

The Wits' Weekly

Conducted by EDWARD DAVISON

Competition No. 36. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best short Ballad (not Ballade) of Book Titles with the refrain, suggested by a recent juxtaposition of publishers' advertisements,—

*Dead lovers are faithful lovers,
But gentlemen marry brunettes.*

(Entries should reach *The Saturday Review* office, 25 West 45th Street, New York City, not later than the morning of July 2.)

Competition No. 37. A first prize of ten dollars and a second prize of five dollars are offered to the two competitors who can suggest the largest number of acceptable new words designed to fill serious gaps in the everyday language of educated people. The standard of acceptability will be determined by (a) usefulness, (b) euphony, and (c) the validity of any derivations that the inventor sees fit to suggest. Specialized technical and scientific terms will not be acceptable. The word camouflage, adapted into English from the French camouflage during the war, may be cited as an unnecessarily strict example of the kind of word required. Competitors must not offer more than fifteen suggestions. (Entries should reach *The Saturday Review* office not later than the morning of July 16.) Attention is called to the rules printed below.

THE THIRTY-THIRD COMPETITION

The prize of fifteen dollars offered for the best Ballade of Dead Poets has been awarded to Homer M. Parsons, of San Bernardino, Calif., for the following entry.

THE PRIZE BALLADE OF DEAD POETS

*WHERE'S David, who sang and
played his lyre,
And ran like the Devil when Saul
got peeved
And hurled at the racket his six-foot
spear?
And the lyric Solomon, many-
twined,
Who liked 'em black? And Byron
who dived
Through the Hellespont, in Leander's
wake?
Curious how these old ducks raved!
Eddie Guest is the poet I like.*

*Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wilde—
To mention part of his Irish
name—
Where is he? Where is the lad who
sailed
From Leghorn, Shelley, the prince
of rhyme?
Where are the bards of Queen Bess'
time,
Kit and Will? Who sees their smoke?
Give me the fellow who harps on
Home.
Eddie Guest is the poet I like.*

*Where's Homer, who sang of epic
strife?
And Catullus, the young Verona
blade?
And the Mellstock ghost, and the
Baltimore scuf
And the golden Sappho, Lesbos'
pride?
Where is the youthful suicide,
Chatterton? Would you have them
back?
They're gone, and maybe it's too
damn bad.
Eddie Guest is the poet I like.*

*Where's Homer, who sang of epic
strife?
And Catullus, the young Verona
blade?
And the Mellstock ghost, and the
Baltimore scuf
And the golden Sappho, Lesbos'
pride?
Where is the youthful suicide,
Chatterton? Would you have them
back?
They're gone, and maybe it's too
damn bad.
Eddie Guest is the poet I like.*

*Envoy
Doctor, examine my feeble mind;
Where it says in the middle, pull
up the slack.
If you cure me of this it's worth ten
grand:
Eddie Guest is the poet I like!*
HOMER M. PARSONS.

This is the first time that Mr. Parsons has carried off a whole prize, though there has scarcely been a week during the past six months when his entry did not seriously challenge the winners'. In the book of *The Wits' Weekly* which, someday, I hope to edit, he would probably have a larger number of contributions to date than any other single author. More's the pity that his Ballade, though by a small margin the best of a large batch, should under-represent the average level of his contributions to this page. He manages the self-imposed analyzed rhyme skilfully, however, and avoids the overwhelming gravity that characterized so many of the other outstanding entries.

The obvious and inevitable model—Villon's "Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis" was not ignored; on the contrary it was rather too slavishly imitated. Nine out of ten of the chosen refrains posed the old question usually by a mere variation of the image, and I quickly tired of the long succession of "Where are the winds that have moved the tree?"

"Where are the winds of years gone by," "Where are the poets that have passed away?" and kindred enquiries. Mrs. M. E. Ballantyne was much the best of the more conventional imitators, though I cannot be sure whether her stammering rhythms were the result of a definite attempt to imitate Chaucerian models or merely due to an insufficient craft.

