

... he created real, living men, immortals." One can read beyond this the deep intention of van Gogh's own art: could he have rent his body and mind for smaller aims?

Figure the painter, van Gogh, during the last years of his life, in the glare of the Mediterranean sun at Arles; living in a house where white and blue and yellow and green leap out of the forms of chairs, blankets, and crockery, without suffering from the tepid gradations which derive from dust and mist. What Wordsworth felt when he saw the daffodils in spring, van Gogh can feel when he looks at the shimmering fields of wheat, the orchards, or the yellow mairie. In old Provence the country is at one's doorstep; the town is merely a place where men chaffer, and rest from their day's labor. One can be a painter here without strain; the very postman shows what a sympathetic and intelligent fellow he is—he poses for one, he becomes a friend. Even the bawdy house is a merry place; the friendly sensuality of the south is not the ugly and necessitous thing called vice in the towns of the north.

Two years pass in a tumult of impressions and interpretations; van Gogh works and enjoys beauty to the full; Gauguin, with whom he had been exchanging pictures because, forsooth, the public will have neither of them, comes to join him; they keep house together; they paint; they test each other's metal and at times strike the fire of hatred or misunderstanding. The life is abstemious to the point of saintliness; here is devotion to art which will make the Philistines shudder with horror in one age, and buy up the pictures, in rapture, in the next. What is the formula? Van Gogh answers: "The healthy man should be able to live on a piece of bread and keep at work all day. He should also be able to bear a pipe of tobacco and a good drink; for without these things nothing can be done. And withal, he ought to have some feeling for the stars and the infinite heavens. Then it is a joy to live."

Van Gogh dreamed of a dedicated life; but he knew the vacant qualms of solitude, as well as the perils of domesticity; and while he saw that "if we wish to keep our strength for our life work we must have only very little to do with women," he was not content to be a hermit and an outcast. He looked forward to founding a community of painters, aiming at the best art possible; in short, he sought to revive, directly and simply, without formal organization, the corporate life which had been the environment of art and culture during the Middle Age; he looked upon his fellow craftsmen as brothers of the guild of St. Luke. "I grow ever more and more convinced," he said, "that the pictures which will be necessary and inevitable if painting is ever to attain to the serene heights of Greek sculpture, German music, and French fiction, will be beyond the strength of the individual. They will therefore have to be executed by a group of painters, who will collaborate in order to carry out an idea which they hold in common." Gauguin laughed aloud at this project; even Theo, Vincent's dear, helpful brother, was sceptical; still, the notion persisted, and to Theo's credit, he spent the last six months of his life, following Vincent's death, in trying to give it a foundation.

I will not dwell on Vincent's end; his insanity was an event in the physical world, and not within the domain of art. It is enough to say that friendship and understanding and a local habitation for his Beloved Community did not respond to the call of this solitary artist; and the great spirit within him took a terrible revenge for its long

frustration. In his last letter to Gauguin, from Auvers, Vincent said: "It is more dignified to die while I am fully conscious of what I am doing than to take leave of the world in a state that degrades me." He died at his own command, and retreated calmly to the cloister where even the demented have peace.

There are two parts to a great life, the history and the philosophy, the daily record of events, and the achievement; and Herr Meier-Graefe's work is, on the whole, richer in the first department than in the second. These two volumes, with their mass of illustrations, are a credit to the printer's art; only, since obviously no expense was spared in their preparation, it is unfortunate that they contain not a single reproduction in color of van Gogh's work. As biography, despite the vivid dexterity of the translator, one feels a certain incongruity in the swift, matter-of-factness of Herr Meier-Graefe's narrative; for there are times when his account seems to reduce van Gogh's stature. I have a sense that van Gogh's own letters leave not merely a truer impression of his mind and his art, but a greater one. Still, except for the Letters of a Post-Impressionist (Houghton, Mifflin, 1913) the present biography stands alone; and one welcomes it as an example of what good writing, good translation, and good printing can produce. The spirit of van Gogh will some day find a St. Luke, who will give us the gospel of a man who was, for the nineteenth century, the crucified scapegoat. That story will answer one of the questions that used to puzzle the age—what would happen to a Christ if he walked again on the earth?

