

Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENET

PETRARCH'S "RIMES"

HAVING had Joseph Auslander's translations of *The Sonnets of Petrarch* in 1931 from the firm of Longmans, Green, I now discover the *Love Rimes of Petrarch* translated by Morris Bishop and decorated by Alison Mason Kingsbury, come from the Dragon Press of Ithaca, N. Y. (240 Linden Avenue). Mr. Bishop is no such poet in his own right as is Mr. Auslander, and his few chosen "rimes," as compared with Mr. Auslander's exhaustive translation of the sonnets, seem rather flat. Years ago Agnes Tobin did beautiful translations from Petrarch. She was a California poet of a distinction that few seem today to remember; and now, unfortunately I have not her work by me to which to refer. Her dedicatory sonnet to her translations is one of the finest sonnets it seems to me that has been written in America. Being no scholar of Italian I cannot comment upon Mr. Bishop's abiding by the letter; only it seems to me that his translations do not sufficiently recreate the distinct and individual flavor that must have been in Petrarch's beautiful verse. In the foreword to his own volume, Mr. Auslander soundly quoted from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's preface to his translations of the *Early Italian Poets*, that "The life-blood of rhymed translation is this—that a good poem should not be turned into a bad one." That is, surely, the root of the matter.

AS TO TRANSLATORS

How many translations of French and German poetry do we not, for instance, come across in libraries where, no matter how literally the translator may have followed the text, the flow of the verse, the freshness of the imagery, the particular quality lent by the original language to the sound of syllables and what Edward Roland Sill anglicized from the German as the "Clang-Tint" of words, seems to have been worked into some utterly stale and unprofitable equivalent. When I first read Francis Thompson's translations of Victor Hugo's poetry for instance, after ploughing through some of the bald and uninspired stuff that passes for translation among schoolmen, I was amazed. It may be that Thompson produced a different Hugo from the original, but he certainly produced poetry of remarkable quality. And that to me is by far the more important thing: to give us some actual hint of the man's greatness. Translation, of course, offers any number of difficulties, as has been often said. There are no equivalents in English for certain expressions in a foreign language, and vice versa. Poetry, that depends so particularly upon the evocative power of metre and rhyme and even of syllabification, is particularly hard to transpose into another tongue. One reaches only an approximation, at best. But there, I think, is

where a poet of distinction turned translator has the advantage. Once he has absorbed the effect that the original produced upon his senses he can work the content of the poem into a transposition that loses less of the quality of the original than it easily might. Mr. Bishop's work seems to me dignified, but to lack, for the most part, that alchemy—rare enough, I grant. However, he has merits. I quote what seems to me one of the best of his translations:

*Life hurries on, a frantic refugee,
And Death, with great forced marches,
follows fast;
And all the present leagues with all the
past*

*And all the future to make war on me.
Anticipation joins to memory
To search my soul with daggers; and at
last,*

*Did not damnation set me so aghast,
I'd put an end to thinking, and be free.
The few glad moments that my heart has
known*

*Return to me; then I foresee in dread
The winds upgathering against my ways,
Storm in the harbor, and the pilot prone,
The mast and rigging down; and dark and
dead*

The lovely lights whereon I used to gaze.

THE GYPSY TONGUE

In his *Romani Poems* (Oxford University Press), John Sampson presents the songs he sang to the Gypsy guitar both in the original Gypsy language and in the English equivalent. He claims in his short foreword that "Rarely, indeed, does one meet with an ancient and synthetic language which has remained so fresh and unsophisticated, and so entirely unfettered by any literary tradition: small wonder then if I succumbed to its charm and magic." He also says, however, that his poems are no translations, "and I fear that the English rendering can convey to the Reader but little of the spirit and sound of the original verse." He does not claim most of them to be specifically Gypsy in thought and feeling; some are adaptations from German, Spanish, and Latin sources. Opposite each poem in *Romany* is set its English equivalent, usually in prose. But at the end of the little book there is an interesting reversal, as Robert Burns's "MacPherson's Farewell" and a song of Mary Coleridge's are turned into *Romany*, with the exact form retained; and by reading forth and back one may gain some slight idea of the differences in sound at least. Some of the other poems have a pleasing mischief. "The Apotheosis of Augustus John" (who furnishes a charming frontispiece in colored chalk to the volume) is one example of this. Another is "Nether Things." The ballad of Count Arnaldos is most graceful. It is a variant of the Spanish ballad that James Elroy Flecker adapted so beautifully in his "Lord Arnaldos," except that

