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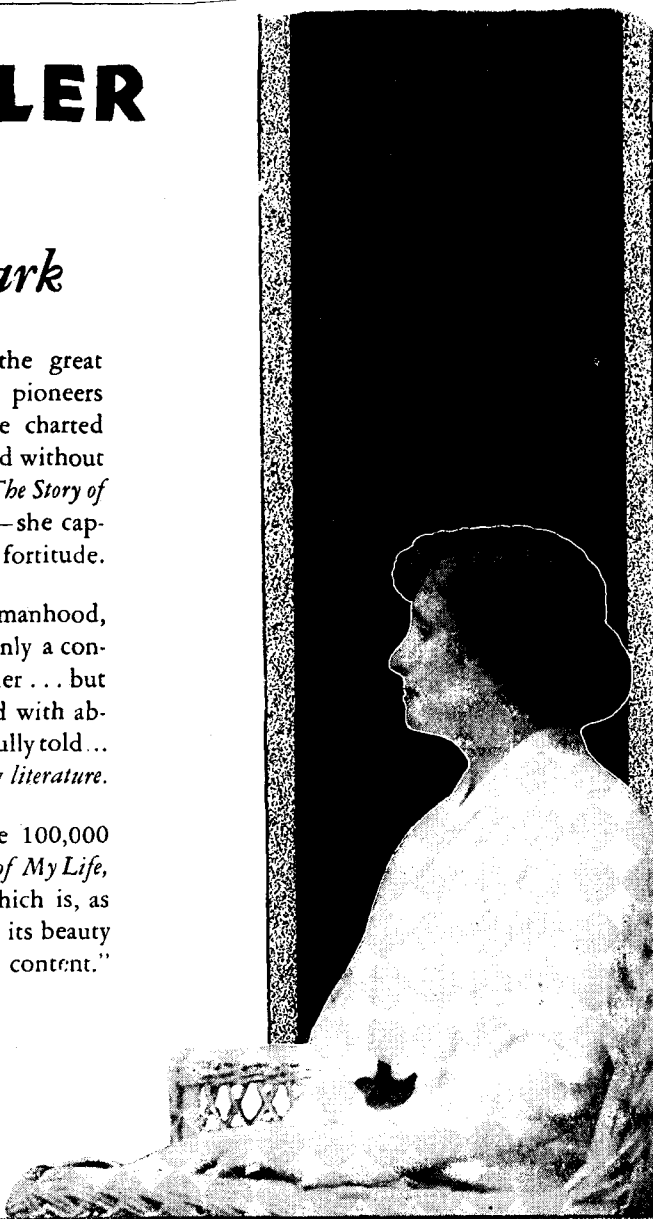
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## MIDSTREAM MY LATER LIFE

## Round About Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE most important book on American poetry that has come out for years is Alfred Kreyenborg's "Our Singing Strength, An Outline of American Poetry, 1620-1930," published by Coward-McCann, Inc. We were going to devote this column to it to-day, but we recalled a promise made last week to treat of certain books of more or less light verse, and also, so large is the Kreyenborg volume, that we have not, as yet, wholly digested it. Several very small points we may make in passing, though our admiration for the tremendous job that Mr. Kreyenborg has done is very great. We share his admiration of Leonard Bacon's satiric verse, but we do not feel that he quite does justice to such pure distilled poetry as is to be found in his "Animula Vagula" and even in certain lyrics in "Guinea Fowl." No one in this day and generation can write satire in verse to hold a candle to Leonard Bacon's, yet the man's greater side is as poet; and a dashed fine poet he can be when he puts his mind to it. Despite all the satire there is also poetry of a high order of the imagination in "Quincibald," for instance. And if Alfred had ever talked to Leonard he would not speak of "Dr. Bacon." I do not know whether or not the author of "The Banquet of the Poets" ever attained a full professorship at the University of California, but I do know that that most lovable of friends conveys anything but an academic impression. He is vital youth personified despite his being somewhere near my own age and his hair now iron-gray. His animation and energy of utterance make most of the people in the same room with him usually seem only half alive. However, in such a monumental work as Kreyenborg's slips are bound to occur, and this one is indeed harmless. It is extraordinary how well he has preserved proper proportionate mention in a work so large, and more than extraordinary that he has left out, so far as we can see, practically no poet of any importance. This is a volume that should be in all libraries and all schools and colleges of the country.

