

Points of View

Approach to Poetry

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

SIR:

Mr. Graves's article "Vehicles of Poetic Thought" is the most stimulating piece of poetic criticism that I have read in years. It opens up avenues of approach to the nature of poetry whose existence has barely been guessed at. Among other things it reveals me to myself as pronounced a "motile," "audile" and Shelleyite as Mr. Graves is a "tactile," "olefactile" (or whatever the word is) and Keatsite. For purposes of comparison with his reactions may I be allowed to give a brief account of mine? Their sole interest, I fully realize, lies not in the fact that I have them, but in the fact that someone has them.

On examining the scraps of descriptive poetry that live verbally in my memory, I find that practically all of them are rich in the suggestion of motion and sound, and not one in the suggestion of smell, taste, or touch. This applies to those passages whose effect is mainly visual. For example, the following from Shelley's "Triumph of Life."

*Like the young moon
When on the sunlit limits of the night
Her white shell trembles amid crimson air*

is almost commonplace except for the one word *trembles*. That gives life and freshness and thrill to the image that a hundred equally well imagined pictures of the moon have failed to awaken. I well remember that after first reading the passage the one thing I retained was that verb. Another example:

*In the spring a livelier iris changes on the
burnished dove.*

Changes! To make a drab and ordinary word like that flash out of its line, in speed and color, is, to me, the great achievement of poetry. Tennyson set the stage prettily enough with "spring" and "iris" and "burnished dove," but how lifeless and uninteresting it all is until that heaven-sent verb breathes motion into it! I can see the neck sleekly rippling green and purple as the creature cocks its softly silly eye at this and that; I can watch the colors replace and repeat each other and never think of the warmth of the spring sunshine, the softness of the bird's feathers, or the smell of anything.

To me and others of my mental cast poetry must necessarily be largely a matter of verbs. To Mr. Graves and his ilk it is more apt to be a matter of nouns and adjectives. In the stanza from Keats in which he finds so much to admire, there are just three verbs: *was, are and blushed*. A quiet and, to me, uninviting little aggregation, whose weakness is not compensated for by the strength of the adjectives that swarm about, though even for me the stanza has great charm, of a placid and ornamental kind. I know that it is poetry, and enjoy it, but the final effect is something like having one's mouth so full of good food that one cannot chew. The "tiger-moth's deep-masked wings," on which Mr. Graves lingers so lovingly, leaves me absolutely cold. The consonantal sequence *sktw* is so harsh, and meaninglessly harsh, that it strikes from my mind all connotations that damask might have, and I relapse with content into the next stanza which starts off with a verb a line.

It seems odd to me that when Mr. Graves quotes so enthusiastically from "The Eve of St. Agnes," he does not include the line that has already appeared to me incomparably the finest in it, a truly magnificent line, one that can stand comparison with Shakespeare at his happiest. I refer of course to

The silver snarling trumpets 'gan to chide.
Here is a verb—and what a verb!—and a verbal epithet, but no motion. This brings in what is, to me, the next most important element in poetical imagery, sound. This is a good example, because it hardly gains any of its effect, as do many sound-passages, from the ancillary music of the words themselves. It is unlikely that Mr. Graves's Welsh quarrymen would pick out this line to weep over for its sheer beauty of sound. There is very little to say about the effect on me, except that it is profoundly moving and vital; nothing could possibly be so trumpet-like as the *silver snarling* and the *chide*. Here Keats has done that supreme thing, translated life into verse with such force that the verse no longer reminds one of life, but life reminds one of the verse. Often on hearing a trumpet I return to that line to find there, rather than in the sound of the instrument itself, the soul and es-

sence of trumpetry. There are other great trumpet lines in English verse; Tennyson's

Far off a solitary trumpet blew,

as majestic in its simplicity as Racine himself, and strangely though obscurely moving; and Robinson's picture of the human race

And ever led resourcelessly along

To brainless carnage by drunk trumpeters.

Here onomatopoeia comes in, but notice how. The words are deliberately chosen for their cacophony. The two short *u* sounds, their effect prolonged by following liquids, and the sequence *nktr* combine, with the meaning of the words themselves, to produce an effect of brutal stupidity that is positively maddening.

