

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

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Spoiled Child of the Arts

THOSE of us now middle aged were educated in school rooms whose walls were dignified, if not adorned, by an impressive row of American poets—Whittier, Longfellow, Bryant, with magnificent beards, and sometimes the beardless Emerson. Whitman and Poe were conspicuously absent, though, of course we did not miss them. Oliver Wendell Holmes was often runner-up.

Poetry in those days was popular. It may have been a weak gruel, but it nourished thousands. Indeed, from the purely social aspect, it may well be urged that the greatest need of American literature is another Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The popular poetry of our day is as much inferior to his as a Long Beach bungalow to his stately Cambridge residence.

After the passing of these dwellers on the lower slopes of Olympus, American poetry became magazine verse, technically good, graceful, feminine, used chiefly for calendars and to fill the blank ends of magazine pages where a story or an article ran short. The poetic revival at the end of the first decade of our century challenged this innocuous desuetude. With Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Amy Lowell, poetry became masculine even to raucousness, and challenged a wider audience—challenged but was answered by the poetical only, who fiercely liked or fiercely disliked the new realism and the new raucousness. We said, poetry is becoming vital again; it is being read, soon it will be widely read. But the impulse passed; the next generation of poets turned in, instead of out, wrote increasingly for special journals and poetry societies, became more, not less, esoteric, more clever, less strong. Poetry in America became, and is, a kind of esthetic exercise, practised, like dancing and gymnastics, by devoted coteries, a means of self-expression, a vehicle for subtlety, but not one of the great arts, not as interesting as American architecture, not as vigorous as American fiction.

Why this miscarriage? What cold eighteenth century has settled so quickly upon the hopeful renaissance of the nineteen tens? Why are we drifting back again to "magazine verse"?

The poets are writing for each other. The poets are criticizing each other with that special consideration, varied by malice, always characteristic of criticism within a coterie by coterie standards. It is easier now to make a reputation in poetry than in any other art, if by reputation one means a name known in literary circles. A writer may be writing short stories read by hundreds of thousands, and getting for them an income respectable even in business, and yet be utterly devoid of literary reputation, his name unknown except to a few editors and forgotten by his careless readers as soon as they have read a story. But a slender volume of poems, approved by a poetry society, and bruited through all the poetical journals by friends of the author, will add in a year to the list of anthology poets the name of an author who has written only this. He is read by his peers only, reads to them in selected gatherings; they only criticize him, they only are sponsors for poetical fame.

And poets, by and large, are the worst of all reviewers, and the most unscrupulous. They, and not the columnists often accused, are the puffers par excellence of our day. It is the poets who unblushingly review their friends' books on every opportunity, and praise to the skies poetry that nobody

Spring in Chinatown

By LAWRENCE LEE

I WONDER what they think of spring
On Pell and Doyers Street,
And if to Chinese noses now
The morning air seems sweet.

Does Chi Ling mix poetic thoughts
With those he gives to trade,
Or think of one who might put on
His greenest string of jade?

Do shiny cups and yellow plates
Bring Chinese girls to mind;
And does the scent of jasmine buds
Seem like a Canton wind?

Do slim young merchants down on Mott,
Where Wu Chen does not see,
With brush and ink print Chinese odes
On packages of tea?

"Association Items"

By WILMARTH S. LEWIS

AS a collector, I am of all things partial to what are called "association items," a weakness I believe general, for only the other day I heard of a Yale undergraduate who entered a book shop and asked for Dr. Johnson's copy of the "Life." To be able to say "This is the copy of the Strawberry Hill 'Grammont' which Walpole gave to the Duchess of Bedford (his Turtle)" means much to me. I like to think of the many gay and friendly acts that so many of the books in my library represent. Here are Mrs. Chapone's "Letters" going to Mrs. Boscawen; Lord Carlisle, having paid thousands of Charles Fox's debts gives him this specially bound copy of his "Father's Revenge;" Mrs. Vesey—the Sylph—flutters through the thin folio, "Six Poems" by Mr. Gray; and Lord George Gordon admires his specially bound copy of "Scotland's Opposition to Popery," which shows himself surrounded by cannon and flags and thistles in, positively, the garb of John the Baptist. No wonder he was encouraged to loose the Terror upon London, to throw Parliament into confusion, and at last to accomplish the burning of Lord Mansfield's library.

