

shows that have no motive at all except sensual excitement, and become shocked and prohibitory over a witty sermonizing play by Shaw, or a sad-eyed brooding play by O'Neill; they have a right to their preferences, and there is something to be said for those preferences, but they have no right to set those fallible preferences masquerading as the thunders of Sinai.

To return to the two volumes before us, Miss Macaulay writes cleverly of the incidents of society. Hers is the comedy of manners. She is worth reading because her good sense is entertaining, and her irony though caustic makes us more or less happy. One is "shocked" no more than is pleasant. Mr. Anderson knows nothing of the comedy of manners. He gives you what he has seen and felt. He is worth reading because he is, or seems to be, one of the significant men of his generation. There is solid artistry in him, but it is a technique which he has mainly worked out for himself. His irony is heavy but it draws blood, and those who are "shocked" by him become personally resentful.

## An Outlaw Supreme

THE RISE AND FALL OF JESSE JAMES.  
By ROBERTUS LOVE. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1926. \$2.75.

Reviewed by JIM TULLY  
Author of "Beggars of Life"

THIS is the first authentic history of Jesse James and the Missouri outlaws. The author, Robertus Love, is said to be a St. Louis newspaperman. If this be true, he learned to write under a slipshod editor. His material is epic, his manner of handling is insignificant. His sense of drama is drowned in verbosity. Given the mightiest outlaw of a mighty law-defying period, he falls short of the work done by another newspaperman, Walter Noble Burns, who has just published "The Saga of Billy the Kid." This is the tale of the snag-toothed twenty-one-year-old outlaw who killed twenty-one men before the night he was shot.

However, Love's book is important. His material outweighs his manner. The author claims that his book is not written for moralists, and yet, instead of telling a straightway story and allowing the reader to draw his own conclusions, he burdens his book with disguised preachments. That Jesse James came of "good stock"—and was a Baptist—is of more importance if it is woven carefully into the story. As one who has observed the workings of environment and heredity I am rather weary of writers who deal in time-worn adjectives which seek to prove that certain characters come from better stock than others. In this respect many critics are as guilty as Mr. James. That Jesse James always had murder in his heart is evident. As one who reads his history I am not horrified. I am merely horrified at the attitude taken by an author who dedicates a book to H. L. Mencken who calls him "The Jesse James of American Letters."

After the dedication Mr. Love says that Jesse James was no greater outlaw than Frank James. He had the luck of having a name as unforgettable as the hiss of a bullet. Did Mr. Love intend to pay Mr. Mencken a left-handed compliment?

As a matter of fact, Jesse James, in spite of his name, was an infinitely greater man than Frank James in his chosen profession. Jesse had daring and initiative. He was resourceful, cunning, brutal, and relentless. Mr. Love unconsciously proves him a greater man than Frank, in spite of himself. After a bullet had crashed through the brain of Jesse James, his elder brother gave himself up. He settled down to peaceful pursuits and became a doorkeeper at a St. Louis theatre. Imagine the blunt-chinned Jesse sinking so low. Frank James, the eagle-faced, who had ridden under the stars with his mightier brother, became the obsequious opener of doors for traveling salesmen and other St. Louis gentry.

Mr. Love, writing a book, "not for moralists" tells his reader that "philandering was not in the code of either Frank or Jesse. The fact is that there is no record of even a suspicion against them in this respect." I dare not doubt such an assertion for fear of offending the descendants of clean-minded men. This book is interesting as a study of the minds and social outlook of middle class America, in the person of its author, as well as a history of Jesse James. We hear from

Mr. Love that Jesse James "Believed himself an immortal being and he was not afraid to die."

There were fine writers on Missouri newspapers in 1882. The report of the great outlaw's death under the caption "Goodbye, Jesse!" is evidence of that. There are several pages of the report. Jesse was shot by Bob Ford, a traitor. The unknown reporter was a master of the written word—he handled pathos with the sure touch of genius, he knew drama. Jesse, hanging a picture of his favorite horse, had been shot from behind. But let the unknown reporter tell:

There was no outcry—just a swaying of the body and it fell heavily backward upon the carpet of the floor. The shot had been fatal, and all the bullets in the chambers of Charlie's revolver, still directed at Jesse's head, could not more effectually have decided the fate of the greatest bandit and freebooter that ever figured in the pages of a country's history.

