

Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

MOST memorial books of verse are distinguished for their feeling rather than for their art. Strength of emotion in loss has sometimes blended with high art in the utterances of great poets. But the usual poems written in remembrance of one loved may better be passed over, with recognition of the sincere feeling that occasioned them merely. The means of expression is usually inadequate. We do not, however, feel this to be the case in respect to a small privately printed volume by Helen Hoyt, whose name is already well established among the most interesting American women poets of our time. Two hundred copies of *The Name of a Rose* have been printed for the author by Helen Gentry in San Francisco, and the sequence of seventeen poems is dedicated to the mother of the author's husband, who was born in 1840 at Columbus, Mississippi, and died at St. Helena, California, in 1929.

This book by Helen Hoyt Lyman, written for Sarah Amis Lyman, is composed with art as well as sincere feeling and introduces us in memory, to one whose spirit must have been rare and distinguished. In the four poems, "The Locks of Hair," "Wilful and Beautiful," "Lie there at Last," and "The Truce," we receive impressions of a person who endured her own distinct tragedy with her own distinct force and beauty of personality. "The Truce," particularly, concerning "the old emulous contending of woman with woman for possession," in this instance not of the mother's son but of the wife's son, is a deeply intelligent meditation. It ends in the recognition of an "indissoluble accord." "Fable" is a beautiful tribute, ending as it does with these lines:

*Though tenuous and most candid-mild the
foam of the delicate bloom,
Yet had this bush the iron of a wilder stock
holding it firm in air,
And barbs along all the stems alert in their
defense—
Of that inviolable, that unearthly, that fa-
bulous innocence!*

"The Slave-Woman's Grave" contains the gist of a characteristically American history. As it is less intimate than the others we shall quote it here in full. Brief as the whole book is, its tenderness is unflawed by sentimentality, and its record has the breath of life.

THE SLAVE-WOMAN'S GRAVE
*As far away from the South as from the North,
In this strange valley by this western sea—
In this new country, in the midst of this new city—
A whole lifetime after Gettysburg, a whole continent
Between that battlefield and this San Francisco graveyard;
As far from Dixie as from Africa—homeless in all lands—
Here in this graveyard, where now her mistress too is laid,
Rest the bones of that slave-woman, that black friend,
Who came with you so long ago, faithfully following,
To this state of the west, this California,
As her own mother—first from Virginia
And then from the Carolina home—
Followed your mother to Mississippi in the days
When Mississippi was the Wild, the New;
patiently,
Down mapless roads and across unnamed rivers,
Followed the whole long way and never turned back.
Now mistress and servant have reached together
The end of their journey, here at the continent's edge—
The edge of Balboa's sea; the edge of Asia,
Where the circle of the world breaks and meets again;
Reached at last the furthest borders of all:
The infinite abyss of Time and dark!*

Beauty for Ashes, by Sally Gibbs, published by Dorrance & Company in Philadelphia, has almost all the faults of the poetry of a neophyte, and yet for all its stammering and confusion, occasionally a freshness of phrase, an honesty of expression that make one impatient that this young poet should be content to be so lavishly careless. Most of the poems are too long, too vaguely rhetorical, lapsing too often into banality. Sometimes there is an excruciating juxtaposition of the inflated and the commonplace. There is feeling, there is temperament, but in her last poem, "The Being," Miss Gibbs expresses her own pre-

dicament; she has not yet, by any means, found her own identity in poetry, neither does she seem to know her best from her worst. She can write

*Dawn ruffled the eyelids of the town
And it began to stir.
The shops blinked up their shades,
The barnyards were stridentulous with dawn.
The cries of the cocks were sparkles of the sun—*

which is not bad. But then, at the end of a poem about love, she is actually capable of saying

*Tell me, are you out for all that you can get,
Or will you bear with me for yet awhile?*

Her most successful poem, perhaps, is "The Girls," consisting of little bouquets of similes for Mary, Ellen, Evelyn, etc. Miss Gibbs generally uses a free verse with an occasional interior rhyme which is rather clumsily handled. In her case we should certainly recommend that she begin to work in strict forms. Even in the beginning of "Fireflies," where she appears to have more command over her versification than in most instances, actual command is lacking. Her language leaves little impression in general because of her lack of precision in epithet or of individuality in statement. Yet she has certainly facility, if little of that humor toward one's own moods which serves to establish the poet's most serviceable critic in his own brain. The afflatus is evident, but the figurative speech, which is so much of poetry, is not ruthlessly enough examined before it is allowed to stand. We have been critical to this extent because we feel that there is in this writer the making of a far better poet than she has as yet tried to be.