It is curious how, once one has committed his heart and soul to the collecting of a man, that man looks after one. I am sure, for example, that often Horace Walpole has said to Mme. de Sevigné, over their tea in the Elysian Fields, "I sent him a little something else today." It may run on almost automatically as it did for me with copies of Walpole's "Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors." When I began collecting Walpole I was not at all excited by this dull sounding work, but presently Walpole, to jack me up, had Messrs. Maggs send me the copy he had given to Kitty Clive! The "Catalogue" was the first thing of his own that Walpole printed at his Press, a year after its founding in 1757. Mrs. Clive was then living under his chaperonage close by at Little Strawberry Hill, and he doubtless delivered this copy in person. The excellent Miss Matilda Hawkins questioned whether Mrs. Clive "would have been as well tolerated as she was in the neighborhood, had it not been for the countenance of Horace Walpole," for Kitty Clive was brief in manner and frank of speech even though she had enough patience to work the carpet with blue tulips and yellow foliage for the Holbein Chamber at Walpole's Gothic Castle. Five other items of importance and interest connected with the "Catalogue" now flowed in on me, including the proof sheets, corrected by Walpole, for the Second Edition, and the copy of the rare "Postscript" which he sent Richard Bull and which still contained his letter. And all these were almost forced upon me!

Then there are the almost unbelievable coincidences. Two years ago when on my way to England, Professor Tinker asked me to get him a copy of the first edition of "The Castle of Otranto." I explained that I had to get one for myself and he replied, that all he wanted was an ordinary copy, but that I could have, knowing my weakness for association items, the copy Walpole gave to—William Cole. He might have said anyone, of course, but Cole probably came first because Walpole's two best letters on how he happened to write the book were addressed to Cole. Six weeks in London produced only one copy and, with a lack of generosity that collectors will understand, I had it sent home with my books. Once this selfishness had been in-

This Week



"The Vanished Empire." Reviewed by *G. H. Danton*.

"A Nation Plan." Reviewed by *Lewis Mumford*.

"The Philosophy of the Abbe Baudouin." Reviewed by *Ernest Sutherland Bates*.

Qwertuio. A Shirtsleeves History. "Turgenev, the Man, His Art and His Age." Reviewed by *William Lyon Phelps*.

"Brother Saul." Reviewed by *John Haynes Holmes*.

"The Dark Gentleman." Reviewed by *Leonard Bacon*.

Next Week, or Later

"Winds of Criticism." By *Percy H. Boynton*.

reads. It is not log rolling, at least not always log rolling. The principle rather seems to be that poetry is a weak plant which must have the sun, that since it cannot make money, it deserves praise, that if the world will not esteem it, then poets must. And American poetry has become the spoiled child of the arts, protected, pampered, praised for every hint of well doing, spanked in an occasional bad temper, tweaked by the ears now and then, but never disciplined, never submitted to standards that the artistic novel must meet, never discussed like the poetry of the nineteenth century as vital expression of importance to humanity. Never!—well, hardly ever. We do not write of exceptions. It is the rule that counts, and the rule is that our poets are content with a family reputation, and that, more than any other literature, their work betrays a lack of rigid criticism, and an unwillingness or inability to make what they say important beyond coterie and clique.

dulged, however, I was smitten with shame, resolved to turn it over to Mr. Tinker on my return, and left word that the next copy that Maggs found should be sent to me. As soon as I got back I delivered the book in New Haven and then, when I reached home, I found a letter from Maggs saying that they had just secured another copy of the first "Castle of Otranto"—the copy Walpole gave William Cole. Progressive virtue, and approving heaven!

One can never tell when the great moment will arrive, the moment when a beaming heaven will open and drop a treasure at one's feet. Two years ago I was looking through the catalogues of some pending art sales—a thing I had never done before. That very night, I found, was to be sold the Arthur Tooth Collection and Number 26 was Lady Mary Churchill by Francis Cotes. The only Lady Mary Churchill that meant anything to me was a half-sister of Horace Walpole, the natural daughter of Sir Robert by the amiable lady who subsequently became his second wife, but of course it might be she, and so I went to the auction rooms to see if there were any family resemblance. There was, a quite remarkable one, one strong enough to gamble on, and that night, with a flap of my hand, I got Lady Mary with only one opposing bid.

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My problem then was to get her home before I sailed the next week. With her frame she was about thirty-five by forty inches, a sizable picture to carry; but I couldn't wait for her to be crated and packed and so I decided to take her myself. The auctioneers refused to wrap her up. "People," they explained, "are liable to stick their umbrellas through it, but if they see it's a picture they will keep out of the way." Then I bundled Lady Mary into a taxi and, clutching her tightly, stepped out upon the marble stage of the Grand Central. It was noon on Saturday and the station was crowded, but trains stopped running and the crowd stood still as our party—my porter, Lady Mary, and I—made our brilliant way across the floor to the farthest end. One man was impelled to inquire if Lady Mary was over a hundred years old, another boldly asked if she had cost over a thousand dollars, while a third, evidently a lover of the ancients, asked in an awed voice if she had come from Athens. Arrived at the barrier, the ticket collector threw a great chain in front of me and announced truculently, "You can't take that thing through here." Balancing Lady Mary on my toes, I fell into a stupor until roused by the ticket collector. "Follow me!" he hissed even as I began searching for a crisp bill. I did and he fairly took my hand, like the Red Queen, as we raced to a mysterious little unseen door. "I'd get hell for this," he volunteered, "it's violating the franchise. You're not supposed to carry things like that. What would happen to the express companies?"