The ball had entered the base of the skull and made its way out through the forehead, over the left eye. It had been fired out of a Colt's .45, improved pattern, silver-mounted and pearl-handled pistol, presented by the dead man to his slayer only a few days ago.

Mrs. James was in the kitchen when the shooting was done, separated from the room in which the bloody tragedy occurred by the dining room. She heard the shot, and dropping her household duties ran into the front room. She saw her husband lying extended on his back, his slayers, each holding his revolver in his hand, making for the fence in the rear of the house. Robert had reached the enclosure and was in the act of scaling it when she stepped to the door and called to him:

"Robert, you have done this! Come back!"

Robert answered, "I swear to God I didn't!"

They then returned to where she stood. Mrs. James ran to the side of her husband and lifted up his head. Life was not yet extinct, and when she asked him if he was hurt, it seemed to her that he wanted to say something but could not. She tried to wash the blood away that was coursing over his face from the hole in his forehead, but it seemed to her that the blood would come faster than she could wipe it away, and in her hands Jesse James died.

All in all, and in spite of all, this book is a scattered but a fine achievement.

## Distinctive Work

NOBODADDY. By ARCHIBALD MACLEISH.  
Cambridge: Dunster House. 1926. \$6.00.

THE POT OF EARTH. By ARCHIBALD MACLEISH.  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1925. \$1.25.

Reviewed by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT  
Author of "Tiger Joy"

WITH these two books Mr. MacLeish assures himself a definite and individual position in modern American poetry. His verbal felicity has always been noteworthy and the tough, defiant substance of his thought both independent and bold, but "The Pot of Earth," in particular, displays a more conscious and adept mastery over form and an ability for sustained flight which give promise of highly distinguished and original achievement for the future.

To turn to present achievement—"Nobodaddy," a three act play in blank verse sometimes adorned with certain end-bells of rhyme, though published a year later than "The Pot of Earth" was written before it. It deals with legendary Eden, before and after the Fall, but the author, in a foreword, expressly disclaims any attempt to reinterpret the Biblical legend in terms of metaphor of primitive man's experience of Nature.

Leaving aside any question of its possibilities as an actable play—and to your reviewer it seems as little adapted to the actual mold of the theatre as "Manfred" or "Cain"—"Nobodaddy," in spite of its cosmic machinery, is smaller and less successful than "The Pot of Earth." There is beauty in it, but it is a perishable beauty—the arrow strikes, but not quite at the center of the target, nor with sufficient keenness to break the mind with a new sorrow or a new joy. Perhaps a quotation will serve to illustrate its merits and its defects.

Adama (*The Voice seems to speak from his mouth*)

I am a god.

I say I am a god. And I shall build  
A world above this hollow world that holds  
Under its bubble Eden that will rise  
Beyond this like a cloud and vault its skies  
Over his heaven where at night he folds  
The dark around him and the winds lie stilled.  
I shall build up a world that will enclose  
His world within it as the curving leaves  
Of lilies hold a rain drop, and I'll set  
Such stars above his stars you will forget  
There was a star in heaven till the bright sheaves  
Of mine were gathered in the field that grows  
East of the evening.

This is not the best individual passage in the

book but it is fairly characteristic of the poem as a whole. The verse is lovely, melodious, and deft—it might distinguish a volume by a minor poet—but Mr. MacLeish's native abilities are not minor, if they have not yet attained their fullest expression—and it is for this reason that I quarrel with that passage and with "Nobodaddy." When his hammer strikes as in Cain's cry before the murder of Abel

Oh, let me go. Oh, sever this thick vein  
That binds me to the body of the earth  
That cannot feed me now, and let me go

I recognize the shadow of that lightning-flash which is Tragedy, but through the greater part of the poem, the lightning glitters but fitfully and the beauty is too composed to leave more than a musical echo in the mind.