In the International Pocket Library series, published at 470 Stuart Street, Boston, appears *The Book of François Villon*, with a rather villainous ('Od's mercy, no pun intended!') paper cover. The translations it contains are familiar enough, by Swinburne, Rossetti, and John Payne, but they are always worth rereading, and the Introduction by H. De Vere Stacpoole with its descriptions of fifteenth century Paris supplies a vivid background for the poet. Take this sentence: "Teeming with people by night, lit by bonfires, unapproachable even by the archers of the watch, the Cour des Miracles, like a terrible lantern, lights the Paris of Villon for the understanding."

In *Poe and Chivers*, by Landon C. Bell, published by the Charles A. Trowbridge Company of Columbus, Ohio, we have a small book consisting of critical comment upon Professor S. Foster Damon's recent *Thomas Holley Chivers, Friend of Poe*, that Harper & Brothers brought out last year. Mr. Bell, an ardent Poete, and quite as evidently an ardent Southerner, feels that despite Professor Damon's exonerating Poe from borrowing from Chivers he has lapsed into inaccuracies, by implication at least, has omitted documentation that should have been included, such as certain genealogical information, and has ignored the cultural background of the South in the era of which he writes. We ourselves did not read Professor Damon's book, but in several matters that appear still to be matters of opinion rather than of circumstantial proof Mr. Bell makes out a strong case against Chivers. He objects to Professor Damon's title for his book as conveying a wrong impression, for Mr. Bell's contention is that Chivers was never so much a friend of Poe as he was a snake in the grass. Doubtless Professor Damon himself will answer the book in controversy. The Poe-Chivers debate is now a matter of long standing. Chivers remains one of the greatest literary curiosities these States have produced.

Dark Odyssey, by Donald Wandrei, with five illustrations by Howard Wandrei, comes from the Webb Publishing Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. The poet has some facility in verse-forms, but we find little or no originality in the volume. "The Five Lords" is original in conception, but we cannot commend the execution, though Mr. Wandrei is fairly fluent in metre.

"It is important to remember," says John o' London's Weekly, "that between the sort of criticism that Byron denounced and the sort that Arnold exalted into a gospel there are many other grades, some of which are not literary at all. A critic is one who has some claim to pass judgment on any human production, from a poem to a prize-fight, but always his main duty is to discover what is best, not to denounce what is worst."

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Foreign Literature

New German Books

DIE GROSSE SACHE. By HEINRICH MANN. Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer. 1930.

DIE JÜNGLINGSZEIT DES JOHANNES SCHATTENHOLD. By JAKOB SCHAFFNER. Berlin: Union Deutsche Verlagsanstalt. 1930.

DIE MICHAELSKINDER. By MARTIN BEHAIM-SCHWARZBACH. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag. 1930.

KLEINE FANFARE. By ANNETTE KOLB. Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt. 1930.

GUTE GESELLSCHAFT. By FELIX SALTEN. Berlin: Paul Zsolnay Verlag. 1930.

Reviewed by AMELIA VON ENDE

HEINRICH MANN has earned the gratitude of all thoughtful readers by such books as "Professor Unrat" and "Der Untertan," books in which he drew a startlingly true picture of imperial Germany, such as no other writer of the pre-war period had dared to attempt. During the war, too, his independent attitude was admirable. Now, after a number of books of minor importance, he has projected upon his canvas with documentary authenticity and sovereign power a picture of life in post-war Germany which, unbiased by outworn traditions and new conventions, sees things as they are *sub specie aeternitatis*. "Die Grosse Sache" records the changed standards of living and the struggle for existence of the many, and the rise to wealth and position of the few, without long-winded description and hollow phrases. He portrays in the person of the Ex-Chancellor Schattich and the new Viennese millionaire Von List political corruption and industrial piracy, and in that of the old engineer Birk a man of large family who tries to arrest the moral decline through poverty by his loyalty to a certain ideal of life. The means by which he hopes to save them may strike the casual reader as childish, but his "invention" is to be taken symbolically. The struggle of the family to capitalize it and the rapacious efforts of the Chemical Trust for its possession furnish a plot full of dramatic episodes, involving in equivocal situations the wife of the Ex-Chancellor and the daughters of Birk. But his ideal of life sounds the final note in this powerful story, written in that clear and fluid style which suggests the Latin strain in the author's maternal ancestry.

"Die Jünglingszeit des Johannes Schattenhold" is the stirring record of a tragic youth based upon the author's own experiences. So simply and honestly is it told, with no superfluous pathos and with an occasional touch of whimsical humor, that Jakob Schaffner is now ranked with the great Swiss masters of the novel, Gottfried Keller and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. Of his hero, brought up in an orphan's home, apprenticed to a shoemaker, he writes: "A boy of sixteen is the most unfortunate being under the sun." His years of apprenticeship are years of keen suffering for the youth with no little artistic temperament and a gift for poetry, music, and drawing. The sex problem is present as in all con-

temporary stories of youth, but Schaffner is not obsessed by it as are so many writers of our day. The book stands apart from the many German novels dealing with youth by the almost naive frankness with which the hero's experiences are related. Jakob Schaffner is the most interesting example of a "self-made" writer in the world of German letters.

