

The PHOENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS

AMONG some sixteen books and pamphlets of verse now on my desk, five seem to me worth examining in more than a paragraph. They are: "The Fleeting and Other Poems," by Walter de la Mare (Knopf), "April Twilights and Other Poems," by Willa Cather (Knopf), "The Queen of Seven Swords," by Gilbert Keith Chesterton (Sheed & Ward), "Connecticut," by Florence Wilkinson Evans (London: The Tamburlaine Press. Paper-bound), and "Proud Horns," by Carleton Drewry (Macmillan). Let us look at them in that order.

Mr. De la Mare's contribution to English poetry is too well-known for comment. What does this new volume add to that contribution? Chiefly, to me, a queer—a very queer description almost entirely in scraps of dialogue of how a grisly butler (to be identified with Death) lured a whole "Fleckless Dinner-Party" into a sub-cellar, or Somewhere,—and that was the last of them. Odd in the extreme, but quite effective; then the longest poem in the book, a narrative. "The Owl," "the owle" actually being, as noted in Hamlet, "a baker's daughter"; then a quite modern ten-page discussion of dreams; and perhaps also "Episodes," and perhaps also "On the Esplanade."

Always something in a De la Mare poem makes his touch unmistakable. Take the first one in this book. Out starts the phrase "How ghast an eye!" No one but De la Mare would have written that. The next poem, in describing one of the undertakers, "One ferrety-fair—." The next, "Episodes," "In vestry chill"; the next, "On the Esplanade,"—look to the last line, "And shrill, sad challenge cried." A certain manner of compacting a phrase or of inverting the order of words in a sentence; that, and more than that, but it cannot be mistaken. However, this is familiar and accepted. So is the poet's preoccupation with ghosts. He is in this world, yet not of it.

Aside from these things, and the sure pleasure of an evening spent reading any book of Mr. De la Mare's—preferably at winter evening—there is not anything in this new volume that actually adds a cubit to his stature, which in my own opinion

is already considerable. But "The Owl" is surely one of his best poems: the shop, the mother and daughter, the strange visitor, the mystery whose meaning becomes quite apparent; but most, the gradual revealing of all that needs to be known about the two women; all is managed with a sure hand. As for the other poems, the twists of De la Mare's secret thought are always interesting.

A NOVELIST'S VERSE

Willa Cather's "April Twilights" is almost all work we have read before, save for the last poem, "Poor Marty," which is not particularly good. A good deal of Miss Cather's poetry dates as magazine verse, rather better than ordinary, of some fifteen or twenty years ago. "Grandmither, think not I forget" and "Spanish Johnny" have been much quoted. "The Palatine" is one of her best poems in an old manner. And it seems to me I recall a poem on Sappho in Lesbos which inexplicably is not included here, ending,

*Night's whole treasury is wasted
And the dawn burns over me.*

I always liked that particularly. It seemed to me one of her best. The simple "Evening Song" is all a song should be, the theme as old as time but the words inevitable. It ends:

*One thing of all dim things I know is true,
The heart within me knows, and tells it
you,
And tells it you.*

*So blind is life, so long at last is sleep,
And none but Love to bid us laugh or
weep,
And none but Love.
And none but Love.*

I hope it has been set to music. "A Likeness" is a truly moving poem, with memorable lines:
*Incapable of compromises,
Unable to forgive or spare,
The strange awarding of the prizes
He had no fortitude to bear.*

Nebraska, naturally, has its poems here, too. Miss Cather is truly of the prairie. And the poem about Chicago's Packing-town is striking. In another category is

"A Silver Cup," an intimate memory well related.

But of all Miss Cather's poems I have longest remembered her "Autumn Melody," which so beautifully begins:

*In the autumn days, the days of parting,
Days that in a golden silence fall,
When the air is quick with bird-wings
starting,
And the asters darken by the wall.*

CHESTERTON'S BALLADRY

Of Gilbert K. Chesterton's "The Ballad of the White Horse," "The Ballad of Saint Barbara," and "Lepanto" I am a fervent admirer. I am not sure that he is not the best balladist of our day. And there are shorter poems, both ironical and wildly imaginative, that are vivid in my memory. His latest book of verse is a series of devotional poems to the Virgin Mary. Through them runs the ringing ballad strain. Chesterton speaks with the old chivalry:

*Vow and averted head and high refusal
Clean as the chasm where the dawn burns
white,
Where shall thy go that have delight in
honour
When all men honour nothing but de-
light?*

Indeed, at the end, the Seven Champions of Christendom speak as they were in the days "of the old boyish romance." J. C. Squire has called these verses "beautiful and nice." I should rather call them vigorous and rhetorical. Chesterton has always owed something to Swinburne in his rolling rhythms—though no two points of view could be more opposite. The impact of this book upon you will be according to your faith. It is a votive offering.

