

ties, the passing of critical power from the academies to the more open and flexible medium of literary journalism. And as he, like transition personified, passed from one to the other, he escaped the vices of both, the stodginess of the first, and the sensationalism of the second.

Avoided by trouble, Mr. Van Doren also avoids trouble; and this keeps him from major stature as a thinker and writer. One feels, reading some of his astute observations, that a little more strenuous delving would have made him more than an arbiter, a discoverer; and more risks for the sake of ultimates might have lifted his book from its present level of grace to higher levels. For the fact is that the book declines after its stirring and valuable first half, which recapitulates with great skill as well as charm and appraises with firmness as well as love, a past generation. In its second half, dealing with known people, it mentions only those who can be well spoken of; and it generalizes about controversies that it would have been valuable to particularize. Mr. Van Doren's motives are clear and to his credit; he escapes not only the imputation of malice but malice itself; but reality and intensity, as a consequence, escape him.

The book can be read by anyone with pleasure. Its style has a gracious eloquence; it offers frequent rewards of realities keenly perceived and pithily communicated. In its record of achievements and limitations it becomes almost an ideal presentation of the liberal, tolerant and progressive, hopeful because hope was the characteristic tropism of his generation, unable to abandon it but wisely forbearing to recommend it to the succeeding generation to whom it would be a delusion.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

A Literary Event

MORE POEMS, by A. E. Housman. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.

THE publication of more poems by the late A. E. Housman is, of course, a literary event of the first importance. The collection has been edited, with a preface, by the poet's brother, Laurence, whose statements are simple, factual, and while no doubt somewhat softer in tone than A. E. might have enjoined, still decently free from sentimentality. The material should disappoint no reasonable expectation.

They say my verse is sad: no wonder;
Its narrow measure spans
Tears of eternity, and sorrow,
Not mine, but man's.

The sorrow of the class struggle is not apparent in this verse. The agonies of hunger and work, the blacklist, the truncheon, the breadlines, are not Housman's concern. It is not so much that this last of the Victorians, and their finest poet, is above the battle, but rather beneath it; he is one whose private universe has caved in on him so com-

pletely that the fighting above and around him is largely inconsequential. Eternity may be a word somewhat grandiose to describe these tears, but Housman has achieved a paradox in time. Living in a pre-revolutionary world, he presents the image of a man without class and without economic sorrow, that is to say, a post-revolutionary man. Nor does this fact render his work unreal or Utopian. We would be foolish to imagine that solution of economic difficulties will resolve all the spiritual ones. The sumless tale of sorrow may well persist beyond the final conflict.

This is for all ill-treated fellows
Unborn and unbegot,
For them to read when they're in trouble
And I am not.

But this book is no mere exhibit of petulance. Most of its forty-nine items stand on their considerable intrinsic merit; and beyond that, all of them are of vital interest as a testament of spiritual anguish. They shift the emphasis, correct the perspective of our full view of Housman's work. It becomes increasingly manifest that the man spent his life in a hell none the less real for being intensely subjective, or of his own making. The same thing seems to have ailed him that ailed his great contemporary, Hopkins; it is possible that in time to come his three books of poetry will be read for more than one of the reasons that compel men's interest in the sonnets of Shakespeare. We are told that "consideration for the wishes of others became increasingly apparent in his last years." In this mollification of his persistent uncharity toward others we may suspect the unconscious hope of a greater sympathy toward himself, and an abatement of the fierce pride which required him, living, to permit no gesture that might be confused with self-pity. His consent to the publication of these poems, however reluctant, indicates a willingness to admit the public to more than a view of his workshop and a collection of material rejected or unfinished.

Simply as such, however, the collection is of great interest. The student of Housman's verse will find here alternative statements of old favorites, the tentative elaboration of the finally successful phrase, the novel experiment, as well as, in one or two instances only, the unfortunate plain flat failure. The collection testifies again to Housman's fine critical taste, his distrust of self-repetition, his modesty and

austerity, his moral scruple, his willingness to give himself the benefit of no doubt.

Let it be said once more: poets who propose to address themselves to the broad masses in a time of anticipated profound social change have much to learn from this man. If not from his content, then from his form; if not from his political analysis, then at least from his high regard for the poet's calling, and his respect for the niceties of linguistic technique. Not that this professor is pedantic, finical, or prone to polysyllables; on the contrary. It is his precision and simplicity that too much alleged revolutionary verse lacks. A sorry error it is to suppose that correct ideology and proper emotions excuse the absence of poetic determination and wit.

