

by C. E. Montague

us all. There are as many different roses or larks as there are different brains to make them. The flower or bird of the great artist's make, when his brain is working at its best, is made with an extraordinary concentration of care and delight. It is like a lover's handiwork, done for the beloved, not a journeyman's.

This intense constructiveness of vision goes beyond objects of physical sight. From the construction of single physical things, at the instance of the eye or on the prompting of the ear, it can pass easily on to the vivid framing of their implications: in Blake's much-quoted words it can see the world in a grain of sand, and Heaven in a wild flower. It can go further and build up, always with a passionate relish for what it is producing, a kind of semi-sensuous image of something abstract and vague—the *lacrima rerum* of Vergil, life's falling tears, or the Wordsworthian sense of the world's loss of transfiguration as we grow up. But, however sombre the theme, it brings to the artist no grief in the usual sense of the word. For grief disables, and this kind of vision empowers. It has been said that God is a person who feels all the pain there is in the world without being disabled by it at all. And that much of divineness there is in a great artist. When the excitement of writing Macbeth had worked Shakespeare up to the full height and heat of his powers, he saw the frustratory aspect of most people's lives with such intensity of clearness that, if he had not been an artist at work, he might well have thrown everything up and sat down to despair. But the heat of artistic emotion is always convertible into force of the constructive order. So the climax of intensity in this tragic vision brought no incoherent cry of pity or prostration, but the extreme opposite, the passionately perfected design of one of the most famous of the writer's "purple patches":

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

To this super-normal level of impassioned constructiveness a writer, or any other artist, mounts by an ascending scale of interaction between the technical exercise of his craft—the act of word-assorting and writing, of laying on paint, or of modelling clay, and the imaginative effort of penetrating to the essence, the inmost and uttermost significance, of the "subject" before him. You may see a painter start a portrait almost apathetically. He will handle his paint in a commonplace way. He will seem to see no more than you or I can see at a glance in the personality of his sitter. But soon the feel of the paint on the canvas begins to enliven his mind; and the mind thus quickened conceives a livelier curiosity about the creature before him. And then the mind that is piqued with this curiosity transmits in turn a share of its new animation to the working hand, firing it to do feats of swift sureness, summary selection, and eloquent brilliancy beyond its ordinary powers. And so this process of mutual stimulation continues till both the faculties engaged in it are forced up far above their natural human commonness. They rise to a point at which the artist is sometimes said, in the old phrase, to be "inspired."

The phrase may be uncritical. And yet it has a measure of aptness. It does at least convey that a painter or a writer has attained a kind of self-attesting note of authority for which we cannot easily account. His lips may not be touched, but he speaks as if they were. And we listen as if they were, too. Out of some experience not given to ourselves, and not to be easily explained to us, he has emerged with an utterance which we cannot prove to be authentic, but which still imposes itself irresistibly upon our belief and our admiration. Somehow it carries about it an indefinable certificate that it is no skumble-skamble stuff, with nothing behind its façade. There shines through it still the intensity of vision and the immense sincerity of the emotion in which it had its origin.

Think how often you have seen some slippery politician put his hand upon his heart and vow that it is only "for the cause" that he has executed this little manoeuvre or that. Nobody minds him. And yet when Othello says, "It is the cause, my soul, it is the cause," you do not merely believe it. You probably feel that never till now have you fully known how appallingly sincere a man may be in trying to remain judicial under a tempest of pain. It is no rare experience, again, to hear someone say that he is dying, and to know that it is true. In such a case you are probably touched by the words, but unless the dying man be a dear friend you will scarcely feel any such surge of emotion as shakes you when Antony says, "I am dying, Egypt, dying." For here you have not merely truth, but truth raised to higher powers of itself; not the simple overshadowing of life by death, but the immensity of tragic import that this obscuration may have for a mind enormously more susceptible to tragic impressions than your own.

