

Books

Effects in Verse

A Prophet of Joy. By Gamaliel Bradford. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Blood of Things. A Second Book of Free Forms. By Alfred Kreymborg. Nicholas L. Brown.

The New Adam. By Louis Untermeyer. Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

In April Once. By William Alexander Percy. Yale University Press.

Moons of Grandeur. A Book of Poems. By William Rose Benét. George H. Doran Company.

Heavens and Earth. A Book of Poems. By Stephen Vincent Benét. Henry Holt and Company.

The House of Dust. A Symphony. By Conrad Aiken. The Four Seas Company.

Poems. By Haniel Long. Moffat, Yard and Company.

October, and Other Poems; With Occasional Verses on the War. By Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Birds, and Other Poems. By J. C. Squire. George H. Doran Company.

Neighbours. By Wilfrid Wilson Gibson. The Macmillan Company.

MR. BRADFORD'S poem is a parable of society's salvation in six books and 567 "Don Juan" stanzas. The prophet-hero, a young, angelic Quixote of a millionaire, proposes as a road to freedom not anarchism or socialism or syndicalism but sheer golden joy and the irrepressible grace of good nature. His is the old story of regeneration (practical union-leaders would call it being bored) from within. He dances through the world preaching soft, pure joy in the hardest of places—prayer meetings, business houses, political rostrums, socialist and anarchist conventions, and labor wars—but is everywhere repulsed for a meddling fool and is finally trampled to death under a strikers' mob which he has tried to melt with his sunshine. Thus the butterfly flutters into the mouth of the threshing machine. Mr. Bradford consents to the catastrophe as natural, but implies that the future will witness butterflies coming in such profusion that they will choke the threshing machine and cover its whole frame with a heap of beauty. He is hardly convincing on that point, since the genius of joy which he invokes is incorrigibly trivial. He takes pains to show what it is that he is not talking about—Christian Science, Sunday school morality, silly altruism—but we are never sure what it is that he is talking about, and never sure that his is not the nambiest-pambiest of palliatives. His stanzas are occasionally merry, but most of the time they bear a heavy burden of self-conscious rhyme.

Mr. Kreymborg is burdened neither with rhyme nor with reason. He is as incapable of expressing a theory about society as he is of composing a "Don Juan" stanza. He may indeed have in his possession the one idea needful for the salvation of us all; but we shall never get it out of him. Nine-tenths of "Blood of Things" is unintelligible, or if intelligible is irrelevant to any human concern. The one-tenth which is intelligible and relevant is diffuse to the point of evaporation. Vers libre was invented, or at least has been accepted, as a means whereby poets might avoid having to use words which they did not want to use; in the hands of Mr. Kreymborg and others it becomes the excuse for swarms of words which no one wants to read. Mr. Kreymborg is encouraged by his particular kind of free verse in a habit of reckless ratiocination. He has a passion for expressing things forward and backward, up and down, and from side to side. His effect is not the effect of thought, or even of the garment of thought; it is the effect of the garment of thought unraveled, strung out into ungainly, kinked threads of desperate discourse. Here is precisianism without preciseness; here is the mathematics of a March hare. Here

is the way not to say the last word. The Japanese used to say the last word in 17 or 31 syllables; Mr. Kreymborg fails to get it said within 150 pages.

Mr. Untermeyer aims at nothing short of a revolution in love-poetry. For the "one-dimensional effects" of Victorian amatory verse, for the monotony of Tennysonian adoration and Swinburnian intoxication, he would substitute a species of communication admitting, along with the "major emotions," the "minor moods of irony, irritation, frivolity, ennui, . . . the little fluctuating phases of love which, besides being ecstatic and mystical, are so often petulant, sportive, cynical, sometimes merely companionable, sometimes actually flippant and vulgar." He would return to Marlowe, Drayton, Donne, Suckling, Carew, Marvell, and Prior. It is well enough in the preface to a volume of poems to castigate patent poetry of any sort, but it is better yet to produce poems which transcend patentism. Mr. Untermeyer, glib of phrase and smug of meter, merely writes patent poetry of another sort. He is casual, as he promised, and flippant, and frank, and dutifully vulgar; but seldom is his effect other than that of an agile pen tracing a facile passion.

