

ple rose and were born once again back to life. But at the same time it carried into the flesh and blood of the Russian intelligentsia the poison of analysis, criticism, and nihilism, and weakened, I think irretrievably, the will power of the intellectual, by narrowing his spiritual world. For, together with criticism it gave nothing to him that could enlarge and deepen the self-consciousness of his personality, develop and strengthen his will. Bringing down the edifice of reality, criticism weakened the power of imagination.

One day a revolutionary sailor, who had been attending several lectures on chemistry, told me: "I do not think much of chemical analysis—it merely makes me see an indefinable void everywhere."

He put it very amusingly. But there are many people for whom the analysis of social matters also discloses nothing but a void. This happens particularly often with the people of a lazy and easily exhausted mind, qualities which are very often found with Russians, of whom the wise Pushkin said: "We are lazy and not inquisitive."

As to the Russian literature of to-day—it is so rich in an entirely new spirit that one feels unable to speak of it in such a brief survey. Young writers, whose name is legion, display a more unreserved approach to the material contained in their works, that are distinguished by an entire lack of political tendency; they have had to confront the cruel artfulness of life and justly appreciate the unlimited possibilities of imagination. They know that their task lies in transfiguring reality, hard and tarnished as it is, into a beautiful dream, an eternal feast.

The Lyre in 1927

MISCELLANY OF AMERICAN POETRY, 1927. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1927.

Reviewed by O. W. FIRKINS

THREE things ask to be said about the current "American Miscellany," the new-type anthology, in which the sixteen authors choose their own poems and nominate each other. The first thing is their far-away-ness from—everybody. I go back through history by steps or stages, fifty years, one hundred and fifty, two hundred and fifty, three hundred and fifty years, and ask myself in order what Matthew Arnold, what Samuel Johnson, what John Milton, what Philip Sidney, would have made of more than half the poems in this volume. Old Chaucer's demure and arch perplexity, as he turned the pages, would be among the drollest of imaginable sights. What a distance between these men's lives and other people's, or, shall we say, between these men's verses and their lives! The oddest questions rise to one's mind. Do these poets ever wind their watches? Do they ever cut their fingers? Do they ever pinch their children's ears? The answer is of course, yes; but why do they make us ask the question? Why put the tripod so far from the hearthstone? Geoffrey Chaucer, riding on an eagle's back to a point in mid-sky, carried earth and its inhabitants up with him; Miss Léonie Adams, on the ground, tramples another planet. To a man of my type, who sees the chief hope of present-day verse along the path of felt and imagined actuality, the group, brisk as they are, seem to have lost their compass. They mistake the kind of sublimation required by poetry. Let them take down their undusted Wordsworths. Poetry is the light that never was on sea or land, not the light on the sea or land that never was.

The second point to be noted is the intensity of their preoccupation with art. They care very much for their own way of doing things; their intonations are calculated and their gestures timed. Their art, in its favored moments, is consummate. Mr. Archibald Macleish, new to me, achieves, in his "You, John Andrew Marvell," an Horatian delicacy of finish; Elinor Wylie, in "Minotaur," reaches a high and disdainful perfection which dares—and safely dares—to recall Gautier; Miss Millay has three sonnet sextets which might be chiseled without profanation under pediments and between triglyphs. Free verse seems to be losing, or at least modifying, its grip; its spring, even in H.D.'s once plastic hands, is already autumnal. Mr. John Fletcher, who grows in saliency, makes interesting, though inconclusive, experiments in a verse that hovers between blank and free.

With this care is found much of proud and wilful negligence, as of a wayward pupil mispronouncing a word to disoblige an unloved teacher.

Is the reader curious of enormity in rhymes? Let him turn to pages 7, 28, 276, of this book. Mr. Macleish, whose art I was just praising, ends lines of blank or half-blank verse with "the" and "and,"—offenses for which he should be chased by bloodhounds. Mr. Robert Frost, vaguely glimpsing flowers through a car-window, closes what might have been the most delicately imaginative lyric in the volume with this stanza:

Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
Not in position to look too close.