We may be beating the release date by a few days with mention of Christopher Morley's "Poems," now all brought together in one volume by Doubleday, Doran, but, as we are turning to light verse, here is one of the best light versifiers of our time, and here is a book that contains both pure poetry and gorgeous occasional clowning. What No Sho says to his friends in the second instalment of "Translations from the Chinese," Morley might say to his audience:

*If there is any kind of poetry  
I haven't written,  
You might tell me about it,  
And I'll do some.*

The "Translations" are his best single contribution in the field of light verse. In "The Palimpsest," preceding "The Old Mandarin," he has explained that what he calls translating from the Chinese is to decipher "in each man's heart, Chinese writing—a secret script, a cryptic language; the strange ideographs of the spirit." His range is wide in these short notations; sometimes he is deliciously trivial, sometimes deeply sagacious. The whole affair is carried off with that gusto which lends a charm even to his least good verse. He has developed greatly since "Songs for a Little House" and "The Rocking Horse," but the practice of verse has been, of course, only one of his multifarious interests. Nevertheless, as the late Elinor Wylie said of his lines that bear a title I have never liked, since it is far too trivial for their excellence, "They are as perfect in their own way as Herrick!" Here they are, an example of his compacted best:

*Truth is enough for prose:  
Calmly it goes  
To tell just what it knows.*

*For verse, skill will suffice—  
Delicate, nice  
Casting of verbal dice.*

*Poetry, men attain  
By subtler pain  
More flagrant in the brain—*

*An honesty unfeigned,  
A heart unchained,  
A madness well restrained.*

Those few lines sum up perfectly the differences between literary media, and every word is telling.

Morley's best poems are to be found in the first section of the book, "Parson's Pleasure," and in the last section of the book "Toulemonde." In the former, "Sir Kenelm to the Lady Venetia," "Of a Child that Had Fever," the title poem, "Château de Miserie," "On a Portrait of Dr. Samuel Johnson," "Desiderio Pulchriora," are all true poetry, and Morley is also most adept with the quatrain. Vide:

*Ad Puellam Minusculam*

*How to convey, describe, that furious note,  
That piston-stroke of squallid reiteration  
That issues from a two-months' infant's  
throat?  
The immortal voice of human indignation?*

Excellent, too, in the section "Hide and Seek" are the two sonnets on Broadway, entitled "The River of Light," and the one called "In an Auction Room," concerning the sale of a letter of John Keats to Fanny Brawne. Also, as we did once frequent together the swimming-pool in the Woolworth Building, its basement, I am still moved to mirth by the puns in "Musings on a Cool Retreat," namely: "And crying *O decorum quicquid* we thank thee for this pool: some liquid!" and "Then splash, or float among the ripple as passive as a participle." Morley will continue to do that sort of thing to his dying day, and nothing can stop him—but I for one find it often enormously engaging. So we come to "Toulemonde," which ends and crowns the book. The interlude "The Coroner's Gone A-Maying" is Morley at his rambunctious best, but we feel that it should not have been sandwiched between the more meditative and philosophical parts of "Toulemonde." Still, at that, it expresses Morley. E. V. Lucas has thought of him as primarily the domestic poet. He once burst out that he would be damned if he would be taken for a "cozy" poet any longer. Indeed, he has become far more than that. Like all journalists he has al-

(Continued on page 359)

## The Reader's Guide

Conducted by EDWARD DAVISON

Inquiries in regard to the selection of books and questions of like nature should be addressed to MRS. BECKER, c/o *The Saturday Review*

F. K. V., Chicago, Ill., says, "I am so thoroughly enjoying rereading and introducing my son to 'The Bastable Children' that I am wondering if that other dear delight of my childhood, 'The Phoenix and the Carpet,' has been reprinted. If it has, tell me by whom; if it hasn't, I should like to put in an order with an English bookseller. I have no idea of its price if out of print, and would appreciate your telling me."

THE first action taken by this reader, upon reassuring herself that the Bastables were all represented in the noble volume above mentioned (brought out in the

