

# → LITERARY NOTES ←

By J. HIGG, M.A.

**T**HE successful formation of the New Zealand Literary and Historical Association has attracted considerable attention to the development of New Zealand literature. Too frequently we find anything savouring of honest colonial effort neglected or derided. We spend enormous sums, for instance, on the education of our youth, and then open most of the best positions in the professions only to foreigners or candidates from the Old Country, forcing the children of our own soil to seek employment away from kith and kin. And in literature we are too fond of pool-pooling the idea that a New Zealander can ever write anything worth serious attention. Yet, at the present time, we find a band of New Zealand writers producing at Home work that the English public, at least, finds extremely palatable. There are the novelists Farjeon, Marriott Watson, Hume, Vogel, Victor Waite, Mrs. Baker (alien); the political essayist, Miss Jessie Watson; St. Clair Tisdall, now a recognised oriental authority, and the Hon. W. P. Reeves, political economist and historian, not to mention many others like Heinrich Von Haast and E. D. Hoben, who are doing good literary work in the highways of British journalism. The poetry of Miss Colborne-Veel finds generous recognition at Home, and no doubt our latest poet, Arthur Adams, whose recent publication will be reviewed next month, will eventually set his face Londonwards.

I read recently in a Wellington journal the report of an interview with Professor McKenzie, of Victoria University College; the subject was the possibilities of New Zealand literature. The Professor's views echo the opinions of many, and yet are so fraught with misconception that at a mere touch from the finger of unprejudiced investigation, they crumble into dust. Literature, says the Professor, is essentially a late development in the life of a nation,

and he cites Greece and Rome as examples. These instances are the stock-in-trade of the one-idea'd pessimist; but what short-sighted vision it is that cannot see how almost every circumstance affecting the rate of the evolution of literature, has completely changed since antiquity, and that with an advanced civilisation, with our education and journalism, both of which the Professor admits to be unrivalled by those of old world countries, a literature may spring up even in the childhood of a colony settled by men and women not just emerging from savagery, be it remembered, but moulded and refined by centuries of culture, and nourished upon the finest and most invigorating body of literature the world has ever seen. We cannot be compared even with America, so vastly has the atmosphere in which literature lives and moves and has its being, changed since a time so recent as the middle of last century. There are few who will deny that Australia is fast developing a distinctive and national literature—whatever their opinion of its tone may be—and she has travelled the road of history but a few miles farther than New Zealand, finding fewer surprising adventures by the way, and receiving infinitely less inspiration from nature.

When our carping friends say, too, that we must rely for ages to come—ages, mark you—upon the traditions and the heritage of the old land, thereby implying there is no local foundation upon which to build up a colonial literature, their assertions are based on ignorance of what the essence of literature is. Surely it is the presentation of life, life either past, or present, or ideal. Wherever there is a human heart, a human soul, there must be subject enough to build up a whole world of time-defying literature. Life is life, wherever lived—delighted in or suffered—and whenever, as in New Zealand of our time, in the midst of every facility for education and culture, it must soon be reproduced in enduring literary form. And