

Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

WE confess to an error. In these columns on May 16th we referred to a poem concerning Sidney Godolphin which we thought had been written by Louise Imogen Guiney. As a matter of fact it is a poem of six stanzas by Clinton Scollard which has found its way into several anthologies. We have space here for only the initial verse of it, but we thank Mr. Scollard for the note in which he wonders whether possibly it was not the poem we had in mind. It was, and we are glad to render credit where credit is due. The first verse runs:

*They rode from the camp at morn
With clash of sword and spur;
The birds were loud in the thorn,
The sky was an azure blur.
A gallant show they made
That warm noon-tide of the year,
Led on by a dashing blade,
By the poet-cavalier.*

While the father has expressed himself in the creation of one of the most soaring buildings in our metropolis, the son of the Chrysler family expresses himself, in turn, at Cheshire House, through the production of beautiful books. The latest of these is Joseph Auslander's translation of that exquisite fourth century lyric, "Pervigilium Veneris," author unknown. To it, Mr. Walter P. Chrysler, Jr., has had Auslander prefix a vivid appreciation, followed by that chapter from "Marius the Epicurean," by Walter Pater, which deals with the poem. Mr. Auslander writes accomplished verse, and his translation is worthy of him. The movement of the original is something between the one he adopts and that preferred by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, whose translation is already known to us. Perhaps Mr. Auslander's is the nearest to the original. Certainly his phrasing is often distinguished, and we are glad to have his version. As he says himself, the original escapes "total, untouched, intangible" from any rendering. Nothing can take the place, for instance, of the poem's incredibly haunting key-line, once one has known it, "Cras amet qui nunquam amavit quique amavit cras amet."

William Edwin Rudge is responsible for another beautifully prepared special edition, this being a complete facsimile of Henry W. Longfellow's "The Leap of Roushan Beg," edited with an introduction and notes by Arthur Christy. Five hundred copies have been printed at five dollars each. It well illustrates what Longfellow could do with an Oriental theme. Far inferior to Browning in his managing of his material, he was often, nevertheless, a creditable writer of narrative verse. The notes show how Longfellow fashioned his ballad from Alexander Chodzko's "Specimens of the Popular Poetry of Persia."

On May twenty-sixth there was held at Cambridge, Massachusetts, an informal opening of the new Poetry Room in the Harvard Library, which has been furnished and endowed in honor of the late George Edward Woodberry of the Class of 1877. We do not know what memorial of Woodberry has been placed at Columbia, where one would be equally in keeping, owing to the large influence of his teaching in that institution of learning. Woodberry was not one of our greatest poets, but he was notable in his time and never stooped from what he conceived to be the highest standards of his art.

In "The Yale Series of Younger Poets" there has just been published by the Yale University Press "Dark Certainty," by Dorothy Belle Flanagan. One characteristic of this little book is Miss Flanagan's fondness for the brief and bitten rhymed line, which has, indeed, now become the fashion among many young poets. "Down South," in a ballad measure already made familiar to us, deals rather trenchantly with the sins of the fathers. Although some of Miss Flanagan's verse is not without an attractive quality, there are too many echoes of fairly contemporary poets. In "Bridges," Katherine Brégy, an older poet who first published upon the advice of Alice and Wilfrid Meynell, and who writes in the Catholic tradition, treats of Sacred and Profane love. There seems to us nothing startlingly original about her work, though there is an occasional extremely human turn to the verse that is pleasing. The volume was published by Ernest Hartsock at the Bozart Press in 1930.

Thin and amateurish as is most of the work in "Songs for Somebody," by Mildred Barish (Poetic Publications, Inc.), there are glints of humorous observation of fellow-mortals here and there. The main

trouble with all the small books we have been examining is a lack of intensity, a friebbling away of talent.

Our quoting last week of an apothegm by the English poetess, Elizabeth Wordsworth, aroused two comments. On re-reading it, Burton E. Stevenson "perceived that it might possibly be by Ella Wheeler Wilcox," to whose work we had compared it. As we said, it *very* possibly might be, so far as style is concerned, but it is not. It is in the volume of poems by Elizabeth Wordsworth which we reviewed in the May 23rd issue. Mr. Stevenson asks exactly where it may be found. Why, where else, Mr. Stevenson, than in *Poems and Plays* by Elizabeth Wordsworth, published by the Oxford University Press, as we remarked in detail at the time? Miss Elsie L. Shaw of Russell House, Lexington, Massachusetts, quotes us Miss Wordsworth's two verses and says she has had a copy of them for five or six years.

These notes summarize all the current poetry that has recently come to us. Probably the most accomplished book of poems for June will be Dorothy Parker's "Death and Taxes," which will appear about the middle of the month, but that will be separately reviewed elsewhere by another hand. No new American poet of importance seems lately to have arisen. Among those most recently "arrived" we rank Stanley J. Kunitz the highest, though a number of the younger writers, both male and female, are doing good work, and many well-known are busied with new projects.