AN AMERICAN WOMAN POET

Florence Wilkinson's earlier work is too little remembered today in American poetry. Now, while living in Paris, though still calling Connecticut her home, she has published in England a book called "Connecticut." Her husband is Wilfrid Evans, the English painter. She has done some most superior work in the past. The present poems, most of them with at least the foundations of the sonnet form, are full of idiosyncrasy, flash occasionally brilliant phrase, are very often crabbed as to style, and are usually interesting as to the thought involved. Her mind, as she says, "is a wilful hound that hunts not with the pack." Some of her titles are characteristic: "Gray and Yellow Words," "Bird Rough with Rain," "I Like to Pick up Curious Stones," "Geometry in the Melon Bed." But her closing poem, "Thrush at Twilight," is wholly exquisite. Among the others, I incline toward the four poems constituting "Lament for the beautiful cows" (that have such a touch of humor as well as sorrow), and toward the dream of her child in "Bird Rough with Rain," though there is a variety of good things in this book to be found elsewhere with a little patience. I must quote the second of the cow poems. It is so entirely original:

*I saw them winding up the wet June road,
one by one straggling, with a mudcaked
man
behind them throwing stones, the polack
Dan,
and a rusty man ahead who cursed and
strode,
yelling by gosh when the sweet runlet
flowed
to emerald—the sad cows were a clan
in exile driven from Eli Cuffe's abode
because of that long ledger too long
owed
for medium mixed, dried buttermilk
and bran.
So the two elders with a grave delight
in their own solvency and rectitude
drove off the beautiful herd, a godly
right
of theirs—they left behind them Eli's
wood
and all the way up the green-roofing
hill
the white bell-cow lamented that bad
bill.*

A NEW SINGER

Carleton Drewry is only a little over thirty and has contributed poetry to a number of well-known magazines. He was born in Virginia and is at present living in Roanoke, where he is Acting Editor of *The Lyric*. "Proud Horns" is his first book, and a creditable one. His poems are brief, and some of them pungent. "The Chaste Profligate" is one of the most understanding, and "Song" should be read as an example of something many have observed, set down in words bearing considerable finality.

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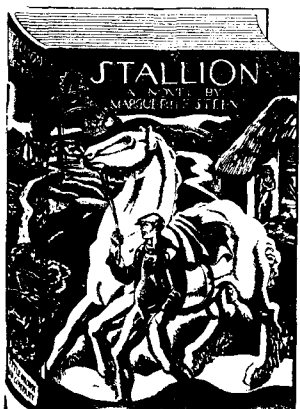
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The Reader's Guide

Conducted by MAY LAMBERTON BECKER

Inquiries in regard to the choice of books should be addressed to Mrs. BECKER, c/o The Saturday Review. As for reasons of space ninety percent of the inquiries cannot be answered in print, a stamped and addressed envelope should be enclosed for reply.

O. E. W., Gambier, Ohio, has adopted a "French orphan" who has been studying English for a year and now asks for English books to read outside of his school work. He is about nineteen but has had much more to do with language than the usual American boy of that age. Considering that after something less than a year of French I was trying my skill on the following works in this order: the lighter periodicals of that nation, the shorter stories of Maupassant, George Sand's "Lucrezia Floriani," and Anatole France's "Thais," I suggest a somewhat corresponding plan for an approach to English. For my plan really did carry through. The admirable conciseness of the French joke, and the fact that, though you always know how it is coming out, you are continually amazed to see how far away from the same point you can start and always reach it, combine to make funny papers a practical beginning—as indeed they are the best beginning to a rough-and-ready acquaintance with any new language. Having thus proved to myself that I could hop, I tried a flight scarcely longer, for the Maupassant stories I chose were little more than anecdotes. I had always wanted to read "Lucrezia Floriani" because I knew it had a close-up view of Chopin, and the style was so pedestrian I could keep my mind strictly on the story. By that time I was getting footloose from the dictionary, and "Thais," again a short book, served the double purpose of introducing me to the writer then believed to represent the best of his country's contemporary literature, and of giving me a chance to feel, if not to appreciate, a literary style that later made me subconsciously intolerant of poor work. On these lines, I would see to it that the French orphan tried an eye on the *New Yorker*. Its localism would be no more trying to a French reader than "Cyrano" to us, and nothing in it takes long to read. Also it does represent us—like it or not. Then I would go straight to a masterpiece, "Ethan Frome." It is short, drives relentlessly to its climax, and has a French translation on which to fall back in emergency—I think it was called "Sous le Neige" when it appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Then, as the *Prix Femina* has just been awarded to Willa Cather for "Shadows on the Rock," and as the atmosphere of this work—also a fairly short book—is one in which a French reader will be at home, I suggest this as the third volume. You can't deny this choice one quality—variety. But I shall be glad to forward other suggestions to this inquirer, or to print them, as this advice may seem to some teachers uncanonical.

