ANIMAL TALES OLD AND NEW

GAY-NECK: THE STORY OF A PIGEON. By Dhan Gopal Mukerji. Angus and Robertson. 191pp. $2-25.

A CHIPMUNK ON MY SHOULDER. By G. J. Helbemae. Angus and Robertson. 95pp. $2-25.

THESE two works provide an interesting contrast in the prevailing styles of animal books for children.

The first is a reprint of a prize-winning children's novel, first published in 1927. It belongs to the Bambi school of juvenile fiction in which the author gives a beast's-eye view of the world.

'Gay-Neck' recounts the adventures of an Indian pigeon which, after half a book full of exploits that take it from Calcutta to the Himalayas, saves the day for an Indian army contingent as a carrier pigeon in Europe in World War I.

There is enough of exotic detail and breathtaking crisis to rivet the attention of the 10 to 14-year-old set, and subtle block art work by Artzybashev to captivate any adult inclined to read the book aloud to his children.

Helbemae's book belongs to the Elsa tradition of literature in which the animal's life is intimately observed and factually related. Helbemae is a refugee author and journalist from Estonia, with a penchant for raising strange pets.

His present companions, a pair of chipmunks, permit him to share a London flat with them. Their habits and antics and daily life, as well as the odd adventure, as when one of them gets lost in Holland Park, provide the narrative matter of the book.

My own preference is for the non-fictional work and, I suspect, the youthful readers' preference would tend the same way. My younger children, anyway, are always asking about books and television programmes, "Dad, is all this true?" And they show more interest when it is.

— GEORGE STERN

New volume of short stories

WITH magazine markets for short stories rapidly drying up, the new venture by Penguin Books into a quarterly volume of new short stories is to be welcomed.

The first contained stories by William Sansom, Jean Rhys, Bernard Malamud and David Plante. 'Penguin Modern Stories 2' (143 pp. 70c) contains three stories by John Updike, four by Emanuel Litvinoff and one by Sylvia Plath.

The first volume sold out. The second has the quality to do likewise.

Reissue of a handy Classic

PENGUIN Books have reissued F. E. Halliday's 'A Shakespeare Companion' in their Shakespeare Library.

The book is the cheapest Shakespeare encyclopedia available and is indispensable for the serious student.

New additions to Penguin Classics include 'The Quest of the Holy Grail' (304 pp. $1-35), and 'Five German Tragedies', which includes Lessing's 'Emilia Galotti', Goethe's 'Egmont', Schiller's 'Mary Stuart', Kleist's 'Penthseilea' and Grillparzer's 'Medea' (504 pp. $2-10.)

The first coach built in Wilcannia, in 1907, is one of the many illustrations from Bobby Hardy's 'West of the Darling'.

How the west was almost lost

By JOHN BRYANT

WEST OF THE DARLING. By Bobbie Hardy. Jacaranda. 270pp. $6-75.
WHALING AROUND AUSTRALIA. By Max Colwell Rigby. 177pp. $3-95.

MAN the unintelligent exploiter, the greedy ravisher, the ruthless miner of his environment? Or man controlling and co-operating with natural resources, the wise conservator, the renewer?

The questions are not academic. They have urgent bearing on the quality of life today and form the basis of inescapable commitments for all our tomorrows.

Both these books touch on the subject and, while throwing light on the mindless exploitation of land and sea in the past, indicate hopefully the efforts to recover lost resources.

In 'West of the Darling', the author has shown how the rape of the delicately balanced dry lands of the north-west corner of NSW resulted in a desert of dust and blasted hopes.

The first citizens, the river and desert tribes, lived in this vast region for thousands of years in a static civilisation without damaging their environment. But in 1829 the newly arrived white men began to press on the western frontier.

In that year the explorer Sturt broke through the multiple headwaters of the Darling to find the main stream. A year later he voyaged in a whaleboat down the Murrumbidgee and Murray and found the Darling junction. Settlement was spreading along the Macquarie from Bathurst and towards the Lachlan, the overlanders and squatters dispersing the tribes as they went.

The explorer Mitchell tried to travel the Darling in 1835 but was forced back by the tribes. By 1838 overlanding of cattle and sheep had begun through the Darling-Murray junction area to Adelaide. By 1841 the Aborigines were offering organised resistance, mustering at times 400 warriors to turn back the whites. Shootings, spearings, deaths became common. Eventually there was the inevitable slaughter of the Aborigines.