Probably not till the fall will the publishing of poetry recommence in any great quantity. Meanwhile this department may be expected to be somewhat intermittent. We ourselves shall be on a working vacation, and although we shall expect to cover any current books of poetry that come to us, our commentary may necessarily take on a more general nature.

The present situation in America in regard to the cultivation of verse certainly seems to us a promising one. If the public interest in poetry is, perhaps, not quite as great as during that experimental period just prior to the Great War, there is evidence that the best contemporary work meets with appreciation, even widespread appreciation, for proof of which last statement we need only cite the reception accorded Edna St. Vincent Millay's fine sonnet sequence, "Fatal Interview."

It seems to us also an undeniable fact that the quality of the verse appearing in periodicals is distinctly better than has been the case for some time. And historical and anthological work has been done, in the last few years, of solid educational value in regard both to modern poetry and its backgrounds. We need merely mention the excellent work of Auslander and Hill in "The Winged Horse" and of Alfred Kreymborg in "Our Singing Strength," to say nothing of the valuable service Louis Untermeyer has performed with his constantly revised and reedited anthologies.

It would seem, therefore, that, as a nation we are growing into a far more mature appreciation of one of the finest of the arts. We have come a long way in our poetical education within the last quarter century. We have not only developed a variety of strong native talents but also critical faculties along with them, an intelligent inquiry into new tendencies. Much breaking of new ground in experimental work has as yet not begotten a major talent that can take full advantage of the new opportunities, but there are certainly a number of candidates, those who still have their best work before them. In the present period of depression, which seems to have extended a good deal farther than mere business, that is something to be grateful for. By the middle of the twentieth century there may be great changes, even a new artistic awakening, for which the present state of flux would certainly seem to be preparing. We will do well to look to horizons.

According to a Vienna correspondent of the London *Observer*, the Austrian monastery of St. Florian, at Linz, the capital of Upper Austria, has just sold an illustrated Book of Psalms, written in Latin, German, and Polish, and dating from the fourteenth century, to the Polish Government for £14,500. This MS. is of high value for Poland, since it represents one of the most ancient specimens of Polish literature. Its value is enhanced by the fact that it was compiled on behalf of the Polish Queen Hedvig, the wife of King Vladislav Jagello, the first crowned head of that dynasty, and formerly a prince of Lithuania.

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A Letter from France

By ABEL CHEVALLEY

WOULD you be much surprised if, some day, you learnt that Europe had been discovered by North Americans long before North America was discovered by Europeans? I would not.

Yes, I am aware that our Breton fishermen haunted your seas all through the fifteenth century. Sébastien Cabot had learnt from them "*le secret de Terre Neufve*" when he sailed from Bristol in 1497. "For more than sixty years," according to a deed of 1514, *les gars marins* (the hearty sailors) of Paimpol and St. Malo had been paying to the monks of Beaufort "a tithe on the stockfish, whittings, and cod brought from the coasts of *Terre Neufve*, Iceland, and other parts." (This is from Charles de la Roncière's "*Jacques Cartier*," just published by Plon, about which more hereafter.)

But who were "the seven dark men" dubbed Newfoundlanders because of Cabot's recent discovery, who were found in 1509 far off the west coast of Ireland, in their long bark-skin-and-wicker boat, and brought at once to Rouen? Were they the first or the last of a string of chance visitors from your shores to ours?

Henri Estienne wrote of them that "they were tattooed from ear to chin in bright spots and long veins." O prophetic Stars and Stripes! . . . But "they had no beard, no hairy growth *sur le pubis ni ailleurs*. . . . Their weapon was the long bow, with catgut strings . . . their headgear was made of seven ears (of big rodents). . . ." Six of them soon died. The seventh was brought to the court of Louis XII. I want to know what became of that seventh, and also whether any of them begat children in Normandy. Because . . .

Well, among minor reasons, they might be remote ancestors of André Maurois and André Siegfried, both Normans. Not that the two André's have so much in common, in spite of the wags who call Siegfried the Maurois of politics and Maurois the Siegfried of literature. The similar scope, depth, and fully deserved measure of their success is more to the point than that kind of banter. But there are analogies, all chaff and ragging apart, and one of them lies in a similar capacity, of North American flavor, for organizing and reorganizing production, even after excess of credit.

Siegfried is outside my province since I eschew politics in these letters, and, except under strong provocation, avoid national sociology. What a blessing not to feel obliged to ask one's self whether the method of a lovable man of all men beloved, able fellow, good friend, former colleague or master—are not sometimes a little bit too facile. I learnt history from the same master as Siegfried, a dear, delightful, and tricky professor called Jallifier, who died before the war. . . . But half a dozen contemporary names occur to me in this connection. I think an American edition has been published of "*Les Bâtisseurs de l'Europe Moderne*," by Count Sforza (Gallimard). An intensely interesting book, though mostly built from the outside.