In this connection I must say that I have just gladly received the annual publication that keeps me realizing how much I miss in French literature: *L'Année littéraire mil neuf cent trente-deux*, by Professor Albert Schinz of the University of Pennsylvania, a pamphlet reprinted from the *Modern Language Journal*.

THE Denver Public Library has had so many requests for lists of novels about science and scientists, similar to the lists of historical fiction so much used, that they have made one that includes all they have found valuable, as well as a few non-fiction titles that they feel more nearly meet the need than the fiction. Here it is (I have added a few brief notes):

"Jane's Island." Marjorie Allee (Houghton Mifflin), a juvenile with an unusually sound presentation of the scientific attitude; it takes place at Wood's Hole, Mass. Conan Doyle's "Lost World." Sir Philip Gibbs's "Age of Reason" (Doubleday, Doran), which holds a somewhat weighted balance between science and religion. Susan Glaspell's "Glory of the Conquered" (Stokes) and Sinclair Lewis's "Arrow-smith" (Harcourt, Brace), with Wells's "Tono Bungay" (Modern) the aristocracy of this type of novel. M. F. Lansing's "Magic Gold: a Story of the Time of Roger Bacon," a juvenile; Florence Riddell's "Can Women Forget?" (Lippincott), which involves the manufacture of poison gas. H. K. Webster's "Quartz Eye," H. G. Wells's "Love and Mr. Lewisham," J. L. Williams's "They Still Fall in Love" (Scribner) a trick story but with a lifelike scientist in it. Thames Williamson's "Opening Davy Jones's Locker" (Houghton Mifflin), in which a boy explores the

bottom of the sea. The books they list "interesting as fiction" are Beebe's "Arcturus Adventure" (Putnam), Paul de Kruif's "Hunger Fighters," "Microbe Hunters" and "Men against Death" (Harcourt Brace); J. N. Leonard's "Loki" (Doubleday, Doran), a life of Charles Proteus Steinmetz, and the delightful record of a young woman's part in active archaeological research and reconstruction, "Digging in Yucatan," by Anne Axtell Morris (Doubleday, Doran).

The latest addition to "scientification" is Edward Balmer and Philip Wylie's hair-raiser, "When Worlds Collide" (Stokes). It raised my interest in the subject to the pitch of reading through Edwin Lincoln Moseley's "Other Worlds" (Appleton) to see what the chances of its happening might be, and found this a book quite as absorbing as fiction and based on the latest reliable news from the field of meteors, comets, planets, the sun and moon, and other sky-travellers. It's one of the New World of Science series published by Appleton, little books of high interest and value for which this library will find a use. No doubt they have done so already, though not in the case of Professor Moseley's book which only just left the press. "Distant Worlds," by Friedrich Mader (Scribner), is a story exploiting the present interest in stratosphere possibilities for high-speed travel; a world-ship working by reverse-gravitation visits Mars, Saturn, and at last a superman's planet; the author is called the German Jules Verne, and wild as the story is, its details hang together and would not outrage an aviator's sensibilities. In Frank Morison's "Sunset" (Century) an astronomer in the Alps establishes communication with a distant planet and gets into trouble thereby.

These are guess-work novels, beloved by amateurs of the amazing. Fred Rothermell's "Preface to Death" (Little, Brown) is the romance of a genuine scientist, the hero being an astronomer who dies in a tuberculosis sanitarium. It is not for the young. Many of the detective stories turn on chemistry, so many that they turn off from the main subject of this list. I do not repeat the titles of a number of older books that the march of scientific progress has passed by. However, a research scientist still may have to face the personal problem involved in H. G. Wells's "Marriage" (Duffield).

E. K., New York, asks for suggestions for a birthday present to a boy so interested in snakes that he wants a book about them. If he gets Raymond Ditmars's "Thrills of a Naturalist's Quest" (Macmillan) he will get snakes from a cobra on the jacket to a Cuban racer on page 266. Also he will get the sort of thrill that a true naturalist seems able to communicate more rapidly and truly than anyone else writing books; the thrill of complete satisfaction in one's work. The classic example of this is the episode in Beebe's "Galapagos," where they go after the elusive and all but legendary yapock. Beebe says, at the point where they have cut holes in their pockets to drain off the water after their long tramp through every sort of difficulty from thorns to Aztec ants—

To all intents and purposes we became yapocks ourselves, and however little I know about them, I at least have shared many of their feelings. The air and water were of equally pleasant temperature, every moment was filled with driving interest, and every coming second with potential discovery. During one spell of watchful waiting I tried to think of some place in the world more preferable—and I failed.

