

SARA TEASDALE

By Jessie B. Rittenhouse

FROM the outset Sara Teasdale has been one who obeyed her own impulse, influenced not at all by changing fashions but rather by changing experiences in a constantly deepening life. Her early books, "Helen of Troy", "Rivers to the Sea", and "Love Songs", were in the main the embodiment of the joy of a young poet in her first vivid contacts and realizations. To be sure, there were pensive songs and sad songs and songs of unrest, but these songs had at heart a curative joy, a healthy vitality. In them all there lurked an assurance, an inner conviction, which made them, whatever their mood, fundamentally positive and stimulating.

Indeed, as one rereads "Rivers to the Sea", the finest of Miss Teasdale's early volumes, and "Love Songs", one is instantly a thrall to that delight, that winged uplift, which true lyric poetry always gives. Even the slightest of the songs has this power to exhilarate which is the supreme test of poetry. This joy, this ecstasy of expression, must impel the poet before it can move the hearer; and Sara Teasdale's work is always born of this inner compulsion, hence its unfailing hold upon her readers.

That it is an unfailing hold is shown by the response to her new volume, "Dark of the Moon", which comes after six years of silence to show how richly in the interval her art has been maturing.

It is a well entrenched theory that the creative years of a lyric poet,

those which show new fecundity, rarely exceed a decade; that beyond this period he may sustain his poetic range but rarely transcend it. To this theory "Dark of the Moon" offers a strong refutation. In fact, between the poet of "Love Songs" and "Dark of the Moon" so great a development is apparent as to show almost a new personality. All of the qualities of the earlier work are here, but tempered, enriched, remolded. The single theme has given place to the symphonic, wrought upon a basic note of "the still, sad music of humanity". Even in the most personal experience, interblended life utters its tone, so that one hears through the voice of the poet the many voices testifying of time and change, of love and death:

When, in the gold October dusk, I saw you
 near to setting,
 Arcturus, bringer of spring,
Lord of the summer nights, leaving us now
 in autumn,
 Having no pity on our withering;

Oh then I knew at last that my own autumn
 was upon me,
 I felt it in my blood,
Restless as dwindling streams that still re-
 member
 The music of their flood.

There in the thickening dark a wind-bent
 tree above me
 Loosed its last leaves in flight —
I saw you sink and vanish, pitiless Arctu-
 rus,
 You will not stay to share our lengthen-
 ing night.

This poem, so magical in its brooding music, delaying in its very notes as one delays who contemplates the thing that is inevitable and yet arrested —



Portrait by Maud Grant-Ford

Sara Teasdale

is the work of a poet still young, as time is counted, of one whose autumn is yet distant but who feels the pre-science of change and withdrawal as Masfield felt it when, though hardly at his prime, he wrote the 'exquisite lines,

Be near me, Beauty, for the fire is dying.

It is the mood of Shelley when, yet in his twenties, he lamented,

If I were even as in my youth

and invoked the west wind as "destroyer and preserver". Just in proportion to the keenness of the passion with which a poet has felt life will be his instinctive apprehension that the waning of the passion is at hand, and among the poets of our day none is keener in feeling, more emotionally sensitive, than Sara Teasdale.

It is not love alone that calls forth in her a response so swift and compelling, but the inalienable joy of beauty, the one thing that survives though love fail and dynasties crumble. Those who read her aright will be moved by the elation of beauty, the love that is a primary passion, older than that which seeks its response in the human. Going back to the earliest songs one finds it beating in their music:

I went out on an April morning
All alone, for my heart was high,
I was a child of the shining meadow,
I was a sister of the sky.

There in the windy flood of morning
Longing lifted its weight from me,
Lost as a sob in the midst of cheering,
Swept as a sea-bird out to sea.

This is a lyric taken at random but how strong its pulses run, how it surges with the joy of living! Rarely does Sara Teasdale write a poem, whatever its theme, but it has an inner theme,

the reaching out for more of beauty, the longing for greater absorption in all the loveliness of earth:

I cannot die, who drank delight
From the cup of the crescent moon,
And hungrily as men eat bread,
Loved the scented nights of June.

The rest may die — but is there not
Some shining strange escape for me
Who sought in Beauty the bright wine
Of immortality?

Even when her specific theme is love, within it is that deeper love that has never yet been satiated.