My dreams are of a field afar
And blood and smoke and shot.
There in their graves my comrades are,
In my grave I am not.

I too was taught the trade of man
And spelt the lesson plain;
But they, when I forgot and ran,
Remembered and remain.

Here, in one short lesson, we can be informed of much concerning the trade of man, the trade of comrade, and the trade of poet.

ROLFE HUMPHRIES.

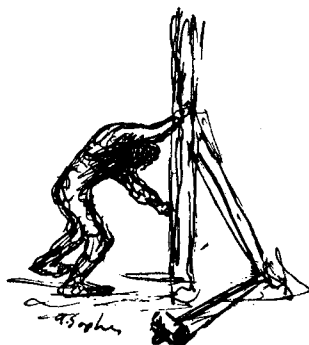
Woman's Supplement

GOLDEN WEDDING, by Anne Parrish. Harper & Bros. \$2.50.

GREAT LAUGHTER, by Fannie Hurst. Harper & Bros. \$2.50.

WHEN the novel by and for middle-class women gets past variations on boy-meets-girl and looks life in the eye, what it is apt to see is the special property of women, the family; what it likes to see is the matriarchy. For at the same time that the artist was resigning from society, women were registering their own opposition to the empty world their men were building. Some rebelled against the home itself and went out to add a brick to the dismal social structure. Those who stayed home had a quiet rebellion of contempt against their foolish, coarse, money-grubbing men, whom they tolerated, while carrying on the vast processes of life in their warm female world, which their novels exalt.

Anne Parrish has a delicate malice for her weapon. It never probes very deeply, but its edge is sharp. Her rebellion is a bit old-fashioned, shuddering against a Victorian atmosphere she conjures up, of stale sweetness, smothered in black bombazine. Tireless in her exposure of the thick-skinned who galumph successfully through life, her affection for sensitive souls is both sentimental and acid. The characters she likes are opposed to bourgeois standards but they are failures: mediocre painters, flinching poetic young men, shrinking girls. In *Golden Wedding*, though there is the same setup, she takes a larger bite



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of reality. If Dan Briggs, self-made millionaire, manages to lay a withering hand on whatever beauty and meaning life may have had for his wife and children, if his emotions trickle falsely over a heart like stone—this, she tells us, is the monstrous weight of gold, the Midas curse. Here are beginnings of economic understanding, but not enough; Dan grows more repulsive until, finally, uttering gushing sentiments at his wedding anniversary, while the troopers fire on his workers, he ends, a caricature capitalist. Considering the audience *Golden Wedding* will reach, this is a forward step; but the effect is that of a feminine rather than a radical attack. For what values does Miss Parrish set up against Dan's? His wife's? Her pallid yearnings scarcely offer more impressive standards. One feels that if Dan loved poetry and woodland nooks (some capitalists do), it wouldn't matter about the tear-gassed workers.

Fannie Hurst doesn't approach Miss Parrish in intelligence, social comprehension, or style, but her scope and vigor are gigantic in comparison. Parrish women, irrespective of class, have the pinched and harried souls of dying aristocracy. Fannie Hurst's women are full-blooded. Theirs is a purely biologic life, an abundance of sturdy female flesh, swelling with young, but lacking in mind and direction. It is easy to see why Hollywood paid \$100,000 for *Great Laughter*. It is a movie anthology offering a free choice of scenarios. With all its glorification of the life-process, its note of hysteria points the underlying frenzy of its frustrated women. Their men are a poor lot. Widowed Carmella, got with child by her husband's brother, is deserted for the crippled daughter of his political patron. Josie gives her life to her married boss. Mabel is worn out by her husband's indecisions. Even Gegrannie, brooding over the huge family as she approaches her hundredth year (brooding with the infinite wisdom of fictional old women, seeing all, knowing all), even she never had fulfillment. What gives them heart is possessions—and what a tender naming of things in these female books—so that Abbey, searching restlessly for belief, shrinks from the poverty of objects in the Soviet Union. Their comfort is that Life Goes On, but no wonder the last sentence presents Gegrannie filled with "an immense and dreary laughter at what men will sweat for," the disillusioned smugness of the matriarch philosophy.

Fannie Hurst is the voice of those sensible, vigorous women one finds in church work and community clubs, alienated from the lives of their men, defensively absorbed in the basic reality of children. The weaker get vaporous dreams of romance from magazines and movies. The crisper minds cultivate the arts. For the world outside, the world of their men, they have an obliterating skepticism, denying "the things men sweat for." In the books they read, even the best of them, as represented by these two, there is no recognition of tragic or noble elements in mankind.

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