Martin Behaim-Schwarzbach is a rare phenomenon among the younger writers of Germany. As publicity does not work as fast and as unblushingly in European countries as it does in ours, his private life is still his own. But it is safe to assume that the man who has delved into the history of the fifteenth century and has so saturated his mind with its religious atmosphere that he could reconstruct it with its haunting mysteries and its cruel superstitions, must be himself a mystic. His novel, "Die Michaelskinder," reads like the story of another Children's Crusade. The dominating figure is the sculptor at work in his hermit shop on a statue of St. Michael for the choir of a cathedral. A friend of children, he had told them of the fortress which the bishop of Avranches had built for the saint on a rock jutting out into the sea. With the arrival of a mysterious stranger in the guise of a juggler, who is no other than a former resident ostracized by the orthodox populace for refusing to give money for a pilgrimage, but is not recognized, a terrible catastrophe wipes out the older residents. Children, returning from the sculptor, had been attracted by the stranger's tricks and on reaching their homes find their families slain, their homes robbed. Remembering the story of St. Michael's fortress, they set out to find it and apply there for a home. A strange boy who joins them plays on a flute which one of the children has found, and all along the road the orphaned and homeless children follow them. They march through Hameln, and when they leave it there is not a child left within the walls of that town. The figures of some of the little pilgrims are of pathetic beauty.

"Kleine Fanfare" is a curious collection of essays, sketches of travel, recollections of meetings with men and women of note, and personal impressions on a variety of subjects. They do not seem to be correlated, but, with the exception of the first chapter, bear the stamp of the author's individuality; and Annette Kolb is a unique personality among the writers of Germany who have risen into prominence since the war. Most interesting are her impressions of the people she has met; with a few words she makes them live before the reader's eyes.

Felix Salten's "Gute Gesellschaft," a new book of experiences and adventures with animals, is very aptly named; for his animal friends are indeed good company. Whether he speaks of his falcon, of the kitten found drowning, of Liesl the cow, of Treff and Lady and other dogs, he makes one feel not only the close bonds that science has established between humans and the "dumb" creatures, but companionship as well.

Points of View

"The Academy for Souls"

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

I was touched by the fundamentalism of Professor Northrop as exhibited in that decisive dismissal of his of "The Academy for Souls." Such faith in the certitudes of science is rare in these days. His colleagues in physics and psychology may well be envious of his assurance, for with Jeans and Eddington desecrating in the universe the outlines of a mathematical Colossus and Einstein disclaiming that relativity throws light on origins, before the world is much older we may all find ourselves back in the arms of Mother Church. If mechanical conceptions of the cosmos have to be thrown overboard, as Jeans says, then theology is not such bad form as he seems to believe. Or, is it that the Professor is so mid-Victorian in his views as to be out of touch with contemporary thinking?

Inadvertently I may have strayed into the field of thirteenth century theology, though I can't imagine any good Catholic admitting resemblance between my thesis and that of St. Thomas, but in consideration of the Thomian reputation the critic might have mentioned that we approached deity from opposite poles. Mine lacks the more pleasing attributes with which the saintly philosopher endows Him, and we diverge *in toto* as regards free-will and morality. But as I suggest, St. Thomas may be coming back into fashion, and the association may eventually amount to flattery.

However, that is not the point. While I am aware that no author has rights a reviewer need respect, rough justice prescribes that the matter adjudicated should be given a measure of consideration. In this instance I undertook to evaluate consciousness as an element with properties and to offer this factor as a substitute for natural selection as the causal agent in the origin and evolution of vital organisms. This is a radical hypothesis completely at variance with accepted doctrines, and the book is an argument to support it. The issue, then, is not St. Thomas or the demodé Aristotle or even the attitude of Big Business, but whether or not this contention had been established. I think I put up a pretty sound case for it, but whether I'm right or not the professor does not say. Of one thing I'm sure, after reading his article,—he is not equipped to decide, so his verdict would have been valueless save as basis for an appeal.

No one knows better than I, who have been editing magazines and newspapers for four decades, that a new idea, or an old one revamped, is a challenge. Humanity is so adjusted to those it has digested that mere contemplation of a different viewpoint excites it to wrath. Witness Russia. Besides, all accepted propositions have vested rights and retainers to defend them. In venturing forth, then, with a theory that seemed to cover more of the phenomena in sight than those now consecrated I was not unmindful of sacrilege. I knew the Academicians would turn up their noses or call it revivalism or let loose the dogs on me. I imagined, however, that it might be possible to escape attention and obtain public hearing in quarters where attributions are not stock-in-trade.