At last home, with Lady Mary looking wistfully down from the wall, over her half-open music book, I began my researches. Was this faintly moustached lady Walpole's half-sister or was she not? Francis Cotes was not mentioned in Toynbee's edition of the letters, nor was the portrait. No help there. The only other place was the Catalogue of the Sale of the Contents of Strawberry Hill, which took place in 1842, forty-five years after Walpole's death. The Catalogue was largely based on Walpole's own "Description of Strawberry Hill" which saved Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, who wrote a foreword to the Sale Catalogue, no end of trouble. This I now consulted and there in the twenty-first Day's Sale, number 39, was "A half length portrait of Lady Maria Walpole, only child of Sir Robert and Maria Skerret, and wife of Charles Churchill, only son of General Churchill." Then follows a line of description taken from Walpole. "She is represented in a veil, with a music book before her." So my Lady Mary was not only Walpole's sister, but his own portrait of her which he had commissioned Eckardt, not Cotes, to paint for Strawberry Hill.

Poor Lady Mary had a hard time of it. Born illegitimate, one of the first things her father did when he fell from power and became Lord Orford was to have her legitimated by Royal Patent, a balm which had previously been reserved for royal indiscretions. The outcry was fearful, great ladies swore they would not give her place at court, the mob carried her about in effigy. But soon the tide turned. Sir Robert's geniality won nearly every-

body back; whereupon his daughter became the greatest match in England. The richest and highest born young men of the day placed their coronets at her feet, but, to her brother's intense disgust, she married Charles Churchill, the natural son of old General Churchill by Mrs. Oldfield, the actress. From this point on, Lady Mary's life was one happy succession of babies and journeys to France. Churchill proved an excellent husband, Hori's affection was won back, Madame du Deffand did all that could be done for her and her daughters in Paris, and she lived, consoled to the end of a long life, by her proficiency on the harpsichord.

The great thing about the portrait is the remarkable resemblance to the portrait of Horace painted by Richardson when he was about the same age. There was a story current in the eighteenth century that Walpole himself was the natural son of his mother by Carr, Lord Hervey. If this were true, he and Lady Mary would be no relation whatever and might be expected to bear no resemblance to each other. But the resemblance between the two portraits is astounding. There is the same long sloping nose and oval chin, the shape of the two heads is almost identical. It is pleasant to think that, at this late date, Lady Mary is doing her bit to dispel a gossiping rumor about her brother's name, a rumor whose actuality had clouded so much of her own life.

Marginalia may make a book of the greatest association interest, and also, as Mr. Percival Merritt has recently shown, they may be most illuminating. The eighteenth century annotated its books with a care and a passion which seems remarkable now. At most we underscore a line or mark a passage in the margin. The ladies and gentlemen of the eighteenth century poured out their emotions with little regard for any subsequent eye that might speculate upon them. Among these arch-annotators a conspicuous place must be reserved for that great poetess, Miss Anna Seward, the Swan of Litchfield.

Miss Seward's "piping" annoyed Horace Walpole. "An out pensioner of Parnassus," he rudely called her, but there were many others to hail her as the modern Sappho, the Tenth Muse, and she was actually known as The Swan. "The mind of Miss Seward was early imbued with the vivid and sublime imagery of Milton," Mr. E. V. Lucas quotes from the *British Lady's Magazine* in his "A Swan and Her Friends," "and she lisped 'L'Allegro and 'Il Penseroso' when only in her third year."

From this auspicious beginning, the Swan flew powerfully on until, in a surprisingly short time, she occupied a position in the female world remotely comparable to that of her great fellow-townsmen to whom there are many feminine references in her letters. Her grandfather had taught Dr. Johnson when he was merely a "huge, over-grown, misshapen, and probably dirty stripling," and she could never quite rid herself of the idea that he was her rival in fame. But among female geniuses she stood at the top, striking her lyre with bold but graceful sweeps. England, virtue, and nature were among her special charges, and she looked forth upon the world with an Empress's, a good Empress's solicitude.

