

Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE holidays were a bit too much for us and involved so much entertainment as well as work of various kinds that this department has been omitted for two issues. We now reappear in a mood of New Year's resolutions. The first resolution that we are going to make—and keep—is to clear our desk of a certain accumulation of small books of poetry, with passing comment upon a few of the better books we have neglected. Next we shall endeavor to a larger extent and to better purpose to keep abreast of the many books of poetry that appear steadily to stream from the presses.

Let us see what we find before us. In the first place we do not believe that this journal has paid sufficient attention to two recent books of poems by two of the most promising younger women poets of America. We refer to Louise Bogan and Léonie Adams. Miss Bogan's "Dark Summer," her second eclectic volume, appeared last September through Charles Scribner's Sons. Miss Adams's "High Falcon" was published in October by the John Day Company. It is half a dozen years since Miss Bogan's first volume. She is of New England stock, of Irish-American parents. She is now married to another poet, Raymond Holden, and lives on a small farm in upper Eastern New York State. Miss Adams has not put forth a second book during the four years following the appearance of "Those Not Elect." She is now abroad on a Guggenheim Fellowship. The poetry of both women has frequently appeared in *The New Republic*, to which Miss Bogan has also contributed book and other criticism. Both poets are precisians. They both preserve a distinguished reticence. There is an aristocracy of the mind. They manage phrase and epithet with delicacy and deeply respect their art.

It is interesting to set against these two books two others by poets now almost of another generation, namely, Eunice Tietjens and Witter Bynner, whose books of last August, "Leaves in Windy Weather" and "Indian Earth," both published by Knopf, follow a number of former volumes by each. Mr. Bynner has written the more voluminously. In his latest volume the longest section is inspired by the region around Lake Chapala in Mexico. Mrs. Tietjens draws a small section of hers from the Orient, which she loves. In both volumes we find a more direct manner of statement and, particularly in the work of Mrs. Tietjens, an emotional quality less astringently restrained than in the work of the two younger women poets—and this is not to forget the impressiveness of Miss Bogan's longest poem, "The Flume." Less a meticulous artist than Miss Bogan or Miss Adams, Mrs. Tietjens is often effectively vigorous. Her impatience with words, in the face of emotional experience, is her artistic handicap. She puts this well, herself, in her opening poem:

QUERY

Oh, is there any use then
In putting words together,
Words as hard to manage
As leaves in windy weather?

And is there any use then
In marking where they fall,
Words that fly apart again
In no time at all?

Neither Miss Bogan nor Miss Adams would have written thus. Their ears are so finely attuned to the clang-tint and their inner vision to the mold of words, their minds so absorbed often in the abstruse, that the most sensitive expression sometimes misses translating that they are inclined to eschew simple, emotional statement. Particularly is this true of Miss Adams. We should say, offhand, that two of her gods have been (if they are not now) Gerard Manly Hopkins and the later Yeats. Miss Bogan, in "Dark Summer," is never as abstruse as Miss Adams can be in "High Falcon." Miss Adams's temper is perhaps as well expressed, as anywhere in her book, in these two verses:

It was decoyed
But cannot change.
Its wing with beating lonely air,
Its beak with tasting wilderness berry,
Its look and lovely flight are strange.

What lover sullen,
What love all paltering,
Possesses the gold bough of heaven,
Or who loving
Beset the royal wandering thing?

This also instances the fact that Miss Adams is the most musical of these three women poets, though Miss Bogan strikes one as having had the deeper experience of life. As for Mrs. Tietjens and Mr. Bynner, they

are less subtle, though occasionally an aphorism of theirs shows how deeply they have thought and felt. They belong, however, to the days when there was more of the *cri de cœur* in poetry and more description with direct implication. Two books in an older manner, two books in a newer. So far as craftsmanship goes, the two younger women excel their elders, certainly. But an eventual winnowing of all the poetry, in numbers of volumes that Mrs. Tietjens and Mr. Bynner have produced, will make two small books of distinction.

In passing, we wish to comment on two volumes by two Canadians. Bliss Carman died recently, and his "Sanctuary" sonnets which he wrote at the home of Dr. Morris Lee King and Mrs. Mary Perry King, in New Canaan, Connecticut, appeared last November through Dodd, Mead. The book bears a prefatory note by Padraic Colum, also a resident of New Canaan, and illustrations by another resident, Whitman Bailey. Years ago Carman had done his best work; in fact, to our way of thinking, his best work is to be found in those most enjoyable Vagabondia books which he did with the late Richard Hovey. These sonnets are old-fashioned poetry, simple and tranquil. Their value is not extreme. Carman is remembered by his later friends as a fine and lovable character, however, and his best work—not to be found here—has for years been treasured in anthologies.