There still remains that ultimate question. In virtue of what do these intrinsically plain arrangements of quite common words carry the germs of a rare and noble fever of the soul from a person long dead to persons living in another age and perhaps at the other end of the world? Is it that, even when masked in print, the written word retains the power of the spoken voice to give a subtle guarantee of its own authenticity, if authentic it be? So that in print, as well as in speech, the same words may stir us deeply in one case, and leave us quite cold in another? Does some intimation reach us that one man has written them with authority, and another only as the Scribes? If so, is the intimation "internal," as we say of literary evidence? Can it be traced in some more elusive quality in the actual words than any that literary criticism has yet marked down? In that passage quoted already,

Beauty falls from the air:
Queens have died young and fair;
Dust hath dimmed Helen's eyes,

is there some delicately expressive quality of rhythm which carries with it the same overpowering effect of momentousness that a spoken assurance sometimes derives, in part, from the modulation of the living voice? Or can criticism only say that by some means which are out of its ken these heavenly lines do somehow convey a state of passionately poignant exaltation from the writer's mind to the fit reader's—and leave us to wonder whether the apparently countless sets of possibly communicative "waves," suspected, but not yet listed, that are said to ripple endlessly about the world, may include a set that enables the passionate stir of one mind to impinge directly on some specially sensitized tissue in other brains, with the aid of no more apparatus than certain verbal memoranda playing a quite subsidiary part in the business?

"What know I?" From this cascade of tough questions I take refuge, for my own part, in the safe old question of Montaigne.

Miss Warner's Maggot

TIME IMPORTUNED. By SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER. New York: The Viking Press. 1928. \$2.

MISS WARNER was not introduced to the American public, as most readers believe, with a volume of fantastic prose but with a book of sharp-flavored verse. "Time Importuned," then, will be recognized by the perfect Warnerite as a successor to "The Espalier" rather than to "Lolly Willows" or "Mr. Fortune's Maggot." The same sparse imagery, much of the vigor, and no little of the earth smell are here, but the interval of three years has occasioned a few changes. The chief difference is one of pitch rather than of key; the rustic note is still to the fore, but it is no longer so broad; the rough country humor, far from being insisted on, is wholly absent. This is not to say "Time Importuned" is a subtler work than its predecessors. Miss Warner's domain, manifest from the first as a definite territory, has always been bounded on all sides by subtlety; it is as prescribed

in its limitations as the country of Edith Sitwell or Lizette Woodworth Reese. But, in its borders, Miss Warner's mind ranges with keen gravity. Even the most sombre poems have the flash and intensity of sudden flight. Nothing is pompous or padded in either phrase or emotion; no line bears more than its just weight of color and substance.

This distinction of utterance reveals itself wherever one turns the pages. It points the dark metaphysics of "Triumphs of Sensibility" (especially the third of the sequence), underlines the bitter sweetness of "The Maiden," individualizes the strangeness of "Sad Green" with its lawn-mower

Proof of this originality can be found in the choice as well as the treatment of Miss Warner's subjects. Here (in "The Patriarchs") is a curious projection of Abraham and Jacob from the point of view of the ram; here (in "The Visit") is a portrait of a most respectable, tidy, and, in the end, tedious ghost; here (in "Potemkin's Fancy") is a vaguely phallic evocation of great Catherine; here (in "The Rival") is one of the bitterest as well as one of the most beautiful complaints ever voiced by a farmer's wife against the earth. I quote an (unfortunately truncated) excerpt from the last:

The farmer's wife looked out of the dairy.
She saw her husband in the yard.
She said: "A woman's lot is hard;
The chimney smokes, the churn's contrary."
She said:

"I of all women am the most ill-starred."

"I am grown old before my season;
Weather and care have worn me down;
Each year delves deeper in my frown;
I've lost my shape, and for good reason."

But she
Yearly puts on young looks like an Easter gown.

And year by year she has betrayed him
With blight and mildew, rain and drought,
Smut, scab and murrain, all the rout.
But he forgets the tricks she's played him
When first
The fields give a good smell and the leaves put out.

Craftsmen will be quick to notice Miss Warner's technical innovations. She is particularly resourceful in her use of the unrhymed line; whether she employs it for a short suspension (as in the verses just quoted) or as an unresolved last line (*vide* "The Arrival" and "Just as the Tide was Flowing"), the interjection of a prose cadence—that most difficult of effects in verse—is enviably accomplished. Still more remarkable and fully as adroit is her combination of assonantal and dissonantal rhymes. Sometimes she combines assonance with interior rhyme, and we have results that are as piquant as they are delightful *via* such couplings as "dust-mustered," "prone-lonely," "head-dreadful," "stripe-disciple." Her dissonances are equally unexpected; she outdoes Wilfred Owen and John Crowe Ransom with these acridly paired syllables: "word-hard," "matter-together," "elms-prams," "patience-acquaintance."