LEWIS MUMFORD.

## Melodious Steam

*Collected Poems, by Vachel Lindsay. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$3.50.*

CAPE COD is a hook, and Provincetown is the bait on that hook. At Provincetown the other day, in celebration of what I was told was the feast of San Marco, I watched a Portuguese procession. It was not a long procession, but it was, in a disorderly fashion, comprehensive. There were three bands in uniform, and an orchestra in Sunday clothes; there were Portuguese flags, American flags, banners of various societies and associations; red streamers, green streamers; men in black, girls in white dresses, babies in perambulators; automobiles, figures of the saint, small boys. The sun shone, the wind blew, the dust of the road covered the feet of the marchers, and everybody laughed and talked to the rhythm of his whim. Vachel Lindsay's collected poems remind me of that procession, so friendly, so naïve, so picturesque, so religious.

The critics, Mr. Lindsay says in his foreword, "gently but altogether misrepresent" him. In an autobiographical fashion he therefore explains himself. His prose is less alluring than his verse. For instance:

"There has been so much discussion as to whether the verses in these first two sections were songs or orations, that the fairly consistent record of an art-student's quest has been assumed not to exist." The plenitude of s's here recalls the closing line of Mr. Lindsay's Kallyope Yell—"Sizz . . . Fizz . . ." Yet he makes himself clear. He is a man with a mission, a mission of which he is earnestly and honorably convinced. As he puts it in *Beyond the Moon*:

Though I draw toward you weeping, soul to soul,  
I have a lonely goal beyond the moon;  
Aye, beyond Heaven and Hell, I have a goal!

This goal is the obliteration of human misunderstanding. A sort of Mason and Dixon's line runs, Mr. Lindsay thinks, through our hearts, and prevents our faith in one another. The worker does not know the virtues of the tramp, nor Main Street the splendors of art; to the Californian the Jap seems alien, and so does the child to the adult. Of all these misunderstandings, personal and national, Mr. Lindsay would rid us. His spirit dwells in the Interpreter's House, and sallies forth singing. He says twice, once in *The Ghost of the Buffaloes* and once in the *Litany of the Heroes*:

I would rouse the Lincoln in you all,  
That which is gendered in the wilderness  
From lonely prairies and God's tenderness.

And in another key he repeats his determination in *The Kallyope Yell*:

Willy willy willy wah Hoo!  
Steam shall work melodiously,  
Brotherhood increase.

So far as steam is concerned, there is no question that it works in Mr. Lindsay's poems. Energy, as Florian Slappey says, he ain't got nothing else but. His rhythms as he has often explained, are meant to be whispered, not shouted; his own soul dwells preferably among the silences. But his lines are very difficult to whisper. He stamps, italicizes, repeats, challenges the attention constantly. Take for example, "I went down into the Desert"—

To meet my God,  
By him be comforted,  
I went down into the desert  
To meet my God,  
*And I met the devil in red.*

The italics are Mr. Lindsay's own. They always are. In the form of his work he seems to have no confidence except through advertising. In *A Rhyme about an Electrical Advertising Sign*, which Mr. Lindsay calls a "clumsy contraption," occurs the following description:

Blatant, mechanical . . . . .  
Wickedly red or malignantly green,  
Like the beads of a young Senegambian queen,  
Showing, while millions of souls hurry on  
The virtues.

Nothing could be further from Mr. Lindsay's red and green assonances than wickedness or malignance; but otherwise the lines are not unaptly characteristic of much of his work.

This is said, it must be understood, from the point of view of one reading to himself. And this point of view Mr. Lindsay refuses to accept. It is as chants that he presents many of his poems. As he remarks of the *Collected Poems*, "practically every new copy will be first opened on the lap of some person in a new audience of mine, trying to follow me as I recite." In other words, Mr. Lindsay is a wandering minstrel boy, and the volume before us is a sort of stenographic record of his public appearances. Accepted in this fashion, his poems do cer-

tainly provide delight. I have heard Mr. Lindsay chant in what seemed to me

A voice  
Far above singing.

