley Grattan, America's leading student of Australian affairs: "The influence which I regard as most important of all—social rebellion—was in the air . . . Pride of country, revolt against the status quo, glorification of the common man, high hope for the future, run through all of them. These writers were critical of the world in which they found themselves, but they believed in the possibility of fruitful change—change, moreover, that was to be directed by and for the benefit of the Australian common man."

To-day we have reached another such period of social awakening. The approach of fascism to our own coastline, the new awareness of Australian values, the determination of the mass of the people to build a better social order when the war is won—all this has produced a ferment such as we have not known for 50 years.

This cannot fail to result in a new impetus to creative art. More and more Australians are going to feel the urge to write of their experiences and the social excitement they sense around them, just as Lawson did in the 'Nineties with his creed of mateship, or Banjo Patterson, Miles Franklin, Tom Collins—or Bernard O'Dowd when he wrote:

That each shall share what all men sow:  
That color, caste's a lie:  
That man is God, however low,  
Is man, however high.

We do not claim to have discovered genius, but are confident that this first issue has something new to offer, notably the short stories by Ken Lewis and Sarah Mattland, both new writers, both with a critical approach to modern social conditions. Of the poets, their avoidance of personal, subjective themes may offend the cloister-ridden critic. Not one is concerned with love, landscape or lotus blooms. But those poets who still write almost exclusively on such themes are only repeating what has been said and said again, and much better, throughout the 19th century. (For a further examination of this, see "Art and the Working Class," page 65.)

To-day the experience of this majority demands expression, and to them Australian New Writing opens its pages. Already in this first issue we can claim that only five of our contributors are professional writers; the others include a coalminer, three school teachers, a typist, a working journalist and three soldiers, who have fought in the present war against fascism.

We are part of a literary tendency that has already appeared in Western Countries, China and America. It is a tendency toward realism, toward an art compatible with democratic living, and as such it will play its part in Australian literature.

—The Editors.