The roughest seasons have their poets who, subscribing to a tutored and more or less fragile tradition, tease fine music out of the obscurest strings. Mr. Percy has returned to thirteenth-century Florence for the setting of a blank-verse play, and to the ancient Greek scene for inspiration in song. He is by no means distinguished, and he is somewhat too fond of his literary good manners, but he has done some shapely, thoroughbred exercises in elegy and exaltation. William Rose Benét, a poet who was taught Browning by his father and whose muse is at home in a very wide world of allusion, exploits for dramatic monologues Venice, Rome, Milan, Egypt, Scandinavia, Saxon England, sixteenth-century Mexico, and the Western plains of North America when the Indians rode free. A poet so fertile and diversified is bound to be interesting, and one cannot but recognize Mr. Benét's gifts of streaming phrase and bannered fancy; at the same time one often misses the clear, strong note of nature, often feels the absence from this work of actual blood and bone. Stephen Vincent Benét, a brother, is equally lavish with his material, and in the same degree unreal. He has a swirling dexterity in syntax and rhythm, and practices a gorgeous, hot impressionism. He is an excellent teller of luxurious stories, stories of purple murder done in a world of typhoons and orchids. His lighter poems, including some burlesque sonnets, are too confiding. Mr. Aiken, as his title-page admits, has written music rather than poetry. His subject is Life, and his aim has been to make us overhear stray bits of it, not hear it steadily and hear it whole. He has held the musical equivalent of a kaleidoscope up to nature, with whose aid we receive, out of a dim, uncertain chaos of people passing to and fro, occasional ripples and whimpers of clear sound. Episodes, ill-defined and prematurely broken off, swiftly come one after another, so that we never quite know what is happening; we only assume, if we are tractable, that this is Life.

It is a relief to turn to poets who always do definite things and who sometimes do perfect things, if only in a small way. Mr. Long, in *Barakeesh*, *The Herd Boy*, *Three Quakers*, *Madness*, *A Sea Maiden*, and *The Moon Beloved*, has been droll and chaste and practically perfect. Not that he deals in flat and trivial materials; he moves by preference through delicate, dim between-worlds. It is his art that is definite, his naive quatrains and couplets that are perfect. Mr. Bridges was created to do small things in poetry, and to do them very well. At his best he has a fainting, fairy fineness, a fern-leaf, sun-lace touch. For the bland and ready Pindarism of the laureateship he is weirdly unfit. The patriot-moralist's cloak wraps twice around his figure when he dresses for an ode. It is only in his private moments that he produces poems of lonely beauty and unearthly temperature like the admirable *Philosopher* and his *Mistress*. Mr. Squire in his latest and very slight volume is definite in the least complimentary sense of that word, being

what is the deadliest thing for a poet to be, literal. His head is clearer than his poetry is fine; he is sober, and he has a vein of reflection not wholly resembling other men's, but the strength that he has is displayed rather than implied, and his metaphors, of which he apparently is proud, are painfully overdeveloped.

The only definitely interesting section of Mr. Gibson's new book is the first, called *Neighbours*, containing a series of grim rural monologues and dialogues. The other sections are filled with turgid sonnets and monotonous quatrains about the war. The monologues and dialogues unquestionably derive from the poems of Thomas Hardy. Their laconic business is to reveal desperate situations suddenly discovered to exist between husbands and wives. They are square and plain and honest, and they are interesting to the last syllable, without ever pulling at the roots of the imagination as Mr. Hardy's can, or as Robert Frost's still complexer recitals do. Mr. Hardy and Mr. Frost, whatever points they want to make, begin by being absorbed with persons whom they profoundly see and feel; Mr. Gibson, having an imagination less original and tenacious, begins with the idea of a condition he wants to exploit, or a point he wants to reach, and artificially, if professionally, proceeds in that direction.

MARK VAN DOREN

The End of the Trilogy

Men and Steel. By Mary Heaton Vorse. Boni and Liveright.

WITH "Men and Steel" the trilogy of the steel strike is complete. Foster's book told what may be called, in no slighting sense, the professional labor leader's story. The Interchurch Report set down with authority the facts and figures about the labor policy of the employers and its result. Mrs. Vorse speaks as a poet. An incalculable, a terrific thing happened in the soul of the nation when three hundred thousand steel workers and their families arose to demand justice and were crushed back into the maw of the furnaces, into their own helplessness and discouragement. Foster gave us the blue-print, and the Interchurch Commission the statistical survey; Mrs. Vorse has written the tragedy.

