

## Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THIS inaugurates a new department solely devoted to the reviewing of books of poetry and general comment upon the art. Books will necessarily be treated in a somewhat desultory fashion, although the department head will endeavor to the best of his ability to bring some sort of order out of chaos—by which we mean to imply that books of verse published today are of such wide variety, and so many in number,—to say nothing of collections of verse drawing upon the work of many writers,—that the task of properly assimilating and distinguishing the virtues and defects of all is a severe one. Regular reviews of certain books of poetry selected as the most important will, as usual, appear in other columns of this periodical, by other hands. Discussion in this column of current books will be varied upon occasion by reference to work more ancient.

We do not intend to write a mere series of paragraphs taking up each new volume in turn and docking its virtues and defects. We shall exercise no categorical imperative. We shall discuss current books of poetry according to our own peculiar views, and if any disagree with us they are at perfect liberty to take exception in writing to our criticisms, providing their communications do not run to such length as makes it impossible for us to refer to them in whole or in part in this department. When we receive any communication which seems cogent or contains a point well taken, we shall print it with our own comment upon it. We shall probably as frequently be in error in our judgments as are most critics. We shall approach the volumes we treat in no strict chronological order. We may also make a passing comment upon some recent book of poems which has been reviewed elsewhere in *The Saturday Review*, comment running counter to an opinion there expressed. Well, that will simply be our own opinion for what it is worth. You are at perfect liberty to make up your own mind.

There is, at least, a wealth of verse being produced today. And rather a large proportion of it is not entirely negligible. Hence this department, which will, in its ruminations, wander back and forth over the whole field of the art. Naturally we cannot undertake to comment at the same length upon every book that comes under our cognizance. We hold a roving commission. And that is probably enough preamble. Certain more or less recent books of poetry are before us. Of these we shall write. Each week they will be replaced by others.

Two recent collections of Edgar Allen Poe have delighted us, for we are a Poe admirer. The first is an anthology of Poe's best work in criticism, in poetry, and in the short story. It is edited by Addison Hibbard, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of North Carolina, with a general introduction by Hervey Allen who wrote "Israfel, the Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe." It is an excellently selected large volume, though we should rather have seen it arranged with the poetry as the first section and the criticism as the last. We had almost forgotten how Poe enriched several of his most remarkable tales with some of his poems of greatest genius. "The Haunted Palace," of course, gems "The Fall of the House of Usher," but could you have named "The Conqueror Worm" as originally appearing in "Ligeia" and "Thou wast that all to me, love," in "The Assignation"? By the dates of publication appended to each poem and story we see that "The Conqueror Worm" was published in *Graham's Magazine* something like four years and three months after it had appeared in "Ligeia" as verses whose authorship was attributed to the strange lady of that tale. Conversely "To One in Paradise" was incorporated in "The Assignation" first published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* in July, 1835, though the poem by itself first saw the light of print in *Godey's Lady's Book*, January, 1834. And strangely, in the later case, the perfect, terminating lines

In what ethereal dances  
By what eternal streams

are changed to

In what ethereal dances,  
By what Italian streams

while the following incredible supplementary verse is added:

Alas! for that accursed time  
They bore thee o'er the billow,  
From Love to tiled age and crime,  
And an unholy pillow—  
From me, and from our misty clime,  
Where weeps the silver willow!

The whole poem is, in the story, referred to as being written upon the interleaf opposite a passage in Politian's tragedy "The Orfeo," by a renowned and mysterious stranger in Venice. Thus did a character in one of Poe's lesser tales all but ruin one of his most beautiful poems!

But the question of Poe's defects, as is noted by Howard Mumford Jones, who writes the introduction for a limited edition of "Poems of Edgar Allan Poe," recently beautifully printed by the Spiral Press of this city "is an absorbing one." He follows this with the best concise excuse for them that we have happened to run across, as follows:

But the astonishing thing is not that Poe exhibits these defects, but that these defects are relatively minor in the small body of his work. Anyone who has read much of American lyric poetry in the thirties and forties of the last century must know that only by the miracle of his own strong, assertive genius did Poe escape from the defects of that amusing age. It was the age of "female" poetesses; the age that saw in N. P. Willis a great and astonishing genius; the age that thrilled to "The Psalm of Life" and worse; the age of Mrs. Mowatt, Lyman Beecher, Peter Parley, and "Maria del Occidente," and if it was also the period of the great New England writers, it is to be feared that readers did not always discriminate between the poems of Emerson and the poems of Thomas Dunn English. It was, in short, the age of "elegance," and I think the best way to estimate the astonishing achievement in pure art which Edgar Allan Poe represents is to read Meade Minnegerode's "The Fabulous Forties" and then to read the lyrics in this volume.

