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Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IN the first place I wish to make a slight correction in regard to my recent review of Dennis Murphy's *Boy with a Silver Plow*. I acknowledge a letter Mr. Murphy was kind enough to write me concerning the review, but *Kaleidoscope: A National Magazine of Poetry*, 702 North Vernon Street, Dallas, Texas, informs me that my remarks about the nature of the contest in which Mr. Murphy won a prize were inaccurate. As a matter of fact, it seems, the contest was not conducted by the Wednesday Club of Saint Louis, was not restricted to the state of Missouri, nor was Mr. Neihardt the judge. The contest was conducted by *Kaleidoscope*, was nation-wide, and was judged by the editors of *Kaleidoscope*.

PADRAIC COLUM'S POETRY

Poems, by Padraic Colum, brings together his verse from "Dramatic Legends," "Wild Earth," "Creatures," and "Old Pastures." He has also added several new poems. Colum is one of the best Irish poets of his time. The only three names that may be mentioned with his are those of William Butler Yeats, James Stephens, and "A. E." Naturally Yeats stands head and shoulders above all living poets, English, Irish, or American, in the bulk and calibre of his accomplishment. Stephens may possibly be ranked next for his inimitable originality. I myself should put Colum a close third, and I am not at all sure that it would be third at that. For all the lovely poetry that "A. E." has written, Colum's has a trenchancy and firm grain that I do not find in the rather cloudy idealism and symbolism of "A. E." This *Poems* of Colum's is a satisfying book. I can remember when I first came across Colum's own adaptation of an old Irish poem that I think Douglas Hyde also put into another version. The burden of it is "Shall I go bound and you go free." The last two of the three verses Colum has written moved me like the sound of a trumpet, to paraphrase Sir Philip Sidney:

*And must I run where you will ride,
And must I stay where you abide?
Not so; the feather that I wear
Is from an eyrie in the air!*

*And must I climb a broken stair,
And must I pace a chamber bare?
Not so; the Brenny plains are wide
And there are banners where I ride!*

This was early work, in the volume *Wild Earth* in which he makes the acknowledgment that "A. E." fostered him, in which are such famous poems of Colum's as "The Plougher," "A Drover," "An Old Woman of the Roads," and "A Cradle Song." No one has interpreted, in verse, the plain folk of Ireland so beautifully as Colum. But he was to range far beyond his beloved green isle. Both back in time—as in the splendid poem "Minoan"—and through wanderings all over America and as far as Hawaii. Let me first quote just the opening verse of "Minoan," to give an idea of Colum's ringing line:

*O what a hound he has! A hound so high
Might follow Talos, him, the Bronzen
Man,
And fill the Labyrinth with just a cry!*

*As bronze-topped spear his height, and
there, besides,*

*A horse that bends a neck that's like a
bride's!*

As for his travelled muse, take this exquisite tribute to the

HUMMING-BIRD

*Up from the navel of the world,
Where Cuzco has her founts of fire.
The passer of the Gulf he comes.*

*He lives in air, a bird of fire.
Cheated by flowers still he comes
Through spaces that are half the world.*

*With glows of suns and seas he comes;
A life within our shadowed world
That's bloom, and gem, and kiss of fire!*

In nine lines, with a varying of only three end-words, what marvelous glamor he creates! His book *Creatures*, indeed, describing as it does various animals and birds, is to me one of the most delightful contributions he has made to contemporary letters. And no experience I have ever had in connection with the reading of poetry has been more thoroughly satisfying to me than hearing on a number of occasions Colum read his own verse in the inimitable brogue he has—thank God!—never lost despite his long sojourn in America. It is a strange reading, for the quality of his voice carries one back to the bardic days, to things more ancient and more important than modern civilization, to eternal beauty that broods in the highest, windiest boughs of the Tree of the World.