But it is unfair to Miss Warner's other qualities to end with an emphasis on technique. Each reader will find a different quality on which to lay stress: the poet's unusual accent, or her half-modern, half-archaic blend of naïveté and erudition, or her echo of Tudor music which has been a preoccupation with the author, or the low-pitched, but tart tone of voice, like a feminine Thomas Hardy. ("The Load of Fern" and "The Sad Shepherd") might have come out of "Late Lyrics and Earlier." For one reader at least, the difficult choice would lead to the poems already mentioned and two others: "Country Thought" and the little "Song" which may well be Miss Warner's maggot. I quote the first stanza of the former:

Idbury bells are ringing
And Westcote has just begun,
And down in the valley
Ring the bells of Bledington.

But I have no intention of spoiling the reader's right to his own surprise by quoting the rest of it. And I envy the person who casually comes upon "Walking and Singing at Night," "Country Measures," "Elizabeth," "The Tree Unleaved"—or any of the later ones. Happy the man for whom Miss Warner is a discovery.

The Vergilian Age

By ROBERT S. CONWAY

Everyone who has succumbed to the magic of Vergil will enjoy this collection of essays on his life and work. They discuss, among other subjects, the proscription of 43 B. C., the location of Vergil's farm, the golden bough and its significance, Vergil's personality, the structure of epic poetry, Vergil's philosophy, and the career of Scipio Africanus. Delightful in and for themselves, these pages hold an added charm; for they will send the reader back to the original or to a translation of the poetry of one who is for us the truest and most complete representative of Roman life. \$2.50.

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Books of Special Interest

Folk-Songs

AMERICAN NEGRO FOLK-SONGS. By
NEWMAN I. WHITE. Cambridge: Har-
vard University Press. 1928. \$5.SOUTH CAROLINA BALLADS: WITH
A STUDY OF THE TRADITIONAL
BALLAD TO-DAY. Collected and
Edited by REED SMITH. Cambridge:
Harvard University Press. 1928. \$3.

Reviewed by LOUISE POUND

PROFESSOR WHITE'S interesting and important book of 466 pages is not an anthology merely, or even primarily, though it includes innumerable texts. It is a thorough and independent treatment of Negro folk-song, its origins, history, types, and its relation to the poetry of the whites. It is well and sympathetically written and may be accepted at once as authoritative.

Nearly sixty books dealing with Negro song, about nineteen of them by Negroes, have appeared since the beginning of the World War. Some of the better known are Dorothy Scarborough's "On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs," Odum and Johnson's "The Negro and His Songs," and "Negro Workaday Songs." Alongside these may be arrayed Puckett's "Folk-Beliefs of the Southern Negro" as testifying to the rising tide of present-day interest, on the part of both whites and Negroes, in Negro lore. Of the books concerned with folk-song, that of Professor White is the widest-ranging and the profoundest. He utilizes what has been done by others, subjects the available material to careful examination, and interprets it in a manifestly unprejudiced way. Not the least valuable feature of his work is its fine bibliography.

Of interest are the groups recognized in "American Negro Folk-Songs" as deserving leading treatment. The subdivision fixed upon by the author as most satisfactory is into religious songs, social songs, songs about animals, work songs, songs about women, recent events, the seamy side, race consciousness, and miscellaneous songs.

The author remarks that Negro song constantly and from the first has been influenced by the songs of the white people, much more than current writers on the subject have realized. The whole body of Negro folk-song is shot through, he points out, with unmistakable signs of the influence of a camp-meeting tune or a secular stanza here, a whole song there, isolated lines and phrases everywhere. But it cannot be doubted that Negro folksong assimilated these influences and retained its homogeneity. His rhythms and melodies, fundamentally different from those of the white man, fused what the Negro possessed and what he imitated into a new body of folk-song neither Caucasian nor African. The Negro had to imitate the white man's songs, but he evolved from his imitation a mass of folk-song that is homogeneous, distinctive, and unmistakably his own.