But then, so have I heard Mr. Bryan, in the olden golden days, speak. So perceived, the abundance of rhetoric, the insistence upon beat, the timidity which fears the loss of all effects not obvious, will never be annoying and seldom even noticed.

To a mere reader, however, the lack of phrases that astonish and charm is likely to be painful. Poetry is sound, but sound is not the whole of poetry. If it were, who should surpass Tennyson? The Keatses, the Sandburgs of our own day, have taught us so much at least. Imagery, conceived of beauty or force, and expressed with richness or precision, the reader demands; and from Mr. Lindsay does not often get. True, he elaborates and colloquializes; true, moreover, that many of his conceptions are, in the large, effective, as for instance the famous idea of General William Booth Enters Into Heaven, or the Song of the Rachel-Jane beside the car-haunted roads of Kansas. But in detail his achievements seem on the whole conventional. There are occasional bits of phrasing; as that describing Lincoln—"star of a weedy stream," or in *Our Mother Pocahontas*:

She sings of lilacs, maples, wheat,  
Her own soil sings beneath her feet,  
Of spring-time, and Virginia.

There is one unforgettable quatrain—the comment on the children of the poor—

Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly,  
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap,  
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve,  
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

And finally there are the two outstanding short poems, *Abraham Lincoln walks at Midnight* and *The Eagle* that is *Forgotten*, both as sure of places in any anthology of American verse as Whitman's *My Captain* or Whittier's *Ichabod*, which in some strange fashion they suggest.

But if Lindsay's verses suggest the accordion rather than the flute at least it is an accordion manipulated by a master. Wonderful rolling vaudeville rhythm, wonderful endearing vaudeville sentiment, wonderful fearless vaudeville cynicism:

Where is McKinley, Mark Hanna's McKinley,  
His slave, his echo, his suit of clothes?  
Gone to gain the shadows, with the pomps of that time,  
And the flame of that summer's prairie rose.

Of lines like these there are hundreds; John L. Sullivan, the Strong Boy of Boston is a treasure-house, and so is *In Praise of Johnny Appleseed*. Different but equally entertaining are *The Mouse That Gnawed The Oak-Tree Down*, *Factory Windows Are Always Broken* and such like comments upon our life, which to Mr. Lindsay is so arithmetically simple. Indeed, it is in the number of such verses that the complete justification for the "collection" of Mr. Lindsay's poems is to be found. He is no delicate developer of details, but a glorified sign-painter on a panoramic rampage; the real value of his work lies not in any incidental finish it may possess, but in its extent and its unfailing gusto.

JAMES WEBER LINN.

## Machen's Masterpiece

*The Hill of Dreams, by Arthur Machen. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.*

THE republication in America of Mr. Machen's masterpiece, *The Hill of Dreams*, to which he has contributed an introduction, is a literary event of permanent significance. The history of this work, as outlined by the author in his autobiography,\* may serve as a typical example of a great book, long neglected, and finally recognized at its true worth. The novel was finished in 1897 and submitted for publication to Mr. Grant Richards, then a newcomer in the London book world. Mr. Richards would have none of it, and wrote the author advising him by no means to publish the book, for it would do him no credit. It was not until 1907 that the work finally appeared, and the publisher was—Mr. Grant Richards.

It may have been favorably reviewed in some quarters, but Mr. Machen, whose temper was always improved by unfavorable reviews, quotes only those writers who declared the book "aridly inhuman," "not written quite well enough," tedious and unpractical. Neither the English edition nor the American edition, published, I believe, by Dana Estes, of Boston, was a "success." Yet a few perverse readers, insisting on the value of excellent writing, naughtily disregarded the reviewers and continued to pass the book round among an ever-widening circle of admirers.