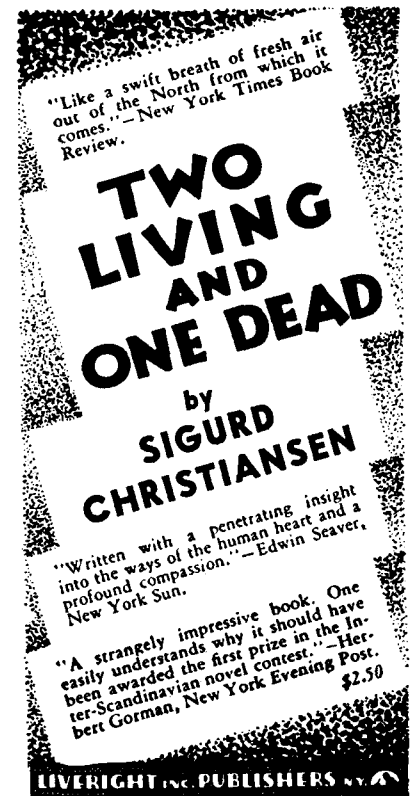
THE CHARACTER OF COLUM

I know of no better human being than Padraic Colum, and when one calls a person "good" in this day and generation one is thought to mean sanctimoniousness or some such thing—which is not at all what I mean. This man, in his intelligent seriousness, his superb drollery, his wealth of learning, his native wisdom, his chivalry of spirit, and his enchanting simplicity, is beyond argument one of the great people of our time. He is of no classification that I have ever known. Even an occasional over-emphasis in his expounding of doctrine does not jar upon me, an occasional absorption in the letter rather than the Word. For if, in regard to religion, dogmatism is deep in his blood, he possesses in its perfect essence the intelligence of the poet which surveys the world on pinions that tower high above dogma. His is a moving sympathy with the creation, a search always for fundamental things. Those who frantically seek happiness in all the non-essentials of modern life, so curious about the impermanent that they can never truly enjoy either life or love,—or find either in its enduring virtue, in the Roman sense,—are apart from this man. His charity and his counsel I have found great things. Drama and romance and legend are rich in his imagination, and he can tell a merry story in an inimitable way. These qualities must all be apparent in this collected volume of his to anyone who sees clearly with the eye of the mind. Likewise the courage that is able so to love the world.

Lincoln Steffens wrote us a letter—

"I have been reading Dos Passos. I think that every young writer should read '1919' and read it, too, with his eye sticking to the fact that this writer is one of the three or four young men in literature who are breaking away from the old schools and seeking, and in this case, finding, a new way to get nearer to the art of showing things as they are—beautifully."

HARCOURT, BRACE & COMPANY, NEW YORK



CHRISTOPHER MORLEY says of

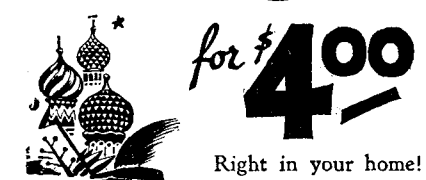
The Devil in the Belfry

By
RUSSELL THORNDIKE
Author of "The Slype"

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Trade Winds

By P. E. G. QUERCUS

THE reminiscences of the veterans of The Trade are sometimes unexpected, and not always literary. For instance John M. Miller, dean of booksellers in Atlanta (his store celebrated its 50th anniversary last January), remembers with special pride the fact that as a barefoot newsboy he hooked a ride on Atlanta's first horse-car.

Or take the case of our old friend Isaac Mendoza of Ann Street, New York City. His earliest recollections of the second-hand book business on Ann Street (where he has been for 38 years) revolve about an injudicious sub-letting. In a moment of generous impulse (and generosity is characteristic of him still) he rented part of his cellar and one of his front windows to a fellow who needed help. His tenant used the space for cooking hot dogs and sourkraut. In those days as you browsed over the book-counters in front of Mendoza's you could munch a hot dog as you looked at the books. It wasn't only the mustard that people dripped on the volumes that caused Mr. Mendoza to think he had made a mistake. The fume of frizzling frankfurters got so strong that it overpowered the good old aroma of calf bindings and rag paper that is one of the joys of a second-hand shop. When even the cop on the beat remarked on the overtones of Mr. Mendoza's tenant's cooking, the goodnatured bookseller decided to make a change.

Isaac Mendoza and his sons, known to all downtown booklovers, preserve with justified care the old account book in which Mr. Mendoza recorded his first figures. The store opened on October 18, 1894, and that day Ike was too busy getting his stock in order to make many entries. But he sold \$1.60 worth on the outdoor stand that day. The next day was his first real business, and the first entry was "2 vols. Russell, \$1.25." I was hoping maybe that was Clark Russell's sea stories, but Ike says it was Whiffen's "House of Russell." And beside that, on that first day, he sold a schoolbook (80c), a Novel (50c), a History of the U. S. (40c) and an Arithmetic (30c). The outdoor stand sold \$5.50; total for the day, \$8.75.

