

THE "DISTINCTIVE" POEMS OF 1909

THE other day it was stated somewhere that, in spite of frequent assertions to the contrary, there is an audience for minor poetry. The audience is made up, so the cynic remarked, of minor poets. If this is the fact, then the large public are neglecting the riches set before them, for Mr. William Stanley Braithwaite finds that in six leading American magazines there appeared during 1909 a total of 317 poems, and no less than 82 of these he terms "distinctive"—that is, "they possess a quality of art and a value of substance that ought to win them something more than an ephemeral existence." Here is a tolerable volume that seems to suggest that the muse at least is not dead or sleeping. The magazines where the verse appeared are *The Atlantic*, *Century*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *McClure's*, and *Lippincott's*.

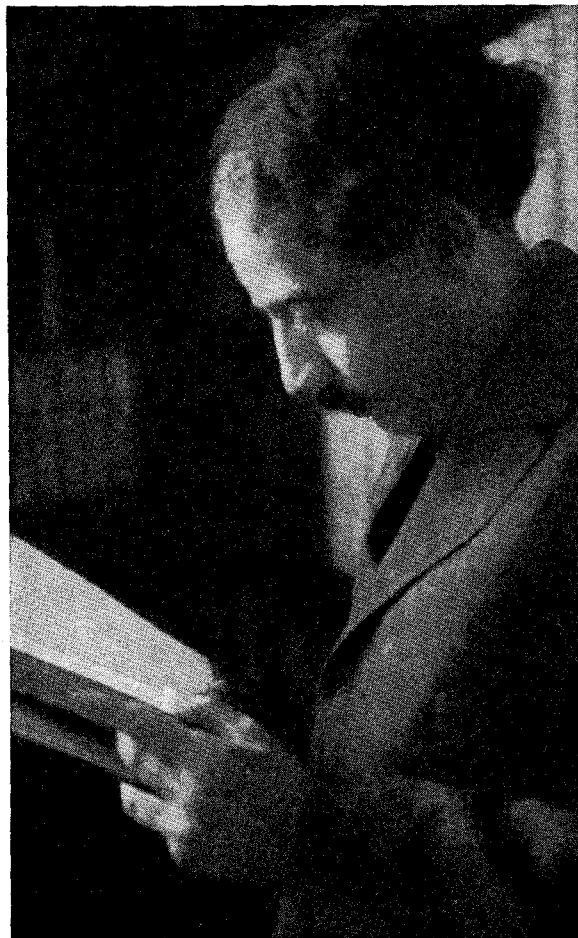
The poets were some of them of established reputation, but, we are told, "there are also a number of names wholly new and unknown to me, and should be noted by discriminating lovers of verse for what they might accomplish in the future to the added splendor of our poetic achievement." Mr. Braithwaite, who writes in the *Boston Transcript* (February 5), states that "*The Atlantic* published a total of 44 poems, of which 18 possess distinction; *Century*, total 63, 18 of distinction; *Harper's*, total 67, 11 of distinction; *Scribner's*, total 46, 14 of distinction; *McClure's* 45, 16 of distinction; *Lippincott's*, total 52, 5 of distinction." From this material he chooses 42 titles to represent what he calls "a little anthology of magazine verse for 1909." Mr. Braithwaite, himself a poet, has performed this task of selection annually since 1905, barring 1908. "However much of the personal equation may have dominated the selection," he observes, "there can be no fault found, in substitution by other hands, on the score of workmanship." He asserts that he has "taken the poet's point of view and accepted his value of the theme dealt with. The question was, how vital and compelling did he make it? We read:

"The first test was the sense of pleasure the poem communicated; then to discover the secret or the meaning of the pleasure felt; and in doing so to realize how much richer I became in a knowledge of the purpose of life by reason of the poem's message. One will see that the success or failure in this depends upon the poet shaping his substance to the highest perfection of an art whose messengers are truth and beauty. The titles and their authors for especial honor are these: 'The Man Who Came,' Edwin Arlington Robinson; 'In the Oasis,' George Edward Woodberry; 'The Fortune-Teller,' Josephine Preston Peabody; 'For a Dead Lady,' Edwin Arlington Robinson; 'Ancestral Dwellings,' Henry Van Dyke; 'Lines to a Hermit-Thrush,' Olive Tilford Dargan; 'The Italian Bootblack,' George H. Bottome; 'Venice,' Arthur Symons; 'At the Making of Man,' Bliss Carman; 'The Trees,' Josephine Preston Peabody; 'In a Sweat-Shop,' Richard Burton; 'Factory Children,' Richard Burton; 'Saturday Night,' James Oppenheim; 'Noon,' Frederic Manning; 'Learn of the Earth,' Mrs. Schuyler Van Rennselaer; 'Ogrin the Hermit,' Edith Wharton; 'Off the Irish Coast,' Cale Young Rice; 'My April Lady,' Henry Van Dyke; 'A Lover's Envy,' Henry Van Dyke; 'Burns,' Charles D. Stewart; 'A Prayer for Motherhood,' Anon.; 'Proserpine,' George Edward Woodberry; 'Ritual for Marriage,' Ridgely Torrence; 'Ritual for Birth and Naming,' Ridgely Torrence; 'The Song of the Stone-Wall,' Helen Keller; 'A Christmas Carol,' Percy MacKaye; 'Lovers,' Richard Le Gallienne; 'Indian-Pipe,' Florence Earle Coates; 'Song of the Earthlings,' Richard Burton; 'Dove's Nest,' Joseph Russell Taylor; 'Sunlight,' Joseph Russell Taylor; 'The Ice of the North,' Margaret Ridgely Partridge; 'To Each His Own,' Margaret Root Garvin; 'The Builders,' Richard Kirk; 'Grandmither, Think Not I Forget,' Willa Sibert Cather; 'The Pipes o' Gordon's Men,' J. Scott Glasgow; 'The Song of the Vine,' Herbert Trench; 'The Castle of the Order of Christ,' Florence Wilkinson; 'If I Have Kept My Heart Sweet,' Mildred McNeal Sweeney; 'Song,' Dollie Radford; 'The Illuminated Cantic,' Florence Wilkinson; 'London Roses,' Willa Sibert Cather.