Flecker's hero "on the Evening of St. John" met with the sailor of a magical ship, and Sampson's Count "on the morning of St. John," a girl in a Gypsy van. Both made the same answer however to the plea as to what they were singing; for they would only tell their song to the one who went away with them.

RELIGIOUS VERSE

Mary Dixon Thayer, the author of *Songs Before the Blessed Sacrament* (Macmillan) has written verse and short stories since 1915, and produced a novel. Furthermore, she received for her verse the Contemporary Verse prize in 1924 and the Browning Medal in 1925. To the general public she is probably best known as standing thirteenth in the National Tennis Ranking for 1928 and holding the tennis championship of Pennsylvania and the Eastern United States for 1927. Her poetry is deeply imbued with Catholicism. She leads a remarkable combination of the active and the contemplative life. But in this particular book of poems is expressed a single devotion, to the Lord of her religion only. The sincerity of the utterance is obvious, the nature of it entire abnegation before the supernal Lover.

*Pour down, O healing Light, into my mind
And tyrannize, O Love, over this heart—
For in all learning I have learned to find
That truth, Beloved, is but where Thou
art.*

Therefore her work must be judged solely as devotional poetry. It is not great devotional poetry. It says the same thing in various ways, burns with intensity, has lyrical movement, but no great command of language. Nor, I think, does the poet care, so long as she may express, however simply, her adoration. Hers is an entirely cloistral attitude of mind.

TWO WOMEN POETS

Two other small books of poems by women, one, *Paduan November and Other Poems*, from Basil Blackwell at Oxford, and the other *Verses: Second Book*, from Humphrey Milford of the Oxford University Press, serve merely to remind me of the many books of verse of about this same level which I have looked through in the past decade. Mrs. Lorna de Lucchi, evidently an Englishwoman married to an Italian, is the author of the first and the better poet of the two. She is graceful and cultivated, but no more. Miss Elizabeth Daryush, author of the other book, has published one former little volume. The work of both women derives from second-rate work of the past, without evincing any particular individuality.

Trade Winds

(Continued from preceding page)

The New York Times reports that John Caples of Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, author of *Tested Advertising Methods* (Harpers) "declares that the average American is approximately 13 years old mentally, and that words not in a 13-year-old's vocabulary are virtually worthless in advertising. In writing advertising copy, Mr. Caples advises, use words you would expect to find in a 5th grade reader. He also warns against attempts at humor. Of the 120,000,000 people in the United States, less than half have a sense of humor"

Per contra, Kenneth Collins of R. H. Macy & Co., in *The Road to Good Advertising* (Greenberg; what dull titles these Big Shots use for their books) welcomes a grin now and then in his copy. "People will think all the better of our merchandise if we have the good judgment to treat it lightly and entertainingly."

There's going to be a lot of reading done this summer; even more than usual. And I think people's minds are turning toward some of the older books, the tried and proven stuff, things they always intended to read but never got round to. Putnam's Bookstore tells me they've had a surprising number of calls for Marx's *Capital*. I myself have a considerable yen to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*: there may be analogies between what happened to Rome and what's happening to us. Suppose (just for the sake of supposing) that you knew this summer was going to be the last chance you'd ever have: what books that you'd never read would you want to try?