"The Pot of Earth" is far superior, both in conception and execution. In this poem of 45 pages, with its symbolic foundation upon the ceremony of the sowing, tending, and withering of the so-called gardens of Adonis, with its limpid music and its curiously successful blending of assonance, free-verse, blank-verse, and rhyme, Mr. MacLeish seems, to have been somewhat influenced, though not overpowered, by Mr. T. S. Eliot, especially by Mr. T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." But it is more a likeness than an influence, even in such cadences as

We are having a late spring, we are having  
The snow in April, the grass heaving  
Under the wet snow, the grass  
Burdened, etc.

and does not detract from the fluid, water-sounding magic of "The Pot of Earth." Of the poem's symbolic content, I do not intend to speak, because any man can twist another man's symbols to answer something in his own mind—I have done so, no doubt, with this poem, in a way that satisfies me—another reader may do so in a way that satisfies him—and both our conceptions differ somewhat from Mr. MacLeish's. But the poem itself remains, with its interweaving harmonies—whether you call it the adventure of a girl, who marries and gives birth, and ends—or the springtime awakening of Nature and the human soul—or the sprouting of dead corn in a shallow pot under the bubbling rains of a carrion spring—and I would rather assert the beauty in such passages as the following than attempt to parse their bones.

The flowers of the sea are brief,  
Lost flowers of the sea,  
Salt petal, bitter leaf,  
The fruitless tree—

The flowers of the sea are blown  
Dead, they blossom in death:  
The sea furrows are sown  
With a cold breath.

I heard in my heart all night  
The sea crying, Come home,  
Come home, I thought of the white  
Cold flowers of foam.

Or again

Go secretly and put me in the ground—  
Go before the moon uncovers,  
Go where now no night wind hovers,  
Say no word above me, make no sound,  
Heap only on my buried bones  
Cold sand and naked stones  
And come away and leave unmarked the mound.  
Let not those silent hunters hear you pass:  
Let not the trees know, nor the thirsty grass,  
Nor secret rain  
To breed from me some living thing again,  
But only earth—  
For fear my body should be drowned  
In her deep silences and never found.

It may not be entirely fair to extract these passages from their context, especially in the case of so unified a poem as "The Pot of Earth," but when a man can speak for himself a critic serves his readers better by a gesture of introduction than by an attempt at paraphrase. And Mr. MacLeish can speak for himself. He is a poet whose thought is as important to his work as his lyric qualities—and for that reason the charge of obscurity may be brought against him by certain readers, in an age when thought of any kind is rapidly being supplanted by pictures of one sort or another. But his apparent obscurity has the depth of a still water rather than the blankness of a mask—and if he continues to develop after "The Pot of Earth" as he has developed since his first book, "Tower of Ivory," his place in the American letters of our phantasmagoric age will be a secure and an enviable one.

## Pastoral Poems

ENGLISH POEMS. By EDMUND BLUNDEN.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$2.50.

**H**ITHERTO it has been all too easy to write of Mr. Blunden as an eccentric landscape poet whose choice of dialect words and the scenes of a particular countryside (not excluding manure heaps and livestock) tended to narrow his range and obscure his artistic power. Happily this new volume offers a more comprehensive view of his poetic character than can be seen in any of his previous books. It is divided into four sections headed Village, Field, Mind, and Spirit, respectively. Any one section contains as much matter and a great deal more poetry than is to be found in all but two or three recent volumes of verse. The variety of the collection proves that the author is not belying that reputation promised by many of the leading English critics when his poems first attracted general notice some seven years ago.

Mr. Blunden's very obvious derivations from the English pastoral poets, notably Thomson and John Clare, need not be stressed because, volume by volume, his own poetic individuality has intensified. It is time to say farewell to any early suspicions of his indebtedness. What he has borrowed he has also improved. In short, Mr. Blunden has overtaken Clare in his stride while, in several respects, he can give points to Thomson. He has enriched their legacy in such a way as to enlarge the field of poetry wherein they ploughed such deep furrows. Although, like Clare, Mr. Blunden can observe and record physical appearances with minute fidelity he does not keep himself out of the verse. He colors the thing he sees, but he also permits it to color him, as Clare seldom did. While lacking that final Wordsworthian self-identification with nature, in our day inherited notably by A. E., and Ralph Hodgson, Mr. Blunden sees the landscape as a background for the shepherd where his obvious predecessors in the pastoral tradition saw the shepherd more as an incident in the landscape. Thus to treat Mr. Blunden, as he has so often been treated, as one of those poets who are content merely to "paint the streaks of the tulip" would be a grievous error. Nevertheless, when the occasion warrants it, how skilfully and feelingly he can paint those streaks!

