

Of Glow-Worms

By DOROTHY WYCKOFF

I wish that you and I could find again
The misty magic of one summer night
When all the grass was filled with the delight
Of crickets, and the sleepy slur of rain;
And under dripping leaves along the lane
The eerie fires of glow-worms were alight—
Cool little flames, mysteriously bright,
That wet and clear would burn, then softly wane.

And kneeling in the fragrant fern I sought
A tiny living ember, dropped it lightly
Into your close-cupped, eager hands—a spark
You scarcely felt, yet held its radiance tightly,
Moon-fire between your slender fingers caught . . .
But afterward you lost it in the dark.

Books

A Survival

The Evening Post. A Century of Journalism. By Allan Nevins.
Boni & Liveright. \$5.

NAPOLÉON once asked the Abbé Sieyès what he did during the French Revolution. "I survived" was the sufficient response. It comprehends the history of the New York *Evening Post*. Born of the bitterness that attended the establishment of government by parties in the United States, it has survived the mutations of ownership, policies, and prejudices, having lived since November 16, 1801, to become the oldest metropolitan daily published continuously under the same name. Although the *Post* is twenty-one years older than the century implied in its title, Mr. Nevins's narrative deals essentially with a one-man publication, detailing the hundred years when intellect, instead of organization, made successful newspapers and before the "syndicate" system turned them into journalistic tables d'hôte. Founded by Alexander Hamilton and a group of associates to defend the hard-pressed Federalists from the assaults of the Jeffersonian press, it found for an editor William Coleman, a young lawyer from Massachusetts, who was making slow headway in New York. News was a negligible factor, not only then, but for many years to come. There existed no machinery for its collection and the contents of the daily journal, so far as the reader went, consisted mainly of grievances. Coleman was devoted to his cause and his patron, but by no means in servitude. He wielded the lash with a ready sympathy that needed little prompting. Yet he had a side for gentler things. He took kindly to Washington Irving, and the delicious hoax that announced the coming of the "Knickerbocker History of New York" appeared in the *Post*. Here, too, at Mr. Coleman's instance, Fitz-Greene Halleck and Joseph Rodman Drake radiated with the Croaker papers, sounding a lightsome note that still echoes. The rest was politics and much of it. The saviors of the country took their task heavily to heart. As Coleman's powers waned he acquired a needed assistant in 1826—a precocious young poet, William Cullen Bryant, who was soon to be the controlling force. He labored tremendously. The yard-long editorial prevailed and the muse in the editor's system rarely sang for his readers. Indeed, he gave sledge-hammer blows. Some fell with force on Colonel William L. Stone, the learned historian and editor of the *Commercial Advertiser*, who replied with a horsewhip under the horrified eyes of Philip Hone, the genteel of all New York's mayors. For this roughness, there seems now small excuse. But in its rapid growth New York ran away from the culture of the twenties and kept it at a distance

for sixty years. Bryant could be constructive even in a town where the pigs were so numerous in the streets as to upset carriages, where the volunteer firemen were incendiaries and pillagers, and where the aldermen were shocking examples of corruption. He was the father of the agitation that brought us Central Park, he opposed "interests" in banking and business, he stood sturdily for free trade, and fought the extension of slavery to the new lands of the West. As the fading of Federalism made him a follower of Andrew Jackson, so the capture of the Democratic Party by the slaveholders turned him into a Republican. Much history is mangled in its making by newspapers, but they also aid in shaping it. Mr. Bryant looms large in the affairs of the nation and of the press. Yet he kept personally aloof from politics and his fellow-journalists. He never met Horace Greeley, with whom his career ran parallel, regarding him as a "blackguard" from the day in 1849 when the editor of the *Tribune* addressed a few remarks to him, beginning: "You lie! villain, wilfully, wickedly, basely lie!" As for the enterprising James Gordon Bennett, the elder, he was a blot on the landscape!

