

# Poetry Miscellany

**THE HIGH PLAINS.** By Kenneth Porter. New York: John Day Co. 1938. \$2.  
**POEMS.** By Alvin Foote. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd. 1939. \$1.50.  
**BREATH OF ALL LIVING.** By David M  for. New York: The Imagery Press. 1939. \$2.  
**INTERPRETERS.** By John Curtis Underwood. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1939. \$2.  
**MEN IN PROCESSION.** By Adele Kelley Thompson. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1939. \$2.  
**BEFORE THE WIND.** By Wilbert Snow. New York: Gotham House. 1938. Limited Edition. \$3.50.  
**THE HORN: A Lay of the Grassington Fox-Hounds.** By Patrick R. Chalmers. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$8.50.  
**ARCADIA BOREALIS.** Selected poems by Erik Axel Karlfeldt. Translated with an introduction by Charles Wharton Stork. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press. 1938. \$3.50.  
**THE TREK.** A Poem by Francis Carey Slater. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1938. \$2.25.  
**COLLECTED POEMS of John Jerome Rooney.** With an Introduction by Edwin Markham. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1938. \$2.  
**WINGS AT DUSK.** By Eugene Edmund Murphey. With a Prefatory Note by William Lyon Phelps. New York: Longmans, Green and Company. 1939. \$2.  
**MORE GREEN FINGERS.** By Reginald Arkell. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company. 1939. \$1.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BEN  T

**A**FTER reading in a miscellaneous group of books of poems none that quite satisfied taste and mind, it is a pleasure to come upon "The High Plains" by Kenneth Porter. Mr. Porter is a real craftsman as well as a real poet. In his middle thirties, born in the Kansas wheat-belt of pioneer parents, he has both worked the plains and learned intimately of their past. He has also taught at Southwestern College, though he is now in the history department at Vassar. Business history he learned at Harvard and has made two contributions to their "Studies." Mr. Porter can even fit Vachel Lindsay's vision of the ghosts of the buffaloes with the modern application of a dust storm, and also tell you dramatically about ghosts of the old glaciers. He makes coyote, jackrabbit, rattlesnake, catapas, silos, ploughing, and sunflowers thoroughly real, with a gift for just the right descriptive word. It is a feat also to have said this of a Kansas farmyard:

Not commonplace can be that prairie's  
 fruits  
 where cattle-feed is stored in feudal  
 towers  
 and liquid silver rises through the roots  
 and stems of great revolving iron  
 flowers.

If most people have waxed sentimental over swans, he is thoroughly and entertainingly realistic about "Swans out of Water" in the Boston Public Gardens, since there are no more awkward land birds known. Fine, bitter truth fills "To the Younger Old Americans: An Oration," and I wish they would stick copies of it up in the halls of Congress. The two sonnets on "Reds of Szechuan" are strongly descriptive, "The Dead Liebknecht" an excellent translation. The poems about the Nativity are quite the opposite of prettified, having a keen and biting edge, and "The Perfect Tribute" is another in this kind. When he adapts Elinor Wylie's "Peregrine" meter to "Let Love Die Quickly," he gives it his own

strictness. These are only some of the things I have liked.

Mr. Porter commands a variety of meters and knows how to use them; and he does not fumble language, nor does he think it clever to write in a sort of Morse code. That is the fault I find with Alvin Foote's "Poems." Obviously an intelligent writer, he often condenses so much that I cannot follow him. He is fond of a sort of nuance that seems to me flat, of the rhetorical question, of occasional startling statement such as

*Confusing results of syphilitic intercourse  
 With natural croup in a blooded horse*

which, fortunately, conveys to me precisely nothing at all. His poems of battle are some of the clearest. He is twenty-eight and a post-office clerk in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, having "been hungry in some of the largest towns of the American Southwest."

David M  for, who writes "Breath of All Living," is a Jewish postman born on New York's East Side. He was taken from public school and set to work when fourteen. Considering everything, his poetry is certainly remarkable. He is a self-styled atheist, torn by a ceaseless search for a "limitless and non-existent God." He writes Whitmanically, transcendently, also in fixed forms and colloquially—in which last manner, strangely enough, he succeeds least. One has a great deal of sympathy with his honest outcry; but he is more a spontaneous inveigher than a craftsman. Words and music are heady intoxicants to him, though he can also write more gently. He will use words and expressions like "sonant," "lethal," "bedecked," "pelf," and "Cosmic Cry," but there is also genuine vigor and a proper, earnest questioning here of the paradoxical evil in Man. John Curtis Underwood, one of whose early books, "The Iron Muse," was the first of many a good many years ago, still writes interesting free verse, and his "Interpreters" include all sorts and conditions of men, among them sea captain, mathematician, watch repairer, astronomer, lawyer, anthropologist, and trapeze performer. His pronouncements, however, do not strongly grip the mind, though they contain sanity and wisdom.

Adele Kelley Thompson, a newcomer with "Men in Procession," is a cultivated woman whose poetry radiates the joy of living. She is fond of travel and the out-of-doors, to which such poems as "Four Davids" and "James River Plantation" testify. Wilbert Snow is a notable New England poet whose story in verse of an old-time Fourth of July "skippers' race" on the Penobscot, illustrated by Gordon Grant, is authentic and vivid; and in "The Horn: a hunting novel in verse," Patrick Chalmers has presented an English fox-hunt, with the illustrative help of Lionel Edwards, in quite remarkable fashion, were it not that John Masefield's "Reynard the Fox" had gone before. In spite of Chalmers's originality of plot, his general style and pace owe altogether too much to the famous prior work of the Poet Laureate. Nevertheless, sportsmen

and poets also will enjoy this unpretentious work of the open written by one evidently fully qualified.