How pleasant to find, in Mr. O'Malley's second-hand bookstore on Columbus

Avenue (about 75th Street; open evenings) one of the nice old Houghton Mifflin copies of O. W. Holmes's *Our Hundred Days in Europe* with the little emblem of the Autocrat stamped on it—the breakfast coffee-urn with wings and spectacles. There, for 25 cents, was a clean copy of 1888, marked 10th Thousand; it was published in '87. I had never forgotten his famous blurb in that book about the Star safety-razor, one of the grandest bits of free advertising any article ever got. Dr. Holmes describes how he changed color and his knees shook when he went to Quaritch's in London and found that a first folio Shakespeare was then worth £785. But my favorite quotation in the book is "Every New England deacon ought to see one Derby day to learn what sort of a world this is he lives in. Man is a sporting as well as a praying animal."

Detective stories:—There's a new Reggie Fortune, a new Dorothy Sayers, and they tell me that *The Rumble Murders* by Mason Deal is worth attention. "Mason Deal," I understand, is a pseudonym for T. E. Eliot, brother of T. S.

Amusing to observe that the numbered and signed racket has got into stamp collecting, too. I note in a stamp dealer's display an envelope marked thus: "This is No. 12 of 75 letters carried in the airplane *Spirit of Vedol* on the first non-stop trans-Pacific flight." Signed by Messrs. Pangborne and Herndon.

The fine binding racket was grand while it lasted. When the Gibbon comes along to do the Social History of 1920-30 he mustn't forget the \$25 copies of Webster's Dictionary bound in levant with insertions of carved cinnabar. There were actually people who bought them.—Among the phony de luxe bindings there were often some very good ones, too. They are good Graduation Presents, and selling, just now, far below normal value.—I know one brooding bookseller for whom \$2,000 worth of f.b.'s from London arrived in the customhouse on the very day of the original stock market crash.

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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received.

Fiction

THE BLACK SWAN. By RAFAEL SABATINI. Houghton Mifflin. 1932. \$2.

The historical romances of Mr. Rafael Sabatini are so many, and so deservedly well known, that it is hardly necessary to say more of the present one than that it is a return to the scene and period of "Captain Blood"—the Spanish Main in the seventeenth century. The heroine, returning from the West Indies to England, has for a travelling companion a gentleman who was a "buccaneer" in its sense of licensed raider against the Spanish, until the buccaneers were ordered suppressed by the king. The ship on which they journey is captured by a pirate vessel, the *Black Swan*, and he finds it necessary to offer his services to the pirate captain, and to represent her as his wife. Their adventures make up a story such as we can expect from Mr. Sabatini, a long, swaying chess-game, whose advantage goes first this way and then that, varied by spirited scenes of high words and of violence.

It must be said that this is not by any means one of Mr. Sabatini's best books. The situation is not so well treated as it was years ago in "To Have and to Hold"; the characterization is unusually perfunctory, even for a romance; and the scruple of honor of which he makes an artificial obstacle to the smooth course of his love story turns out to have had no real existence, which gives the reader a feeling of being cheated. Also, one has been able to count on Mr. Sabatini for accuracy of detail, but now one finds such slips as "Sois tranquille, mon fils," the Union Jack in the reign of James the Second, and, most surprising of all, "Do they think they can get gay with Henry Morgan?" in an otherwise Jacobean speech. But even below his best, Mr. Sabatini can provide his own kind of entertainment as few other writers can; and for summer reading in an uncritical mood, one might do much worse than "The Black Swan."

RIVERS INTO WILDERNESS. By Burke MacArthur. Mohawk Press. \$2.50.

YOUNG LONGAN. By James T. Farrell. Vanguard \$3.75.

ELOPEMENT INTO EXILE. By V. S. Pritchett. Little, Brown. \$2.50.

THE PRIDE OF MAURA. By Nina Larry Duryea. Sears. \$2.50.

FLOOD OF PASSION. By Ursula Bloom. Dutton. \$2.