Take a line that is purely visual, and of a kind that Mr. Graves or I or any reader can hardly fail to enjoy, take Shakespeare's description of dawn

Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

To me that is full of light and color, but hardly less full of motion and sound. I can see the yellow disc of the sun climb momentarily over a black hill with a slowness and irresistibility that has a magic quality; I can see the gray waters become gold till they fairly leap up at me; I can see ripples on their surface that show where a current crawls or a day-breeze wanders. I can hear the trees whisper in the dawn and the birds already in full song, though there is nothing said about them; and then I realize that Mr. Graves will all this time be smelling the wet earth or longing to plunge into the golden waters to see what all that color feels like.

It would be interesting to know how Mr. Graves would react to this passage, and even more interesting to know how the generality of readers would, and in what proportion they would differ. It would be still more interesting to know whether those who are mainly sensitive to motion are, like me, also sensitive to sound, or if they may also respond strongly to touch and smell. I am with Mr. Graves in thinking it of great importance to investigate poetic psychology, and I wish the *Saturday Review* would conduct an experiment with the co-operation of its readers, by some such methods as asking which of a pair of passages they prefer, or inquiring what secondary impressions they receive from a purely visual image. The thing could be done, and the results would be valuable.

WAYLAND WELLS WILLIAMS.

What Price Comment?

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

SIR:

May I not deplore the ingratitude displayed toward me by the friends and admirers of Mr. W. E. Woodward? Their identification of me with all obscurantism and reaction I readily admit. I am the man who made Socrates drink the hemlock, burned John Hus, forced Galileo to recant, and failed to recognize the transcendent merit of "The Waste Land." None the less, the Woodward fans owe me some gratitude not only for writing a review of "Lottery," which I thought was favorable, but for giving them an opportunity to get their own indubitably favorable reviews printed in your correspondence column.

ELMER DAVIS.

Romance

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

SIR:

I occasionally send a clipping of some article which I think will be of interest to a daughter who has been in London for some years now. Possibly her offer and comments may be of interest to you. She writes:

"I read Christopher Morley's 'Map of London.' If he seems so irretrievably intrigued by 'Bessborough Gardens,' I think it would be splendid of me to send him a snap of that block of tenement houses, and tell him that is where my maid lives, and if he can get romance out of it, I'll congratulate him. One always can about things that aren't next door like the post-office or hardware store. And Lupus street, the shopping mart of the poor, a dingy, dirty, ugly street a stone's throw away. I wish he had picked out some street I could get a thrill out of. It seems such a waste of his optimism and good spirits. Believe me a man living there would have to write and write fast to keep the wolf from the door."

J. L. H.

[Bessborough Gardens was where Joseph Conrad began writing "Almayer's Folly."—EDITORIAL NOTE.]

The Reader's Guide

(Continued from preceding page)

teachers say over and over again that no other book produces the same results. It is intended for students beginning their Greek in college, and all other pedagogical devices are subordinated to the end of developing reading-power. Its selections are not from the "Anabasis," but largely from Xenophon's "Memorabilia"; it aims as a whole to reveal the nature of the Hellenic mind. "Homeric Greek," a handsome book by Clyde Pharr (Heath), is a novel introduction to the subject, teaching the Homeric dialect rather than that of the later Attic. This book has enthusiastic admirers who believe that it has the right method of approach. I have always wondered why this was not feasible, from the time when my own enthusiasm for the language, surviving even through many parasangs, doubled at the first line of the Iliad. At Cornell last Spring this book was used by a large class of beginners in preference to any other beginners' book.

Dutton has just brought out a new edition, the seventh, of James O. Halliwell's "Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words," a standard authority for more than seventy-five years and highly valuable to all students of early English literature. This is a one-volume edition of almost a thousand pages, with more than 50,000 words and phrases now obsolete and dating from the fourteenth century, also a glossary of provincialisms including archaic words. The "Cambridge" and "Globe" editions of Chaucer have glossaries, as have most editions of Chaucer, even the school texts.