Staffs were small, reporters negligible. Bryant had but one strong editorial helper, William Leggett, who served him during an absence in Europe, in the thirties, and really pitched the key that prevailed for eighty years in the *Post's* policy. This about wrecked the advertising, but gave it readers and fame, attracting the attention that has so long endured. Later came Charles Nordhoff, with his vast experience and virile pen. Parke Godwin, becoming Bryant's son-in-law, and part owner, was a forceful factor when he cared to exert himself. Bryant's death in 1878 gave him a three-year control. This was sold to Henry Villard in 1881. Then began the *Post's* golden age, intellectually, with Carl Schurz, E. L. Godkin, and Horace White as its editors. Schurz retired after two years and Mr. Godkin became the responsible head. As founder of *The Nation* in 1865 he had substituted the rapier and the scalpel for the bludgeon in American journalism and never gave opiates. He could goad a victim into a fury for which there was no relief in words, and yet so skilfully were his criticisms framed that to others they gave keen delight. If he could not construct he could correct, which after all is an important attribute. Where he failed in the latter faculty he served effectually as a counter-irritant. It was during the Godkin era that the *Post* became the first American newspaper in literary criticism, due to the guiding care of Wendell Phillips Garrison, brother-in-law to Mr. Villard. Letters owe his memory a deep respect.

Mr. Nevins makes it quite plain that the *Post* could have made a wider appeal had Mr. Godkin manifested any regard for the news side of the paper. He rarely read beyond the first page or the one opposite the editorial. Reporters did not interest him. The editorial writer may create a newspaper's influence, but it is the reporter who brings the readers upon whom this influence is to be exerted. It evidently gave Mr. Godkin pleasure to be remote from the general public, though he was socially inclined and not at all chary of meeting men of his class. His policy of deprecating the success of such newspapers as contrived to reach the masses through rudimentary methods was narrow. It is better to catch the interest of readers by reaching their level, in the hope of lifting them up, than to never come into contact with them. Least of all should they be despised. That they improve and graduate is easily demonstrated by a study of the circulation charts of the larger journals. To keep the readers whose taste begins to revolt and to capture those with fresh appetites is no easy task. A good many popular publications have gone to the wall because unable to solve this problem.

Of the first hundred years the author gives a minute record, but is hurried with the overrunning twenty-one. The days following the retirement of Mr. Godkin in 1900, including those of his successor, Rollo Ogden, are briefly sketched. They are too near for dissection. Oddly the paper which had its origin in a syndicate has now returned to the hands of another, hoping to

preserve an institution which fared badly under its last individual owner, who took over the Villard interests in 1917.

Mr. Nevins is often negligent in the matter of initials and should not have called the learned Charlton T. Lewis "Charlton M." Nor did Thurlow Weed ever edit the *World*, as stated on page 356.

DON C. SEITZ

Genevieve Taggard and Other Poets

For Eager Lovers. By Genevieve Taggard. Thomas Seltzer. \$1.25.

Eight More Harvard Poets. Edited by S. Foster Damon and Robert Hillyer. Brentano's. \$1.50.

Banners in the Dawn. Sixty-four Sonnets. By Vincent Starrett. Chicago: Walter M. Hill.

Finders—More Poems in American. By John V. A. Weaver. Alfred A. Knopf. \$1.50.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD'S first volume places her among the considerable poets of contemporary America, and promises, if other volumes follow as good, to place her permanently there. Everywhere save in the longer poems, which are inferior, she combines the three gifts which need only to be combined to insure success: passion, lucidity, and thorough technical competence.

Her passions are those of a lover, but they are also—and this has come to seem inevitable in an American poetess—those of one who likes sometimes to escape from love. The will is sudden and strong in her to live alone with the sea, to penetrate and identify herself with vegetation, wind, and heat, to love, that is to say, impersonally and abstractly. All of this expresses itself with unexampled clarity. Lightning and waves and the outlines of hills slice themselves from Nature with clean strokes. The oldest of themes—fatigue, fear, rebirth, comfort, and ecstasy—speak with a lithe, individual accent. Water is intelligent under this eye and the air is pleasantly conscious of itself. Serene reflection, profound observation approach us through just and beautiful images. The seasons pass as large as life but as definite as one black branch. It is easier to describe than explain the technique that creates these illusions. One can do no more than say that everywhere the touch is delicate and varied and right. The phrases are rich with meaning yet transparent from emotion—the emotion of an artist. Moods are pricked into the page with steady dexterity, and ideas are completed in sentences of just the proper weight. No single quotation would justify so much praise, but the volume will.

