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The PHOENIX NEST

CONTEMPORARY POETRY: BY WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

TWO of the major figures of our time in literature are recently gone. In Edwin Arlington Robinson America has, of course, lost one of her leading two male poets, and now his last poem—a long narrative—appears bearing an introduction by the only peer of his time, Robert Frost. It is called "King Jasper." It is published, of course, by Macmillan.

As the last work of one who had dedicated a long life to poetry and had worked more assiduously at his craft than most artists, failing now and again—never in the wielding of a style that is one of the most saliently individual of our time in literature; but sometimes in the significance of what he had to say—as the last work of such a man, this narrative seems to me of extraordinary directness and vitality. Its characters are really symbols, but they are symbols significant of our era. It seems to me that Robinson left this world in closer touch with the time spirit than he had been for some years. Zoë, the spirit of life, flees upward through the darkness. But

*Now she could rest, and she could see
Two fires at once that were a kingdom
burning.*

*In one of them there was the king himself,
The prince, and their destroyer. In the
other,
With chimneys falling on him while he
burned,
There was a dragon dying. . . .*

He left his world of the imagination saying that; even as Elinor Wylie left her own world of the imagination saying

*"O grain of God in power,
Endure another hour!
It is but for an hour," said the Spirit.*

It seems to me that these are different testimonies to the same thing, that "somehow good shall be the final goal of ill." However that may be, they both strike me as oracular; as, at least, having something of pre-vision. I believe that today there is a dragon dying in the world and that the latest convulsions of the social order will be seen in the light of future history to mark his passing. Robinson's story is the story of the individual of great wealth and hence of great power, and of how he inevitably compassed his own destruction. There is much more to it than that. But that is part of it. And the spirit of life, ever a renewal of itself, is with him to the end with the greater wisdom. A renewal and a change, which persists and goes on—beyond Man's petty ambitions and spoils, even beyond his vengeance and violence.

To some the parable that is in this story, also intensely a story of human beings, may either confuse or annoy, but they cannot miss the wisdom in many passages of the blank verse which is handled not only with all of Robinson's subtle skill, but also with dramatic fire. You should get the book also for Frost's "Introduc-

tion," which is not about this particular poem but about the Robinson he knew, and has also many shrewd and pungent things said in it concerning the development of poetry. It was what Frost calls "that grazing closeness to the spiritual realities" that gave Robinson's poetry far greater depth and substance than that of most poets of our time. His style had the defects of its virtues, and for a while it grew upon him to develop too circuitous a manner of saying a simple thing. But it also enabled him to express certain genuine findings concerning human nature inimitably well.

I spoke in the beginning of "two major figures of our time in literature." By the other I meant the late "A. E." of Ireland. Not major as a poet, I think, but major as a man and an influence. Here are his "Selected Poems" also from Macmillan. "If I should be remembered," he said, "I would like it to be for the verses in this book." The volume was planned shortly before his death last July. One has only to read his poem "Resurrection" to find his kinship with Blake. But his poetry was more vaporous; though I think some few of his poems may be read for years to come—the beautiful "Memory of Earth," for instance, beginning,

*In the wet dusk silver sweet,
Down the violet scented ways,
As I moved with quiet feet
I was met by mighty days.*

A mystical music was his, and a love of Earth, and a love of mankind. And Ireland knows how much her poets owe to him.

The best book on poetry recently published is "This Modern Poetry," by Babette Deutsch, with an excellent bibliography and a good index. I recommend this book to all those who wish to know just what influences are contemporary and just how the modern attitude of poets toward poetry differs from the old. Miss Deutsch takes us back as well as forward, discusses tradition and the Imagists, and brings us down inevitably to Spender and Auden and Day Lewis. Her judgments are for the most part sound. Her book is published by W. W. Norton; and you ought to get with it Elizabeth Drew's "Discovering Poetry."

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 85)

OGDEN NASH—"TLL HUSH IF
YOU'LL HUSH"

Do you sometimes wonder which is worse,
Verce for voice, or voice for
verse? . . .


Why what about the radio?
The affected, oily tongues that drip
With spurious good-fellowship,
That flood your parlor with a spasm
Of cultured sales enthusiasm?

THE *Dissolute Years*

A PAGEANT OF STUART ENGLAND

by EDUARD STUCKEN

Author of THE GREAT WHITE GODS



THE era of *James I* was an incredible period in English history. Fantastic, bloody, lustful . . . it was everything that was capricious and mad. An embarrassed silence fell over it finally, and it became the glossed-over era for historians and novelists. It remained for a European novelist to bring this fantastic era back to glowing life.

Eduard Stucken, whose *The Great White Gods* was acclaimed last year by the critics as "one of the great fictional murals painted on the wall of history" offers here another pageant of riotous color and violent action . . . a great historical love story woven into one of the most daring studies ever made of the picturesque and grotesque decadence of English Court life during the reign of the preposterous James.

The novel is divided into three sections, the titles of which are: 1. *Lechery* 2. *Illegitimacy* 3. *Heritage*. The translation is by Marguerite Harrison. 375 pages, \$2.50.

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The Clearing House

CONDUCTED BY AMY LOVEMAN

Inquiries, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, should be directed to Miss Loveman, in care of The Saturday Review.

A BALANCED RATION FOR
A WEEK'S READING

MY SHADOW AS I PASS. By Sybil Bolitho. Viking.