*Has Langland forgotten Saxon dree-
ing,
My masters? Does merry Chaucer bait
Everyman for a tale? Is Jonson free-
ing
The bag of the bee? Where then is
Lydgate?
Where does Spenser the virtues
animate?
And Shakespeare, the singer with no
compeer,
Did he inherit a worm's estate?—
But where did the blossoms go last
year?*

Alice Boorman Williamson confined herself to the women poets with the refrain "What would they think of Amy L.?" Here is Miss Lowell's entry into heaven.

*Perfumes exotic around her flow,
Colors are crashing and trumpets
bray;
Saffron and scarlet and indigo
Splash up the whiteness with rain-
bow spray.
Stalwart and virile, and come-what-
may,
She strides along, and we know full
well
She doesn't care (with a double k)
What they may think of Amy L.*

This, and the entry by R. Desha Lucas, were the best of several that entirely disregarded Villon denying the plain hint of the title, "Ballade of Dead Poets." Mr. Lucas's offering was both witty and satirical.

*A poet needs a good mortician
To make his fame forever shine;
Or, in a state of inanition,
He need not heed sharp tongues
malign;
Tho' savage critics should combine
To put him down a poor misled one,
Why should he live to peak and pine?
The only good bard is a dead one.*

*Envoy.
Complaisant as contended kine,
The living poets! Have you read
one?
If all of them were good, how fine!
The only good bard is a dead one.*

But I could not help feeling that this excellent piece did not fulfil the spirit of the competition. C.R.S. at least gave us a catalogue and implied a lament. Others who deserve praise are M. F. Melcher, L. H. Richards, Deborah C. Jones, and R. S. Buck, Jr.

RULES

Competitors failing to comply with the following rules will be disqualified. Envelopes should be addressed to Edward Davison, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City. All MSS. must be legible—typewritten if possible—and should bear the name or pseudonym of the author. Competitors may offer more than one entry. MSS. cannot be returned. The Editor's decision is final and *The Saturday Review* reserves the right to print the whole or part of any entry.

The Oxford Press

By M. EDMUND SPEARE

(This article has been unavoidably delayed from last week's issue, due to the temporary confusion of moving the Oxford University Press offices to their new quarters, at 114 Fifth Avenue, New York City.)

THE most sublime single utterance in all literature is perhaps that from the first chapter of Genesis: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." In this majestic sentence (if I may be forgiven a mundane application of it) lies the whole *modus operandi* of our university presses—their great past and their happy future. What other kind of organization could have undertaken the seventy-year labor of erecting, with practically no subvention, a cathedral to scholarship like the Oxford English Dictionary, except a university press? What commercial enterprise could have held together, in a great coöperative business, some thirteen hundred men and women throughout the world, most of them not receiving a penny for their labor, under the leadership of a Murray, a Furnivall, a Bradley, and a Craigie, and patiently awaited the completion of a work of erudition unto the second generation? No business that subserves a private interest can afford to launch great enterprises of scholarship which, initially, are certain to bring no profitable returns, whether in money or in advertising or in both.

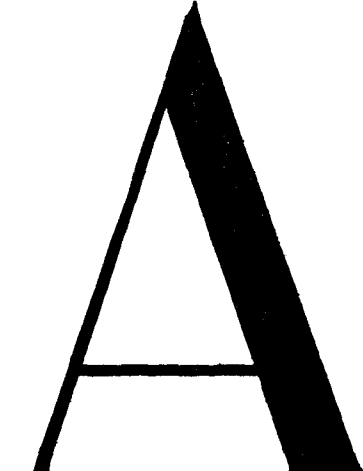
When, at the close of his eight laborious years, Samuel Johnson delivered the last pages of his dictionary to his publisher, and was informed that the latter had thanked God that he had done with him, Johnson made his famous reply: "I thank God that he is able to thank God for anything." In our own day, we hear of another kind of reply, one honoring an organization of printers which, for two centuries, has had no shareholders or debenture-holders, and which serves no private interest. The scene is in Heaven. The colloquy is between Max Beerbohm and Boswell's hero. Says the Inimitable Max: "Doctor Johnson, I have heard that there has just been published, by the Press of the famous Oxford University, the last or twentieth volume of an extraordinary dictionary, treating of some 425,000 English words in 15,500 imperial quarto pages, and illustrated by almost two million quotations." Johnson: "'Tis a noble monument indeed to Oxford. I should call it one of the wonders of their world." Beerbohm: "But it is said, Sir, that the work was finally brought to a conclusion by an editor who is a Scotchman and a Presbyterian." "What!" thundered the

Doctor, "have you never learned that a man may be facetious without being both ribald and vulgar?"