C. E. F., West Monroe, La., asks where to get prints of famous paintings, for a grammar school, and where to find the stories of them.

A GOOD way to approach this subject would be to get the book first, say "First Steps in the Enjoyment of Pictures," by Maude Oliver (Holt), or Estelle Hurl's "How to Show Pictures to Children" (Houghton Mifflin), and select the pictures from it. An excellent picture guide for teachers or for family use is Lorinda M. Bryant's "Children's Book of Celebrated Pictures" (Century), which has 50 full-page reproductions of famous pictures such as generally appeal to children, with the opposite page for the "story." There are companion volumes for celebrated sculpture and celebrated buildings. For inexpensive reproductions for framing, the prints of Perry Pictures, Malden, Mass., the Prang Co., Boston, and Rudolf Lesch and the Brown-Robertson Co., of this city, and the fine color prints issued by the Medici Society of America, Boston, Mass., give a wide range of choice. "Picture Worlds," by Richard Clarke (Little, Brown) is a story book made by expanding pictures in a Mother Goose book, and meant for little children interested in these illustrations.

CARL VAN VECHTEN, author of "The Music of Spain"—by the way, though this is out of print in America, the recent inquirer on this subject can readily get the English edition with preface and notes by Pedro G. Morales, published by Kegan Paul, London—says that other inquirers might be referred to the fourth volume of the Encyclopédie de la Musique, issued by the Paris Conservatoire (Librairie Delagrave, 1920) which is devoted to Spain and Portugal. In this extremely large volume (513 pages printed in double columns over a foot high) Rafael Mitjana writes of religious music, Raoul Laparra, composer of "La Habanera," of popular music, and Henri Collet of the musical renaissance in Spain.

V. F. M., Boston, Mass., is to write a paper on the literary work of the younger generation, and is at a loss whom to include in this category.

LOUIS BROMFIELD, I'd say, author of "The Green Bay Tree" (Stokes), a novel that still keeps selling as if it were not its author's first offering in this line. Though it is an open secret that his first novel published owes something of the mellow maturity of its style to its four little elder brothers never allowed to breathe; novels completed to the last word and then set aside by their creator as not yet up to grade. Thomas Boyd, for his "Through the Wheat" and "The Dark Cloud" (Scribner); I expect some unusual novels to come from one who can write the latter of these, Laurence Stallings, not only for his part in the play "What Price Glory?" but for the admirable story of a young veteran's post war readjustments, "Plumes" (Har-

court, Brace). And certainly Sidney Howard, who has rung the bell twice in one season, with the surprising brilliancy of the play "They Knew What They Wanted" and with what seems to me by far the best collection of short stories by a single American author to appear in a good while, "Three Flights Up" (Scribner). Study-clubs interested in the short story should by all means bear these in mind.

IF clients of this department have quotations in prose or poetry that would help a reader in Connecticut making a study of "the kiss in literature," I will forward them to him. If this includes music, I nominate Wotan's kiss that ends "Walkure," "Il Bacio," and the second act of "Tristan und Isolde."

The New Books Science

(Continued from page 532)

part is tiresome in places. The rest of the book is interesting.

The reviewer is not convinced that the kind of description sometimes adopted in the book—a type which would probably be called "popular"—is the best for the purpose. Take, for instance, the following sentence which describes what happens when light is shut off from selenium: "So the wandering electron promptly 'goes home' and the electric field is deprived of one more slave to do its bidding." Such a statement would never appear in a real scientific article. One might write: "Selenium then becomes a non-conductor" or "Selenium then becomes a much poorer conductor due to recombination of the electrons." We suppose the shorter statement is less interesting but it has the enormous advantage of clearness and brevity.

BIRD ISLANDS OF PERU. By Robert Cushman Murphy. Putnam. \$5.

HELMHOLTZ'S TREATISE ON PHYSIOLOGICAL OPTICS. Edited by James P. C. Southall. Vol. II. Optical Society of America.

THE DOGMA OF EVOLUTION. By Louis T. More. Princeton University Press.

