

## Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

QUITE a few books crowd our shelf this week-end. One of the most interesting is William Alexander Percy's "Selected Poems," with a preface by Llewellyn Jones, published at three dollars by the Yale University Press. It is now fifteen years since Mr. Percy's first volume, "Sappho in Levkas," was printed; but he was publishing before that. He is of an age with most of the older poets still writing, but he has remained more secluded. Much of his rhetoric seems to us no more than mere rhetoric, and his absorption in the thirteenth century has not often produced verse really impelling. Also his turn for poetic drama fades as a candle in the sun before the robustness of the Elizabethans. But here and there he holds the attention and can achieve truly passionate utterance,—in the old tale of Sappho and Phaon, in a description of the Children's Crusade, in several sonnets and several brief lyrics. There is also much beauty in one of the last poems in the volume, "A Legend of Lacedæmon," as well as in "Chimes," where he finds the spontaneous, fortunate phrase:

*Her shadows are rimmed with silver,  
And there is wild beautiful sunlight in her  
anger;  
Her injustice is some virtue in excess,  
And the dapple of dew is on her passion.*

This is the voice of love suddenly inspired. A great deal of his poetry is paler. And the poet in him often trips into the lilled marsh of sentimentality. But surely "The Unloved to His Beloved" is a finely wrought lyric:

*Could I pluck down Aldebaran  
And haze the Pleiads in your hair,  
I could not add more burning to your  
beauty  
Or lend a starrier coldness to your air.*

*If I were cleaving terrible waters  
With dead ahead on the visible sands  
I could not turn and stretch my hands more  
wildly,  
More vainly turn and stretch to you my  
hands.*

It is by such moments of accomplishment that William Alexander Percy will be known of posterity, not, we think, by his more ambitious and elaborate attempts to recreate the pageant of the dim past. "Safe Secrets" is another brief poem that appeals to us in its profound humanity and direct statement:

*I will carry terrible things to the grave  
with me:  
So much must never be told.  
My eyes will be ready for sleep and my  
heart for dust  
With all the secrets they hold.  
The piteous things alive in my memory  
Will be safe in that soundless dwelling;  
In the clean loam, in the dark where the  
dumb roots rust  
I can sleep without fear of telling.*

As we see, Percy's gift is not for remarkable imagery. When insufficiently moved he often states things tritely. And sometimes he even trifles with a pretty quaintness. But few poets can hope to make linger in the memory of mankind more than a very few of their words. He has uttered a few that, it seems to us, may linger. He is not a first-rate poet (as, indeed, are few), he has not greatly impressed his own personality on his writing, but, as we think we have shown, on occasion he can strikingly express his emotion.

Polly Chase Boyden, a Chicagoan, educated at St. Timothy's and at Bryn Mawr, interests us technically and is occasionally quite felicitous in her first book of poems with the peculiar title, "Toward Equilibrium." It is not a good title, being too close to the edge of humorous implication. But the poems in the book are more fastidious than the average. The influence of Elinor Wylie can easily be discerned here and there. But Miss Boyden also has imagery of her own, and is finding her own voice. "Fall of Snow" is perhaps as representative a poem of hers to quote as any other.

*Your hand within my hand  
Sleeps moth-wise in a closely spun cocoon.*

*There is no stir  
Of feather or of fur . . .  
And the snow falls from the caverns of the  
moon.*

*Your lips against my lips,  
Moist with the frosty immanence of breath,  
Are more alone  
Than footsteps covered and gone . . .  
And the snow falls from the corridors of  
death.*

This poet has evidently chosen her inclusions carefully and her book has dignity and grace.

"Spindrift," by Florence Mary Bennett, from the Mosher Press of Portland, Maine, and "Trailings, a Rhymed Sketch-Book," by Jessie S. Miner, from the Lantern Press of New York City, have in common the fact that many of the poems deal with foreign places and with classicism, though many of Mrs. Anderson's (Florence Mary Bennett) signalize America. Hers is naturally the more beautifully printed volume as well as the larger, though both books are small, but the phrase of neither is very distinguished. Edwin Valentine Mitchell of Hartford has published Eleanor O'Rourke Koenig's "Two on the Old Pathway," and such titles as "Twilight Dream Song," "Snow in April," "To a Late Bird Singing," "End of Summer," and "March Twilight," may serve to indicate what is the fact, that, though Mrs. Koenig possesses talent, it is no greater than that of a large number of today's minor poets. Grace Noll Crowell's "Flame in the Wind," from the Southwest Press of Dallas, Texas, is even more obvious and easily foreseen in its pronouncements upon life. It is a relief to turn from these books to "After-Walker," which title characterizes the poems of Leonard Cline, who died tragically last year, who wrote several remarkable novels, and who experienced more than his share of hounding in his private life by the daily press. His career was erratic, his prose fantastic, but "The Dark Chamber," "Listen, Moon!" and "God Head" are novels well worth reading. His publishers' note tells us that the manuscript of his poems was brought to them as early as 1927. He later revised it, added newer poems, and returned it a few months before his death. Meanwhile he had sent in the long poem "After-Walker" from which the posthumous book takes its title. The publishers (Viking Press, \$2) have added five poems to the original manuscript.