There are people professionally at grips with objective reality, such as engineers, architects, builders, and manufacturers, who know the language of specifications, whose minds are not clogged with ascriptions, and who get things done. Folks such as these should be able to check an analysis of the principles that enter into an action and from their experience of process and operation, recognize its truth or falsity. Ordinary accountancy for an action includes set-up, motive, design, energy, supervision, and fulfillment and when one has separated and checked each quantity one knows what the whole is about and can take a position regarding it. My argument was pitched for this kind of thinking, and in order to get an outside and unprejudiced perspective on the affairs of our lives I imported a Martian and dramatized my thesis in the form of an argument between him and a disciple of Behaviorism. The Martian is posed as a critic of the prevailing notions of automatic determinism and bitter in his denunciation of those who believe that the secrets of life are hidden in protoplasm. Incidentally he tells of an intellectual revolution on Mars whose authorities some six hundred years ago were caught in the mechanistic eddy in which so many of our own are still whirling. It was led by engineers who appealed from the Academies to the common sense of practical Martians of the Henry Ford,

Schwab, Owen Young type with the result that the scientific hierarchy was overthrown. That is the slender basis of Professor Northrop's allusions to the arbitrage of Big Business. May I assure him that my Martian is no nearer relative of Bruce Barton's than he is of St. Thomas?

Anyway, there's nothing especially heretical in "The Academy." My Martian has a sense both of humor and relativity. He does not dispute the findings of the biologists as bearing on the physical geography of the human system, or the assurance of the Behaviorists that the life story of a man is the biography of an organism adapting itself to an environment. He does insist that cause, coördination, architecture, tenancy, and motivation are outside their pictures. No one who can read and understand Whitehead in the original would be shocked at my presentation or conclusions, even though I do pitch my narrative in conventional English.

In conclusion may I suggest to those who have thought of investing in "The Academy for Souls" not to be deterred by Professor Northrop's hard usage? He did not get far enough into the book to find what it was about. Besides, this is a busy season for professors of philosophy, and he has just finished a book of his own. If the editor of the *S. R. of L.* will give it to me to review I'll heap coals of fire on his head. At least he did not drag in the argument of design.

JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE.

More on "Relief Unbound"

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

It is difficult to conceive how so ill-mannered and ignorant a review as that devoted to Dr. Montague's "Belief Unbound" could have been printed in the *Saturday Review*. It is so obviously conceived in anger and brought forth in contempt that its unfairness is apparent on the face of it. Dr. Montague's book—as many of the best thinkers whom I have met cordially agree—is a notable attempt to rethink the whole religious problem from a modern point of view and with the full equipment of modern experience. Nothing can be more obvious among intelligent people than the breakdown of confidence in the traditional religious beliefs. Dr. Montague, instead of joining the ranks of the sneerers—where he might have had high honor in present-day America—does the far more difficult and thankless task of seeking to build up a conception of life and the universe in which the things that matter most will no longer, as he writes, be at the mercy of the things that matter least. That he may not have done this to the full satisfaction of every serious thinker is altogether possible, but that he has made a notable attempt to clarify and restate the most fundamental of all human issues there can be no doubt whatever. Not only are the authorities of Yale University to be congratulated upon the appearance of so noteworthy a book, but Dr. Montague is to be commended for a piece of work searchingly honest and philosophically brilliant.

The climax of the reviewer's ineptitude is reached when he patronizingly tells Dr. Montague that Prometheus really was not a rebel at all, but that he was only a symbol to show that divine compassion had its place on Olympus. Shades of Æschylus and of Shelley!

H. A. OVERSTREET.

College of the City of New York.

Mint Condition

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

Reading the article "Mint Condition" in the *Complet Collector* was like finding a green oasis in a desert. I was delighted to find that there are booklovers who delight in a book even though the book may have a stain or a name written on the title page.

I have been working in a rather select little bookshop, the owners of which go in for first editions with a bang and a whoop. The fuss raised over a first edition and condition of dust wrapper and title pages, etc., led me to wonder if book collectors really did enjoy the matter between the binding. I'll confess that hitherto I have enjoyed browsing in second-hand bookshops and picking up worn, well-thumbed books and enjoyed discovering that the preceding owner cared enough about a book to make notes in the margins. It happens to be one of my weaknesses, that habit of bracketing similes, phrases, and paragraphs that appeal to my mind. I had begun to feel like some brutal criminal for having indulged this weakness. It was a delight to read the article on the subject.

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