THREE RICH MEN. By Sidney Herschel Small. Covici-Friede. \$2.

MURDER AT THE HUNTING CLUB. By Mary Plum. Harper. \$2.

THE HANGING OF CONSTANCE HILLIER. By S. Fowler Wright. Macaulay. \$2.

BING, THE STORY OF A TRAMP DOG. By Thomas C. Hinkle. Morrow. \$1.75.

THE RAKISH HALO. By Harriet Henry. Morrow. \$2.

A DAGGER IN THE DARK. By Walter F. Eberhardt. Morrow. \$2.

FLAME. By C. E. Scoggins. Morrow. \$2.

LIVE BAIT. By Ethel M. Dell. Putnam. \$2.

MAN GOETH FORTH. By Charles W. Gilum. Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. \$2.50.

DECLINE AND FALL. By Evelyn Waugh. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.50.

MAD PUPPETSTOWN. By M. J. Farrell. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.

RUEFUL MATING, THE. By G. B. Stern. Knopf. \$2.50.

"—A BRILLIANT FUTURE. . . ." Anonymous. Vanguard. \$2.

LINDA SHAWN. By Ethel Mannin. Knopf. \$2.50.

STRANGE WOMEN. Anonymous. Mohawk Press. \$2.

THE DISTURBING AFFAIR OF NOEL BLAKE. By Neil Bell. Putnam. \$2.

THE RADIANT YEARS. By Elizabeth Carfrae. Putnam. \$2.

MARY LEITH. By Ernest Raymond. Appleton. \$2.50.

LITTLE ALECK. By E. Ramsay Richardson. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.50.

History

HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE. By Chester Penn Higby. Century. \$3.50.

ROME AND THE ROMANS. By Grant Showerman. Macmillan. \$2.40.

THE FRENCH COLONIAL VENTURE. By Constant Southworth. London: King.

FRENCH HISTORY. By Emilie Saillens. Lipincott. \$1.

MAKERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Ralph Henley. London: Dent.

WORKBOOK IN UNITED STATES HISTORY. By Charles Garrett Vannest. Scribner's. 60c.

MEDIEVAL EUROPE. By Sydney MacGillivray Brown. Harcourt, Brace.

THE INQUISITION. A Political and Military Study of Its Establishment. By Hoffman Nickerson. Houghton Mifflin. \$4.

MEDIEVAL ENGLAND, 1066-1485. By F. M. Powicke. Holt. \$1.25.

KING CRIME. By Collinson Owen. Holt. \$2.50.

THE MAN WHO KILLED KITCHENER. By Clement Wood. Faro. \$4.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PALESTINE AND THE BIBLE. By William Foxwell Albright. Revell. \$2.

BRITISH TRADE AND INDUSTRY. By G. D. H. Cole. Macmillan. \$5.

EDDA AND SAGA. By Bertha S. Phillpotts. Holt. \$1.25.

International

SOCIAL ECONOMIC PLANNING IN THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS. By V. V. Obolensky-Ossinsky, S. L. Ronier, A. Gayster, and I. A. Kraval. International Industrial Relations Association, 130 East 22nd St., New York.

EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN PRE-WAR AND SOVIET RUSSIA. By Susan M. Kingsbury and Mildred Fairchild. International Industrial Relations Association, 130 East 22nd St., New York.

THE NEW WORLD-ORDER. Edited by F. S. Marvin. Oxford University Press. \$2.75.

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BONEHEAD BRIDGE. By Berton Braley. Sears. \$1.

HUMAN STERILIZATION. By Hugh S. Landman. Macmillan. \$4.

HISTORY OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE. By Leon Burr Richardson. Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth College. 2 vols. \$7.50.

BONDS WITHOUT SAFETY. New Republic.

HOW SUPERIOR POWERS OUGHT TO BE OBEYED. By Christopher Goodman. Facsimile Text Society (Columbia University Press).