The Principality of Steel is a majestic, a beautiful, and a cruel kingdom. It covers many states and rules hundreds of towns; it extends from the great red open-pits of Mesaba, with engines crawling along their sides like beetles, to the gigantic blast furnaces of Homestead, to the mills flaring red upon the rivers at night and sending up pillars of smoke by day. Their rows of stacks loom across the sky like Gargantuan organ pipes. Before the pomp and power of steel, one scarcely thinks of men at all. In the mills the men are almost hidden, servants of the levers and slaves of the furnace doors; outside the mills they are huddled in drab piles of huts. To find women here in the houses, washing for their children and spreading the curtains eternally to dry, to find children, wholesome, merry children playing in the muddy alleys, is as startling as it would be to find mortal families dwelling on the borders of Inferno.

Mrs. Vorse has built up this picture by vivid spots of color which seem for a while chosen at random, just as they would flash upon a sensitive observer as he looked about him at this strange country. Gradually the things of steel take form before the eyes, then the people of steel, then the revolt of the people against the things. We receive the same sense from the book which those of us who were there received from the reality, and which none of us but Mrs. Vorse has adequately expressed: that this was not merely a quarrel for domination, that it was a heroic thrust of humanity upon "chaos and the dark," that it was symbolic of the high drama of the earth. How hopeless was the struggle of these simple people against the impersonal power of the corporations, against the cold and hypocritical hostility of officials and institutions, against the ignorance and prejudice of the public, against the silence which robbed them of the knowledge of their own achievements and insulated them

from the courage of their fellows! Each man in his own house, waiting, waiting, drawing every day nearer the time when there would be no more bread for his wife and children, had to nourish himself against doubt by a superb faith. And at the end, the breaking of that faith was far more cruel than blows from State constabulary or the return to a life of nothing but toil and sleep. We are not likely soon to forget the sobbing of the big Slav in the silent hallway outside the strike headquarters at Youngstown, when he had been scabbing because he thought the strike was over, and knew now it would soon be over in earnest.

It is a beautiful and a terrible book, because like a true work of art it embodies the elemental beauty and terror of life. If we think of the sacrifice of individual persons and individual causes, and of the vengeance that some day is likely to be exacted for those sacrifices, it will depress and frighten us. But if we think of the mighty faith of the humble that some day must triumph, it will strengthen our courage. Mrs. Vorse might have ended with the prophecy of Zephaniah: "Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted! to the oppressing city! . . . Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they leave nothing till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons; her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. . . . Therefore wait ye for me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured by the fire of my jealousy. . . . Behold, at that time I will deal with all them that afflict thee; and I will save that which is lame, and gather that which was driven away; and I will make them a praise and a name, whose shame hath been in all the earth."

GEORGE SOULE

Chapters of Medical History

The Dawn of Modern Medicine. By Albert H. Buck. Yale University Press.

A LOOSE and disorderly arrangement greatly lessens the usefulness of this stately volume, which appears as "the third work published by the Yale University Press on the Williams Memorial Publication Fund." Dr. Buck says in his preface that it is in the main "a continuation and amplification" of his earlier work, "The Growth of Medicine." After completing the latter he was unexpectedly given access to a collection of medical works in the library of Transylvania College, at Lexington, Kentucky. This collection, purchased in Paris in 1819, had remained unexplored by historians of medicine for nearly a century. Dr. Buck went to Lexington and spent seven months studying it. Unluckily, the fruits of his labor do not testify very eloquently to the value of the collection. The material of genuine interest that he presents might have been discovered without difficulty in any of the medical libraries of France or in the superb collection of the Surgeon General of the Army at Washington.

Worse, the circumstances of his inquiry give a decidedly lopsided character to his book. All the stress is laid upon French physicians and surgeons at the expense of their colleagues in other countries, and though it is undoubtedly true that French medical men, during the period he covers—"from the early part of the eighteenth century to about 1860"—played parts of enormous importance in the development of their art, particularly on the surgical side, it is equally true that advances of the utmost value were also made elsewhere. As a result of this stress men of obviously inferior talents are given a false significance. For example, Raphael-Bienvenu Sabatier. Sabatier was a respectable surgeon in Paris from 1756 to 1811, "highly esteemed by his professional brethren," but there is not the slightest indication that he stood appreciably above many others of his kind, or that he had anything whatsoever to do