"The Book of Poe," we neglected to mention, is published by Doubleday, Doran, and the same firm has recently brought out one of the great dramatic poems of the world remarkably illustrated in line and in color by Elizabeth MacKinstry. We refer to Ibsen's "Peer Gynt," for we strongly feel that it belongs with the great poetic dramas of all time. In fact it overtops almost all modern poetic drama save perhaps Hardy's "The Dynasts." It is an extraordinary epic of the soul. Among Miss MacKinstry's interpretations of certain symbolic personages in the poem we particularly liked her horned woman, and her view of the Button Moulder.

As we have spoken already of a publication from one esthetic press we should also here take note of the fourth book issued by Nancy Cunard's "The Hours Press" located at Chapelle-Réanville, Eure, France. It is Richard Aldington's poem, "The Eaten Heart," modern commentary upon a legend of a knight and troubadour of Roussillon which is briefly outlined as prelude. The book is hand-set, attractively bound, and consists of two hundred signed copies, after the printing of which the type was distributed. While it is not one of Aldington's best works it is of decided interest.

Last year, through Harold Vinal, William Stanley Braithwaite brought out the sixteenth annual tome of the "Anthology of Magazine Verse and Year Book of American Poetry," which has grown in size and completeness with each succeeding year. It is truly an heroic winnowing when one stops to think of the labor of reading all the poems appearing through the year in such many and various American periodicals. Mr. Braithwaite's introduction does not find the present situation in regard to poetry in the forty-eight States satisfactory. But he does claim that facts and figures, even of the pessimist, prove "the optimist's contention that poetry of late has been looking up." In fact, today it sells better in book form. Nor is this entirely, in the case of the largest sales, due to the Book Clubs. Mr. Braithwaite cites the fact that though Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Tristram" went out to but about 10,000 subscribers (the early clientèle of the Literary Guild at that time) the total sales of this poem at the time of his writing were nearly 70,000 copies. He calls attention also to Miss Harriet Monroe's organization, the Poetry Clan, which sends out to subscribers six volumes of poetry a year, and may well be on the road to acquiring at least a thousand members. He refers to 25,000 copies being sold of Dorothy Parker's "Enough Rope," and to Samuel Hoffenstein's "Poems in Praise of Practically Nothing" running through seven editions.

As for the verse he has gleaned from the magazines, in running through the entries we have not, on the whole, been greatly impressed. There are present a number of well-known good workmen, a

number of rather promising new-comers. Themes are varied. There is quite a bit of originality in the themes and there are pictures and impressions that linger. But the trouble seems to us to be the growing bulk of the collection. It could have been cut in half, at least, without losing the best. Mr. Braithwaite's taste is a whit too catholic. He is too inclusive. This is chiefly due to his earnest search for new merit, his generous desire to surprise some treasure in periodical literature. Better poetry, it is true, is to be found there today than has been the case in the past. And new work by poets of considerable contemporary stature often now appears in the magazines. For anthologists of the future his shelf of collections will be a supplementary boon, supplementary that is to the works of the poets themselves. To specialists in contemporary verse the results of his assiduous ferretting are necessary. But assimilation of, say, half a dozen books a year by the best new writers of verse, English and American, will be of more value to the average reader. We append here and now, as we shall append every week, the titles of three at least fairly-recent books of poetry with which we think *Saturday Review* subscribers should be familiar.

WINTER WORDS. By THOMAS HARDY. The Macmillan Company. 1928.

CAWDOR, AND OTHER POEMS. By ROBINSON JEFFERS. Horace Liveright. 1928.

ANGELS AND EARTHLY CREATURES. By ELINOR WYLIE. Alfred A. Knopf. 1929.