In his "South Carolina Ballads" Professor Reed Smith has brought together the results of his many years of interest in traditional balladry. In the earlier pages of his book he reprints, or presents for the first time, short papers on the topics: ballads and folk-song, dramatic and narrative traits, communal composition and transmission, ballad degeneration, the ballad in literature, and the ballad in America. In the second part appear a small sheaf of English and Scottish ballads surviving in North Carolina and a few songs. The volume adds yet another to the growing collections of folk-song from various localities in the United States. It is pleasingly written and of scholarly character.

The short introductory discussions are non-controversial in tone. Though obviously brought up on older views, the author is open-minded, and he gives his readers probably the most rational presentation at present available of what is left of the old "communal" theory of ballad origins. Nevertheless a few statements seem obsolescent, to the present reviewer. Professor Smith repeats unquestioningly Franz Boehme's affirmation of as far back as 1888 that "in the beginning there was probably no poem that was not sung, no song that was not danced to, and no dance that was not accompanied by song." Students of primitive peoples and primitive poetry no longer believe that the earliest song necessarily or always emerged from the dance or had dance accompaniment. The dictum, too, that the "birth of the ballad was on

the lips and heart of the people as a whole" will hardly do for balladry in the mass. After decades of searching, the missing connection between folk-improvisation and the composition of lasting story-songs has never been supplied. Ballads of the type collected by Professor Child, or of any other type having genuine plot and structure and winning diffusion, seems never to be produced by improvisation.

On the other hand, in all literatures, endless ballads that entered into folk-song, gained currency, and exhibited "communal" characteristics, have been traced to individual authorship. That "ballads are born from the people as a whole" is a remark too vague to be worth repeating. The fact is that ballads or narrative songs are "born" in many ways, and they enter into folk-tradition in many ways. Equally obsolete should be the stock distinction, emphasized by Professor Smith, between poetry of the folk and poetry of art. Folk poetry should not be set off against poetry of art, but against poetry of culture, which is not the same thing. The most primitive peoples have their own standards of art, from which they never vary. Even the crudest songs of the most primitive singers conform to the set patterns with which they are familiar.

A New Variorum

THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS. New
Variorum Edition. Edited by HORACE
HOWARD FURNESS, JR. Philadelphia: J.
B. Lippincott Co. 1928.

Reviewed by HOMER E. WOODBRIDGE

ONCE more lovers of Shakespeare have occasion to feel gratitude (with a slight admixture of other emotions) to Dr. Furness. The Variorum "Coriolanus" deserves the praise which has been widely given to its predecessors for enormous and minute learning, infinite patience in the collation of texts and the perusal and selection of comments, and generally sound and conservative—perhaps over-conservative—judgment. It is unnecessary to expatiate upon these qualities, which everyone expects to find in a new volume of the Variorum; they will be found here. It seems more profitable to point out certain limitations or imperfections in this great work of scholarship than to echo the just praises of its merits.

It must be recognized that textually "Coriolanus" offers as hard a problem for an editor as any of Shakespeare's plays. It is written in his highly compressed and difficult later manner; we have no earlier quarto by which to correct the errors of the folio; and the folio text is very badly printed. We must expect then a vast amount of critical debate about proposed emendations and about the meaning of the text. It is proper, too, that the notes in a variorum edition should be to some extent a graveyard of bad conjectural emendations and "happy thoughts" which would not have happened if their authors had known a little more. The tombstones serve as warnings to future commentators. But the notes need not be a necropolis. In his capacity of sexton Dr. Furness seems to me to have been much too generous. By a more rigorous selection he might have considerably reduced the bulk of his book without loss to its usefulness. The point is hard to illustrate, because it would be unreasonable to object very strongly to the inclusion of any single piece of folly on the part of a commentator, and a review has not space for many illustrations. Consider, however, the note on Act IV, Sc. vii 11. 53-55, one of the famous *crucies* of the play.

