

# The PHOENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

## ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS

SINCE I have been turning over the leaves of books of new poetry for a good many years now, it seems to me that one can tell a good deal by the random opening of a book and the reading of a few lines. Either something arrests the eye or the mind upon any page of a noticeable poet, or the eye and the mind slide quickly over unimpressive words. Looking over the few books of new verse that I have brought to the mountains with me, I tried this morning such a test, and in one book I found something. "Like a pointer," I read "twilight gingerly slips on To flush the covey of a mirrored sound." My mind immediately raised several slight objections to the analogy of the pointer, but the line was sufficiently unusual to make me pause. I then turned to the jacket of the small volume published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, and learned that its title was "Daemon in the Rock," that its author was Edwin Richardson Frost, and that so good a poet as John Crowe Ransom had written a foreword for him. Someone called Sidney Miron-Hirsch also believes he has discovered a genius in the work of Mr. Frost. This adds one more to the distinguished list of poetic Frosts, none of whom seems to be related to any of the others.

I am late in mentioning Mr. Frost's book, as it appeared this Spring. It suffered from being whelmed in the tide of many books of verse in that season. But it is unusual and should be singled out. One finds at once that this poet is enamoured of peculiar words—of "Numinous planets, galactian breath." He is often cacophonous. He is also, as Mr. Ransom points out in his brief foreword, inclined to be occult after a fashion that "is not readily intelligible except to mystics." But his main virtue is that he is usually interesting and that his search is for the expressive epithet. If he stumbles a good many times, his feet are at least upon the right road. I think he will refine away the much dross of his language as he goes on. Mastery of rhythm and cadence has not yet been attained. His lines are inclined to thump woodenly and his syllables to huddle or scatter. But, as his title indicates, he is sincerely attempting to free the spirit from the rock, though his chisel as yet be often maladroit.

I daresay a good many readers will find nothing but such work as a new Thomas Holley Chivers "in Hypogean West" might be essaying. But in spite of the jaw-cracking embellishments of Mr. Frost's vocabulary I contend that his is not, to borrow an expression of his own, "mulerian effort futilely spent." His poetry needs a harsh purge. He has read so much, it would seem, and has actually experienced so little as yet, that he often and often takes a jugglery of words for oracular utterance, whereas it is certainly nothing of the kind. Nevertheless his sometimes convulsing pedantry would seem to indicate the rough beginnings of a more genuine power.

## UNHEARD MELODIES

From E. P. Dutton & Company comes "Unheard Melodies," by Lord Gorell, originally published by the famous John Murray in London, Byron's publisher. Poets as good as Lascelles Abercrombie and Gordon Bottomley find the work worthy of comment. Abercrombie speaks of "a style of orderly and yet vivid, finely and actively adjusted beauty which I find extraordinarily satisfactory." Orderly the work may be, yet a great deal of it is boring, and the general savour is stale. "The Private View," a lighter moment, though sufficiently old in idea, is fairly entertaining. "The Coat" is a better story, yet could also have been better told. But it is simply a fact that much of this verse is so bald and totally undistinguished as to arouse wonderment at its publication.

## RAMON GUTHRIE

As an intimate of the Provençal, an accomplished novelist, and a salient individual, Ramon Guthrie is one of our most notable younger Americans. In the series of "The Arts Chapbooks," from the Arts Press—the address is not given me—I have his "Scherzo" from a poem to be entitled "The Proud City," dedicated to Malcolm Cowley. There is a good deal of freshness and amusement in this poem. The first section is well-wrought, and the third section, about Billy Bender, exploits what Conrad Aiken calls Ezra Pound's "charac-

teristic trick of shock by juxtaposition, the cheek-by-jowling of the quick poetic flash with the ironic matter-of-factness of the vulgate." Even if it's an old trick, Guthrie brings it off here rather better than Pound usually does—"the jane that drilled herself," and "Magna Helena whom the Gnostics knew." Like Aiken, I wish they'd learn new tricks—but if one cannot perceive the subtle take-off on Pound one has only to read a little further and be violently arrested by the more blatant take-off on Eliot, parts of which are both entertaining and sage. Mr. Guthrie is so adept at the devices of the modern great that one wishes he would launch forth for himself in poetry and show us some real pitching.