## The Jalna Clan Again

WHITEOAKS OF JALNA. By MAZO DE LA ROCHE. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

"JALNA," the Atlantic prize novel of two years ago, a story of exceptional originality and richness, did not demand a sequel. It was probably written without thought of one. But for two reasons it was a novel particularly well adapted to extension in another book. Its emphasis was upon character, and the development of its principal figures—the tyrannical centenarian grandmother who had migrated from England via India to Ontario, the redhaired young master of the Ontario estate, Renny, the two old English uncles with their aroma of Victorianism, Ernest and Nicholas, and the sharply differentiated young people, Eden the poet, Piers the yeoman, and Finch the callow youth—might well be pursued through new vicissitudes. Moreover, "Jalna" broke off just after a family crisis which left a number of these persons at loose ends. Eden had fallen in love with Piers's wife and been thrust out of the house, his own wife, Alayne, had left him and gone back to her New York position, and the unity of the family had been violently disturbed.

Miss de la Roche has produced a book which every admirer of "Jalna" will enjoy and wish to keep, and which should make new friends for her talent; but naturally enough, she has fallen a shade short of the fine, fresh inspiration of the first tale. This is evident in more than one way. Whereas in the first book the characters exhibited themselves in a wholly natural fashion, here the author is a bit intent upon exhibiting them. We watch her put them through their paces and make them live up to the reputation for salt individuality which they acquired in the earlier volume. The grandmother has to be more tyrannical than ever, the parrot harsher in screaming its Indian oaths, Renny more masterful and fascinating, Finch more wistfully appealing, Eden more irresponsible and unmoral. Again, this time Miss de la Roche tells a story in which plot counts for a little more than it should, and the long arm of coincidence is stretched to its full length more than once. When Uncle Ernest visits New York City, for example, he accidentally runs square into the long-lost Eden, now penniless and ready to collapse; the sort of accident that might occur once in a million times, but occurs more than once in this short book. And at the end the probabilities have to be squeezed again to provide us with a completely happy ending.

Nevertheless, it is once more a rich and finely readable story that Miss de la Roche has given us. The chapters which describe the last days of old Gran, and which hold us in suspense to learn upon which member of the great Jalna clan she has bestowed her hoarded fortune, would alone make the book a welcome acquisition.



## The BOWLING GREEN

### John Mistletoe

#### III.

AS vanished as the *Just Suits*, a coarse and forgotten tobacco that was favored in Mistletoe's own coterie of conscientious smokers, are the moods, simplicities, dolors and merriments of the student era. But smile at it as you will, the world we knew then was fairly sane. It was not magnificent, but it was peace.

In the mind of the undergraduate there was always—perhaps still is?—a pervasive awareness of now being a college Man. This implied a serious obligation of Knowing About Life. To be awake after midnight (at which hour the dormitory lights were shut off at the power-house) and finish a card-game by candles, to consume late pannikins of cocoa with olives and crackers and argument about God, to read *Tom Jones* or Boccaccio, to visit the burlesque theatre in Philadelphia, these were recognized forms of philosophical initiation. Going Fussing, as calling on young women was then always known, was respected as an inevitable concession to destiny, but hardly regarded as Seeing Life.

Mistletoe's class—I speak of the era 1906-1910—rather enjoyed fancying themselves as a group of hard cases; they blithely imagined that rarely had so lively and virile a posse of humorists been gathered. How weary of their bumpkin antics their enduring dominions might well have been: their senseless japes and horseplay, the parrotings of a thousand generations of students which themselves believed so fresh and new. Yet it is pleasant to think of that green julep of freedom that ran in the young bipeds. Crude as it was, it was better than the dull mannerly conformity into which the mass output of American alumni soon subsides. For the usual youth that short four years is his only period of fantasy. As soon as he leaves college the docile creature yearns for his destined servitude, from which he rarely again emerges. Likely it is better so. The wise man in his time kisses many chains.

"A guarded education in morals and manners" was the statesmanlike phrase always used in the college catalogue to describe its purposes; a thoroughly prudent and liberal Quaker policy. Behind apparent liberty such as dazzled many boys of seventeen or eighteen, a shrewd and watchful observation was alert. But in spite of discipline a good deal of cheery exploration was possible.