This is the way Dr. Ditmars thinks about snakes. It is the right spirit in which to approach them. I brought up my daughter in this spirit, with the result that I nearly jumped out of my skin every time she brought one fondly in her baby fingers and laid it on my lap. But even I can enjoy "Thrills." Of course if you can run to six dollars for his birthday present, you can make him perfectly happy with Dr. Ditmars's "Snakes of the World" (Macmillan), which bulges with photographic pictures large-sized and active.

B. E. W., Towanda, Pa., has been inspired by Zweig's "Marie Antoinette" to ask for a good book on the subject of the "Lost Dauphin." There is a little

literature at the disposal of those who have what the French have named *fauxdauphinomanie*, but most of it is in French or German, and the English entries are for the most part out of print. The best is the excellent review of the whole subject by "G. Lenôtre" in "The Dauphin: the Riddle of the Temple" (Doubleday, Doran, 1921). This goes all over the facts of the trial and what little is actually known of his subsequent imprisonment, and examines carefully and without prejudice the various theories. It is not without interest to learn that on the site of the Temple a statue of Diogenes has been placed, his lantern raised in an endless search. "The Shadow-King," by Hans Madol (Houghton Mifflin), was published here in 1930 and is in print; it is highly interesting but practically committed to the cause of Naundorff. "Monsieur Charles: The Tragedy of the True Dauphin," by Eric Buckley, was published by Witherby, London, in 1927. One of the old Mühlbach novels was "Marie Antoinette and Her Son," and Witter Bynner's "Book of Plays" (Knopf) has his "The Little King." The claims of Eleazar Williams were settled, so far as I am concerned, in Legler's old book, the "Story of Wisconsin"; a persistent tradition nestles in the neighborhood of one of the downtown New York parks that a certain "Louis Leroy" buried there in the graveyard whose site it occupies, had a royal coat of arms on his monument and was really Louis XVII. Sickening as some of the details of the Temple tragedy are, it remains a mystery likely to bring out books as long as people read.

B. N., New York, asks in which poem of Eugene Field there is a reference to Hildegarde Hawthorne, who wrote her grandfather's biography in "Romantic Rebel." The poem about the Hawthorne children appears in the excellent selection of "Some Poems of Childhood by Eugene Field," made by Bertha E. Mahoney, illustrated by Gertrude A. Kay, and published by Scribner. The poem, with a group picture of the family, appears on page nineteen.

THE Birmingham-Southern College, Alabama, asks if there is a book dealing historically or otherwise with the Eastern Shore of Maryland, somewhat after the nature of "The Carolina Low Country," Saxon's "Old Louisiana," or Mrs. Lovell's "Golden Tales of Georgia." This is an order completely filled by Paul Wiltach's "Tidewater Maryland" (Bobbs-Merrill), which is just such a blend of history, description, romance, architecture, garden details, and general local color. With his "Tidewater Virginia" (Bobbs-Merrill) one is equipped for a motor tour or a much longer stay in a section marvellously rich in interest. Both books are well illustrated. Collectors of books about places should also note the three fine books named by the inquirer.

To commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Prince William of Orange, called "the Silent," on April 24, 1533, The New York Public Library has placed on exhibition in the cases in the Fifth Avenue corridor, on the second floor, three original documents signed by William (Guillaume de Nassau). With these interesting documents are shown various books and prints relating to William the Silent from the Library's own collections. They will remain on view until May 21st.

The earliest of the documents, dated Antwerp, May 6, 1578, lent by Mr. Henry R. Kingsley, directs his subjects at Breda not to buy, tap, drink or sell, any other kind of beer than those brewed within his barony of Breda. Mr. H. S. J. Sichel has lent a document of 1580 concerning the quartering of a company of soldiers in the town because of the danger of fire "or other mishap" in the Prince's overcrowded castle. The third document, lent by the University of Denver, relates to the publication of the statute (1583) of the States-General of the United Netherlands forbidding all persons to trade or traffic with the enemy.

The most interesting book shown is the first edition in Dutch of William's famous "Apology," or review of his life and defense of his actions, which was printed at Leyden in 1581. The "Apology" was his reply to the edict of Philip of Spain against him. Seventeenth-century engravings of the castles of Dillenburg (his birthplace) and of Breda, and an early plan of the city of Delft, where William is buried, are among the prints shown.

Lisbon reports that the house at Sines in which Vasco da Gama, Portuguese explorer, was born, is to be put up for sale unless the Government buys it.