To maintain a Learned Press to-day, in the face of the exacting conditions of modern business practice, and to meet squarely those conditions without losing one's integrity, often requires the finest kind of heroism. One must continue ever increasingly the output of scholarly and educational books, many of which are in their nature unremunerative, and must manufacture these in a world of expensive labor and high cost of material. The dullest classroom pedant of our day prefers the book that is attractively printed and neatly bound, however dully written the book may be, to one that is commonplace in appearance. The modern student must be saved from weariness of spirit; hence whatever the text-book allows that can heighten his interest, must be included. So we have countless plates, and half-tones, and vocabularies, and notes, and more notes, and general bibliographies, and "suggestions for writing," and topics, and more topics, and indexes, and thumb-indexes. All these things cost money. Books to-day must be printed with the greatest accuracy, often at excessive speed, and learned books require a personnel in the manufacturing plant second only in intelligence to the persons who write them, and often experienced in a special craftsmanship which the authors do not possess. The most modern printing machinery must be used and the finest paper and the best binding and the most subtle skill employed, for, in this instance, the body is expected always to be a fitting embodiment to the spirit which it houses. When Christopher Morley informs the world "that university press books are occasionally (and unavoidably) expensive," his parenthetic phrase holds a deal of wisdom in it, and his full statement tells the whole story.

The whole of Oxford University Press business has been gradually built up by the thrifty utilization of profits made by the sale of its books. It possesses virtually no endowment. The maintenance of its learned press has depended solely upon the profitable management of the publications of the Press as a whole (including Bibles, and prayer-books and the many "popular" series like the *World's Classics*), and the loyalty and idealism of a large part of its personnel. The future good fortune of such a Press (as of any other press whose primary function is the promotion of education and research) lies with those scholars, and in the hands of that intelligent general reader who, by persistent use of its output, would encourage its tradition of ideal standards and meticulous craftsmanship.

"No other novelist
approaches Beyle."
—GEORG BRANDES



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GOOD BOOKS

Edmund Gosse, 1849-1928

By JOSEPH COLLINS

Author of "The Doctor Looks at Literature"

EDMUND GOSSE was a Victorian, but one would not suspect it from his writings. He kept pace with western European literature for more than half a century, and to nearly the day of his death his gait was swinging, his stride long, his wind good. He was one of the most useful men of letters of his time. Biographer, poet, critic, essayist, he interpreted foreign and domestic literature to his countrymen wholesomely, lucidly, and entertainingly, and he wrote one book worthy to be called great, "Father and Son." It is the story of the relationship between a harsh and exacting father, a biologist of merit who had no difficulty in reconciling science with religion, and a vignette of his mother, a religious, repressed, resigned Puritan who combined the narrowness of bigots with the sanctity of martyrs. Though it takes the author only to late adolescence the book is a model. It makes clear to us the factors that converged to make him what he was as child and man.

So little of the religious child seems to have remained in the man that one is tempted to attribute to the strictness of his religious education the laxity of his beliefs in later years, his rebellion against the over-dominating influence of his father, his flight to London, the escape into himself from a living death among the "Saints" of the parish of which his father was a leader. What remained of the overdose of piety and discipline was a habit of scientific order and accuracy, a burning longing for freedom and for kindness. In the portrait of his childhood, we see the purity of strict Calvinism in all its sombreness. "It darkened the rays of the sun, hardened the smile on the lips, turned to stone the warm impulses of nature, made strange, cruel monsters of human beings" who had started with normal endowment of compassion, tenderness, kindness, and understanding. His childhood must be beyond the comprehension of the present generation of young people who were spared the double isolation of poverty and piety in their infancy. As a child, Edmund Gosse had only his dreams, and as he knew nothing of life save the dourness of a pious father and the martyrdom of a zealous mother, his dreams were not those of normal children. There was tragedy in his constant striving to give freedom to his nature, to be constantly disheartened by the necessity of living up to his reputation as a "saint" and chosen child of a chosen father.