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**CURRENT READING GUILD**  
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United States by Coward-McCann last fall), was to flutter through the pages in the fond hope that the Psammead might have slipped in, or the Phoenix. It was too much to hope, considering how much has been already crammed into this charming "omnibus," and I can but trust that Coward-McCann have it in mind to continue tapping the rich vein of Nesbit-Bland literature. Out of print? not a bit; every London shop-window showing children's books blossoms with "The Phoenix and the Carpet" at three and six; T. Fisher Unwin publishes this, and "Wet Magic," and a long line of peerless stories whose names would stir responsive chords in the breast of any old reader of *The Strand Magazine*—by the way, that should have gone on the list of English periodicals mentioned in a preceding reply. There is another E. Nesbit story, not for children, that went out of print in the United States some time ago, but was so much in demand by a friend of mine that she used to order several copies a year for presents to convalescents, people in the dumps, and such-like objects of Christian charity. This is "The Red House" (Methuen)—not to be confounded with "The Red House Mystery," by A. A. Milne, though this admirable detective story appears

on the same page of Methuen's catalogue. E. Nesbit-Bland's "Red House" is leased for a honeymoon; there are some of the famous children as visitors; the atmosphere is sweet as lilacs and the fun of the sort that leaves one breathing freely, with the knots of nerve-strain at least partially loosened.

SOME time ago I asked for suggestions for a list of books to be given as presents, at the rate of one a year, to a class of boys in memory of one taken from them by death. The age of the heroes of these books was to rise with the years, and their characters were to be such as would compel their interest and admiration. I have received several replies, of which the one from Evelyn O'Connor, assistant editor of *Boys' Life*, is especially interesting from the experience of the writer in making such recommendations. "I assume," the letter goes on, "that the givers are not interested in suggestions about the great classics, nor about those classics for boys like 'Treasure Island,' 'Kidnapped,' or 'The Black Arrow'; like 'Kim,' 'Captains Courageous'; like 'Men of Iron'; like 'Martin Hyde'; but are interested in more recent stories which have literary quality. A beautiful animal story which a boy of almost any age would certainly enjoy is 'Bambi,' by Felix Salten; and 'Master Skylark,' by John Bennett, is a splendid story of Shakespeare's time. 'After School,' by Laurie R. King, is a really inspiring story about the career of Nathan Hale, presented as influencing a young man and a boy of to-day. After 'David Blaize' boys might be interested to read 'The Hill,' by Horace Annesley Vachell, and 'The Big Row at Rangers,' by Kent Carr, which ought to appeal to boys of fifteen or sixteen. This story is unusual in that it has a witty hero who is really witty. 'Jinglebob,' by Rollins, is a story of the West and of cowboys quite unlike the current story of this type. 'Swords on the Sea,' by Agnes Danforth Hewes, is a highly colorful tale of Venice in her great days. 'The Trumpeter of Kracow,' by Eric P. Kelly, which was awarded the John Newberry medal of this year, is a remarkable story. Then there is 'The Trade Wind,' by Cornelia Meigs, a story of pre-revolutionary days and the sea. For the older boy, 'Drums,' by James Boyd, would surely be interesting, and Sandburg's 'Abe Lincoln Grows Up,' the early chapters from his life of Lincoln ought to interest boys of fourteen up."

Another specialist, Fannie E. Teller of the Social Service Department of St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, Philadelphia, sends a list for a boy about Penrod's age, beginning to interest himself in society and girls; a list for which suggestions were asked. "Of course, you have thought of Walpole's 'Jeremy' books? Do you know of an English book called 'Lifting Mist,' by Austin Harrison? My copy I got straight from London for seven and six; the book deals with the youngest son of a high middle-class English family, who goes away to a public school. The boy, Sam, has a hard time to find himself, can find no grown person who will give him information about sex instead of pious advice, escapes an entanglement with an older boy, and finally adjusts through a very normal adolescent intensive friendship with an imaginative girl of sixteen. The book might be as good for the grandmother as for the boy himself."

"Do you know Hugh de Selincourt's 'One Little Boy'? I am sure you do. The book may be out of print, but it is worth the grandmother's getting, even if she has to advertise for it. I think it is unequalled in boy-literature for boys and for grown-ups, except that the book is marred by the unreality of the episode where the boy sees the girl bathing in the woods."

"For the second list, to be given to a boy's classmate, books about boys whose characters they would admire, for the present there is Kipling's 'Captains Courageous,' and in a year or two, when the boys are fourteen or fifteen, I think I should give them the following books, in their respective order, in four successive years: 'The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,' published anonymously, but written, I think, by Weldon Johnson; Conrad's 'The Rover'; Somerset Maugham's 'Of Human Bondage'; Galsworthy's 'The Dark Flower.'"

This is a courageous list, and one that I have no doubt the boys would be greatly the better for reading. Whether it is the sort of list for which the giver of these books is looking I am not so sure, but I am happy to have so many of my own preferences confirmed by it. I do think, however, that "One Little Boy," indispensable for teachers and parents, would be less suitable for the age about which it is written.

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