Rolfe Humphries, whose "Europa and Other Poems and Sonnets" Crosby Gaige issued in 1928, has been too little appreciated. His sonnets are particularly original. He is satiric, ironic, sinewy, essentially masculine. The "poison-bitter, amber-yellow eye" of his eagle, the head that he calls "a bony noggin," his "Words to Be Flung Up a Stairway," his "Hard Wood Woman," all testify to a personal idiom that is often effective.

Countee Cullen is the best of the younger negro poets. We have always felt that his workmanship lacked finish, though occasional stanzas are remarkable. What relative of his, we wonder, is the Charles Cullen who illustrates this new book ("The Black Christ," Harper & Brothers, 1929) as he has illustrated others of Countee Cullen's? Charles Cullen has interesting, definite, highly personal draughtsmanship. Some of his drawings are also poetry. Countee Cullen's longest and most ambitious poem in this new book of his is "The Black Christ." To our mind he is more successful when he is more brief. One desire of his with which we sympathize is expressed in "To Certain Critics." He has never wished to write poetry solely as a colored man. He desires to be judged as a poet in the great English tradition, and there is no reason, certainly, why he should not be. It is fundamentally a foolish attitude that parades the work of any poet because of some interesting but extraneous fact of his life. Editors will do it because people like extraneous things about writers. But what fundamentally matters about Cullen is that he has control of the mechanics of verse, sincerity of utterance, a sense of the dramatic, and an ability to express the emotions of his heart. Judged by the highest standards of poetry he has yet his spurs to win. He has proved a portent, but the final discipline which makes for the highest art has not yet grasped him.

Margaret McGovern's "The Lost Year" is another case in point. Rollo Walter Brown introduces it for Coward-McCann. (It was published last September.) He calls our attention to the fact that Miss McGovern never went beyond the eighth grade in the public schools and earns her living by being a waitress. It is well, indeed, to know that her desire for matters of the spirit, through poetry, has enabled her to surmount much painful experience; but for all that we must judge her work by her simple ability to write, by the words as they stand on the page. Judged thus, her verses are promise merely—so far. They convey temperament and individuality; but, though they convince us of the integrity of her vision of life, they do not seem to us as remarkable as they have evidently seemed to her publishers. However, we shall look for more from her. She is well worth watching.

Recommended:

EUROPA. By ROLFE HUMPHRIES. New York: Crosby Gaige. 1928.

LEDA. By ALDOUS HUXLEY. Doubleday, Doran: Department of Rare Editions. 1929.

SAILOR WITH BANJO. By HAMISH MACLAREN. The Macmillan Company. 1929.



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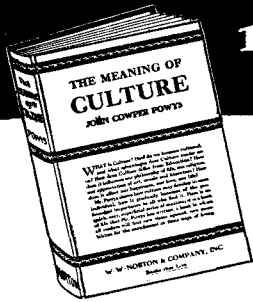
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Points of View

Our Ignorance

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I was interested to see that the review of my novel, "The World's Delight," published in your issue of December 28, was a reprint of a review by E. M. Benson, published in the *New York Evening Post* of September 14.

My impression has always been that the *Saturday Review of Literature* published only original contributions. Feeling sure that the editors were not aware that this material had been published elsewhere, and paid for, I am calling your attention to these facts.

The circumstances seem all the more interesting in view of subsequent developments. In the *New York Evening Post* as well as in your own publication it was stated, with reference to the infant son of Adah Isaacs Menken—"This unverified and unverifiable legend comes down to Mr. Oursler from the incandescent pen of Ed James, one of Adah Menken's earliest biographers, etc., etc."

In reply to this, I submitted to the editor of the *New York Evening Post* a photograph of Menken taken with her baby, one of three such portraits in my possession. I further drew his attention to the fact that I had not obtained my information from the biography of Mr. James, although I did obtain some material from a living member of the James family. The picture of Adah and her baby was published in the *New York Evening Post* on September 28, yet Mr. Benson has contributed to you his already printed and paid for review, repeating the same statement.

I forbear to call attention to numerous other points in the review because I am entirely satisfied that the true nature of this piece of writing is disclosed by itself. I merely feel that you are entitled to know what I am sure you did not know when you accepted this contribution—that it had already been printed and paid for by another publication.

I am enclosing for your information the review which you published, the review which the *New York Evening Post* published, and the picture of Adah Menken which the *New York Evening Post* published.

FULTON OURSLER.