The science of biology was in its infancy at the beginning of the second half of the last century. The doctrine of evolution was just being formulated. Young Edmund was not admitted to the discussions that it suggested. His rearing was so orthodox that nothing was considered worth while by his parents save fear of God and hope of salvation. His turn of mind doubtless owed much to the severity of his education. The passion stifled by such upbringing may never be recaptured by the individual, even after he finds himself in freedom, in harmony and world-communion with nature. Seventeen years of constant smothering leave indelible traces.

At seventeen he rebelled, went to London, became a Civil Service employee, and later assistant in the Printed Books Department of the British Museum. There he met many coming and some arrived poets. They formed a literary circle whose ambition was to regenerate mankind through immortal verses. None of them achieved immortality, but Patmore and Garnett are still bright lights in romantic poetry. He taught for a short time, then edited a magazine, secured membership in the Marlborough Club, and in 1904 became Librarian to the House of Lords. But none of these activities and indulgences had much effect upon him as critic, essayist, translator, interpreter.

Mr. Gosse was more widely known to the present generation as journalist than as poet or biographer. In later years, he contributed weekly ten-minute chats to the London *Observer*, and published a number of books, enlarged editions of his journalistic contributions, mostly portraits of men and women, some of whom he had known and many of whom he had loved. Were it for no other reason than the lesson he gave to purely academic writers that journalism is not necessarily the enemy of literature, he should be acclaimed as patron saint of journalism.

As poet, Gosse was not significant, save in a limited fashion and for a restricted audience. He may have had a clear vision of his value as a poet, for he wrote in the

preface to his "Collected Poems": "I put them forth with a strange timidity." They reveal a man who finds comfort in poetry, not an outlet for passion.

He was not a great historian—at least insofar as dates and sequence go. He had a hazy notion of them and was content with that. He liked the biographical side of history which allowed him to give free rein to the qualities in which he excelled: the art of literary vignettes in which conclusions and interpretations, personal and fanciful as they may be, are always based upon study of facts and sagacious deductions of events. He plays hide-and-seek with his characters, but he is always the one to hide. He wrote many biographies, and he is entitled to be called an accomplished biographer. When his life of Swinburne appeared, it was hailed by some critics as the best of his books. It is far from that, nor has it the merit of his *Life of the Immortal Physician of Norwich*. There are certain varieties of temperament with which he seemed to have been sympathetic and understanding, but Swinburne's was not one of them. The vices of a man are as much a part of him as his virtues, and the biographer who aims to give a real interpretation of his subject must throw them into relief. Had he revealed the hiatuses in the affective side of Ibsen his book on him in "The Literary Lives" would be satisfactory.

Edmund Gosse and William Archer "discovered" Ibsen, but the former did not uncover him. Ibsen would not have been a hard man to reveal had he not covered his tracks so carefully. Letters are far more revelatory of a man than formal writing. How little we should really know of Charlotte Brontë had not Dr. Heger published the letters which that genius addressed to his father after she left his school in Brussels. Save for the letters Ibsen wrote Fräulein Emilie Bardach, an eighteen-year-old Viennese with whom he fell in love when he was old, most of his epistles were from the head, not from the heart, and many of them were querulous and defamatory. He had his Boswell, but Mr. Paulsen stood in such awe of his master that he set down only the trivial and thin things of Ibsen's life. Were Janvro Larkin to add a chapter entitled "Interpretation" to Gosse's "Henrik Ibsen," it would be a satisfying account of the Apostle of the psychopath.

His best biography is the life of that strange poet and priest, John Donne, whose writings had such profound and at the same time malign effect upon the literature of England. Had not Mr. Hugh PAnson Fausset turned the searchlight of modern investigation and interpretation upon that histrionic cleric and philosopher, Gosse's account of him and his work might still be considered satisfactory.

As an essayist and critic, Gosse was at his best. One might think that his erudition, talent, profound study of books and authors, and facility with words would have developed some traits of priggishness, a tendency to self-sufficiency in him. But there is none of either in his writing. His seriousness is never overbearing, his enthusiasms never offensive, and his levity and joyousness in his task do not make one suspicious that literature is not a serious, essential element in his life. The business of criticism in its great lines and general scope, and its object is to serve as medium of intimacy between author and reader; the critic according to our hearts' delight develops an intimacy of charming nature between the creator and the reader; he walks with the latter among the paths of literature, pointing to his loves, expounding on texts, unravelling labyrinths. This being the important task of the critic, Gosse was the ideal man for the job as he possessed the art of being silent on his aversions so far as such silence is consistent with sincerity.