"Of these poems *The Atlantic* published 10; *Century*, 10; *McClure's*, 8; *Scribner's*, 6; *Harper's*, 6; and *Lippincott's*, 2."

People, so Mr. Braithwaite surmises, "know contemporary poetry only through the magazines," and very few of these, he thinks, "form any deliberate judgment of its character as a whole." He goes on:

"This large majority may, doubtless do, have their favorite masters, but are ignorant, from prejudice I think, of contemporary



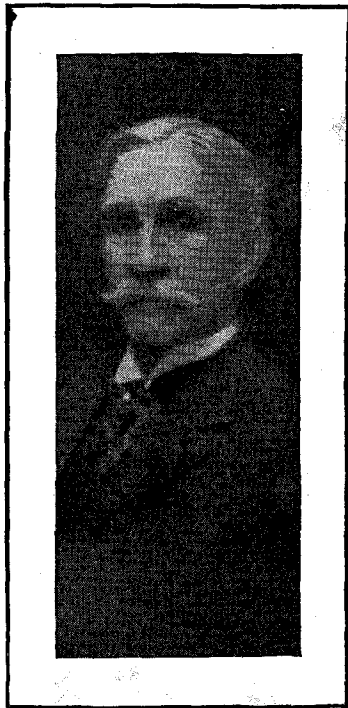
WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE,

Who asks, "Why declare we are barren of poetry to-day because no figure elects to stand out from the many who are really doing incomparable things?"

work worthy of the great poets they love. Perhaps the professional critics help them to this false impression. Mr. Sidney Low, writing recently in an English periodical, laments the lack of an English poet of the first order since the passing of Swinburne; explaining at the same time why it is impossible, because of the conditions of life and universal education, for great poetry to be written to-day. Yet Mr. Robert Bridges, metaphorically speaking, is right under his nose at Oxford—too close under his nose for him to see how big he is, as Keats was too close under Gifford's nose for that tyrannic pigmy to see how big was the author of 'Endymion.' I don't see why we should demand to-day that one or two lofty, isolated figures should stand above all others in poetic utterance to convince us that poetry is a vital and beautiful reality in our common existence. The one-man dominance in any branch of human activity is a thing of the past. Shakespeare ruled Elizabethan literature, Milton the Puritan and Caroline periods, Dryden the Restoration, Pope the Queen Anne; but, so long, almost, as a hundred years ago, who could say whether Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, or Scott succeeded to the dictatorship of Johnson in English letters? We still dispute whether Tennyson or Browning, Rossetti or Swinburne was the scepter-bearer of the Victorian epoch. Then why declare we are barren of poetry to-day because no figure elects to stand out from the many who are really doing incomparable things?"

COLLEGE DEMOCRACY THREATENED

OUR college life, according to current comment, is threatened by a subtle danger. It is not the invasion of luxury, explains an editorial writer in the New York *Evening Post*, but the spirit of caste that attaches itself to luxury. A concrete instance is noted in the controversy raging at Princeton over a would-be donor's withdrawal of a gift of half a million dollars originally intended to forward a project



HENRY HOLT,

Who thinks the publishing of *belles-lettres* "has got to be conducted as a profession or there is no money in it."

for a graduate school. The plans for this school seemed to one element, headed by President Wilson, to foster exclusiveness and a lack of unification with the undergraduate machinery, as the proposed location was about a mile distant from the college campus. Dean West, who heads the faction that favored the proposed plan, sees the collapse of a project upon which he has worked since 1904. "If this were an affair that concerned Princeton alone, it would be important," says the writer in *The Evening Post*, "but not nearly so important as it appears when we reflect that the same question is troubling college authorities all over the country." How to resist the threatening invasion and "how to preserve that democratic mingling of

young men which many still think of as the best thing that college life has to give them—these are problems vexing professors and presidents from East to West." We read further: "Yale has, in essence, the same question to meet as Princeton, and so has Harvard. Indeed, President Lowell's plan for dormitories in Cambridge, in which at least all freshmen shall be compelled to reside, might almost be taken as an echo of President Wilson's plea for the 'quad' system at Princeton. The reasoning is much the same in both cases. Indeed, President Lowell's inaugural expressly cited Dr. Wilson's 'luminous Phi Beta Kappa oration,' in which he had dwelt upon 'the chasm that has opened between college studies and college life.' Dr. Lowell assented to the view that 'daily association with other young men whose minds are alert is in itself a large part of a liberal education.' This is what men mean when they speak of keeping democracy alive in the colleges.