Cline was a Michigan man and was thirty-six years old when he died. His first book, his only volume of poems except "After-Walker," appeared when he was twenty-one. The work we now have gathered together of his is not astounding. Much of it is, as a matter of fact, mediocre. But the section entitled "Mad Jacob," the title-poem (with its haunting bitterness), the poem called "Snake," the lyric "Sun Go Parch," and the peculiar "Cellar Idyl," all arrest the attention. Leonard Cline could command the communication of weird ideas in fitting rhythms. His intelligence was quick and strange. His book is more or less of a curiosity of literature. Perhaps it is partly the history of the man, who gave proof of a talent that might just possibly have become great, and the pathos of his comparatively fragmentary achievement, that influence our judgment here. That may be. But there is a force and fire and eerie sagacity in many lines of this book.

M. A. DeWolfe's "Yankee Ballads" (Cambridge: Washburn & Thomas, \$2), with illustrations by Philip Kappel, are brought out with heads in imitation of older printing and with pictures in silhouette. They are entertaining and convey the atmosphere of the time of which they treat. Metrical facility, dry wit, a love for epitaphs, a penchant for philosophizing in metre, distinguish the verse of F. L. Lucas (Macmillan, \$1.75), the English writer of belles lettres who now gives us "Marionettes." One poem, "Discord," dealing with a terrible incident, stands out in his volume, which, for the most part, is just about what one would expect from a scholarly and cultured Englishman, no more and no less. A much lighter effort is, however, what we wish to quote in this context, as we think it may be said to have some bearing on a good deal of argument going on at the present time. Here it is, anyway:

CHORUS OF METAPHYSICAL CRITICS  
*Here we go gathering wind and wool,  
Wind and wool,  
Wind and wool.  
Reason!—we left all that at school,  
No doubt whatever afflicts us.  
We twist the riddle of things terrene  
Into such a riddle as never was seen,  
And nobody knows what on earth we mean,  
So nobody contradicts us,  
Ducdame, ducdame, ducdame,  
So nobody contradicts us.*

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## A Letter from France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

M. JEAN MARTET, who was Clemenceau's secretary for some years after the war, has published "Le Silence de M. Clemenceau," and "M. Clemenceau Point par Lui-Même" Albin Michel).

"You will note," says Jean Martet, "that, like all aged men, M. Clemenceau remembered more vividly and more willingly the first years of his life than such and such recent happenings." But this happens to be the reason why Jean Martet's second book appeals to me.

I hail from the same village (in Vendée) as Clemenceau. My first eighteen years were spent at Mouilleron, where he was born, and Mouchamps, where he lies buried. ("The two poles of his life," as he said.) My (adoptive) grandmother was a friend and my mother a favorite of Clemenceau's maternal grandmother, Madame Gautreau, the Huguenot housewife whose influence was profound in his development. He used to say: "I prefer my Gautreau blood to the other." He had left Vendée (forever, as it then seemed) when I, thirty years younger, was growing up. But his name was a household word in the whole district. He was much discussed and not a little feared by the good bourgeois, Catholic, and more or less reactionary families of our neighborhood. I need not say that, to some young people like me, belonging as his grandmother to a tiny minority of emancipated Calvinists, Georges Clemenceau was something of a hero.

I never met him until I was more than forty and he more than seventy. I was then consul-general in South Africa, and happened to be on leave at the moment he had become Prime Minister for the first time. Three years later, being then in charge of the American department at Quai d'Orsay, my intercourse with Clemenceau became closer and, in one case at least, contributed to safeguard Franco-American amity. But of this, more some day. . . . I see from Martet's book that Clemenceau never wavered. The trend of his political thought, or rather sense—and sensibility—remained the same after the war.

His references to his family, youth, and milieu, in Martet's book, are in some places mischievous. Their subtle dryness is irresistible, chiefly when he speaks of his grandfather. But he says precious little about the very Balzacian aspect of his own clan life. No real biography of Clemenceau can be attempted for some time yet. Some picturesque episodes where he was not directly or immediately concerned may come to light before other and more personal incidents. I wonder how many people are aware of some little romantic affairs (such as "La Dame Blanche" of Mouilleron) in which he took an avuncular interest.

M. Jean Martet shrewdly notes that "M. Clemenceau was not particularly well-informed as to the history of his own family." This is true but in one sense only. History is one thing, "Story" is another; even, said Prior,

*The solid Story and severest Truth  
That's no Poet's thought, nor flight of  
Youth.*

Clemenceau's baffling personality would stand clearer in the eyes of posterity if it were remembered that, like all people born in Vendée, he was, from birth to maturity, a sort of Montagu-Capulet. For instance, he liked to play at times with the idea that the Mongol invasion reached the sea near our birthplace and, stopping there, permeated the Celts with Asiatic blood. The fact that there was something of the Hun in his own features (high cheek bones, slanting eyes, etc.) tickled his fancy. Clemenceau a Hun! A Hun at war! Yes, at war with himself.