After "Father and Son," his most valuable contribution to the literature of England was interpretation. The burden of leading others through the mazes of books, picking here a flower and there removing a thorn did not weigh heavily on him. His art was neither that of the teacher nor of the critic, from the academic standpoint. He did not analyze techniques or argue ideas. He said to his readers: "This is what I have found to delight me, to sharpen my mind, to soothe my soul; come and share my pleasure and diversion." That is how he brought to our cognition such men as Henry James, Rousseau, Pater, and Ibsen. Though the underlying principles of literature and the theory of book-writing were

matters of profound concern for him, he gave no indication that they were as important to his well-being and equanimity as they are to George Moore or George Sana-yana. It is when he came to personalities of books as well as of men that he was most attuned to nuances and sounds. He had the knack of saying much in a few words, catching a whole attitude in a phrase, a portrait in a smile, a personality in a book, and despite occasional moods of harshness, he remains a model of tolerance. He was humorous yet sincere, modest yet skeptical, and he had good, seasoned taste.

As essayist (which it is difficult to separate from the critic, since many of his essays are criticism and most of his criticism is essay) Gosse delights, instructs, charms, and amuses. Naturally, his essays leave much unsaid, but what they say gives assurance that the author has secured the fine flower of many of these delicate spirits and it leaves "the complete conviction that we cease to be savage and caustic when we are acquainted with the inner existence of a man, for the relentlessness of satire is only possible to those who neither understand nor sympathize."

And he displays similar insight and erudition in his essays of foreign literature. His study of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, the unwitting founder of the French Academy, shows not only an intimacy with the ebb and tide of the French literary movement unusual in a foreigner, but a remarkable gift of literary deductions. Of Rousseau and the dwindling of his fame in England during the nineteenth century, there would be much to say that would weave an interesting chain between the literatures of the two countries. Mr. Gosse has not said much of that, but he has said nothing that is not logical and convincing that he has understood the finer points of his subject. His words on the romantic French poet, Leconte de Lisle, might well be applied to himself.

It must be said, however, that Mr. Gosse's essays seldom embrace much beyond personal characteristics and purely one-sided reactions on the literary achievements of his sitters; seldom does he explain subtle and technical points of psychology and philosophy.

There is no apparent effort in his handling of the English language. His prose flows like the rivulets which he sang in his poems. It has a quality of sterling purity which rings clear as a silver bell. He commands his own words and obtains shimmering, colorful effects from them. He speaks of the "mean and flatulent society which surrounded Poe." In his characterization of Daisy Ashford, he said, "It is almost as shocking that an infant should be vulgar as that a soldier should be cowardly or a nun unchaste." "He moved like a greyhound among those heavy beasts of burden, our politicians," gives an indelible quality to the grace of George Wyndham, while his picture of Tolstoy adds to our impression of his weight: "Intellectually, spiritually, during the close of his life, Tolstoy was a hippopotamus rolling about in a clouded pool."

Gosse's writing was not a matter of constant improvement and gradual perfecting; like Anatole France, he reached a degree of perfection early and kept it over a period of fifty years. His adventures in book-land were good-natured and devoid of a desire to reach anywhere in a given time; he takes his time to loiter along the way with none of Don Quixote's determination to fight wind-mills or a crusader's eagerness to find the holy grail. He was "a literary historian, a portrait painter of shrewd eye and deft practice, seizing and fixing rather than interpreting and questioning the visible features and using, for this purpose, the English language as though he loved it, having wooed and won it to his use through long assiduous years." And because he loved the English language, he sunk himself into it with such complete homogeneity that one associates him with the best there is. In his desire to blend himself with it, his personality appears shadowy and unreal; having none of the prima-donna traits in his make-up, he is apt to appear to his readers more like a voice from a literary Paradise than a man of flesh and blood, of weaknesses and powers. We can only guess from his writing what sort of disposition he had, how he spent his time, and what he considered relaxation and happiness. He spared no gossip of his friends, but of himself he said nothing. He seemed to know everyone, few seemed to know him, and when he tried to explain himself he remained enigmatic. Perhaps, this very suppression of his ego had much to do with the quality of his literary criticism, objective and unconscious of self. What did he mean when he wrote that his pathway through the maze of fifty years of his criticism had been

a vibration to the appeal of certain elements? He did not say to what elements, but it may have meant that his ready response to all that is alive and vibrating accounted for the preference he showed for brief sermons and short sketches. Humanity is too diverse to give unsparingly of self to one achievement, and Sir Edmund liked to mingle with all that is human.