Surely these are sounds which a self-protecting ear would not investigate. Mr. Frost grants his favors on precisely the same terms as heaven. Then there are the pointed writers who furnish every evidence of point except—the puncture. Psychologists tell us that an animal whose foot has been moved aside by electricity while a bell is sounded can be trained to a point when he will draw back his foot at the sound of the bell without the electricity. Substitute mind for body and wit for electricity, and some of these poets seem to be training their readers in a precisely similar agility. Everything is there except the charge. Akin to this is part of the verse of the eminently nameable person whom I shall forbear to name who makes the commonplace oracular by the simple expedient of saying "Hush" before and after it is uttered.



"I shall fight the darkness until I die;
Then I believe all will be light."

STEELE MACKEYE.

Woodcut by Arvia MacKaye, daughter of Percy MacKaye, to illustrate "Beyond," a poem by Steele MacKaye.

The matter of these poets, then, is far-sought, and their unfailing interest in method sometimes takes the form of a solicitous negligence. These are heavy discounts, but let me preface my third point by the remark that, if this poetry is mainly barren, it is not contemptible. While many of these poems, being simply unintelligible, are dull, the artists as units and as a group are interesting. My third point is that as artists they are virile; they are energetic seekers; if they miss the undiscovered port, they sail in novel seas, and they come back, if not with gold beneath the hatch, at least with bronze upon the visage. Moreover, they are not mere parts of a flotilla. Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Frost are individuals; Mr. Benét's demi-voltes among the constellations have their own peculiarity. Turning to the neophytes, Mr. Robinson Jeffers, who owns a temperament, and the pleasantly tomboyish Miss Nathalia Crane seem more strongly individual than artists of the same grade and the same ripeness would have been in almost any earlier period of our literature. In this wakeful and diverse energy there is hope. I think these people mainly plow the sea, the unharvested and barren sea, but, often before this, men by furrowing water have reached other furrows in which they could both plow and sow. One could frame no kinder wish for these adventurers.

"Most of us use fountain pens nowadays," says John O'London's Weekly, "and we all think of them as comparatively recent inventions. The fact is that this form of writing implement has been known for about two centuries past. The word 'fountain pen' itself actually appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century. In a dictionary published in 1754 'fountain pen' is defined as 'a pen made of silver, brass, etc., contrived to contain a considerable quantity of ink and let it flow out by gentle degrees.'"

A Genius of the Theatre

EPOCH, The Life of Steele MacKaye, Genius of the Theatre, in Relation to his Times and Contemporaries. A Memoir by his Son, PERCY MACKEYE. 2 vols. New York: Boni & Live-right. 1927.

Reviewed by ELWYN A. BARRON

In the days when Steele MacKaye was in his prime, and drama was drama and not the noisome by-product of the divorce mills, police courts, and brothels it is rapidly coming to be, Mr. Elwyn Barron of *The Chicago Inter-Ocean* was the foremost critic in America, and the author of several successful plays.

No one was more highly esteemed by good actors and playwrights, and feared by bad ones, and one golden word of praise or encouragement from Elwyn Barron was more precious than royalties.

If this tribute from his old admirer should somehow—somewhere—meet the spirit-eye of Steele MacKaye, there will, I am quite sure, come from Station G. K. W. (God, knows, where) a radio message to Elwyn Barron in Kansas City, that will give him the thrill of his life.

OLIVER HERFORD.

A PARAGRAPH of devout eloquence in the Epilogue tells us that the incentive to preparation for the writing of this work, fitting crown to the literary labors of his successful life, came to the author after the close of his father's funeral ceremony.

On that bleak day, following close behind the frail form of my mother in her long black weeds, the organ music insufferably transmuting all life into anguish as we passed outward, I recall forever the shock of the glare of daylight and the pall of new responsibility, which has never wholly lifted since that hour—the overwhelming sense that some day I must bring him back, vividly back again to the world of breath and light his brave charm had lived to inspire and vivify. Thirty-two years is itself a lifetime, yet it has taken me that time to focus the records of his life. Even now, how may I know whether words have breath and life to re-embody him? Yet, as none of us who live shall ever be born again here, except through words pregnant with desire, perhaps—because of desire long pent—this memoir may not have failed of its living issue.

