

The PHOENIX NEST

CONTEMPORARY POETRY: BY WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

MY remarking recently that I was a bit tired of the "hearts and flowers" motif of many housewifely poets, saying further that "I honestly think—and hope to heaven they don't take my advice!—that if they went off and committed one good ripsnorting, scarlet sin it would do more to tone up their systems than the tons of treacle through which they mew about their souls"—my remarks to that congested effect have inspired the following from an old and favored contributor who calls herself *Gretna Green*:

I HOPE HE'S SATISFIED!

*Ripsnorting scarlet sin
I have been wallowing in,
Hoping 't would help me pen a
Poem to please Bill Benét—
Out of a carmine spree
Winging to poesy
Which, though the verses creak'll
Never be labeled treacle
By critics who warn us to hie away
From poetry schools they dub dieaway!
Critics! I long to poke 'em;
Their nostrums are mostly hokum!
Blame me who can for despairing
If after a sound Baudelaire-ing
All I achieve for my sweat
Is fleurs du mal de tête!
Lovers galore how I kissed 'em
Merely to tone up my system,
Sinning until I've grown livid
To make my vague ecstasies vivid.
Though roses and raptures my skin burn,
I learn I'm not Algernon Swinburne.
Dope I takes makes me no Coleridge
(What's the pet vice of Miss Lola Ridge?);
Black cigars I am smoking, but know well
I can't polyphone like Miss Lowell;
Both ends of my candles ablaze,
My sonnets ain't Edna Millay's.*

*My doggonest ditties prove doggerel,
My stein-songs the merest of groggerel;
Parnassus won't give me free passes,
My passionate lava's molasses!*

*My vice hasn't made me highbrowish—
More'n more I am waxing hausfrau-ish—
My poetry no better since is,
But vastly improved my cheese-blintzes!*

Joyce Bernard of Wichita Falls, Texas, seems to think that I am "sore about this whole business of State Anthologies" and particularly about the anthology, "Texas Legacy," from whose compiler, Lois F. Boyle, I have just had a very nice letter. No, I am not "sore," nor do I feel malicious. It is merely that I have carefully examined a good many state anthologies in my time and I think, in general, that they contain a nucleus of good work together with a great deal that is negligible. I was not "picking on" Texas. As a matter of fact, the Texas anthology is quite as good as, if not better than, the average state anthology. Anyway, I'll be lecturing down in Texas in April, so Joyce Bernard can have a pot-shot at me! Neither did I mean to imply that the Texas anthology was a "pay-as-you-enter" proposition. I haven't the slightest idea which state anthologies, if any, are conducted on that basis. It's all very well to be patriotic, but you must allow a reviewer his independent opinion. You may not agree with him and he may be all wrong, but he can only say what he honestly thinks.

The Peter Pauper Press announces the publication of an epic of evolution by Chard Powers Smith, entitled "Prelude to Man," in a limited edition of three

hundred and seventy-five signed and numbered copies, with decorations by Valenti Angelo. This book is being published by subscription, with the names of all advance subscribers printed and bound into the volume itself. The publishers guarantee that the first edition will be followed by no further editions for at least a year in England and at least two years in America.

The Poetry Society of America invites anyone who wishes to do so to submit one unpublished poem for reading and criticism at its monthly meetings, held in New York, usually on the last Thursday of the month, from October to May excepting January. Poems read are eligible for the annual prizes of \$100 and \$50. The poem should be sent anonymously with the poet's name and address in an envelope on which is written the title of the poem. It should be addressed to the Corresponding Secretary, Margery Mansfield, Apt. 93, 516 East 78th Street, New York, N. Y., and should reach her by the tenth of the month. Only a small percentage of poems submitted are read, but contestants may arrange to attend meetings on the chance that their poems will be criticized.

The new literary monthly, *Partisan Review* and *Anvil*, has been printing some interesting poetry. The magazine is published at 430 Sixth Avenue, and you'll find it a lively and insurgent publication. It has had such contributors as John Dos Passos, Carl Van Doren, Genevieve Taggard, and Clara Weatherwax.