The march was truly on, and in 1843 Sturt took an expedition up the Darling from the Murray. The first Darling overlander came down the river in 1846. In the 1850s the squatters were moving in. A big impetus was given to settlement when the first Darling river boat puffed up the stream in 1859.

The great days of the Darling and west of the Darling had begun. In the 1870s the river and its settlements, Wentworth, Menindee, Louth, Wilcannia, Bourke, Brewarrina and so on, were thriving centres served by coaches and river boats, with big, established sheep stations. Settlement in the semi-desert further west began in the 1860s.

Then in the 1870s and 1880s came the big silver and gold strikes in the Barrier Range culminating in the famous Broken Hill where silver and lead were discovered in 1883. Opal fields were exploited at White Cliffs as settlement spread to remote Milparinka and Tibooburra.

But the desert, the blinding sun, droughts and rabbits were in the wings. Sheep were trampling and gnawing off the delicate desert growth, closer settlement after 1861 quickened the denudation process, and in the 1890s devastating droughts brought ruin to many. In a side process the area became a seedbed of militant unionism with the combined strengths of the mining workers and the shearers setting the political stage and the industrial tone of the nation up to the present day.

But it was only as recently as the 1930s that the pastoral empire of the cattle king Sir Sidney Kidman was broken up by the depression-pressed Government of NSW so that intelligent, closer settlement could begin the long fight back against the man-induced desert. With the aid of such organisations as the CSIRO rehabilitation of the stricken area has begun. A sign is that the Menindee Lakes area has become a national park and tourist resort.

The author has given a thorough and detailed history of the region, and her intelligent treatment of its wide diversity raises the book to the level of a valuable general history.

* * *

'Whaling Around Australia' may well have been subtitled, 'The Bigger they are the Harder they Fall'. For the whale, the world's largest creature, has fallen very hard indeed. To the point of extinction of some species.

Once again it is the story of greed and ruthlessness. Lighting oil for Eurone's cities and flexible whalebone for ladies' corsets were the prime motives until petroleum came in from the 1850s.

For the men who did the dirty work it was a brutal, stinking life, with perhaps an afterglow of primitive heroism — of man against nature — which had its literary highlight in Melville's 'Moby Dick'.

But today, with 20th century efficiency, factory ships are busy at the business which is likely to result in elimination of species.

(In May, 1968, a Soviet whaling fleet called at Sydney after a catch of 3,321. In 1965-66 4,538 sperm whales were taken from Antarctic waters). The blue whales and humpbacks are on the verge of extinction and are now totally protected.

But, as the author points out, "another of the world's great natural resources is rapidly being destroyed for the profit of a comparative few". He says that the International Whaling Convention of 1946, an effort at conservation, is made ineffective by the provision that any nation can abrogate IWC conservation measures simply by objecting to them.

And where are all the whales going? Into soap, margarine, polishes, lubricants, fertilisers and hormones.

Australia, from being one of the world's whaling centres, is now on the fringe of the industry, having no whaling fleet since the Government sold the assets of the Australian Whaling Commission in 1956.

Whaling had been soundly established from Carnarvon in the west to Byron Bay in the east. The only centres still operating are Carnarvon and Albany, both in the west.

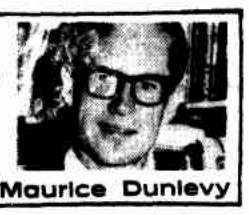
The history of the industry in Australia goes back to Yankee skippers in the early 19th century, the merchant-squatter adventurers of the mid-1900s (Ben Boyd and the Imlay brothers of Twofold Bay) to the Norwegians in the 20th century (they introduced the factory-ship system and the harpoon gun).

At present Australia is merely host to other nations exploiting the harvest. With no industrial interest, Australia is now reduced to the position of having no influence on the conservation and "farming" of this resource.

Hopefully, man may learn that sterile claypans in a desert that once bloomed and seas where whales can no longer live are frightening trends of his own actions, and as such, the remedy is in his own hands.

Mr Bates and a serpent in paradise

Writers' World



by Maurice Dunlevy

A YOUNG writer could follow one of two paths, Edward Garnett said in his introduction to H. E. Bates' first novel, 'The Two Sisters' in 1926.

He could walk the endlessly difficult path of art or move smoothly along the path of facile achievement.