One who reads the graphic vividness of "Epoch" will have little doubt that Percy MacKaye has responded nobly to that inspiration of his young manhood with the output of his genius-equipped maturity, the biography of Steele MacKaye.

This book is more than the record of a life; it is a synthesis of many lives and the reflective epitome of a notable period, wholly original in form and method of treatment—an absorbing recital of aspirations, enthusiasms, achievement, fortitude, fidelities, and tragedy. It is not a work that lends itself easily to review, so multiple and varied are the elements of interest luring the reader page by page through the two large volumes. Romance, passion, humor; the poetic and the sordid; character in its noblest development and shreds of character at their meanest; the sanctities of home and family and the distractions of public concern; summits of hope and abysses of despair—"Epoch" teems with these, and other contrasts, presented with the candor and integrity of the poet, scholar, and student of humanity who understands.

Steele MacKaye has been designated "Genius of the Theatre." Innumerable attestors quoted throughout the volumes, confirm the title. He was that and more, but—the common experience of those who discern the realities beyond the horizon—he was smilingly or slightly termed an "idealist" and a "visionary" by short-sighted contemporaries unaware that the beneficently practical is begotten always of ideals and visions. Had he devoted himself exclusively to any one of the various lines of mental activity that shared his productive interest—actor, dramatist, manager, educator, lecturer, inventor, creator—undoubtedly, with his splendid vigor of mind and body, he could have grasped that authority and fortune by which the "practical" estimate success; but he would not have become the wonderful personality and potential genius which, surmounting the defeats that treachery thrust upon him, glows triumphant in the irradiations of "Epoch." Truly a strange, eventful history, not like that of any other character developed in the conflicting struggle and vicissitudes of American life wherein, only too often, Soul is allowed but a subordinate part. The spirit of inquisitive adventure that impelled him as a little lad to climb to the top of a church steeple, under repairs, to "find out where God lived," animated him in every field of his life work; and if he did not secure the full measure of his quest he never failed to prove the validity of his purpose, the clarity of his artistic

and scientific judgments. He gave more to the theatre and to theatrical art in practical benefits than any man before him ever gave, and the fruits of his genius are the enjoyment of thousands who do not know their indebtedness.

As one reads the record of this extraordinary life, this indomitable character, admiration grows into an eager desire that reward shall be equal to the passionate, but altruistic, zeal of the man's endeavor. That reward was all but realized. Had the faith and courage of his moneyed sponsors been adequate to combat pessimistic prejudice in a critical hour, the reward would have come in the thrilling glories of the Spectatorium, the greatest theatrically educative project ever devised. But panic-fear gripping at purse-strings shut off the building power when but a little more was needed to consummate the dream.

There are other crucifixions than that on the wooden rood, and Steele MacKaye had survived many of them; but this one came when physical resistance was broken by disease, and even the inflexible will that called out, "I'll be back in six weeks" could not keep the wasted body vital. The journey to California in quest of health was not quite completed. A little short of that destination the spirit of inquisitive adventure slipped away on another quest.

Whether "Epoch" be valued as a memorial to the genius and manhood of the father who inspired it, or be esteemed as evidence of the genius and manhood of the son who produced it, the work will stand to the honor of both, a lasting addition to the classic literature of America. Rich in anecdote and incident, in thought and fancy, in intimate reminders (and photographs) of persons famous in arts, letters, and science, friends of MacKaye, native and foreign, there is many a page that offers highly interesting matter for quotation where there is space allowed. But these really are lights and shades of the portrait and should be found in place. One feels in sympathy with the judgment of Percy MacKaye himself, who says in a paragraph of his preface:

My father's living portrait, in all its elusive lights and shades of contrast, may only, I think, be limned at full length by the gradual self-revealings of his whole record as these gradually unfold themselves to the imagining reader. For this, his record must speak—and live—of itself, and not by another's epitome.