## Trade Winds

Split second exposure No. 2: Recipe for a honky-tonk bookshop—Three gents, a gripful of books, and a Forty-second Street or Broadway spot with plenty of pedestrians. We galloped up to one of these fresh air layouts one day last week and found business not colossal. There is a different twist to selling books the honky-tonk way. Two of the gents act as look-outs for the law and the other baby opens up his grip, displays his merchandise, and rattles off a swift, glib line of chatter that draws a crowd. High rental locality on a no rental basis. The term of lease depends upon the cops. The book stock is entirely of publishers' remainders bought for about ten cents a volume and peddled to the throng at a quarter a throw. The spiel is brief: Improve your mind—read books by famous authors; two and three dollar editions for only a quarter; no time for browsing, folks; you can't go wrong for a quarter. A flash glance reveals several good titles. There are a few Crime Club volumes; Sinclair's *Boston*; Maxwell Bodenheim's *Georgie May* and *Replenishing Jessica*. The jackets are fresh and to the transient customer the value appears big. There is no let up on the talk. A few sales are made. More people stop, a larger crowd results. And this is when the business must soon fold up. The look-outs are on guard. Any moment now one of the guardians of the law may appear. Suddenly, swiftly comes the warning, from one of the watchers. The books are dashed back into the grip, the three gents scam along, and soon choose another spot for their business. The boys split the take three ways. No rent? Not exactly. If the law catches up with them they do pay rent. The fine comes to about five dollars.

Book Babble: We went ahead one day this week to find out the reading choices of the masses and the classes. And here is the dope: From Ball & Wilde, a financial district bookshop on Broad Street, we found the bankers hunched over *The Coming American Revolution* and *So Red The Rose*; the workers, according to The Workers' Bookshop on E. 13th Street, are going strong for *The Land of Plenty* and *The Coming Struggle for Power*. From the Wakefield Shop on East 54th Street the debutantes are reading *So Red The Rose* and in the non-fiction class it is a toss-up between *I, Claudius* and *Stars Fell On Alabama*; the office girls are giving *Lamb in His Bosom* and *Nijinsky* a swell break according to B. Altman's book department. The down-town literati in Greenwich Village are fighting over *Nijinsky* and *And Quiet Flows The Don*, says the Washington Square bookshop; the swanky literati around the Sutton Place tenements are praising *So Red The Rose* and *I, Claudius*. This last report comes from the Sutton Place bookshop. \* \* \* Pat Delhi doing the night trick for Dauber & Pine sold a mess of books for \$60 to one customer just before closing time. Included in the purchase were two copies of *Holy Deadlock*. \* \* \* With the two to one decision handed down by the U. S. Court of Appeals in favor of *Ulysses* last week the tome goes into another printing and Sumner is far behind. \* \* \* Books for the tots are getting big window play all over town. \* \* \* The Doubleday Grand Central shop is knocking 'em over with *Holy Deadlock* and *American Song*. Both bear the D. D. imprint. \* \* \* The Carter & Pollard tome, *An Enquiry Into Certain Nineteenth Century Pamphlets*, is bringing plenty of headaches to the first edition and rare book dealers. \* \* \*



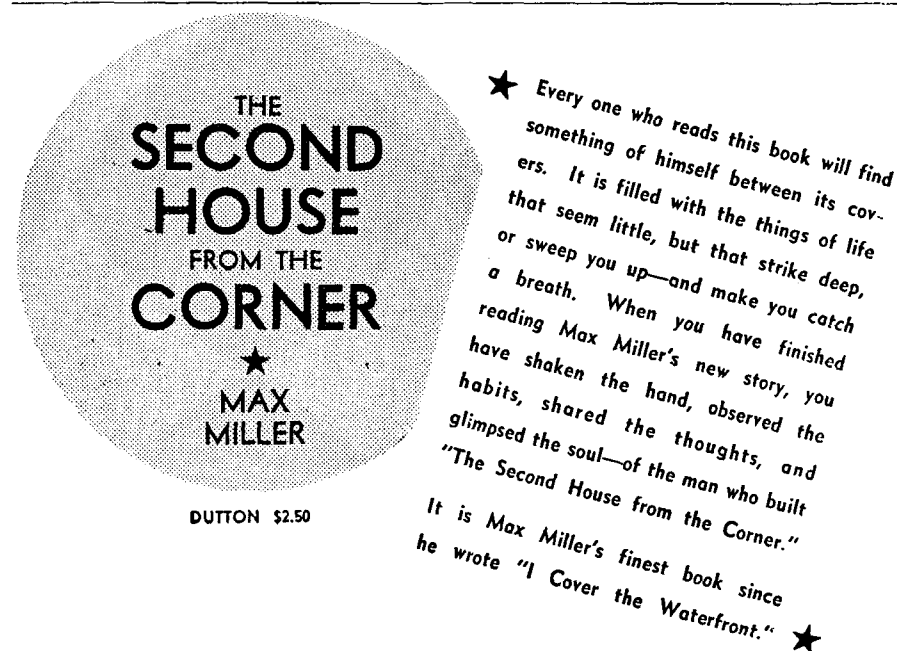
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## EVERYDAY IN EVERY WAY...



There is still some magic in the old formula. Bookstore sales of *The Saturday Review* are steadily increasing. Take The Everyday Bookshop in Burlington, Vermont, for instance. Alice A. Blanchard writes as follows in a recent letter to Mr. Joseph Consolino, the Review's New England representative: "Our experiment in pushing *The Saturday Review of Literature* is going so well with our summer tourist trade that we will be glad to increase our order. We wish to make it eleven issues a week instead of five."

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