Travel

ATHOS AND ITS MONASTERIES. By F. W. HASLUCK. Dutton. 1924. \$5.00.

This book may be of interest to those who delve into the details of church lore, but for the casual reader it can be of small value. A recondite subject is sometimes illuminated and made to appeal more or less popularly by an eloquent style. But this book is written in dull and heavy-footed prose, and with an alarming absence of beauty. In discussing the dietary of the monks on Athos, the author says, "Wines are of course included in the commons, as is also generally a small allowance of spirits." That seems to be the only bright spot in 195 pages.

THE EASTERN ROAD. By L. H. DUDLEY-BUXTON. Dutton. 1924.

The Albert Kahn Travelling fellowship was founded for the purpose of providing young men and women of promise with the means for extended periods of foreign travel. The founder hopes that, by this means, their minds may be so broadened and attuned to the essential principles and potentialities of civilization in its widest sense, that when they return they may exercise some influence on the political thought of their own countries, and eventually on international opinion.

Mr. Dudley-Buxton was chosen by the trustees of the English Foundation as Travelling Fellow, and this volume embodies his experiences and observations during his travels in Japan, Korea, China, and Mongolia. From the outset it is apparent that the author has been trained as an ethnologist, and views the world through the conformation of lenses peculiar to such training. His paragraphs dealing with the physical characteristics of the racial types under observation and their probable origin are of considerable interest. His descriptions of scenery are rather tedious and have been much better done by earlier travellers. The conclusions reached on economic and political questions, though sound, are quite obvious, and are opinions accepted generally by the intelligent reading public.

UNKNOWN TRIBES UNCHARTED SEAS. By Lady Richmond Brown. Appleton.

THE CHURCHES OF ROME. By Roger Thynne. Dutton. \$5.

The World of Rare Books

By FREDERICK M. HOPKINS

SALE OF AMERICANA.

AMERICANA, printed and in manuscript including autograph letters from the collection of Walter Dormitzer, and books from the library of K. D. Ellsworth, with additions, were sold at the American Art Galleries, January 30, 268 lots bringing \$24,409. The star lot brought \$3,300 which was paid for the only known perfect copy of Charles Chauncy's sermon, "God's Mercy," printed in Cambridge in 1655. A first edition of William Wood's "New England's Prospect," small 4to, London, 1634, giving the first detailed account of Massachusetts with a brilliant impression of the original map, brought \$1,700. A few of the many important items and the prices realized were the following: Collection of 632 A. L. S. and A. D. S. by members of the Continental Congress, 1774-1788, \$620; "Report on the Territory of Oregon, by a Committee, appointed at a Meeting of the Citizens of Columbus" 8vo, morocco, Columbus, O., 1843, apparently an unrecorded item, \$560; Zebulon M. Pike's "Account of a Voyage Up the Mississippi River," etc., 8vo, morocco, Washington, 1807, only one other copy offered at public sale, \$325; collection of the autographs of the presidents from Washington to Wilson, and their cabinet officers, \$620; and Edward Williams's "Virgo Triumphans; or, Virginia, Richly and Truly Valued," small 4to, calf, London, 1650, a rare uncut copy, \$525.

AT THE ANDERSON GALLERIES.

SELECTIONS from the Library of Harry Bishop of Louisville, Ky., miniature books from the collection of Wilbur Macey

Stone of this city, with additions, were sold at the Anderson Galleries January 26 and 27, 540 lots fetching \$6,136.85. A few of the more important items and the prices realized were the following: Chaucer's "Works," folio, russia, London, 1561, fourth collected edition, \$75; Mark Twain's "Writings," 35 vols., 8vo, boards, New York, 1922-23, the new definitive edition, \$115; William Combe's "Life of Napoleon," 8vo, calf, London, 1815, first edition, \$100; Combe's "English Dance of Death," 2 vols., 1815-16; "The Dance of Life," 1817, with colored plates by Rowlandson, 3 vols., London, 1815-17, \$150; Spark's "Life of Franklin," 1 vol. extended to 2, 8vo, morocco, Boston, 1844, \$145; The Nuremberg Chronicle, folio, original oak boards covered in the original pigskin, Nuremberg, 1493, original edition, \$170; and nearly a complete set of the Tudor Translations, 24 vols., 8vo, London, 1892-1905, \$180.

