

## BOOKS ABROAD

Voices of the Stones, by Æ. London and New York: Macmillan, 1925. \$1.25.

[Robert Graves in the *Irish Statesman*]

It must always be an embarrassment to the editor of a literary journal when he publishes a novel or a book of verse and the assistant editor asks, 'Who is to review your book, sir, in our journal?' For even the discreetest praise by a colleague will provoke jealousy among subscribers ('Lord, what a clique it is!'), and to omit a review altogether looks even worse.

The editor of the *Irish Statesman* has taken an unusual course. Perhaps paying a debt to the past, to a time when, as a young poet not yet accepted by the pundits, he came in for a good deal of critical censure without chance of revenge, he has sent his new poems to me, a stranger whom recently he exasperated by an uncomplimentary notice of my verse.

Now I should have no hesitation in returning the slap if I thought as little of Æ's verse as he did of that particular piece of mine, but fortunately for all concerned I have great admiration for it. To salve my self-respect I will suggest that though expatriated permanently from Ireland since I learned to walk, with the unhappy exception of six weeks' garrison duty at Limerick with a Welsh regiment, I am still Irishman enough to get something of the depth and intensity of Æ's poetry; whereas Æ is not, and probably never will be, good enough Englishman to get at what I have recently been doing.

The first impression I get is the great healthiness of the verse as verse, the poise, balance, and strength of it: on the mere technical side, his capacity for getting the right verse-unit for the thought, for carrying the argument across the stanzas without spilling or stopping; his concealed use of alliteration, one of the most happy poetic arts; his variation of rhythm within a fixed metre without forcing or virtuosity; his control of *texture*, the relations, that is, of vowels and consonants considered as mere sound, the rarest of all technical accomplishments.

The development of Æ's poetry through these many years suggests a man sensitive and visionary in temperament who has with difficulty made himself a man of affairs. There has been a great addition of strength both in the thought and technique with little loss of sensitivity, and this can only mean that he has not let his practical affairs run counter to his visions. On the other

hand, there is a heavy line drawn between the practical life and the poetic life; complementary to each other, they must not trespass. Æ's poetic method is sternly idealistic; it allows nothing to the errors, weaknesses, and stupidities with which practical life is strewn. The eagle of poetry must always fly high, he must never descend to hawk for flies or let his tail-feathers trail in the dirt.

[*The Nation and the Athenæum*]

If a poet lives in this degenerate and ugly age, when the old gods are dead, or 'have taken alien shapes upon them,' when all things

Since Eden, bird and beast and fin, have strayed from their pristine beauty, which is found preserved only in stocks and stones, what is he to do? Is he to sell his lyre and his soul, and go out into the world which he hates, or is he rather to haunt out-of-the-way places where faint scents of Eden still hang in the air, and retire as much as he can into the fantastic world of his imagination, which is valuable just because it is so different from everything outside? Irish poets in particular are given to this solution of the difficulty. Æ, however, differs from many others in that he is completely happy with the solution he has adopted. He feels that a world in which the only beautiful things are stories and dreams is, after all, but a poor creation, and — in his later even more than in his earlier poems — he is haunted by a sense of helpless bewilderment: —

My wisdom crumbles,  
I am as a lone child.  
Oh, had I the heart now,  
My weeping were wild.

My palace dwindles  
Thin into air:  
The Ancient Darkness  
Is everywhere.

But the heart is gone  
That could understand,  
And the child is dead  
That had taken its hand.

It is when he is expressing such feelings as these that Æ is at his best. In his other mood, when he has shut himself up in his daydreams, he writes delicate, well-worded poems, but they are too unsubstantial to be satisfying. The symbolism is clear, but the imagery is sometimes dis-

jointed and confused. He lacks, moreover, the vigor and conviction of the best mystical poets. His poetry would have been greater had he been either less or more of a mystic, instead of living between two spheres, and making his songs 'half from the hidden world and half from this.' And is this world so hopelessly ugly? Some younger poets would perhaps disagree with Æ on this point; but, even if they consider him old-fashioned in that respect, they have still to learn from him that symbolism in poetry is not inevitably obscure.

*Erinnerungen eines Junkers*, by Hellmut von Gerlach. Berlin: Die Welt am Montag Verlag, 1925. 2 marks.

[*Neues Wiener Tagblatt*]

A SLENDER little book by a distinguished German student of politics lies before us. In a tone of gentle banter the author causes personalities of every party and every tendency, ranging all the way from William II to Friedrich Engels and August Bebel, to pass before his reader. Gerlach, to be sure, does not wish it to be thought that he has written this little book as an apology, and yet the reader gets the impression that the author wishes friends and foes alike to know why he, a Silesian Junker from the conservative stronghold of the extreme Right, has turned toward the Left, toward democracy and toward pacifism. For Hellmut von Gerlach was a genuine Junker only by descent. His ideal, even as a boy, was his great-grandfather on his mother's side, a bourgeois landed proprietor, who by his own ability had made his way from an agricultural laborer to the rank of landowner and country doctor of the University, but who declined the patent of nobility that was offered him.

Hellmut von Gerlach spent the years of his boyhood at his father's castle, and grew up like the other boys of his rank, riding, fishing, and hunting. One of his friends maintains that his political evolution is in a large part determined by the fact that he grew up in the one part of Prussia where the earnings of the laboring class were lowest. The comfortable living of the castle, contrasted with the terrible living-conditions of

the agricultural laborers and the whole social degradation of this class, which expressed itself in humility toward even the children of the nobility, roused a critical spirit in him even at the tender age of nine. He felt ashamed when, at the Christmas festivals, old men and women came to kiss his hands. Another great influence over him was a tutor, Marquis de Bernard, who had once belonged to the democratic students' association, the Burschenschaft, and had been condemned, first to death, then to imprisonment for life. But Gerlach's pious mother did not long endure the presence in the house of this atheistic revolutionist.

Gerlach has much that is interesting to tell of the first eighteen years of his life in the so-called 'Golden District of Conservatism.' He describes the right of patronage which the squirearchy had over church and school, in which, for example, the fact that a man was a good player of skat was a better recommendation for a clerical position than his professional attainments.

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#### BOOKS MENTIONED

- PROUST, MARCEL. *Du Côté de chez Swann*. Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française. 10 fr.
- PROUST, MARCEL. *À l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*. (Prix Goncourt, 1919.) Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française. 12 fr. 50 c.
- PROUST, MARCEL. *Le Côté de Guermantes, I*. Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française. 10 fr.
- PROUST, MARCEL. *Le Côté de Guermantes, II; Sodome et Gomorrhe, I* (1 vol.). Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française. 22 fr. 50 c.
- PROUST, MARCEL. *Swann's Way (Du Côté de chez Swann)*. Translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2 vols., 1922. \$5.00.
- PROUST, MARCEL. *Within a Budding Grove (À l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs)*. Translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff. New York: Thomas Seltzer, 2 vols., 1925. \$5.00.
- PROUST, MARCEL. *The Guermantes Way (Le Côté de Guermantes)*. Translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff. New York: Thomas Seltzer, 2 vols., 1925. \$6.00.



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