"It is said, we know, that the introduction of 'rich men's dormitories' and luxurious clubs, to which only the sons of the wealthy can belong, does not really cut into the old democratic spirit. There remain the rubbing of elbows in the classroom, and the free contact in college meetings, debating-societies, and the like. But we are not saying that nothing remains, only that there is danger of something being taken away. Normal college life is probably the nearest approach to a pure democracy that we have—meaning by that a society in which a man is ranked strictly according to his talents and his character, with all social accidents put one side. Anything which impairs that natural matching of man against man, with the resulting moral judgments all the while being formed, would be a fearful blow at the college ideal. The whole academic life would suffer, but most of all would suffer, in our opinion, the very boys whom foolish parents or weak instructors allow to find cushioned retreats whence they may escape from the rough but wholesome friction with their fellows. The chief victims of the destruction of college democracy would be the college aristocrats. They would have lost what they can gain in no other way, and would go through life morally maimed. The possession of money

may be a great advantage, but if it is used to shield a young man from the tonic criticism of his kind, and to take him out of the field of equal and honorable striving, it is a great curse. A sound philosophy is implied in the old saying of the Oxford bargeman in a student fight: 'I likes thumping a lord.' It is good for the commonalty when rich noblemen take pot luck with it, and it is also good for the noblemen. Thumper and thumpee alike benefit."

A PUBLISHER'S PESSIMISM

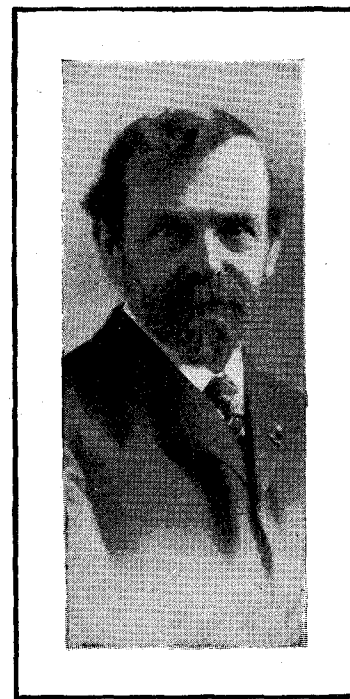
TO one who has reached "Pier 70" the publishing-world of to-day seems to loom less in the intellectual firmament than it did forty-five years ago. Publishers' fortunes, says Mr. Henry Holt, were then relatively much larger. They have since, he thinks, "stood at the same level or declined, while fortunes from other sources have enormously advanced, and men seem now to command an influence by brute force of dollars which then was more readily conceded to character and high tastes." Mr. Holt, in writing at the request of *The Publishers' Weekly* (New York) some impressions of the past and the present, is not fearful to praise the long ago at the expense of to-day. We get some insight into the changed methods of business through these reminiscences. He says:

"All those old publishers—Putnam, Appleton, Harper, and Scribner—were incapable of petty or ostentatious things, and were much more inclined to friendly cooperation and mutual concession than to barbarous competition. The spectacle of a crowd of other men making fools of themselves exercised upon them no temptation to do as the herd did. No one of them, or of a few more, would go for another's author any more than for his watch; or, if he had got entangled with another's author through some periodical or other outside right, would no more hold on to him than to the watch if the guard had got caught on a button. They were wonderfully kind to me as a young fellow, and their kindness and example have been of inestimable value all my life. The idea of any knowledge that I might glean from them being used in rivalry against them, was too small for any of them to think of. In fact, any notion of the contemptible kinds of business rivalry was too petty to find a place in their minds.

"Those men were born in a less blatant, less extravagant, and therefore less competitive age. And yet I am not sure that it was not an age of greater elegance as well as of greater dignity and character."

As he looks "toward the setting sun," Mr. Holt declares, he "is not impressed that the horizon is in any way crowded by worthy successors to the publishers of a generation ago." And the reason for this he finds in the passage of the International Copyright Law. This law, he observes, has enabled America to find herself in literature much more completely than before, because it reduced the vogue of the English novelist and paved the way for the American. The rights of each publisher are better defined by law, but there is developed a new kind of buccaneering that the law can not be framed to meet. Mr. Holt expands on this phase:

"Now that the respect for so many publishing-rights is enforced



GEORGE HAVEN PUTNAM,

One of our highest authorities on the International Copyright Law "which has enabled America to find herself in literature."