Henry Harrison, publisher of poetry, at 430 Sixth Avenue, this city, has written me as follows:

Thanks for the write-up on the state anthologies and on Tooni Gordi's "Contemporary American Women Poets." Maybe shame on you for not knowing who Tooni is because she has appeared in *Voices*, *Poetry World*, *Spinners*, but on the other hand that may mean nothing to you.

You scare me because I know you've never heard of Thomas Del Vecchio, who is to edit "Contemporary American Men Poets" (announcement inclosed), and you don't have to take my word for it that he's the sanest judge of poetry I've ever known and will make his anthology so good it will knock your weary eyes out. Why not help make it the swell book it's going to be by asking your male readers to submit their own work? Yours for less and better poetry.

All who wish to submit material for this book may address Thomas Del Vecchio in care of Henry Harrison. But I am rather appalled when I note that "Contemporary American Women Poets" contained 1311 living writers and the anthology of male will doubtless contain the same number. There was good work in the former book; there will probably be in this. It is this vast army of poets that snows me under. Whither, oh whither Everything?

Belatedly I wish to thank Mabel Kingsley Richardson, librarian of the University of South Dakota, for sending me a graceful tribute, in the form of a sonnet, to the late Lizette Woodworth Reese; a sonnet that, unfortunately, I have not space to print here.

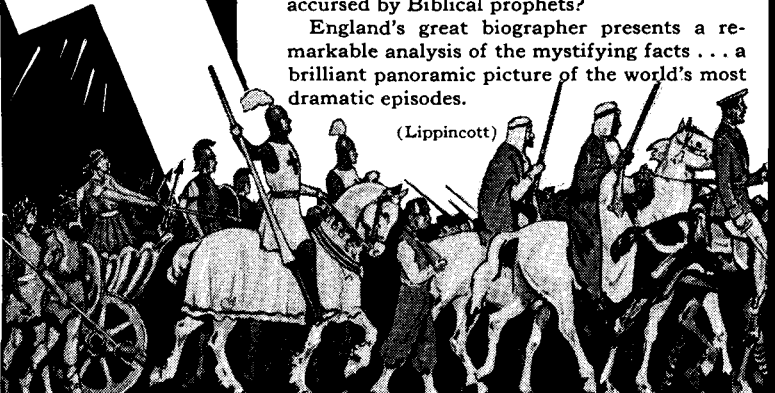
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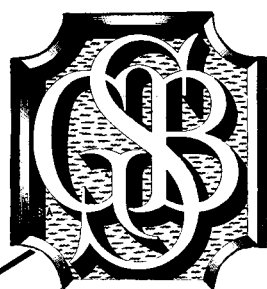


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Forgotten Flowers

TREE FLOWERS OF FOREST, PARK, AND STREET. By Walter E. Rogers. Published by the author, Appleton, Wisconsin. 1935.

Reviewed by RAPHAEL ZON

MANY trees like magnolias, black locust, red bud, dogwood, and others, are known for their conspicuous and colorful blossoms. The majority of our common trees, however, especially in the northern part of our country, like the aspens, oaks, and elms, have very inconspicuous flowers. This perhaps accounts for the fact that we seldom associate trees with flowers. How many, even of our nature lovers, can see the beauty in the catkins of oaks, poplars, and willows and in the simpler flowers of maples and elms?

Professor Rogers seeks in this volume, and with commendable success, to call the attention of the layman to the great variety and delicacy of structure which may be found in the flowers of our common trees if we would only take the time to examine them more closely. They are the "forgotten" flowers of the plant world. The author makes no claim of contributing to our scientific knowledge of forest, park, and street trees. He frankly points out that the value of his book lies almost exclusively in presenting portraiture—photographs and silhouette drawings from nature.