His form of criticism did not "seek the roots of the mountains, ask and suggest what is the place of art in life, and what is the meaning of beauty, or grope for a relation between psychology and esthetics." These considerations did not disturb him, his mind seldom questioned. The world he had created for himself was pleasant, passions had little place there, culture smiled and none was more righteous than others. He walked "happy and content, smiling at a flower, admiring a reverberation of the sun upon a pool, undisturbed by the rougher elements or the calamities of a storm," among the paths where many have lost their peace or found themselves.

In his last collection of biographic interpretation and comment entitled "Leaves and Fruit," Sir Edmund said hail and farewell to some of his old loves—to Montaigne, Epictetus, Pope, Johnson, Whitman, and to several new acquaintances, Miss Sitwell, George Gissing, Samuel Butler, René Boylesve, and others. The urbanity and insight to which he had habituated two generations are there, and also the mellowness and indulgence. He revealed, in his late maturity, why Whitman no longer appeals; he saw Samuel Butler as he will be seen probably by coming generations; he gave Miss Sitwell fatherly advice, and he remonstrated benevolently with Mr. Lytton Strachey.

Gosse got a great deal from life. He deserved more than he got.

A Renaissance Treasury
LA LITTÉRATURE GÉOGRAPHIQUE
FRANÇAISE DE LA RENAISSANCE.
RÉPERTOIRE BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE.
By GEOFFROY ATKINSON. Paris: Auguste Picard, 1927.

Reviewed by A. V. MERRILL

THIS handsome tome may be considered the crown of the series of studies on travel-literature which Professor Atkinson has published. He is known already for three monographs on the "extraordinary voyage" in French literature. The present bibliography is valuable as giving sources for later writers and as evincing the budding exotic interests of the period. The compiler has collected nearly six hundred titles of books published before 1610, with appendices listing enticing works in the field of "la géographie merveilleuse" and similar categories. A review of the titles in their chronological order is enlightening as to the *Wanderlust* of the sixteenth century: for Europe was looking eastward toward a flaming frontier at which the Moslem was hammering, and westward toward the tenuous fringe of settlements on the American coast. In the Levant, Don John of Austria and the Knights of Malta furnished stuff for inquiring bookmen of journalistic tastes, while Tamerlane, the fabulous Prester John, and Marco Polo's account of Tartary whetted the appetite of the more antiquarian. As Montaigne witnesses, Brazil to the west attracted anthropologists; and the influence of Rabelais's romance on Cartier's and Robertval's reports of explorations in New France has been noted. The massacre by Spaniards of the French colony in Florida (in 1565) is here graphically recorded, as is the bloody recapture by Captain Gorgues three years later. The hostility of France to Spain further explains the three editions of Las Casas's famous work under the French title: "Tyrannies et Cruautés des Espagnols, Pépétrées en Indes Occidentales." This is the book which so moved the young Amyas Leigh in "Westward Ho!" And apropos of Amyas, his idol Drake, together with the Arctic Frobenius, appear in French dress; one even finds a work consecrated to their exotic solace, tobacco.

Exhaustive cross-indices and much bibliographical detail, including even call-numbers in many libraries, demand the scholar's gratitude; while the reduced facsimiles of three hundred title-pages add to the picturesqueness of this approach to an absorbing type of literature.

Dr. Carl Niessen in "Das Rheinische Puppenspiel" (Bonn: Fritz Klopp) has made a small but entertaining addition to the literature of the marionette. For many years the author has collected old manuscripts of the puppet-plays, for which Cologne and the Rhineland are famous. He prints for the first time a puppet version of "Faust." His illustrations are likewise new.