But let us return to literary production and organization. Facility is, to some writers, a dangerous gift. Not in Maurois's case. Repetition may be an efficient weapon, even in the service of inefficiency, but is apt, if wielded by stronger hands, to break under the stress. Now Maurois's hands are stronger than they appear. But he will neither miss a good subject nor fall into the pit of over-iteration.

His book on "*Turgenev*" (Grasset) is made of four lectures delivered here, possibly in anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the great Russian's death. His life and works are described by Maurois in such a manner, limpid yet not shallow, brief though not curt, devoid of mere anecdotes, true to the essentials, that the author of "*Ariel*," "*Byron*," and "*Disraeli*" seems to have, once more, renewed the art of biography.

But even biography might pall, even his own variety of (and in) the *genre*. Then comes his "*Pescur d'Ames*" (Gallimard), a sort of scientific anticipation, something quite new and unexpected from his pen. He had written a good, true, short novel, "*Bernard Quesnay*," my favorite, because it is nearer to this workaday life than the much distinguished "*Climats*" which followed. Maurois strikes a new vein in "*Le Pescur d'Ames*." (Æschylus had, it is true, written a tragedy called "*The Weighing of Souls*," but that tragedy is lost. Only the name remains.)

Since even what we call light or electricity can, now, be canalized, fragmented, retailed, even weighed, why should we not, some day, transform what we call vital en-

ergy or *soul* into light and power—and even industrialize it? Why not, indeed, detect, and harness, *psychons* as easily as, for instance, *electrons*?

I hasten to say that Dr. James, the Soul-Weigher, turns his method of materializing to the only account that is proper and meet, at least in a novel. He brings the spirits of two dead persons to cohabit under his glass bell. The radiation is, of course, more or less intense. And this, of course, means that they loved each other more or less. Now Dr. James loved his wife. His wife died. He committed suicide. (Robert Browning did not, after all.) Maurois came too late to repeat on Dr. James the experiments of Dr. James on other people's conjugal souls.

Why did Mr. Sludge's tormented spectre hover about me while I read "*Le Pescur d'Ames*"? He must bitterly regret nowadays having ever confessed his impostures. But how proudly, feeling somehow rehabilitated, he must remember the passionate reservation which his creator made him utter from the deeper depth of his nature:

. . . *Though it seem to set
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I've knocked down, I can't
help that,
It's truth. I somehow vomit truth today,
This trade of mine—I don't know, can't be
sure,
But there was something in it, tricks and all.*

Maurois's fantastic and macabre tale is told quietly, in places almost reverently, and the mere tone of the telling imparts something new into the *genre*. Of course, one misses the earnestness of Wells's "*Anticipations*," his rough and tumble handling, but you can't eat the proverbial cake and still have it, devulgarize a brand of strong stuff and keep it throat-skinning.

I wonder what would happen if some spiritualist could read André Maurois's works, especially "*Le Pescur d'Ames*," to the ghost of the late lamented Robert Browning. Would not the great, jealous, tempestuous enemy of all the Mr. Homes of creation be compelled to find "that there is something in it, tricks and all?"

Georges Oudard's "*Vieille Amérique*" (Plon), published in the United States under the title "*Four Cents an Acre*," is a short history of French Louisiana. The first part deals with the heroic period: the discovery of the Mississippi; the life and travels of Nicolet, Marquette, and Joliet, Cavalier de la Salle, Iverville, and Bienville. Then comes the systematic colonization beginning with Law's *Compagnie d'Occident* in 1717, the foundation of New Orleans (450 inhabitants in 1722), the "revolt" of the Natchez (1729) and the retrocession of Louisiana to the French Crown since the Company was unable to defend its possessions (1731). The third part unfolds the well-known tale of economic development and paralyzing fits of interference and indifference from headquarters. Then follow the cession to Spain (1764) of what remained of the colony after the Seven Years' War, the thirty years' Spanish domination, a short return under French rule (1800-1801), and the final sale of the colony to the United States. Almost each decade in these two hundred years had already been studied in detailed memoirs and Thwaites and Fortier had sewn together these fragments as best they could. Georges Oudard does not fail to mention their work in his very complete bibliography of the subject. But some new facts have since come to light, and new theories, not all weather-proof, have spread about. Georges Oudard is the author of a good "*Life of Law*," and a brilliant "*Life of Pierre le Grand*." In "*Vieille Amérique*" he has turned to good account his knowledge of Europe in the early eighteenth century. You feel that he is sure of his background, which is more than can be said of some lively rhapsodies of American discovery and pioneering.

Nazim Hikmet, a Turkish poet, has been prosecuted by the Government for the publication of Communist poetry considered as flattering the sentiments of the people, according to a correspondent of the *London Observer*. In court he admitted being a Communist, but pointed out that since it is the people who are sovereign in Turkey, and not a Sultan, there can be no charge against him for "flattering the people's sentiments." Neither, he contended, was it right to condemn him for referring to the sufferings of the nation. The Attorney-General has demanded the poet's acquittal, and it is expected that this will be the Court's judgment.