The reader studious of this portrait unfolding in the lights and shadows of a vibrant epoch will be repaid amply in interest and benefit for the time he gives to it.

A Social Experiment

THE COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE. By JUDGE BEN. B. LINDSEY and WAINWRIGHT EVANS. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by BERNARD DEVOTO

AGAINST the amenities of the unenlightened Judge Lindsey sins twice. In the first place he observes contemporary life without employing the lenses of moral preconception. In the second place, he reports what he sees without propitiating the conventions. Offenses against right-thinking are heinous, but those against right-speaking are insupportable. The Judge has learned what penalties are in such case made and provided.

It is a commonplace that educated people the world over, though not unanimously or as a class, have acclaimed Judge Lindsey's work, books, and ideas. His publishers have, a little offensively, covered the jacket of "The Companionate Marriage" with tributes from the great of this world. Whenever there is liberality of thought you will hardly find a dissenter from his judgments or one who does not believe him among the mightiest of the righteous. And, indeed, there is little possibility of dissent from his facts, however affrightedly a larger part of the public may denounce him for talking about them. "The Companionate Marriage" says merely, in effect, that the changing fashions of behavior noted in "The Revolt of Modern Youth" extend, on the whole more significantly, among the elders; that the institutions surrounding sexual union are far from ideal; that the companionate marriage is a social fact whether legalized or outlawed; and that there is a widespread, not necessarily new demand for renovation of our sexual folkways. All that is indisputable.

And yet, though the Judge's facts cannot be

questioned, there is room for dissent from his conclusions, which is to say his expectations. One wonders whether the opinion of educated or enlightened people matters anything at all. Can even the great ones on the jacket, in this profoundest mystery, by taking thought add a cubit to our stature? The folk, we are taught, move eccentrically according to laws of which the very paths are obscure and the meaning quite withheld, our only knowledge being that reason has no part in them. It is established, further, that such changes as take place have no reference to books or the decrees of legislative assemblies.

* * *

The freedom Judge Lindsey calls for is a freedom of sexual action. It is a freedom that has always existed on the highest level of society and on the lowest. The companionate marriage, under one name or another, or under no name, has always existed among the very rich and the very poor. His observation is that this freedom is now surreptitiously spreading among the middle orders, and his demand is that surreptitiousness be taken away from it and science and frankness substituted. No one can question the desirability of such an outcome. But is it that easy? Have not even the middle orders always practised some measure of this freedom, withholding only conversation and legality? Legality is, of course, bound up with the concepts of religion and economics that may not be immutable but are certainly fundamental in the constitution of those orders. If the movement of social change, at the heart of the great mass, could be accelerated, then taking thought might be more promising than it seems at present. But the folkways, one repeats, cannot be accelerated from without. The periphery may be enlightened and vocal—or even mistaken—without noticeably affecting the center.

This is to suggest that sexual questions may be insoluble, and that Judge Lindsey's observations may after all concern only a change in fashion. History, especially American history, is sown thick with sexual experiments that proposed Utopia and achieved mention in indexes. The ragbag of defeated idealisms is crammed full of proposals as sane and as high-minded as Judge Lindsey's. Yet such formidable experiments as the Oneida Community, the Shakers, and the polygamous machinery of Mormonism did not make any more tolerable the unhappy union of the flesh or leave any impression on the social structure of America. Even if immediate legal recognition of the companionate marriage were within our power, would the hazard of sexual variation be reduced or the damned soul of man be comforted to any permanence?

One may feel that sexual problems are not susceptible of conscious guidance by the state, and still honor Judge Lindsey for the extraordinary value of his services, for his realism, his courage, and his charity. He is a north wind coming hardily into a discussion that has had little of frankness in it and less of fact. He is altogether on the side of the angels, and against his opponents all righteous men must be of one voice. But neither ideas nor discussion, nor yet facts, avail much to alter the currents of the earth. How, indeed, can the heart of man, moving darkly, be guided toward its goal, in the sexual agony, when one has after all these centuries of taking thought no knowledge of what that goal is?

