

## A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

### IN DIVERS MODES

By Llewellyn Jones

**I**T is probably through no accident that so many doctors have been good poets, for poetry is something like surgery. The surgeon's kindness is of no avail unless he has technique: and technique is always deliberate and cold blooded. In poetry what the public loosely calls "inspiration" gets nowhither unless the poet is a master of his craft. Robert Bridges, the English poet laureate, is not only the greatest living craftsman in verse but he is the only great craftsman who has shared his technique with the world. Generally the prosodist is not a poet but a man with a "theory" as to what constitutes rhythm — and in the light of it, a captious critic of what the poet does.

In his "New Verse" Mr. Bridges has not only given us a collection of beautiful poems — or rather three collections, each representing a different mode of versifying — but he has given us a demonstration that his own contributions to prosody are sound. Disregarding his ideas about quantitative metres (a vexed subject), Mr. Bridges says that English verse is of two kinds: that based on syllable counting and that based on the counting of accents. Milton, according to Mr. Bridges, by a system of strict syllable counting — admitting extra syllables only where he could account for them by "elision" — was able to write blank verse which had great rhythmic freedom because the accents could fall wherever they would — almost as freely as in prose. Now Mr.

Bridges has taken a longer line — of twelve syllables — and by treating it in the same manner has acquired a rhythmic freedom and a music which are new to English verse. He says in a preface that his system may give the free verse writers what they have been seeking: evidently a prosody which will differentiate their lines from prose. Of course these lines have to be read as Mr. Bridges intended them to be: that is, in feet of two syllables each (except where there is elision), or else they become accentual verses or prose lines. Here is an easy sample, the first stanza of a noble poem, "The Psalm":

While Northward the hot sun was sinking  
o'er the trees  
As we sat pleasantly talking in the meadow,  
The swell of a rich music suddenly on our  
ears  
Gush'd thru' the wide-flung doors, where  
village-folk in church  
Stood to their evening psalm praising God  
together —  
And when it came to close, paused, and  
broke forth anew.

The chances are ten to one that, on first reading, the newcomer to this verse will misread the second line. It is not, as it would be if this were accentual verse, a line of four or five beats, each marked by a speech stress. It is rather:

As we / sat pleas / antly / talking / in the /  
meadow.

Working on this firm basis, Mr. Bridges can do anything he pleases, even to inverting the accent of his last foot — which all the textbooks censure severely:

In solitude bewailing and in sad silence.

But the chief interest of this collection is not a technical one: in it will be found both philosophical and lyrical poetry which shows Mr. Bridges at his undiminished best.

In "The Selected Poems of Lizette Woodworth Reese" we have brought together the best work of one of our finest singers — poems familiar to readers of her Mosher editions and some new ones. There is "Tears" with its vision of

How each hath back what once he stayed  
to weep:

Homer his sight, David his little lad . . .  
and there are some beautiful new lyrics, fine spun, spiritual, but as concretely symbolized as the greatest realist could wish:

And through the dwindling of the light  
And clear unto the town  
Was heard the blunt, rich, huddled sound  
Of the apples dropping down.

Vachel Lindsay's "Going-to-the-Stars" is another hieroglyphically illustrated record of a sojourn in Glacier Park, this time with Mrs. Lindsay instead of Stephen Graham. There is jazz, and a long and picturesque curse on the saxophone, a political poem giving Andrew Jackson his just homage, and some unexpected touches like:

Only boys keep their cheeks dry.  
Only boys are afraid to cry.  
Men thank God for tears,  
Alone with the memory of their dead  
Alone with lost years.

That we are all tired of hearing people sing "The hours I spent with thee, dear heart" should not prejudice us against the late Robert Cameron Rogers, whose collected poems have been reissued. He wrote romantic tales — that of King David pouring out to God the water brought him by his three "mighty men" is perhaps the best known — classical vignettes, and poems of the cowboy. These and his lyrics are well done, crisp, and moving, but

the jacket writer went too far when he put Rogers on a par with Moody and Emily Dickinson.

New Verse. By Robert Bridges. Oxford University Press.  
The Selected Poems of Lizette Woodworth Reese. George H. Doran Company.  
Going-to-the-Stars. By Vachel Lindsay. D. Appleton and Company.  
The Poems of Robert Cameron Rogers. Dial Press.

## FIRST AID IN ART

By Robert Cortes Holliday

THERE are, apparently, a great many people who would like to know something about art. They go in remarkable throngs to the museums, where their faces wear an earnest expression, frequently somewhat strained. They move from one picture directly to the next with a conscientious intention of thoroughness. They pack lecture rooms there, and they enter the rapidly multiplying courses on the subject in schools and colleges. They, multitudes of them, presumably buy the books which are regularly got up for their purchase, volumes of first aid, so to say, to the appreciation of pictures and other objects of art, and purporting to lead the reader on by an "easy" and "practical" process to a full comprehension of intricate mystery. They, most people who cultivate an interest in the arts, are extremely anxious to be *right*. And, it may be observed, a great many of these people believe implicitly anything on the subject which they see in print. "See what it says" in the book.

Something ought to be done about this matter. Just what, it is not so easy to determine. A good deal is being done, of course, by way of talks at museums and through other agencies