HARRY HERSHFIELD'S JEWISH JOKES. By Harry Hershfield. Simon & Schuster. 98 cents.

LIVING WITH OUR FLOWERS. By Mrs. William Stanhope Rowe. Stewart Kidd. \$3.

A GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON. Compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scot. Edited by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie. Oxford University Press. \$3.50.

PLANNING FOR RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS. Washington, D. C.: The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. \$1.15.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR LIFE. By John J. B. Morgan and Ewing T. Welb. Long & Smith. \$2.50.

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PRACTICAL CHURCH SCHOOL MUSIC. By Reginald L. McAll. Abingdon. \$2 net.

THE COLLEGE LIBRARY. By William M. Randall. American Library Association and the Chicago University Press. \$2.50.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PENOBSCOT COUNTY. By Edmund Hobart Bartlett. Orono, Me.: University Press.

CHILD LABOR. Century. \$5.

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THE THEORY OF SOCIAL ECONOMY. By Gustav Cassel. New Edition. Harcourt, Brace. \$5.

A CHILD'S BOOK OF THE TEETH. By Harrison Wader Ferguson. World Book Co. 68 cents.

ENGLISH COINS. By P. C. Brooke. Dial.

YARDLEYGrams. By Herbert O. Yardley. Bobbs-Merrill. \$1.50.

ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND. By Ernest Cobb. Putnam. \$2.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED. By Harold G. Aron. East River, Conn.: Georgic Press.

GOOD BUSINESS AND THE WAR DEBTS. By Horace Taylor. Columbia University Press. 25 cents.

THE PARIS COMMUNE. By V. I. Lenin. International Publishers.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1905. By V. I. Lenin. International Publishers.

AMERICAN BOOKTRADE DIRECTORY. New York: R. R. Bowker Co. 1932. \$10.

WOMEN UNVEILED. By Marion Isabel Angus. Vancouver, B. C.: Vancouver Bindery, Ltd.

VASSAR JOURNAL OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES. Vol. VI. Poughkeepsie, New York: Vassar College.

LANDMARKS OF CHARLESTON. By Thomas Petigru Lesesne. Richmond: Garrett & Massie. \$1.

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THE STREET RAILWAY IN MASSACHUSETTS. By Edward S. Mason. Harvard University Press. \$3.

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THE WISDOM OF CONFUCIUS. Edited by Miles Menander Dawson. Boston: International Pocket Library. 25 cents.

WHAT WE LIVE BY. By Ernest Dimmet. Simon & Schuster. \$2.50.

PLATO AND HIS DIALOGUES. By G. Lowes Dickinson. Norton. \$2.

PASCAL'S PENSÉES. Translated by W. F. Trotter. Everyman's Library. Dutton.

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SONGS OUT OF SEASON. By Samuel Roth. New York: William Faro. \$2.

THE LOOM. Omicron Epsilon Pi. Washington: American University.

THE NATURAL YEAR. By Frederick Edwards. New York: Schulte's Bookstore. 6 vols.

THE WORLD'S BEST POEMS. Edited by Mark Van Doren and Garibaldi M. Lapolla. Boni. \$1.

WEST OF THE GREAT WATER: AN IOWA ANTHOLOGY. Edited by Paul Engle and Harold Cooper. Iowa City: Athens Press.

Religion

THE REINTERPRETATION OF JESUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. By Carl Everret Parinton. Scribners. \$1.75.

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Science

GENERAL BOTANY FOR COLLEGES. By Ray Ethan Torrey. Century.

STARS, ATOMS, AND GOD. By Harris Elliott Kirk. University of North Carolina Press. \$1.

THE LIFE OF THE BUTTERFLY. By Friedrich Schmack. Houghton Mifflin. \$2.50.

THE OUTLINE OF NATURAL HISTORY. Edited by Sir J. Arthur Thomson. Putnam. \$5.

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