The Renaissance hardly touched Vendée. Yet the first printer who set up a press in that "closed" country was a Clemenceau. The Reformation reft his descendants into alien groups. The Calvinists were decimated, ruined or exiled. Another Clemenceau died penniless in London. One (never mentioned, but why?) was a great slave-dealer in the eighteenth century; others, Rousseauists.

M. Jean Martet is full of ideas. But in his books there is little of Jean Martet. All is Clemenceau's, which shows that Jean Martet is not only a very able writer but also a very clever journalist.

I am not sure that anything has yet been published about Marcel Proust that can compete for wealth and range of ideas with Arnaud Danieuf's "Marcel Proust" (Humphrey Milford, London, and Firmin-Didot, Paris). This short book transcends its own title by so far that it can be considered as an epitome of the processes of artistic crea-

tion, or other "revelation." The first edition was sold out in a week, before any review appeared, and the book had to be reprinted at once.

It has nothing to do with Marcel Proust as a chronicler of sexual aberrations and salon life; very little with Marcel Proust as an analyst, stylist, or even novelist in the book-selling sense. Its appeal is far more universal. Marcel Proust has been called a dissociator of personality. True in a sense. But the sort of personality that he dissociated is that which, manifesting itself in action, mental or physical, is constantly dramatic and irreducible to identity. The real personality, the only one that is concrete and endures, he has spent his whole life and work in trying to reconstitute and invigorate. When he says: "Temps perdu," "Temps retrouvé," he means: Reality lost; Personality recovered. I need not insist upon the affinity of that position with contemporary philosophies.

How did it come to pass that an invalid, a recluse, an apparently snobbish slobberer, an inveterate lingerer, compelled the hard world of after war not only to admit him, but to remodel its attitude towards artistic creation? Dandieu's book is an answer to that query. He explains how Proust has re-invented, for us all, the magical process by which children and primitives apprehend reality. Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl, Loisy, Paget, incidentally Freud and his followers, Meyerson, Minkovsky, are brought up as witnesses. The power of "metaphor," that is transposition in all its aspects, was Marcel Proust's instrument. In wielding it he went to the root of all art: affectivity, not intellect. To speak of Proust's infantilism is to beg the question. Why did he triumph? It is true that he was finally led to isolation and self-immolation, not merely physical. This is another aspect of the sacrificial rite that lies at the bottom of artistic achievement. Either kill revealers, or, if you want them, accept their conditions. Marcel Proust played the whole game and Dandieu's book contains the main key to his work.

"Eva," by Jacques Chardonne, is rightly considered here as a masterpiece of the same importance as "L'Épithalame" by the same author. Jacques Chardonne is the pseudonym of one of the partners in the Librairie Stock. He writes at leisure, flatters not, and is greatly admired. His books belong to a type which even well-informed foreigners do not associate with the French reading public, though it is quite in the national tradition. They are purely mental and sentimental adventures, fertilized by an undercurrent of culture and learning, illuminated by frequent references to the art both of thinking and writing. Their poignancy is, however, so true to nature that they appeal to all lovers of fiction. "Eva" is the story of a couple told by the husband, Bernard. He sacrifices everything to the wife he loves. But the wife he loves is his creation. She cannot entirely desert him.

"Robert," by André Gide, is the second part of "L'École des Femmes," which I have reviewed at length. It is the husband's journal. His self-revelation is an accomplished piece of work. One feels almost sorry for him. Yes, decidedly, André Gide is still the greatest, I mean the most universally accessible and admirable, of our fiction writers.

The Hawthornden Prize for the year 1929 was recently bestowed upon Lord David Cecil, for his book "The Stricken Deer." The presentation was made by Stanley Baldwin. Mr. Baldwin, it appears, had read it on its first appearance, and especially delighted in the subtle and memorable prose of its first chapters. This was the eleventh award of the Prize since Miss Alice Warrender first established it in 1919. The previous winners were Edward Shanks, Romer Wilson, John Freeman, Edmund Blunden, David Garnett, Sean O'Casey, R. H. Mottram, V. Sackville-West, Henry Williamson, and Siegfried Sassoon. The second and third of these, still young, have died since last year's presentation was made. Amongst those who have made speeches awarding the Prize have been Sir Edmund Gosse, Maurice Hewlett, A. E. W. Mason, Gilbert Murray, Augustine Birrell, John Drinkwater, John Masefield, John Buchan, John Galsworthy, Walter de la Mare, and Lord Lonsdale.

Thirteen scholars, financed by the American Council of Learned Societies and directed by the Medieval Academy of America, are to undertake a study project of "The English Government at Work, 1327-1336." They are to be led by Professor James F. Willard of the University of Colorado.

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