Before me is her copy of "The Vales of Weyer: A Loco-Descriptive Poem," by J. Gisborne, Esq. J. Gisborne, Esq., was known, with the weakness of the eighteenth century for calling people by any name but their own, as The Man of Prayer. He was a Poet, and "The Vales of Weyer: A Loco-Descriptive Poem" was one of his most perfect expressions. Published a year before "Lyrical Ballads," it is not to be confused in any way with the great movement which was about to usher in the nineteenth century. Miss Seward, happily still unconscious of young Mr. Wordsworth and young Mr. Coleridge, was ripe. Fifty-five years of this world had established in her the manner of a seeress. Dr. Johnson had been dead for thirteen years, the great Mason was dying, dear Mr. Hayley was still going strong, but as she herself had confessed nine years before, "the silver cord of our amity is loosening at more links than one." For the moment she was quite without peer as she picked up the Man of Prayer's Loco-Descriptive Poem.

She read, so the book shows, until the ninety-fifth line before she brought into play her critical pen in the margin.

While many a rill with querulous tones
Frets o'er the moss-embroider'd stones,
And liquid music softly wakes
The stillness of those tangled brakes.

Opposite this she marked a bold line and wrote "beautiful description." The Man of Prayer had won his spurs, but, in line 126, he began a sin which was to prove nearly fatal. The moon, he said in effect,

Sheds a glory on the streams,
and the Swan underscored "glory" and wrote sternly opposite: "too strong a word for moonlight. It is the Sun's property." As soon as line 131 he again makes this mistake—

Pale o'er the woodlands moonshine glows
and the Swan after underlining "Pale" and "glows" tartly says "Nothing that is *Pale* can *glow*." Nor is the peril past. In line 163 we read

Queen of the skies, who silver'st wide
This dreary world with glory's sea,
Roll from thin orb the radiant tide
And pour thy lucid streams on ME!

Glory and radiant are underscored. Then the Swan: "Pope's example betrays succeeding Poets into the error of allotting that magnificent term for the modest Moon. Radiant also is too fine an epithet." Finally one feels that all is lost when one finds the modest moon again glaring, for Miss Seward, losing patience, coldly says, "the moon never glares." Fifty lines flow by before the warmth of the poetic fire can thaw the frozen Swan, but at last it proves too hot and she exclaims, with an exclamation point, "beautiful." This lucky hit is followed by a long passage telling how Hygeia, with her sweet voice, "leads stout youths and maidens o'er the mead." Applause breaks out in the middle and at the end Miss Seward's critical hands beat together in honest praise: "The whole of this invocation is very poetic." Useless to multiply evidences of the Swan's generous recognition of a younger genius. Fortunately, no further references are made to the glaring moon and through the rest of this Canto and the second—the Swan apparently did not read the last—praise is profligately bestowed. Nay more, so completely does she enter into the Man of Prayer's mood that she unbuttons her own bosom and bares it, so to speak, to the modest moon. J. Gisborne, Esq., was not above appending a footnote of a few hundred words here and there to help the stumbling feet of his less informed readers. "The dire Empress of the North" is mentioned and receives a superb footnote of three hundred words full of indignant horror. Miss Seward is caught up and swept on in her turn until she cries out: "Yet how is the Military Monster who executed her dire behests, the cruel Suvaro, extolled in all our public papers, now he is fighting for our allies." Poor Suvaro was made to feel the full force of a virgin's wrath—and England with him, for in another place Miss Seward again bursts out: "Blush England blush for thy applauding epithets for that infamous Homicide."

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It is pleasant to turn from the spectacle of such duplicity to "Immortal Washington—Columbia's lord," who was, J. Gisborne, Esq., declared in a footnote "the Saviour of his Country, the Supporter of Freedom, and the Benefactor of Mankind." Miss Seward was in complete accord, and does not hesitate again to confront England. "What then," she asks with a bristling exclamation point, "has England to answer for in that unjust war!" This is a challenge which even today stirs answering chords in Republican breasts.

And then we come, suddenly, at the foot of page 49, upon a passage that makes us catch our breath. Mr. Gisborne backs up a note on the nightingale by reference to three great poets. "I think Shakespeare, Milton, and Mason have noticed this circumstance; and it has not escaped Dr. Darwin:

There as sad Philomel, alike forlorn,
Sings to the night from her accustomed thorn.
Botanic Garden, Vol I., 1.34."

In words of fire, the Swan has written opposite: "those lines are not Dr. Darwin's, they are Anna Seward's, though inserted without acknowledgment, together with thirty-six more of hers which form the exordium of his *Botanic Garden*."

Picture her, alone with her book, as she set the sinister truth down. Dr. Darwin—whose grandson was also to be a naturalist—had done this thing to her, after their life-long friendship and after she had written an immortal biography of him. Her note was again addressed to England, but it was also addressed to posterity. And now posterity, in America, publishes the fact nearly a hundred and thirty years later. *Fiat justitia ruat coelum!*