POOR SPLENDID WINGS. By Frances Winwar. Little, Brown.

COLLECTED POEMS. By Robert Frost. Holt.

A Reading List for the Young

M. E. M. of Philadelphia, Pa., is struggling to make a not impossible list of modern literature (say from 1900) for a group of young people. She wants it to "have breadth as well as depth of vision, and asks for about twenty-five titles in various fields which would give these young folk a modern background for present-day reading."

I'M drawing up a list in rather hit or miss fashion, I am afraid, since I can't from M. E. M.'s letter gauge the age of her readers with any certainty. I take it for granted that they are ready for completely adult if perhaps not sophisticated reading, and have selected books that would seem in a way to reflect the temper and drift of contemporary society. I have

included among them works written outside America as well as a greater number, perhaps, of home origin. The titles represent merely one selection that in no way pretends to be better than a number of others that might be made. Since nothing is more revealing of the background and outlook of a period than the autobiography which springs from it, I start with a group of volumes which, as it happens, reflect the experiences of foreigners who have either become Americans or lived in America—Michael Pupin's FROM IMMIGRANT TO INVENTOR (Scribners), Mary Antin's THE PROMISED LAND (Houghton Mifflin), and Etsu Sugimoto's A DAUGHTER OF THE SAMURAI (Doubleday, Doran). These, it seems to me, are interesting not only as life stories but in the light they cast on an alien society as it appeared to intelligent observers. To this group, as representing a reverse process, that is, the appearance his own land wore to one who had long been separated from it, might be added Louis Adamic's THE NATIVE'S RETURN (Harpers). Biography of another sort is represented by two books which should find eager readers among the young, Lawrence's REVOLT IN THE DESERT (Doubleday, Doran) and Paul de Kruif's MICROBE HUNTERS (Harcourt, Brace). Passing from biography to fiction there is a list of novels all of which have a common base, varied though they are, in that they are indicative of the temper of society and the forces which at their various times of appearance were holding front place in public interest. These include H. G. Wells's MR. BRITLING SEES IT THROUGH (Macmillan), Galsworthy's THE FORSYTE SAGA (Scribners), Booth Tarkington's ALICE ADAMS (Doubleday, Doran), Du Bose Heyward's PORGY (Doubleday,

Doran), Sinclair Lewis's BABBITT (Harcourt, Brace) and his just issued IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE (Doubleday, Doran), a book which it seems to me it would be well if every young American could read, Thomas Boyd's ROLL RIVER (Putnams), Robert Nathan's ONE MORE SPRING (Knopf), Edna Ferber's so BIG (Doubleday, Doran), Ellen Glasgow's THE SHELTERED LIFE (Doubleday, Doran) and BARREN GROUND, Willa Cather's MY ANTONIA (Houghton Mifflin), and Louis Bromfield's THE FARM (Harpers). This, as I said before, is but a single selection from the books of the last twenty years from which other groups might be chosen, but I think it represents reading which in itself should be interesting and which reflects much of the background of thought and feeling of recent years. There's one book which if read by youth might serve as a spring-board to determined action, and that is Vera Brittain's TESTAMENT OF YOUTH (Macmillan), a chronicle of the war years which more forcefully and movingly than a dozen prepared peace pleas makes cause against battle. To the foregoing books it would be well, too, to add Louis Untermeyer's MODERN AMERICAN POETRY and MODERN ENGLISH POETRY (Harcourt, Brace), for in the verse of contemporary times as much as in its prose resides the spirit of peoples. And Mr. Untermeyer, skilled anthologist that he is, has here skimmed the cream from recent poetical achievement.

Story Parade

This particular issue of The Saturday Review which devotes considerable space to juvenile literature seems the fitting one in which to make mention of a new monthly to be edited for children. Story Parade, as it is to be called, is to contain stories of contemporary life both in this country and in foreign lands, reprints from foreign literature as well as from English, verse, illustrations, plays, book reviews, and writings by children themselves. An advisory board has been established, and the magazine, installed at 70 Fifth Avenue, is to issue its first number on the fifteenth of December.

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Published in two beautiful editions by the University of Pennsylvania Press, with an Introduction by A. Felix Du Pont. For further information write to the Committee on Publication, The American Historical Scene, N. W. Corner 10th and Orange Streets, Wilmington, Delaware.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
DEATH ON THE BRIDGE Royce Howes (Crime Club: \$2.)	Tramp steamer, modern hell-ship, suffers sanguinary losses of various officers—and then up pops a G-man.	Multitudinous seas are so encarnadined that gore almost swamps the story. There's "pungent" love-interest.	Blutwurst
THE SCARECROW RIDES Russell Thorndyke (Dial Press: \$2.)	Dr. Syn, pirate turned clergyman, helps honest Romney Marsh smugglers and thwarts numerous villains in tale of 1770's.	Follows not unfamiliar pattern (vide J. Farnol) but has movement, romance, gawdy verbiage, and unremitting action.	Good of its kind
THE BAT FLYS LOW Sax Rohmer (Crime Club: \$2.)	Secret of marvellous light known only to ancient Egyptian leads American to adventures in Nile valley—and cataclysm at home.	Incredible made plausible in expert Rohmeresque with much spooky Egyptian stuff and customary super-lovely gals.	Guaranteed thriller