*And power unto itself most commendable
Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
To extol what it hath done.*

The note begins with a five-line comment and paraphrase by Warburton. It runs on for twelve pages of fine print, in which many emendations are proposed and argued, and various other paraphrases quoted. At the end the editor remarks that none of the proposed emendations has been accepted by more than one editor besides the proposer, and that no one has really improved on Warburton's paraphrase. Would not five or six pages of these bad emendations and less successful paraphrases have served every purpose. Or take the note on Act I, Sc. i line 94, "I will venture to scale it a little more." Unlike Menenius, Dr. Furness does not venture to "scale it." Six and a half pages are devoted mainly to a discussion of Theobald's excellent emenda-

tion "scale," which the editor, following the majority, finally accepts. On pages 77-78 Roderick's "rather verbose paraphrase" of a passage in Act I is quoted, the editor remarking that Roderick might have spared himself his trouble if he had first found out the meaning of a word. Do we need a page and a half of notes on Coriolanus's affectionate greeting of Virgilia as "My gracious silence"? Is there any sound reason for including so pointless a remark as this of Stevens: "I lately met with a still more glaring instance of the same impropriety in another play of Shakespeare, but cannot, at this moment, ascertain it"? The right comment on this would seem to be Coriolanus's "By Jupiter, forgot!"—on which, by the way, Dr. Furness quotes an extraordinarily stupid comment by Prolls.

When such specimens of the folly of commentators are amusing, their inclusion needs no defense. Thus Sicinius's question to Virgilia (IV ii. 24), "Are you man-kind?" (i. e. masculine) is interpreted by Leo as a reflection on the lady's virtue, meaning "Are you kind to man?" (i. e. too kind). And Theobald's emendation of Act II, Sc. i, line 231,

Into a rapture let her baby cry

to

E'en to a rupture let her baby cry

with his solemn defense of the change, is one of the bright spots of the commentary. Rarely the editor himself indulges in mild satire. Wordsworth in his edition omits Volumnia's remark about the breasts of Hecuba (I. iii. 43) thus out-Bowdlering Bowdler, who retains it; and the editor comments: "Bowdler was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and of the Society of Antiquaries, and therefore could hardly be as competent a judge as Wordsworth, who was a Bishop, of the concealed impropriety in this outspoken mention of a part of the human body." One wishes that Dr. Furness had given his own opinion more often; he frequently "takes each man's censure, but reserves his judgment." Thus after thirteen pages of fine print on the great *crux* of the play (I. ix. 57-59),

*When steel grows soft as a parasite's silk,
Let him be made an overture for the wars,*

he offers no conclusion.

The volume, then, owing to the editor's too generous hospitality, includes a great deal that we could well spare in the way of mediocre criticism and futile argument about bad conjectures. A more serious fault, in an edition which runs to over seven hundred pages, is the omission of a good deal which we should be glad to have. Dr. Furness rightly includes Dennis's foolish but typically neo-classic objection to the character of Menenius; but he strangely omits Dr. Johnson's wise retort: "Dennis is offended that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon. . . But Shakespeare is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. . . Wanting a buffoon, he went to the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him." The eighteenth century, however, is in general well represented in the choice of critical comment; the nineteenth century is over-represented. Most of the conspicuous omissions are in the field of recent criticism. We look in vain for Boas's striking observation that Shakespeare's misrepresentation of the Roman plebeians is "the most serious falsification of historic fact that occurs in any of the plays purporting to rest on a historical basis." The criticisms in the appendix include no quotations from R. M. Alden, G. P. Baker, Boas, Wendell, or Masfield, though all of these writers give us interesting and rather extended comment on the play; and of the five, only Boas, so far as I can recall, is quoted in the notes. Alden's book, one of the best in its field, is not even mentioned in the bibliography; nor is Stoll's volume of challenging criticism (published in February 1927), which makes brief but provocative comment on the technique of the play. We could spare a good many of the pages consecrated to Gervinus and Hudson, to Mrs. Jameson and Miss Grace Latham, for the sake of representative extracts from these moderns.

These considerations (brought forward, if you like, by the devil's advocate) may serve to indicate the limitations of Dr. Furness's work; they leave almost untouched, of course, its substantial and enduring merits. It remains, like the earlier volumes in the Variorum, indispensable to the Shakespearian scholar.