MELVILLE'S "MOBY DICK."

"AN Introduction to Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick; or the Whale'" (1851) by Dr. Rosenbach, an octavo, bound in brown boards, limited to 250 copies, and beautifully printed by John Henry Nash of San Francisco, was sent out by Mitchell Kennerley on Christmas. Mr. Kennerley has given a beautiful setting to Dr. Rosenbach's delightful essay. Dr. Rosenbach says that Melville "has written an epic of the sea, a Beowulf of our own times, he has enriched the world with the one story dedicated forever to those that ply the deep. . . . The style of 'Moby Dick,' at once familiar,

is exceedingly rich, almost unctious, mediocrally copious, and prophetic. It rolls on, page after page, with the gentle, noble motion of a great sea, never-ending, never-stopping, but always changing. . . . Melville has made the deep give up its dead; he has disclosed to us its hidden mysteries. But he did more. He has revealed, like Shakespeare, the secrets of the soul. Melville cannot be compared with other writers of the sea, for he has reached heights undreamed of by them."

MEMORABILIA OF THE PRESIDENTS

MEMORABILIA of the presidents, consisting mainly of books once owned by the presidents, autograph letters, documents and manuscripts, the collection of Henry Goldsmith of this city, was sold at the American Art Galleries January 29. The collection was not a large one, comprising only 240 lots, but it realized \$19,912. Of course there has been a lively demand for everything of associational interest concerning Washington and Lincoln, but there are many indications of a tendency to include all of the presidents as a group, and for this reason this sale and its catalogue have a special interest.

A few of the more important lots and the prices which they brought were the following:

Washington. "A New and Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences," illustrated, 4 vols., 8vo, original calf, London, 1763. Washington's signature on each title page and his bookplate in each volume. \$2,600.

Washington. L. S. 2pp. 4to, Mount Vernon, April 3, 1788, pertaining to the adoption of the proposed constitution of the United States. \$325.

Adams. L. S. 3 pp. 4to, Quincy, August 29th, 1798, states that if it were possible he would resign the presidency in favor of

Washington. \$325.

Jefferson. A. L. S. 1p. 4to, Monticello, March 25, 1826, written a few months before his death. \$160.

Madison. A. L. S. 1p. 4to, Montpelier, April 10, 1817, a personal letter to Jefferson. \$40.

Monroe. A. L. S. 9pp. 4to, Oak Hill, March 15, 1826, defending his course while minister to France. \$170.

Adams (John Quincy). A. L. S. 2pp. 4to, Boston, September 15, 1827, discussing government finances. \$30.

Jackson. A. L. S. 2pp. 4to, Washington, March 16, 1829, written a few days before his inauguration. \$160.

Van Buren. A. L. S. 2pp. 4to, Washington, January 7th, 1839, a personal letter. \$22.50.

Harrison. A. L. S. 2pp. 4to, Cincinnati, May 24, 1813, of Northwest Territory interest. \$70.

Tyler. L. S. 2pp. 4to, Washington, December 2, 1842, regarding the issuance of a Thanksgiving Proclamation. \$25.

Polk. A. L. S. 1p. 4to, Washington, December 5, 1845, asking for information as called for in a resolution of the Senate. \$40.

Taylor. A. L. S. 1p. 4to, Baton Rouge, October 22, 1848, referring to his election to the presidency. \$220.

Fillmore. A. L. S. 2pp. 8vo, Buffalo, February 25, 1862, referring to his occupancy of the presidential chair. \$20.

Pierce. A. L. S. 1p. 8vo, March 7, to his postmaster general on mail matters. \$10.

Buchanan. A. L. S. 1p. 16mo, April 9, 1858, a personal letter. \$17.50.

Lincoln. A. L. S. 1p. 8vo, Springfield, May 1, 1860, written two weeks before his first nomination. \$2,100, one of the highest prices given in recent years for a Lincoln letter.

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