"Eight More Harvard Poets" is the eighth anthology of Harvard verse since "Verses from the Harvard Advocate" was published at Cambridge in 1876. It is very much of our time, and most of it is admirable, though of course young. Norman Cabot is an intellectual adventurer who walks abroad in somewhat too showy a dress—big, pessimistic boots and impudent doublet. He is speculative and reckless like Rupert Brooke, with a nihilism that is no less attractive because it fails to convince. Grant Code is a brilliant poet, remarkably an adept in that method which invokes moods without naming them, purely by appeal to objects around—stone and light, water and strange flowers. He controls a musical line with some subtlety. Malcolm Cowley is very free, with a wide range of poetic conceit. His themes are sensational, and he attacks them with all the ruthlessness of a knight who has given an oath to Lady Psychology. In Jack Merten college poetry returns to the neat and the scrupulous. Fancy's shy wing has left its powder on his pen. The other four writers are clear and intelligent, but seldom distinguishable.

Mr. Starrett tries to see a sonnet in everything, even when one is not there; and sometimes, indeed, one is not. At least he has not always got the thing into the sonnet. His lack of discrimination among subjects is commendable, for it argues a personal energy, a self that can be flung into all kinds of experience, high, low, left, and right. But there should be dis-

crimination as to treatment, and Mr. Starrett often lacks that. His embrace of the universe at the worst moments reminds one of a bear trying to hug a mountain. The gesture is generous but the response negligible. He has been content with standard attitudes and enthusiasms when he might have felt his way to expression through difficult new alleys. Half a dozen of his hearty sonnets, however, require to be praised, and at least one, *Cricket*, may be quoted:

"The cricket sings upon the—No! not that!
I have no hearth where haply he may sing.
Pity for one who marks the planets swing
From the high window of a city flat!—
A pigeonhole where careless circumstance
Thrust me away some dozen years ago,
Forgetting to return. And time is slow . . .
And I am through with casual romance.

"The cricket sings: I cannot place his song,
But of my restless thought he is a part.
Deep in some secret crevice of my heart
He has found bed and board. And time is long . . .
And I would miss that cheerless, cheerful theme,
Lone obbligato to my lonely dream."

Most of Mr. Weaver's content is as common as his lingo, and that, all admit, is sadly common. It ought to be significant of his power that the poems in "English" here are empty. Denude the poems in "American" of their vulgarity and little is left, except an occasional poignancy which is independent of idiom. Then, as always in passable poetry, it does not occur to us to wish the language different. In their context the following lines are of such a sort:

"Well, the next night I goes down to her house
And takes her to a movie. Just by luck
It was a pitcher that was kinda good;
It had some laughs, and yet it had some tears,
And some way made us feel we knew each other."

The rest is rubbish.

MARK VAN DOREN

Sewer and Turnpike

English Local Government: Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes. By Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Longmans, Green and Company. \$8.25.

AT the recent British elections the Labor candidate for a mining district of Durham was one of the "intellectuals" of the party. His Conservative opponent, thinking to poke fun at his qualifications to represent the workers, challenged him to a coal-hewing contest. Mr. Webb replied that, according to the laws of the duel, it was for the party challenged to choose the weapons. When he fought he fought with his head, and he therefore suggested to his rival that they should see which of them knew most about Durham and its miners for the past thousand years, to be tested by the production of a thesis which might be submitted to the University of Durham for the degree of Doctor of Laws.

In such a contest Mr. Webb—for whom the electorate showed its preference by a vote of 20,203 to 8,315—would easily have been the victor. There is no man living who is more competent to break new ground in historical investigations, especially those concerned with social and industrial conditions. In this volume he and his wife have completed a veritable *magnum opus*—a study of the development of English local government from the Revolution of 1689 to the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835. It is a magnificent piece of work, which will be a landmark in the progress of research into English institutions.

The previous volumes have dealt with the parish, the county, the manor, and the borough. Mr. and Mrs. Webb now address