To me, this quality in Sara Teasdale's work is all important: that joy is always quick at its heart; that eagerness of living, of understanding, even of suffering, beats so insistently in it. It is this which lifts even the songs in a minor key into the major harmony of poetry. The poet must not only accept, he must invite the thrust of pain, knowing that he is sheathed in love and invulnerable through beauty. When one reads Sara Teasdale's poetry, even though the song be sad, one is conscious of that inner valor, that affirmation, which confirms his own faith and says "Yea" to life. The poet who has resolved life into its meaning will find that all its notes blend to a rich diaphanon. It is a music not to be compassed by one singer, but each one, to whatever degree he approaches it, is lifted into rapture. It is in this sense that "the song is to the singer and comes back most to him", returning in the enrichment of joy.

Each poet has his way of approach to the realization of life, and with Sara Teasdale it has been largely through love. Perhaps the psychology of love and its evolution could not be traced more subtly than through her successive volumes. To generalize is misleading, since there is always the

exception that seems to refute the premise, but in the main one will find the volumes up to the appearance of "Flame and Shadow" to have been the demand of life for its fulfilment in love. In the earliest verse this demand overshadows all others; it is the urge of youth for its destiny and inspires in Sara Teasdale some of the most exquisite and impassioned of her songs. How one would like to quote them to show how perfectly the emotion creates its expression, how every word falls true! It is interesting also to note that while these poems have the transport, the "fine excess", of poetry, they have the instinctive restraint which holds it true to art. A lyric, if perfect, is conceived and created simultaneously. It can never be added to nor taken from. It has at once the quality of inevitability and the illusion of improvisation. Particularly is this true of the work of Sara Teasdale in her most lyrical period. Whatever the theme, its expression seems to leap into being with it and one feels that it could not have come otherwise. Just as the earlier songs voice the urge of youth for its destiny, so they lament, as youth must lament, that it is withheld. Upon this theme turn some of the loveliest of Miss Teasdale's lyrics, some of those most likely to sing on in the future, as her well known lines:

When I am dead and over me bright April
Shakes out her rain-drenched hair,
Though you should lean above me broken-
hearted,
I shall not care.

I shall have peace as leafy trees are peaceful
When rain bends down the bough,
And I shall be more silent and cold-hearted
Than you are now.

Could any mood be truer to youth
than that?

It would require a much more exact
and delicate tracing than is possible in

so brief a space as this to show how these moods of desire and reaction merge into the larger significance of love. Their foretokens are apparent in "Rivers to the Sea" and "Love Songs", and in "Flame and Shadow" they show a progressive deepening, an increasing absorption of the personal in the universal; but it is in "Dark of the Moon" that they reach the finality of vision.

Neither in "Flame and Shadow" nor in "Dark of the Moon" is love the paramount theme, but where it is the theme, so richly is it fused with all that maturer life brings as to make a complete unity of experience. One theme may be the lens through which one focuses the whole of life. Most of us have one spiritual preoccupation, one avenue of vision through which we comprehend what is given us to comprehend of eternity. With Sara Teasdale, if love has been the lens it has swept in a wide arc, an arc which subtends the whole of the circle.

Starting with the joyous certitude of "The Sussex Downs" and "August Night", keen with the zest of living, "Dark of the Moon" passes through many phases:

There will be stars over the place forever;
Though the house we loved and the
street we loved are lost,
Every time the earth circles her orbit
On the night the autumn equinox is
crossed,
Two stars we knew, poised on the peak of
midnight
Will reach their zenith; stillness will be
deep;
There will be stars over the place forever,
There will be stars forever, while we sleep.

Exquisite in its restraint and its artistry, with its music wedded to the mood, this poem is typical of the later beauty of Sara Teasdale's work, a beauty if less obviously lyrical, perhaps finer and more enduring. There is no loss of emotion, because it is tempered

by knowledge and evoked by deeper delight. The time has come to brood upon fruitions, to let go the unrealized, to readjust the dream until it embraces with complete acceptance even death.