The silver eel slips through the waving weeds  
And in the tunnelled shining stone recedes;  
The earnest eye surveys the crystal pond  
And guards the cave; the sweet shoals pass beyond.  
The watery jewels that these have for eyes,  
The tiger streaks of him that hindmost plies,  
The red-gold wings that smooth their daring paces,  
The sunlight dancing about their airs and graces,  
Burn that strange watcher's heart; then the sly brain  
Speaks, all the dumb shoal shrieks, and by the stone  
The silver death writhes with the chosen one.

Here, as in his more vital work, nothing is to be seen of that recent feverish anxiety, the curse of so many young poets, to say more at the moment than there is to say. He never strains after an effect. He takes his mood for what it is, capturing it in a net of finely wrought verse, with the dew still on it.

Because Mr. Blunden is frequently content with such plain statement and never intellectualizes his emotions, many of his poems, like this, will earn the blame of the contemporary *intelligentsia*. He will be called traditional and old-fashioned. And so, indeed, he is, but not in any ignoble connotation of those too often ill-employed terms. The truth is that Mr. Blunden, unlike so many of the younger poets, does not step out of the path of the eternal verities. Throughout the new poems he displays an exceptional ability to wrestle with and conquer what, in less competent hands, would be commonplace. The remembrance of the myriad bad poems about moonlight and roses has not been able to frighten Mr. Blunden away. He looks at his world with a fresh and ready heart and eye.

When I went abroad, the land  
Proclaimed a new dominion,  
The black lanes which ploughs had planned  
Shone vital and virginian.

Nobody has said it in just that way before. And although the city-bred literary generation of today may have lost some of the old power to respond to

the sweet country breath of these English poems it is difficult to believe that Mr. Blunden is any the less a fine poet because he has chosen to ignore the clamoring voices of the great cities. Those who can question the suggestion are recommended to turn to his "Rue du Bois" or "The Still Hour," pieces which any poet alive today might be proud to have written.

## Buckles and Lace

THE EXQUISITE PERDITA. By E. BARRINGTON. New York. Dodd, Mead & Company. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK

**N**O risk is involved in the prophecy that the new Barrington book will attract even more readers than "The Divine Lady" and "Glorious Apollo." Mrs. Beck has discovered an almost infallible formula and her pen grows increasingly facile in following it. Moreover the life of Mrs. Mary Robinson—known to romance as poor Perdita—is ideally adapted to the requirements of a Barrington tale. Luscious sentiment, mild tragedy, and heavy costuming color the story of the beautiful and talented woman who was tempted and fell—and then fell more than once. Her little page in history spices the large volumes devoted to Garrick, Sheridan, Charles Fox, and George the Fourth; actress, poetess, mistress of the Prince of Wales, a romantic and somewhat pathetic figure, she takes her place—in pink satin banded with sable or pale blue lustring and a chip hat—among the gayest and noblest company of her day.

One can hardly quarrel with the use of poor Perdita as heroine in the period-furniture, pseudo-historical type of fiction. Unlike Byron, she is fair game. Fox, who knew her as well as any man, said that the Almighty himself would be at his wit's end whether to place her in heaven or hell, and after all the accurate interpretation of her hesitations and desires, her retreats and advances, can matter very little to the sternest historian. Between the rosy picture of herself that Mary Robinson has left us in her "Memoirs"—Mrs Beck's is on the whole even rosier, though she neglects the side of Perdita that delighted in "the mixed confusion of a study and a nursery"—and Percy Fitzgerald's opinion that she was a foolish, excitable, designing, and exceedingly vain creature, there is room for much speculation—most of it futile. Whether she actually sold the Prince's letters to her, as historians say, or nobly burned them, as our novel has it, whether the Duke of Cumberland was indeed the villain of the piece, whether the Prince after the break wrote her not unkindly and her husband offered to take her back, whether she was forced by circumstances or love of finery into the arms of Fox and Tarleton—who really cares? The tale moves on nimbly, a matter of surfaces rather than depths.