The bohemianism of college boys is well standardized. Naive souls, how scandalized we would have been to realize that any Dean with plotting paper could have sketched beforehand the exact parabola of our curve of experience and predicted every coordinate of our supposedly unique conduct. In the few cases where zeal carried the young experimenter over the edge of the plotting paper it did not take the authorities long to hear about it; the two-handed engine was at the door. For the most part our sallies were fairly innocuous, resulting in nothing more unseemly than an occasional misdemeanor in the late smoking car from Broad Street. The Red Lion, long a famous tavern in Ardmore—now I believe the cafeteria of a motor-truck factory—was visited for beer. The Casino burlesque house in Philly was a steady resort for the student of drama. Mistletoe and I were profitable patrons of that rump parliament, but better than any of the ladies of Billy Watson's Beef Trust (not to be confused with William Watson) I remember the bored air of the large paternal man who stood sawing on the bull-fiddle. It amazed us that he could be so unimpressed by the elevated proximity of so much haunch of Venus. Mistletoe always contended that the burlesque show was the lineal descendant of the Tudor spirit, and I fear that some of his relish for carnal mirth can be traced to the old show-house on Walnut Street. In that stage-door alley floated the exhilarating odor of grease-paint. Have you ever considered the delightful Seven Ages of Man offered by the various tones of grease-paint? As you find them listed in the make-up box they compose a perfect Shakespearean sequence:

1. Pink
2. Very Pale Juvenile
3. Juvenile Hero-Flesh
4. Juvenile, Robust
5. Sallow Young Man
6. Flesh, Middle Age
7. Robust Old Age

The period I think of now may be described as a moderate blend of Juvenile, Robust, and Sallow Young Man. Sometimes Sallow had the upper hand, as when, after tremulous waiting in the rain outside the stage door to invite some Casino sourette to a glass of beer, the hobbledehoy fled in sudden panic; otherwhiles Robust prevailed: Mistletoe enjoys remembering a Chinese restaurant on Race Street where these juveniles, in delicious rake-hell glamor, sat at table with some rather jetsam madams and listened to professional anecdotes. The zenith of that episode was when one of the ladies, saying "It's a shame to waste it," tucked an unfinished chicken-leg inside her stocking to take home to her dog. Such evenings were as good as Mau-passant. Perhaps, in a guarded education in morals and manners, they had their useful contribution. I think it was probably a strong Stevensonian influenza that impressed the sophomore J. M. with the social importance of harlots.

The exceptional thing is the thing unduly remembered; let me not give exaggerated prominence to harmless escapades into the Debateable Land. More in routine, certainly more approvable by the faculty, were the excursions on Ninth Street where the dioscursi of culture were Leary's and Lauber's. To Leary's famous second-hand bookstore I have paid full tribute elsewhere; for three generations it has yeasted the dumpling temperament of Philadelphia. These boys, buying there their first copies of Chaucer, Wordsworth, or Tennyson, would then proceed to Lauber's "German Restaurant and Wine House" a block or so up the street. The 50-cent table d'hôte dinner was plentiful and accompanied by a musical trio which was excellent. But what lifted Lauber's to the status of education was that there Mistletoe ordered his first own bottle of wine. There was a California claret, 35 cents a quart in that dulcet era; I dare say it was meagre and brackish, and I know we secretly disliked it; but it was claret, which we had read about in Tennyson, and nothing else would do. By some miracle of prognosis Mistletoe has saved one of Lauber's menus all these years, and I see that he has put a sentimental tick opposite that claret on the wine list. Lauber also served most of his wines on draught; claret at "10 cents per schoppen" seems a pleasantly German touch. The date on the menu before me is January 29, 1910, and I see that by the time the young bohemians got there from Leary's the Hamburger Rauchfleisch mit Erbsenbrei was all gone, for the waiter has pencilled it out.