The second day (Saturday) the high points were Vaughan's Mystics (\$1.75) and Macaulay's History of England (\$1.00) and a set of Dickens (\$4.00). The stand didn't do so well (perhaps it was raining on Saturday, Oct. 20, 1894) but the day's total was \$12.60. The first month's business was \$444. Isaac Mendoza concluded that with prudence there was a living to be made in the book business. He has been making it ever since, and raising a fine big family of children and grandchildren to carry it on. His customers all become his friends, and are innumerable. And he has raised a lot of collectors too, young business men who drop into the shop on Ann Street and browse round.

The most forcible case of dropping in was not long ago when a painter, working on an adjoining building, fell from his scaffold and through the skylight of Mendoza's back room, that genial little cavern where the rare books are kept. By some miracle of luck the man was not hurt.

On one of the shelves of that back room is an association copy that should catch the eye of some Browning collector. It's the *Familiar Letters of James Howell*, 9th edition, 1726. And besides the word *Familiar* on the title pages two signatures are neatly bracketed, like this:—

FAMILIAR { Elizabeth B. Barrett
 { Robert Browning

Those names were written, I expect, on Wimpole Street.

A dark horse that looks to me to have chances is *The Survivors*, by Francis H. Sibson. Any bookseller who will give himself a good evening with this wild yarn (more exciting than most cinemas) can sell a lot of it (Doubleday).

And my special congratulation to good old Henry Holt and Co. for two such grand detective tales in one season as *The Trial of Gregor Kaska* (a translation from the German, and a book quite unique in its kind) and *The Stolen Cellini*, a tale of most engaging suavity. It ingeniously leaves one little code message (p. 170) to be worked out by the reader. You won't find it difficult.

The most erudite pun in recent fiction is probably that in Russell Thorndyke's

The Devil in The Belfry, a mystery story (Dial Press).—We were really amused by the description of the hero's dismay at finding himself in a railway carriage with seven blokes who were so tough looking that he knew they must be Princeton men. "Few would relish," says Mr. Thorndyke, "being the constant companion of seven old Princetonians."

Few also will relish the jape unless they remember that Princeton, in England, is a famous convict prison; and to be sure that "campanion" isn't a misprint you must remember the word "campanology."

When an English writer refers to the American Princeton he usually spells it "Princetown."



ISAAC MENDOZA.

In this very Review, about anno 1926 (as previously elsewhere), Cooper's Oxford Marmalade was bespoken as the best of all the varieties of squish or breakfast-gum. It is the genuine aristocrat of the breakfast table, so imagine the pleasure of learning (from an advt in the *New Yorker*; what ho, 45th Street) that Frank Cooper now has a distributor right here in town, Mr. R. L. Albert of 466 Greenwich Street. Cooper's marmalade is bitingly and beneficently different from the usual run of saccharine mucilage; and if you think this has nothing to do with literature, how wrong you are; many of the liveliest authors from Compton Mackenzie and Philip Guedalla and A. P. Herbert and Geoffrey Dennis down to J. B. S. Haldane and Aldous Huxley were reared on Cooper's. And it's much more practical to review a case of good grub than many of the new novels.

A severe blow was dealt to the Book Trade by the recent closing of a favorite mid-town haunt on East 38th Street. This most comfortably conducted of lunching places, in a charming old mansion which had once belonged to a president of Tiffany's, was known in a small coterie as The Goldfish Bowl and had even been mentioned in recent fiction. It was specially frequented by the scheming entrepreneurs of Harper's and Doubleday's; a Nobel prize-winner had there been groomed for a new contract and a British lecturer who had erred was stayed with flagons. The proprietor showed his appreciation of all this literary trade by naming a special mess of spinach after a literary critic. *Eheu, fugaces* . . . when you open up again, A—, send us your new address.

I make myself tea, flavored with slices of lemon and sugar. I don't take milk. I remember a tea planter railing at the enormity of mixing a fine oriental vegetable decoction like tea with the vulgar animal product of a cow's udder.

—The Private Papers of a Bankrupt Bookseller (anon; published by Appleton; I doubt its authenticity, but it is pleasant reading and timely enough nowadays).

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