

PRELUDE

by Conrad Aiken

I

All this is nothing: all that we said is nothing:
 Your eyes, your hair, are nothing, your grief, your tears,—
 Your laughter too, that filled the room with laughter,
 And your quick step, as quickly gone as come;
 Nothing, nothing, as goldenrod is nothing,
 Withered in season, and from it gone the web,
 And the poor spider gone, and all his flies.
 What's goldenrod to Deneb, that bright star?
 What means the spider to the moon? what means
 This lecherous human, with his loves and griefs,
 To such rank vegetation as Venus knows,
 Or the cold chasms of snow that mantle Mars?
 Nothing: they do not know us. We dispense
 With all authority; and what we are,
 Or what we have, are what we have and are
 In our own godhead, and in that alone.

II

And all is meaningless? . . . Or all means nothing?
 Your hand is but a claw for clutching food,
 Food for the heart or belly? . . . Your two eyes
 But sharpened senses for the just perception

Of this? . . . So come we to our mother chaos.
But there is,—so you tell me,—music, too:
Music and beauty, and the love of love,
Music and love and beauty, and all that.
There is this moment, this unsubstantial moment,
Which has a substance deep as God is deep:
Deeper, in fact, than thought of God can be.
You there, I here,—the rug of wool between us,
Four pictures on the wall, a room, a house,
Water in pipes, brought from the hills for us,
An ash-tray, and a table, and three chairs:
All this devised for man by man; all this,
And our communion through them, and our speech.
You there, I here, who half-perceive each other. . . .

III

Woman, the thing is madness, we are mad.
You are not Helen, nor I Solomon.
Bathsheba you are not, nor am I Troy.

THE FACSIMILE TEXT SOCIETY

by Robert Shafer

THE organization of a society "for the reproduction of rare printed texts and manuscripts" was announced at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America in December, 1929. Later a prospectus (now in its second edition) was issued, which explains fully the organization and program of the Society. Its tutelary genius is Professor Frank A. Patterson of Columbia University, who has an executive committee to assist him in carrying on the proposed work, and also a council, to whose members "the executive committee may appeal for general advice and assistance". There are in addition, at present, thirteen program committees, engaged presumably in selecting texts for reproduction. The mechanical work has been entrusted to the National Process Company of New York. The Society engages to produce accurate facsimiles from rotographs—*i.e.*, photographic copies—by the offset process, which is said to be as faithful to the original pages as collotype—at least for the purpose of "securing typographical details". The whole field of works useful to scholars, "without limitation as to the period or language of the original text", has been pre-empted, with the single exception of Elizabethan drama. This exception was made at the request of the Malone Society, which for nearly twenty-five years has been engaged in reproducing Elizabethan dramatic texts. "When one considers", the author of the prospectus says, "the large number of

important texts that are unique or exist in very few copies and remembers also that many of the essential modern tools of scholarship are practically unprocurable, the work of the Society appears almost limitless." For the present, this work will be confined to five series, whose titles, however, are comprehensive: Literature and Language; History; Philosophy; History of Science; and Economics, Political and Social Science. The only qualification for membership in the Society is ability to pay the dues (\$5.00 the year), and anyone, whether a member or not, may purchase its publications. The chief advantage afforded by membership is the privilege of securing publications at a substantial discount whenever one's purchases amount to more than \$5.00 in any single year—purchases up to this amount being debited against the dues.

By the end of 1930, the Society had obtained 563 members—a surprisingly large number—and had published eight volumes. It is felt that readers of *THE BOOKMAN* should know of its existence and work, and that many of them will give it a hearty welcome and active support. It deserves both, because its potential importance is great, though its continuance and success depend entirely upon its becoming known promptly to the right persons, and upon their giving it something more substantial than their passive approval. And though, as is indicated above, the advantage of membership is likely