The largest prize ever offered for a purely literary work, \$25,000 in cash, has gone to Katherine Holland Brown of Quincy, Illinois, for her novel "The Father." The sponsors of the contest, *The Woman's Home Companion* and The John Day Company, offered two awards, \$25,000 for the best novel submitted by a man and an equal sum for the best novel submitted by a woman, but as no novel entered by a man was considered worthy of receiving the prize, Miss Brown is the sole winner in the competition. The \$25,000 award covers first serial rights and American and Canadian book royalties under \$5,000, only. In addition to the cash prize, Miss Brown will receive royalties on American and Canadian book rights in excess of the \$5,000 advance guarantee and will retain full motion picture rights, dramatic rights, and the like.

Of the 1,391 manuscripts entered in the competition, only 418 were written by men. The judges agreed that no novel submitted by a man was of sufficient merit as a serial and as a book to justify their awarding it the prize.

The Play of the Week

By OLIVER M. SAYLER

OUT OF THE SEA, A Play in Four Acts. By DON MARQUIS. Staged by Walter Hampden for George C. Tyler at the Eltinge Theatre, New York, December 5, 1927. New York: Doubleday, Page and Co. 1927.

Reviewed from Performance and Published Manuscript

IN the production of his first serious drama on the professional stage, Don Marquis has played in poorer luck than he did with his first comedy. While "The Old Soak" had the advantage of the flexible and sympathetic stage direction of Arthur Hopkins, "Out of the Sea," a modern tragedy of the Cornish cliffs with subtle legendary implications, is the victim in the theatre of heavy hands, clumsy minds, and sterile imaginations. My recommendation to read this play rather than to see it as presently acted at the Eltinge may be relished by doubters as surrender of my contention that a play never reads as well as it plays. "Out of the Sea," on the contrary, is perhaps the season's most egregious failure to realize the playwright's conception in the terms and expedients of the theatre, a deplorable example of what happens to dramatic literature when the theatre falls short in performing its share of a sensitive and intricate collaboration.

"Out of the Sea" is not enough of a literary masterpiece to override inept interpretation and to register its intrinsic merit on the minds of the casual playgoer in despite of theatrical mayhem. "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Oedipus" can defy novice, bungler, and charlatan. Lesser plays, even very good plays, succumb to the fog of misconstruction. Even when published, their inherent values may be underrated, due either to the competitive concept provided by a faulty rendition or to lack of any kind of production to reveal latent possibilities. Only thus can I understand the verdict of a newspaper critic, who may be presumed to be acquainted with the published manuscript, that "Out of the Sea" is closet drama. On the contrary, in the face of a blundering production, in the face of a manuscript that reveals many stilted and commonplace phrases and passages, I feel that Marquis has written a moving, sincere, and authentic tragedy in poetic prose which an able *regisseur* could translate even more movingly, more sincerely, and more authentically in the media of the theatre.

The deathless saga of Tristram, his Iseult, and Mark the King, is the hovering impetus of Marquis's play. Harding, an American poet, is guest at a country house on the coast of Cornwall, where Lyonesse was submerged a thousand years ago. He falls in love with Isobel, a waif from the sea and wife of Mark Tregesal, bully and misanthrope. In an atmosphere of doom and foreboding, these three live their passionate drama through to its tragic dénouement.

This modern parallel with one of the most ubiquitous of medieval legends is told in a vein of realism shot through with poetic feeling. It sedulously avoids overstepping the borders of the supernatural, but there is an omnipresent suggestion of another plane of consciousness which may be rationalized by nothing more formidable than coincidence of natural forces or human psychology verging on the eccentric. For the theatre to create and sustain this realistic atmosphere and its subtle overtones is a difficult but not an impossible task. It is easier, of course, to manage simple realism, and likewise the frankly supernatural. Each has its own well-defined theatrical terminology. The demand here,

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