Forty-four years and 70 books later, it is clear that Bates chose not one, but both ways. Some of his short stories and novellas are among the most beautiful of their kind. His survey of the modern short story is still the best available, 29 years after it was first published.

A few of his novels rate high among the second rank of traditional 20th century English fiction. But a large slice of his stories, novels, plays and essays is facile, fatuous and careless.

Now a peevish old countryman of 65, Bates gives us the first volume of an autobiography.

'The Vanished World' (Michael Joseph, 189 pp., $6-20) in which he declares his prejudices, rants against the modern world, remembers a lost one fondly, and writes some of his best, and much of his worst, prose. It takes him from his birth in 1905 to 1925 when Jonathan Cape accepts 'The Two Sisters' for publication.

Tens of thousands of readers will enjoy it. Most of them will be the fans of the Flying Officer X stories of World War II and of the war novels such as 'Fair Stood the Wind for France' (1944), 'The Cruise of the Breadwinner' (1946), 'The Purple Plain' (1947), and 'The Jacaranda Tree' (1948).

SOME of them will be from the large new audience Bates won at the end of the 1950s with some deplorable rib-tickling pot-boilers such as 'The Darling Buds of May' and 'A Breath of French Air', books which minimise the mysteries of natural beauty which he had long celebrated, and maximised mirth in the welfare state.

A more select group of readers will be the audience for his novels of English country life. But the most discerning of all will be those who recognise Bates as one of the finest short-story writers of his generation. For this last group the autobiography will be treasured as his first important revelation of the man behind the books. In a career spanning nearly half a century there have only been glimpses in scattered prefaces, some disjointed notes in a memoir he wrote about his mentor, Edward Garnett, and a few Press interviews.

'THE Vanished World' is the world of the English Midlands in the early years of this century. For the young Bates it was partly the world of leather and shoemakers into which he was born, but mainly the world of the English countryside to which he was strongly attracted.

He was protected from the booze and the brawls of the former by the respectability and strait-laced Methodism of his family, and flung headlong into the latter by his father and grandfather who loved the busless, motorless roads, the blackberry hedges, river towpaths, woodland ridings and surrounding farms. This world was engulfed long ago by urbanisation and industrialisation but it continues to live in Bates' imagination as a paradise "utterly unblemished, a joy for ever".

The serpent first intruded into this paradise when Bates left school and failed dismally as a 10 shillings-a-week reporter on a provincial newspaper. It showed its evil eye again after he had secretly written 'The Two Sisters' three times at break-neck speed while appearing to work as a clerk in a leather warehouse.

He was sacked and thrown on the dole. Meanwhile, his precious manuscript did the rounds of 10 publishers.

Forty-five years later he is still proud of this immature and cloudy novel because it was a work solely of the imagination, not the typical first novel of chronicled realism or an intellectual's puzzle. Bates insists that "the business of writing fiction is an exercise in the art of telling lies". His conception of imagination seems to mix the Hobbesian view of memory freed from many restrictions of actual experience with the view that Coleridge expressed of Wordsworth's poetry: "the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed".

CERTAINLY Bates has always mixed close observation of real objects with a kind of lyrical idealisation of them. Like the symbolist poets he seems to pursue an ideal of beauty. He also operates within an aesthetic like the symbolists'. He said in the preface to 'Country Tales' (1938) that he had never written a story to illustrate an idea, nor did he ask his readers to accept a philosophy, a point of view, a creed, a moral or a sermon.

Most of his stories express nothing but themselves. The most successful are bubbles of sparkling beauty. The failures, strained with artifice, collapse into the common water of prettiness.

Bates rates style as high as matter and compression higher. In 'The Modern Short Story' he praises Chekhov and Maupassant for "the art of distillation, of compressing into the fewest, clearest possible syllables the spirit and essence of a scene".

Certainly these are the qualities that distinguish his own best work. He is a sensuous writer. His prose has "the painterly quality" he found in that of Stephen Crane. Some might call it a cinematic quality. He writes in technicolour with stereophonic sound and he assaults several senses at once with a Tennysonian ability to cram a high density of word pictures into a few sentences, each picture rich in colour, sound and feeling and flowing easily into the next on waves of rhythmic prose.

UNFORTUNATELY his best writing appears rarely in his autobiography where he mechanically parodies himself with facile appeals to stock emotions and lachrymose sentimentality.

It is as though his years of writing compressed, impersonal fiction have left him with no adequate personal style. He plasters facile descriptions too liberally on a weak and meandering narrative and the few flashes of beauty are lost in the froth of prettiness.

He constantly justifies actions that need no justification and he records mainly his successes. There is no more than a hint of the theological arguments he is said to have had with the local clergy and only a mention of the unsuccessful play he published three months before the successful 'The Two Sisters'. Nevertheless, there are more revelations than he has ever given us about Bates the man.

Perhaps he is saving his literary reminiscences for a later volume. It is to be hoped that if he does, he sets his standards higher and writes specifically for an audience a cut above that which worshipped his Larkins.

A boy's crisis in spiritual development

By DALE DOWSE

THE PROMISE. By Chaim Potok. Heinemann. 359pp. $4-95.

THE ingenious fallacy of the book reviewer's craft is to regard a novel as a self-contained entity, a kind of closed-circuit integral. Go no further (the honoured dictum implies), this, as any other inspired creation, exists to be considered in its own right.

Ingenious, because it provides the reviewer with an easy conscience while saving him a lot of time. A fallacy, because few creations are spontaneously generated, and fewer still, perhaps, are totally independent.

Let's be honest. More often than we would care to admit, people read authors instead of books. A single rewarding experience with a writer whets the appetite; we are at once anxious to seek similar satisfaction in anything else he has written, and well disposed to find it.

Rabbi Chaim Potok's literary output to date affords a fortuitous, if admittedly extreme, illustration of my point. 'The Promise' is his second choice. The stern, loving Yahweh-like figure of Reb Saunders is replaced by a novel and an unabashed sequel to 'The Chosen', published two years ago. The earlier book, a sensitive rendering of the response of a pair of New York adolescents to the Judaism of their fathers, is richer in its characterisation and, necessarily, more expository, so it is wise to approach the second novel as an extension of the first, rather than simply as an isolated statement.

Potok is deeply concerned with the dynamics of the father-son relationship, a theme which takes on heightened significance in the context of the patriarchal emphasis of Jewish Orthodoxy. Bob Saunders, the tzaddike, or hereditary leader, of a tiny Hasidic sect, raised his elder son to know suffering so that the cold brilliance of the boy's mind would not freeze his soul, the hunger for knowledge blunt his compassion for humans and isolate him from his God.

So the burden of Danny Saunders' youth was his father's silence, broken only for the long periods of Talmudic instruction that were to prepare him for the holy manhood for which he was destined. But 'The Chosen' ends with Danny's renunciation of his legacy and his decision to enter Columbia University as a graduate student in psychology.

'The Promise' takes up from there, only now the focus has shifted from Danny to his friend Reuven Malter, a non-Hasidic candidate for the Orthodox rabbinate who is the first person narrator of both books. The Brooklyn Hasidim, whose origins and style supplied the matrix for 'The Chosen', are reduced in 'The Promise' to points of symbolic reference: they file past in the city streets, black-caftaned and bearded, solemn and oddly menacing.

The father-son theme is broadened, to operate finally as a springboard for a more thorough examination of man's relation to God. In the course of the narrative, Reuven is forced to reconcile the traditional aspects of his religiosity with the consequence of the intellectual energy which his rabbinical studies demand, a reconciliation made all the more difficult by the intense polarisation of factions within Judaism itself in the aftermath of Hitler's decimation of European Jewry.

The survivors who went to the United States after the war were figures of deference, but they were also a threat; they brought with them the ghetto mentality which Jews in America had relinquished with pride, and not without inner struggle. The oppressiveness of the newcomers' influence, in the synagogues, in the yeshivas, in Jewish publications was likened to the political McCarthyism of the same period.

But Reuven is given a trinity of spiritual fathers: Rav Kalman, the fierce fundamentalist who fought with the partisans in Poland in defence of the Torah; Abraham Gordon, the modern Jewish philosopher excommunicated by the Orthodoxy for his secularism; and David Malter, Reuven's real father, a Talmud scholar who occupies a position midway between the other two.

The crisis in Reuven's spiritual development is metaphorically stated in the schizoid estrangement of Abraham Gordon's 14-year-old son and its resolution mirrored in the boy's traumatic first step to recovery.

Reuven confronts the Orthodoxy with the validity of text emendation during his final examination, knowing that the use of this method may cost him his ordination. After repeatedly resisting traditional psychotherapy, Michael Gordon is subjected to radical treatment administered by Danny Saunders, who hopes to vindicate his own choice of vocation with the success of the experiment. Both gambles pay off.