One wishes, however, that the impersonal narrator of it might have slipped less clumsily in and out of an eighteenth century manner. Sometimes, half in, she interlards the expository passages with "twas," "I dare swear," and the like, sometimes, wholly out, she gravely explains the customs of the period or facetiously mocks at its manners. The moral asides, also, often pretentious and platitudinous, are wholly unnecessary: Perdita's actions can be trusted to speak for themselves. And there are all too many traces of hasty and slovenly writing in such scrambled sentences as:

To her misfortune, she had a clinging romantic strain in her that wound its tendrils about any who showed her a little kindness, and could not easily conceive that they should bear to wound her any more than she would have wounded them, and when it came, it brought a kind of terror with it, as of moving in darkness where dreadful creatures lurked about her.

Nevertheless the tale as a tale is succulent, filled with piquant situations and a paste-like sparkle. It will doubtless be immensely popular and many will find an additional charm and a virtuous satisfaction in the belief that romance is here tintured with learning. That the historical background comprises only thinly painted drops and flats, that the characterization probes very little beneath the lilac waistcoats and lace fichus, and that the biographical detail, insofar as it concerns the important persons of the day, resolves itself for the most part into twaddly gossip, all this will not—and perhaps should not—mar their enjoyment. The book appears, very opportunely, at a time of year when one takes one's pleasures lightly and lazily.

## The BOWLING GREEN

During the absence of Mr. Morley in Europe general contributions will be run in his column.

## An Unpublished Fragment

(From the Travel Diary of a Philosopher)

**I**HAVE now been for three days in pagan Rome and have come to understand the Romans perfectly. My first impatience with their lack of metaphysical profundity has passed away quite completely. There are other profundities than those of metaphysics. When I talked with Nero, I was indeed surprised at his indifference toward all questions of religion and morality but as soon as we touched upon the gladiatorial shows he revealed a delightful intelligence and a genuine grasp of the subject. I find deep significance in this. The Romans have chosen the way of action, the cult of the body, the glorification of the flesh, and have discovered perfection therein. And perfection is the one thing needful, no matter in what element it appears. Fundamentally the body and the mind are equally illusory in themselves, equally valid as means of self-realization, and it is quite proper to choose either path if it is chosen wholeheartedly. The Romans in their wisdom have known how to realize themselves even through lust and cruelty. Surely they should be praised. One should not think of the emotions of Caligula's guests as they fell into the sea from his Baiae bridge but those of Caligula himself, the young god, exulting in the success of his well-planned insolent device.

Yes, I am coming more and more to feel like a Roman. I no longer object to the blood of the hundreds of animals that are daily slaughtered in the arena, their howls of terror, or their groans of suffering. These are incidental to the display of man's triumph over nature, the conquest of instinct by a higher power. I am not even offended by the mutual murder of the gladiators. How admirably graceful are the movements of the retiarius as he throws his net over his victims! And not one of these gladiators but knows how to die with dignity. How superior is the culture of this people to the vulgar democracy of my own day!

I spent this morning with the Christians who are to be thrown to the wild beasts tomorrow. I found them wholly admirable. How trivial seem the aspirations of the pagans in comparison! It is indeed well to be the slayer, but it is far better to be the slain. For the sake of the inner experience, I accepted the Christian faith for the space of three hours. It proved to be marvellously strengthening. I had not the slightest fear of the arena, my approaching death seemed absolutely nothing, nay, the thought of imminent martyrdom brought with it an ecstatic solace such as I have never felt before in all my travels. Then I recanted lest I become the victim of a single type of perfection to the exclusion of all others. Those hours, however, were well spent; they enabled me to enter into the very soul of Christianity.

Rome is in flames. Some say that the fire was started by order of the emperor; if so, what a magnificent inspiration on Nero's part to prepare for himself so sublime a spectacle. Others accuse the Christians of being the incendiaries. That too, is plausible, because these Romanized Christians have never understood the true spirit of their religion imported from Asia and often act in a way directly contrary to its precepts. In either case, the fire must be regarded as a symbol of the ultimate fact that the whole external world exists solely as means of inner self-realization. I have always understood this in principle, but the vision of Rome burning to ashes before my eyes lends immeasurable grandeur to my feeling. The event, however, is unfortunate for my own plans. Nothing can be learned from or of men in a state of extraordinary danger and excitement. I must away. Nor does this really matter. Nero and Christianity are already left behind, states of the soul which I have now outgrown. Once more I float upon the shoreless sea of being.

ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES.