

than a nickel-plated romance like *The Strolling Saint*.

My lament in reading *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* is not that it is a romance, but that it is so excessively unimportant. It is simply one more mechanical tale of mystery, crime, and a beleaguered damozel. The red-headed villain is finally chucked out of the window, like the sly butler in *The Green Goddess*.

By the way, why do we say black-haired, brown-haired, yellow-haired, and red-headed?

When I was a child it was considered a misfortune to have red hair. A boy, if so handicapped, had to demonstrate his right to live with his fists; a girl suffered from daily insults, in which the word "carrots" was the least offensive. Later, owing perhaps to various novelists, red hair lost its sting, became often, indeed, an enviable possession. I hope that the probable popularity of this wild yarn will not bring the redheads back into opprobrium.

Of course this book is well written; its author is a literary artist. The opening chapters are exceedingly fine; I find them more interesting than the later developments of the plot. It is a story of villainy, insanity, torture, and horror; but I did not care for it, and awaited the outcome with complacency.

A man who has shown magnificent ability in *The Cathedral* and in *The Old Ladies* ought not to publish a triviality like this. Let the second-raters write the thrillers; they have their day and cease to be. But Mr. Walpole, with a well-earned and hard-won place among the leading writers of our time, should run his race unhindered by excess baggage. He insists that this story is "readable"; I found it not nearly so readable as *The Old Ladies*.

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS.

### "The Higher the Fewer"

DIONYSUS IN DOUBT, Edwin Arlington Robinson. (Macmillan, \$1.75.)

COLLECTED POEMS OF H. D. (Boni & Liveright, \$2.50.)

CARAVAN, Witter Bynner. (Knopf, \$1.50.)

FOR THE MORNING, James Russell McCarthy. (Doubleday, Page, \$1.75.)

MIRRORS, Margaret Todd Ritter. (Macmillan, \$1.25.)

SLOW SMOKE, Lew Sarett. (Holt, \$2.00.)

The higher the altitude, the fewer the venturers. Which is as true symbolically as it is geographically. Applied to poetry it has a particular significance, a definiteness that is proved by every publisher's catalogue, and is emphasized by the six volumes at hand. The first two overtop the others even as they loom above all this season's collections of verse. Edwin Arlington Robinson and H. D. dwell upon stark eminences though their peaks belong to separate ranges. Robinson's *Dionysus in Doubt* has already provoked a controversial tempest because of its acidulous title-poem and the more vitriolic *réplique*, "Demos and Dionysus", which concludes the volume. There are those who concede that both poems are excellent anti-Prohibition tracts but on the whole, rather pedestrian verse; others maintain that, though the poetry is outspoken enough, its value as propaganda is negligible. The present reviewer finds that the pair combine to make one of the most biting arraignments of our standardized civilization ever printed, disguised as a scornful condemnation of the Eighteenth Amendment, an attack which is as Robinsonian (in the best sense) as "The Man Against the Sky". The new volume is further distinguished by two long psychological studies which will take their places well to the front in that great gallery of Rembrandt-like portraits in which are "Miniver Cheevy", "Flammende", "The Gift of God", and "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford". No psycho-analytical poet has ever traced, — or, for that matter, will ever delineate, — a more delicate study of cross-play and frustration than "Mortmain"; no dramatic dialogue has ever found lines more probing than "Genevieve and Alexandra."

But, even were all these omitted from Robinson's latest offering, the eighteen sonnets which adroitly divide the volume in three sections would make it one of its author's most admirable works. Several of these sonnets are already famous. "The Sheaves", an unusually picturesque evocation, has been quoted so often that the reader may be led to underrate

"Haunted House" in which a ghostly drama is projected into fourteen lines; "Karma", with its whiplash satire; "Reunion", that cadence of frustration, and the mordantly witty "New England", which I quote:

Here where the wind is always north-north-east  
And children learn to walk on frozen toes,  
Wonder begets an envy of all those  
Who boil elsewhere with such a lyric yeast  
Of love that you will hear them at a feast  
Where demons would appeal for some repose,  
Still clamoring where the chalice overflows  
And crying wildest who have drunk the least.

Passion is here a soilure of the wits,  
We're told, and Love a cross for them to bear;  
Joy shivers in the corner where she knits  
And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,  
Cheerful as when she tortured into fits  
The first cat that was ever killed by Care.

In assembling H. D.'s three slender volumes and adding some of her most recent work, the publishers have presented one of the most important poets of the period in one remarkable collection. Though H. D. has been writing since the days when she was recognized as the only true Imagist, she has not produced more than an ordinary bookful of poems, — "few indeed," as Meleager said of Sappho, "but those roses." The quotation is not inappropriate, for H. D. recalls Sappho not only in her stripped imagery, her love of roses and bitter-sweets, but in her passion for perfection. So much has been written of H. D.'s form and her technique, so many tributes rendered to her cool clarity, her extraordinary condensation, the rare and subtle music of her shifting vowels, that one is likely to forget the poignance which is at the very core of this poet's suffering and ecstasy. Every page bears witness to her inevitable beauty; it is, perhaps, most pronounced in the lyrical "Holy Satyr", the tearing "Mid-day", the almost playful "Heliodora" and that luminous elegy which ends:

Nor word nor touch nor sight  
Of lover, you  
Shall long through the night but for this:  
The roll of the full tide to cover you  
Without question,  
Without kiss.

One of the most modern among contemporary poets, she has risen far above the boundaries of any school or movement; her work, as I have written elsewhere, discloses a poet responsive to pain as well

as to effects of light, a woman aroused by loveliness, shocked by brutality, affected by all those manifestations which are too old to be timely, too recurrent to be ancient.

It is a decided decline to the ledge occupied by Witter Bynner. Bynner, to do him justice, has breathed more rarefied air than arises from the pages of CARAVAN. He is, by nature, a gallant mountain climber, even though he chooses broad paths and comfortable gradients. But there is something about his stride, something about his carriage that is graceful without being affected, half-heroic without theatrical gesticulation. "Pallor" is, perhaps, the most winning poem in this volume; "The Old Men and the Young Men" the most defiant; "A Son Of Earth" (which I reprint) the most characteristic:

I look away to the valley,  
Though darkness comes there soon,  
And though the moon has risen,  
I look away from the moon.

Is it the ache of boyhood,  
Dreaming among the dews,  
Or the frozen breadths of wisdom  
That a son of earth would choose?

Another step, or rather a whole flight, down brings us to John Russell McCarthy's *FOR THE MORNING* and Margaret Tod Ritter's *MIRRORS*. The sincerity and what might be called the poetic eagerness of both is evident. Equally evident is that dilution of ecstasy in a plethora of pretty words, that substitution of neatness for grandeur which is the mark of the minor poet. It should be said at once that no sneer is intended; the minor poet suffers the same pangs and thrills with the same beauty that incites the major poet. Both aspire to the heights. But whereas the latter, climbing uncharted tracks or plotting his own trail, wins to the summits, the weaker singer, too timorous to attempt uncertain paths, is content with vicarious adventures, — and remains, pathetically dreaming of ascent, in a bog of generalities. This is exactly what Miss Ritter does. She has seen the white peaks; sometimes, she advances toward the dangerous slopes. But, after a breathless moment, she is glad to fall back to the lower levels, to the lukewarm air of familiar poeticisms, to "the immortal pipes of Pan", "Spring's enchantment",

Beauty's "lyric charm and potent ecstasy". Mr. McCarthy, less mannered than Miss Ritter, is also less interesting. He can, at infrequent intervals, stir the reader with "Come Down, Walt Whitman!" and "Pelican" but far too much of his volume is in this key:

The high hills for the young feet,  
The stream for me and you —  
And far the fair green meadowlands  
Dream through the wonder-blue!

Lew Sarett has been forging upward ever since his *Many, Many Moons*. In *SLOW SMOKE* he emerges on a clear space which, if not a plateau, is higher than any previously attained by him. His first two volumes were distinctly if not predominantly Indian-flavored; the new book reflects Sarett's more general experiences as guide and forest ranger. There is wind and smoke in these adventurous pages; such poems as "Feud", "Tamarack Blue", and the much quoted "To a Wild Goose over Decoys" are rugged but not rough, compassionate but seldom sentimental. "The loam and lingo" to quote Carl Sandburg, "the sand and syllables of North America are here." Sarett has made his material a part of himself; it is to be hoped that, with another volume, his idiom will be equally his own.

LOUIS UNTERMEYER.

## Porgy

The appearance last year of Julia Peterkin's *Green Thursday* with its simple, warmly human plantation Negroes, marked a change of the current in the handling of Negro themes which will define itself even more sharply as the literature of the South and of the Negro matures. It revealed a new and sudden appreciation of the artistic importance of this neglected wealth of folk life, which is further evidenced in the present industry to collect and record those sparkling gems of Negro folk song and poetry scattered and half buried beneath the accumulating layers of education and sophistication.

Du Bose Heyward's *Porgy* (Doran, \$2.00) is a finished string of these gems, flung with a grave rapture across the white bosom of the South. Like Julia Peterkin, he is a native of South Carolina, but more than this, he is a poet whose

reputation extends quite beyond the limits of his State. *Porgy* is a story of Negro life in Catfish Row, the black quarter of romantic old Charleston, with two central characters, — Porgy, a shrewd, crippled beggar endowed with a dull, groping sense of beauty, and Bess, a man's woman, who though weak in the flesh, shows, beneath a crust of worldly wisdom, finer feelings and a redeeming sense of decency and honor. There is a charm about this wise and practised old mendicant, who emerged daily from the decayed splendor and noisy intimacy of Catfish Row in his goat-drawn cart, to sit in rapt and powerful silence by the path of tender-hearted pedestrians. The ways of the white folks he knew, and he answered their sallies of generosity with the same inscrutable placidity that he met their abuses. At night his stagnant blood could dance with the life of the Row. Dice, "happy dust", strong and irascible wharfmen, murder, sorrow and song, "conjuration" and superstition, made up the life of the Row. Porgy, the pitied cripple, could love; and Bess, of the strong mind but weaker flesh, could worship a good heart. The odd alliance provides the theme of the story which ends in tragedy. Characters are set into the broader pattern of Charleston, mellow and drowsy in its old age, the Charleston of imposing old mansions with deep French windows, high-ceilinged ball rooms, Grecian friezes, and delicate scroll work; wharves with cotton, and the swinging bronze shoulders of stevedores, and lusty, reckless fishermen.

Mr. Heyward, though handling his characters with a discernible honesty, is ever conscious of his distance from them, — a distance which permits a view of this absorbing panorama while withholding the thoughts behind. He has shown wisdom in selecting types of Negroes most accessible to the white person. There is a conscious effort to avoid generalization. Occasionally, however, he lapses into such telltale comments as, for example, his observation that a "look of resolution" on the face of a Negro is rare. There is humor but no fun-poking. Porgy, fleeing in his goat-cart from the arm of the law, makes a ridiculous picture, but there is a tenderness mingled with it which preserves it from the *opera bouffe* of Mr. Cohen. Humor and an ominous serious-