In his introduction to the new edition, Mr. Machen describes thus the origin of *The Hill of Dreams*: "The required notion came at last. . . . I am not quite sure, but almost sure, that the needed hint was discovered in an introduction to *Tristram Shandy* written by that most accomplished man of letters, Mr. Charles Whibley. Mr. Whibley, in classifying Sterne's masterpiece, noted that it might be called a picaresque of the mind, contrasting it with *Gil Blas* which is a picaresque of the body. This distinction had struck me very much when I read it . . . and applying it to another eighteenth century masterpiece, I asked myself why I should not write a 'Robinson Crusoe' of the soul. I resolved forthwith that I would do so; I would take the theme of solitude, loneliness, separation from mankind, but, in place of the desert island and a bodily separation, my hero should be isolated in London and find his chief loneliness in the midst of myriads of myriads of men. His should be a solitude of the spirit."

*The Hill of Dreams*, then, concerns the soul of Lucien Taylor, driven by disappointment in actual people and things ever farther into the country of the imagination, until that country claims him completely. A very undiscerning critic, steeped in all sorts of modern psycho-analytic hocus-pocus, has declared that the book is a marvelous description of a man going mad. It is far from that. It is a marvelous description of a man taking refuge in the higher sanity of the imagination from the madness of the world about him.

The boy is born in the strange border-country between Wales and England, and its ghostly relics from the Roman past, its haunted forests and glimmering white twilight become a part of him. Ever he attempts to live

in the outer world the occult beauty that he knows so well. He tries to effect a compromise between the transmuted realm which he inhabits and the actual countryside of mean little climbers, hypocrites of all sorts, and people who seem to his beauty-accustomed eyes worse than the Yahoos. A single hint of kindness or intelligence will convince him for the moment that he has discovered, in flesh and blood, someone worthy of his own land. Always, quickened by an over-sensitive imagination, disillusionment follows. Bit by bit, he is driven back into the recesses of the spiritual forest. He recreates in his mind, the Roman city that had left its fallen stones and ruined fortresses among the entangled thickets of the hills.

Henceforth, his life becomes dual. Leaving his homeland, he goes up to London, intending to express in words the spell of the occult territory that he carries with him wherever he goes. Casual incidents of the streets become monstrous Sabbatical rites before his gaze; the torpor of a London Sunday becomes an unendurable horror. From these he turns back to the gardens, the taverns, the lovely and awful inhabitants of his dream. Reality and vision become confused in his mind; he thinks that passers-by are shrinking from him in terror; and as the outer world becomes transformed into shapes ever more dreadful the inner assumes ever more alluring and intricate patterns.

Still there would be an escape for him if he could express adequately the wonder of the "town great as Babylon, terrible as Rome, marvellous as Lost Atlantis, set in the midst of a white wilderness surrounded by waste places." But he cannot. What he writes one day is torn up the next; the phrases that seemed so resonant, so fiery, become flat and ashen. And this failure, combined with a very realistic lack of the necessities of life, builds a great gray wall round the country of his imagination so that he cannot escape from it, and what he had created to be his playground becomes his prison.

The book suggests comparison with music more than any other that I can think of, and, as Pater remarks, all the arts move toward music as their goal. The construction is almost symphonic, the opening sentence: "There was a glow in the sky as if great furnace doors were opened" announcing the subject of the work. The themes of the novel become ever more fantastic and more enraptured as the hero moves onward from the life of actuality to the life of the spirit; they are developed and restated ever with a new significance; and the tempo of the whole composition quickens consistently, becoming more and more intense, right up to the terrible climax. And, of course, Mr. Machen's supremely sonorous style at once suggests the analogy of music; it is the only style that continues and enriches the sort of loveliness for which Thomas De Quincey's *Dream Fugue* stands as the symbol.

This edition of *The Hill of Dreams* will not fall on unlistening ears and unbeholding eyes. Mr. Machen's literary destiny is a happy one. Almost alone among the temporarily neglected masters, he has become recognized during his lifetime. And, let us hope, this appreciation will somewhat atone for the obscurity he describes so vividly in his memoirs and reflects in *The Hill of Dreams*. He is one of the masters of our literature, and *The Hill of Dreams* is his greatest work.

ROBERT HILLYER.

\* *Things Near and Far*, London: Martin Secker; New York: Knopf.