The smart set among undergraduates used to visit a renowned café they called tautologically The L'Aiglon, but it was an overdressed Bailey Banks and Biddle sort of place compared to the homely and burgherish old Lauber's. Lauber took wines seriously, and an inquiring youth could learn something. How excellent to make virgin experiment among parsimonious half-pints (at 25 cents) of Liebfraumilch and Assmannshäuser; or India Pale Ale at a nickel a glass. A dollar an hour was what one earned by tutoring indolent classmates in math., and those dollars were scrupulously divided between Lauber and Leary. What the two L's symbolize is certainly as important as the three R's. To discover the poets for one's self, and to learn to drink decently, with a sense of ritual, are part of a gentleman's education. As you move on from Juvenile, Robust, toward the epoch of Flesh, Middle Age, it is well to avoid the fatuity of rearward praise. The speakeasy of the better sort has many charms, including the paramount one of raising the death rate among numbskulls, but at its best it lacks something of the good human dignity of a place like Lauber's.

(Those who have known sea bathing can never again be wholly content with swimming in fresh water. There is always a subtle taint about it: it stings the eyes and strangles in the nose. Similarly, if you have ever enjoyed the tidal freedom of a community where the necessities of the artist are understood and respected, it is sometimes perplexing to be immersed in the muddy shallows of the United States of Agility. That sounds like a hard saying, but I prefer we should remark it about ourselves.

If Moses could draw up a constitution in ten prohibitions, it seems as though we shouldn't need nineteen. We are beginning to realize what the French meant when they spoke for years of British and American hypocrisy.)

But visits to Philadelphia were rare, and I give a falsely Latin Quarter impression of a college life almost entirely rustic. *Non doctior sed meliore doctrina imbutus* is its motto—a quotation whose provenance not even the faculty classicists have ever been able to place for me. Like the Latin mottoes of respected publishing houses, few of the inmates can parse them or even know they exist. But to that good plea against raw sophistication the college has honorably adhered. If I seem to import an irrelevant tavern flavor, that is of my own private sentimentality. We lived mostly without benefit of orgy; no place was ever less bohemian in spirit. It never even occurred to it to want to be; the peccancies of Mistletoe and his cronies were surreptitious and unauthorized. One of the best of memories is of a volume of Ben Jonson bought at Leary's and *The Alchemist* read aloud with a companion (and shouts of laughter) in a field of cornshocks beyond the college.

I have looked back over some of Mistletoe's notebooks, and I find that he has learned very little in twenty years, about literature anyhow, that they didn't tell him then, or try to tell him. I get a twinge of wistful amusement in some of the old memoranda: as for instance when the poor young scholiast, alongside the purplest stanza of the Eve of Saint Agnes, set innocently down the notation that *shielded scutcheon* was an example of "pleonasm." That, entered perhaps by dictation, was a mere childishness of pedantry, but every child is properly a pedant. The only danger is in his remaining so. You must start him off hunting for rhetorical oddities, which may be just as much fun as parlor games; perhaps eventually among pleonasm or metonymies he may become aware of what lies behind rhetoric, the burning human mind. It would be wrong to suppose that because he jotted down such naivetés on the margin he did not feel the thrill of Keats. In fact a 75-cent Keats bought from John Wanamaker—not from Leary, because he wanted one utterly his own, with no reminiscence of any previous reader—has been one of the most important things that ever happened to him. To this day he remains one of the few who can tell you offhand what day of the year is Saint Agnes' Eve. The very pages of that poem are loose in the book because he used to read it in bed and fall asleep on it. We were lucky at Haverford in having in the Roberts Autograph Collection one of the most beautiful and terrible of Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne. I doubt if many of the boys were enough interested to go and look at it, but I know one who did. He can still call to mind the actual handwriting of those words at the bottom of the sheet, describing his love. "Tis richer than an Argosy of Pearles."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.



## Thinking of My Little Boy

By TU FU

Written about the year 756

Translated by FLORENCE AYS COUGH

CHI TZU! it is Spring, we are still apart!  
The song of the bright oriole, the warm  
weather verily but sharpen my distress.

Cut off, separated, I am startled by the change of  
season;

With whom can I talk of your quick perception?

Of the mountain torrent which pours its water be-  
side our pathway in the lonely hills?

The rough branches which form our gateway in the  
hamlet surrounded by old trees?

I think of you, and in my sadness find no comfort  
but in sleep;

Leaning on the balustrade I warm my back and doze  
when the sun shines after rain.