It would be misleading to overemphasize the contemplative note in "Dark of the Moon", since it is relieved so frequently by lighter notes, but when all is said, the finest lyric poetry comes from the depths of life. The poet is reaching out for spiritual fulfilment, just as the poet of youth reaches out for physical fulfilment. Both are needed to make a balanced and beautiful body of poetry, and both have had their full expression in the work of Sara Teasdale. Beauty is never sacrificed in either, and the increasingly subtle and refined artistry, the richer music, with its nuances, which one finds in "Dark of the Moon", is achieved at no loss of the moving quality which has animated Miss Teasdale's verse from the beginning.

It may be noted also that in a period when technique has been the preoccupation of the poets, when they have gone to any length to be "different", with a mistaken idea of individualizing themselves through the strained and bizarre, Sara Teasdale has held true to the lyric norm, to simplicity, sincerity, and emotion, not thinking to hold true but doing it unconsciously as the poet does who is possessed by his genius. There has crept into poetry of late a strain of cleverness, an affectation of cynicism. Some of the finest of the lyric poets, as far as accomplishment goes, obviously write with an eye to capturing an audience by their smartness; but did these poets

ever stop to think that the immortal lyrics are not clever? There is nothing clever in

Old, unhappy, far-off things;

nothing clever in

I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more;

nothing clever in

I would I were where Helen lies,
Night and day on me she cries!

Poetry is so in earnest as to forget itself. The poet speaks to his own heart, and just in proportion as he makes his own heart his audience does the world listen. So out of every generation, out of the voluminous singing, comes the small residue of poetry. With this residue, one may well believe, will be found the winnowed songs of Sara Teasdale, those which carry at once the magic and the passion of poetry. For Miss Teasdale has inherently that most precious of all poetic gifts, magic, as her unforgettable lyric, "August Night", attests:

On a midsummer night, on a night that
was eerie with stars,
In a wood too deep for a single star to
look through,
You led down a path whose turnings you
knew in the darkness,
But the scent of the dew-dripping cedars
was all that I knew.

I drank of the darkness, I was fed with the
honey of fragrance,
I was glad of my life, the drawing of
breath was sweet;
I heard your voice, you said, "look down,
see the glow-worm!"
It was there before me, a small star
white at my feet.

We watched while it brightened as though
it were breathed on and burning,
This tiny creature moving over earth's
floor —
"*L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle,*"
You said, and no more.

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH COLLEGE

By William Louis Poteat

EVERYBODY knows that the early American colleges were Christian in origin and aim. They were avowedly established to prepare young men for the life to come or for preaching in this. Among the first rules of Harvard College, which was established in 1636, occurs this one: "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is to God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life." Nearly a century and a half later the Massachusetts Articles of the Constitution linked Harvard with the "honor of God and the advantage of the Christian religion". Fifteen ministers of Congregational churches and fifteen laymen constituted the Board of Overseers down to 1834, when ministers of all denominations became eligible.

Reverend James Blair was the founder and first president of William and Mary (1693). He was sent by the Virginia General Assembly to England for the charter. He secured royal support, but the Attorney General refused him the charter. Blair protested, "Virginians have souls to save as well as their English countrymen." "Souls!" shouted the Attorney General, "damn your souls! Plant tobacco."

Yale was founded in 1701 by ten Congregational ministers of Connecticut to the end that they might "educate ministers in their own way". They were all graduates of Harvard but they did not like the Harvard way of that period. The Harvard theology

was too loose for these conservatives and its religious influence pernicious.

Forty five years later Princeton came on, founded by the Synod of New York. Nearly all of its first students were preparing for the Presbyterian ministry. King's College (Columbia) followed in 1754, whose Letters Patent declared its objects to be "to lead students from the study of Nature to the knowledge of themselves and of the God of Nature, and their duty to Him, themselves, and one another, and everything that may contribute to their true happiness both here and hereafter". Then came Brown (1764) by the cooperation of the Baptists of the entire country, the first American college without religious tests. Then Dartmouth (1769) "for the spread of the Redeemer's Kingdom".

With the exception of the University of Pennsylvania (1740), the story is much the same for all the educational establishments before the Revolution. After the Revolution there was some break up of the old order as the result of the war and the invasion of French influence. It was not long before both professors and students in many colleges sat in the seat of the scornful. Skepticism was the badge of respectability. Citizenship, a serious and virtuous citizenship indeed, supplanted religion as the aim of higher education. Thomas Jefferson, for example, in the William and Mary curriculum substituted the chair of law and police for the chair of divinity.