The intricacy with which Potok manipulates the plot to serve his thematic purpose is admirable. The quality of his prose, sparse and direct, is uneven and at times disappointing.

But 'The Promise' is a literate rather than a literary book. With its internal reference and external allusions to Joyce, Miller, Kafka and others functioning to underline the psychic conflicts posed, it succeeds in a structural sense, giving substance to its claim to universal relevance.

Unique among the writers who have contributed to the flowering of Jewish letters in postwar America, Potok speaks not of the ethnic experience, but of the religious consciousness of his people. How can one accommodate the existential nature of modern man within a system of law two thousand years old? Potok finds the answer within the code itself: The **pikuach nefesh**, which commands that law must be violated when it endangers a man's life. The spirit, too, must gamble in order to live.

Wide-ranging study of migration

By GEORGE ZUBRZYCKI

MIGRATION. Edited by J. A. Jackson. Cambridge University Press. Sociological Studies 2. 304pp. $3-25.

THIS collection of papers covers a number of aspects of the study of migration and reviews recent developments in this field.

Every one of 10 papers is concerned with the underlying theoretical problems and shows the application of such concepts as mobility, integration, pluralism, etc to the recent experience of overseas migration from Europe, refugee movements, internal migration in Britain and Africa, immigrant assimilation in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

While the majority of the papers are clearly written for the specialist there are nevertheless sections of the book which repay close study by anyone interested in migration. Three chapters in particular 'Sociological Aspects of Migration', by C. Jansen, 'The Study of Assimilation', by Charles Price, and 'Migration in Industrial Societies', by Anthony Richmond, provide a detailed and fascinating account of migration as a social process which, in it major forms (external and internal, long and short-distance), has become a norm of behaviour at least for selected age and occupational groups in the advanced society.

The significance of this phenomenon in Australia cannot possibly be overstated.

There is one particular lesson of the recent research in the United States reported in this book which has direct application to Australian conditions. This is a view of the process of immigration from within the receiving society. The approach starts with the assumption that the entire population of the United States, almost from the beginning, was made up of elements from a multitude of sources.

In my opinion this way of looking at immigration is more meaningful than by considering the settlers as a foreign element. By taking the immigrant as a type of American, this approach contributes to an understanding of the development of civilisation in the United States and sets immigration in a more comprehensive context.

The central and most decisive point of the experience of migration was the breakdown of traditional, communal life. Migration led to the destruction of the traditional community of comprehensive and integrated social institutions in the old world.

The shock of having left behind such a community and the adjustment necessary to compensate for its lack in the new world were the fundamental social experience of the American nation.

This in turn led to the development in American life which we are also gradually beginning to experience in Australia today. Social scientists refer to this development as ethnic or cultural pluralism, that is the situation in which group differences form an enduring part of social life and provide a course for its enrichment.

In 1927, when Andre Siegfried visited the United States from France, he could still say, "Protestantism is America's national religion. To ignore this is to view it from a false position". But by 1961 this had changed. When John F. Kennedy took office the country, whose Presidents until Van Buren had all been British subjects, had broken sharply with its past in this respect. From a relatively homogeneous Protestant nation with anglo-Saxon background the United States was now acknowledged to be a pluralist nation with a Protestant tradition.

Though the election has been rightfully taken as a giant step in the expansion of American political democracy, it was no less important as a public endorsement of pluralism as the national policy. Roosevelt had made the religio-ethnic group viable and politically relevant. Kennedy made it respectable.

Until the advent of Roosevelt and Kennedy, minority politics was the province of the big machine and the ward boss. In general, those social practices which stressed the solidarity of minority groups were disapproved while practices that made for their dissolution and led to the assimilation of their members were looked upon with favour.

But by the time Kennedy ran for office, group solidarity such as secured for him more than 80 per cent of the Catholic vote was generally accepted as natural. His election to the presidency eliminated second-class status for Catholics and benefited other minorities as well.

The result of these developments was that minority groups now appeared less an old-world hangover and more an authentic part of the American community.

America thereby acknowledged the failure of the melting pot. The answer to ethnic diversity was no longer dissolution and assimilation. The religio-ethnic group was seen as a permanent part of the American scene sanctioned by the new doctrine of cultural pluralism.