The selection of trees for planting in our streets and parks will probably not be modified by this greater acquaintance with the structure of the inconspicuous flowers of our common species. Such selection is based more on the shape of the crown and on the lasting luxuriance and color of the foliage, rather than on the flowers which last for only a short part of the season. Nor is it to be expected that such trees will be planted for their flowers alone. If we want flowers, we will naturally select plants which bloom more colorfully and more conspicuously for a

much greater part of the vegetative season, although in the southern part of our country some trees and particularly shrubs may properly be used for that purpose.

Most of the photographs in this book are very lifelike and stand out sharply in all of their detail. A few of the half-tones, however, probably because of handling the flowers preliminary to photographing and the high degree of magnification used—in some cases twenty to thirty times their original size—show considerable loss in detail and sharpness.

In striking contrast to the pictures of the flowers, are the silhouette drawings of trees in winter, where nothing is left but the stark skeletons. Yet it would be difficult to say what part of the book will leave a more lasting impression upon the reader. The 240 pages of illustrations in the volume are equally divided between half-tones of flowers and silhouette drawings of trees in winter condition. The text consists of little more than descriptions accompanying the half-tones and the drawings. The book could, therefore, have been named with equal propriety, "Winter Characteristics of Trees in Forest, Park, and Street."

Of trees in blossom and those in winter condition, one is inclined to believe that the latter lend more life and color to the winter landscape than do trees in flower to the summer scene. What other vegetation enlivens the winter landscape more than the sharp outlines of the bare trunks and branches of deciduous trees or the somber greens of the pines, spruces, and firs especially when touched with snow?

The book should be of value to any nature lover, and very helpful in high schools in the teaching of botany. Even the trained forester, well versed in the life of forest trees, will find a great deal of delight and occasional aid in having this convenient reference book.

Raphael Zon is professor of forestry at the University of Minnesota and chairman of the forestry commission of the National Research Council.

Genus Rhododendron

RHODODENDRONS AND AZALEAS: Their Origins, Cultivation and Development. By Clement Gray Bowers. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1936. \$10.

Reviewed by NORMAN TAYLOR

OF many garden books it is permissible to be indifferent or tolerant or scathing. Of few it is possible to say that they are all that one hoped they might be, but Mr. Bowers's book is even more than this. The times were ripe for an authoritative book about his subject. This is, emphatically, that book.

Written for the intelligent public—it is no book for dabblers—the author has the sense to keep rhododendrons and azaleas horticulturally separate, well knowing that the botanical purists insist they all belong to the genus *Rhododendron*. The astonishing increase in species, varieties, and named forms is shown by the fact that no less than 2,000 forms are dealt with. Sir Joseph Hooker, who knew more about rhododendrons than anyone in his life-time, knew probably less than a fifth of these, and nothing at all about technical details of soil acidity, and many other aids to cultivation of which the author treats with singular lucidity.

As such books must be, it is based upon years of research and observation. But it wholly lacks the pedantic touch, and most of it can be read and used by any intelligent person—even by those to whom the jargon of the botanist is repellent. Purely systematic descriptions are, of course, written in the terminology of science, for accuracy can be secured in no other way. But even in this section of the book he has cut technicalities to a wise minimum.

Much more than half the book deals with the garden uses of these gorgeous shrubs, their soils, propagation, hardiness, breeding, diseases, and climatic preferences. And in the latter connection the author makes no bones of the fact—long known to the initiated—that for vast stretches of the United States rhododendrons are climatically impossible. They love coolness and moisture too much to thrive in the plains and prairies of America.

Adequately indexed, with a profusion of appendices for special purposes, this volume of 546 pages is by way of becoming a classic in its field. It would be a pleasure to record also one's appreciation of its illustrations. The black and white figures of corollas and modes of flower branching are admirable, but the twenty-eight full-page color plates, while very useful for purposes of identification, would have been tremendously improved by having some other background than the one chosen. One of the most valuable illustrative features of the book is the endpapers which comprise a colored map of the world showing the distribution of rhododendrons and azaleas. It is impossible in a brief review to notice the technical excellence of the work, its scholarship, and many things the author has done to make information readily available.

Norman Taylor is editor of "The Garden Dictionary," reviewed last week.

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