It is probably unnecessary to state that the Editors of *The Saturday Review* were quite unaware that the review of Mr. Oursler's book had appeared elsewhere.—*The Editor.*

"Mrs. Eddy" and Lord & Taylor

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I have just read with great interest your editorial on "Mrs. Eddy" by Edwin Franden Dakin and, while I think all the facts were literally true as of the time the editorial was written, there is one condition which has been changed in the meantime which it is only fair to bring to your attention.

While "Mrs. Eddy" was "under the counter" at Lord & Taylor's for a certain length of time and while copies could only be secured by special order, it should be known that in their book shop "Mrs. Eddy" is again on the counters and has been for several days and as far as we know it will continue to be sold as long as there is a demand.

In view of this action by Lord & Taylor it is in fairness to them that I send you this information.

WHITNEY DARROW
Charles Scribner's Sons. Sales Manager.

Mrs. Eddy

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

A charter subscriber, and one who reads with much enjoyment the *Saturday Review*, I was sorry to read your editorial entitled "Mary Baker Eddy."

As a member of the Christian Science Church I appreciate your acknowledgement of Mrs. Eddy's place in history, as a great leader, but I regret your evident misunderstanding of the situation.

The book in question, to speak very mildly, totally misrepresents Christian Science and its leader. Christian Scientists in withdrawing their patronage from publishers and booksellers who offer for sale disguised attacks on their religion and teacher, are simply taking the quiet, dignified step of ceasing to support in any way those who are striving to hurt them, and are doing no more than the man who, on finding his clothes returned damaged from the laundry, changes to another laundry.

Such a step is not extra-legal but normal and natural. Such a step is not boycott, but

a sane and sensible protective measure directed against no one.

No disinterested, impartial person would deny to Christian Scientists, the right to defend and protect their religion, and its discoverer and founder, from public misrepresentation.

I want to thank you for the many good things which are always to be found in the *Saturday Review*, and which are deeply appreciated.

JOHN C. W. BIRD.

[The question is not of the undoubted right of any individual to refrain from patronizing a given shop for a given reason, but whether the bookshops involved in this discussion were intimidated from selling Dakin's book to the general public.—*The Editor.*]

The Brooklyn Fire

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I am sending you another version of *The Brooklyn Fire*, almost twice as many lines and a more coherent story. I thought perhaps you or Anne Ellis might like to see this, that is, if you haven't already been snowed under with other versions.

My copy comes from Ernest Beard of Downing, Wisconsin. I recalled hearing him sing it when we were small boys back in Ohio, some forty years ago. The poem follows:

THE BROOKLYN FIRE

The evening's bright stars they were shining,
The moonbeams shone bright o'er the land,
Our city lay quietly sleeping,
The hour of midnight was at hand.
But hark, do you hear the cry fi-er?
How dismal the bells they do sound!
Our old Brooklyn Theater's on fi-er;
Alas, burning fast to the ground.

Chorus:

I ne'er shall forget The Two Orphans,
Bad luck seemed to be in their wake.
It seemed they were sent to our city
The lives of our dear ones to take.

The doors they were opened at seven;
The curtains were rolled up at eight.
Inside they were seated and happy;
Outside they were mad they were late.

The play it went off very smoothly
Till sparks from the scenery did fly;
'Twas then that men, women, and children,
"Oh God, save our lives," they did cry.

Next morning amid the black ruins,
Oh God! what a sight met our eyes;
The dead they were lying in all shapes,
And some there could none recognize.
Dear mothers were crying and weeping
For sons who'd been out all the night.
Oh God! may their souls rest in heaven
Among the pure, innocent, and bright!

What means this large gathering of people
Upon such a cold dreary day?
What means this long line of black hearses
All plumed in their feathery array?
They are bound for the cemet'ry at Green-wood,

Where the winds through the tall willows
Sigh.

'Tis there where the funeral is going,
Their poor unknown dead there to lie.

A. L. PHILIPPS.

Religion

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

The following definition of "Religion" recently won a five dollar prize from a prominent American magazine in which it was printed. It is an excellent example of that kind of "tall" writing that conceals false or commonplace ideas under a show of learning or erudition.

Religion is a sort of egocentric conceit, in the interest of which man postulates a "supernatural" world, populated by the risen dead, over which reigns a vain-glorious sovereign whose alleged solicitude toward mundane economy is made the basis of the assumption that man occupies the supremely important place in the universe—a pretty theory in proof of which biological research has not been reassuring.

Much writing like this is published on the theory that writers who can marshal and march their words in such "sesquipedalian" array must have something to say. But most of this writing is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." It is like a vast toy balloon that needs but a pin prick to cause it to collapse into a thimbleful of rubber. The great writers of the world used simple language, because great thoughts are best expressed in simple language. "Beauty unadorned is adorned the most."

CHARLES HOOPER.

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