Charles Wharton Stork is well known as a capital translator from the Swedish, and he has now done the best of the work of Erik Axel Karlfeldt, the only lyric poet ever to receive the Nobel Prize, selected from the six volumes published in the poet's lifetime and from the posthumous collection of 1934. The limited edition bears decorations by Hilma Berglund in the spirit of the famous Dalecarlian frescoes. In spite of a reference to Robert Frost on the jacket, some of the poems seem to me to recall one of the best of our light versifiers, Guy Wetmore Carryl. Others, of course, are much more serious. All have gusto and color.

In "The Trek" we have a narrative poem of South Africa by Francis Carey Slater, a poet native to that country, one of whose former volumes received tribute from no less a fine South African poet than Roy Campbell. The central event in South African history was, of course, the Great Trek, concerning which centenary celebrations were held there last December. This is the epic of the Voortrekkers, of their search through the Karroo, of their party strife, of their battles with the Matabele and Zulu impi. The author's handling of metres seems to me rather wooden, on the whole, though background and local color are often interesting. In contrast with what John G. Neihardt did for our own fights on the plains, "The Trek" does not seem to me comparable in workmanship. John Jerome Rooney, whose book has an introduction from Edwin Markham, was a writer of yesterday, as well as a well-known judge, whose martial and sentimental strains from 1898 on were widely read. A journalistic type of poet, whose work considerably dates, it shows evidence of a kindly and genial man underneath. If you like poems about birds done by a real ornithologist, Professor Phelps introduces to you Eugene Edmund Murphey, with "Wings at Dusk"; and if you are a gardener you will find Reginald Arkell's "More Green Fingers," an English importation, full of charming light verse about the ups and downs of gardening.

## New England Artery

**CONNECTICUT RIVER.** By Marguerite Allis. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1939. \$3.

**T**HIS is an excellent historical description of the Connecticut River from source to mouth. It is not a guide book. It is not a formal history. It is not merely description. The author, using the various methods of transportation from the canoe up as a thread for her discourse, has woven early records, political and social history, anecdotes, character studies, and description into a book that makes the Connecticut live, as it should live, as the major artery of the great region. Miss Allis's book is very good reading away from the Connecticut, on it, or beside it. She has plenty of scholarship which she uses without pedantry, a good sense of human values, and an excellent faculty of description. The book can be highly recommended.

## Mad King

*THE TRAGIC IDEALIST: LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA.* By Otto Zarek. Translated by Ella Goodman and Paul Sudley. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1939. \$3.50.

Reviewed by PAUL HENRY LANG

NO music and no musical gospel ever exerted an influence upon the general spiritual life of an era as did Wagnerian music. This influence was out of all proportion to the intrinsic value of the music. A Beethoven or Mozart with his incomparably superior art has never attained such immediate, expansive, and revolutionary influence. There must be other than purely musical reasons that made Wagner the prophet of European culture of the *fin de siècle*. His intention was to create a universal art by conjuring up the elemental power of ancient Germanic mythology. But the mythology he gave us was new and did not resuscitate the heroism and divinity of pure will and pure action. While it provided the music lover, in the form of the leitmotiv, with a musical dialecticism much more accessible and self-explanatory than the infinitely more subtle conception of "absolute music" or "classic opera," the new mythology created a world of theatrical passions. With all the magnificent music that can be found in these music dramas, human passions are inextricably disguised under premeditated intentions. This had to be so because their creator was a man false and treacherous to the roots. Wagner placed in the center of his new mythology his own life, and this life was as theatrical, as filled with false gestures, as was his mythology. One of the most dissonant and irreconcilable chords that returned again and again in the music of his life was Ludwig II of Bavaria.

Ludwig interests the world because of the strange friendship between him and Wagner. There have been other insane and eccentric Bavarian monarchs, but they have not inspired biographies. When one reads the present volume, one finds all the other figures of nineteenth century Europe, from Bismarck to the Empress Elizabeth, fading into the background before the all-pervading passion of the king for Wagner. The reader becomes aware of the *raison d'être* of the biography of Ludwig II when he encounters the composer, his wife, von Bülow, and the other well known figures of Wagner's suite on every page. The task confronting the

author of "The Tragic Idealist" was such as would intrigue a psychiatrist: an insane king pitted against an unscrupulous musical genius, and Mr. Zarek has creditably acquitted himself of the task. But how unrewarding the results, how far is all this from us, how repelling the whole atmosphere of an overripe, pathologic, and dying romanticism. The book itself could not escape the period's mood and spirit, it is filled with rhetorical questions, exclamation points, nebulous German quotations, French *mots*, and italics. No fault can be found with the sincere labors of the author, but the morbid subject and atmosphere leave the American reader with a sense of futility and with a bitter taste in his mouth. He will question the author's conclusion that "this hapless monarch has played a decisive part in the formation of the artistic and political Europe of today," but he will admit that the "mad king" and his story are illuminating documents of a world which had to be engulfed by 1914.

## Corporative Country

*THE PORTUGAL OF SALAZAR.* By Michael Derrick. New York: Campion Books, Ltd. 1939. \$2.

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

IT is an understandable but regrettable irony of our contemporary world that writers and publishers should overlook the small, secondary countries of Europe, where the dragon's teeth of another world war are being sown, in preference for more spectacular subjects like Germany, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. The game of power politics is always played along the fringes of the Continent, in fact, with the border and buffer states serving as unwilling pawns in nationalist and imperialist rivalries. One glance at the daily headlines indicates the importance of Portugal in the present struggle for supremacy, yet until this

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As the title implies, Christopher Morley looks a bit sideways at a good deal of our mass-thinking. His attitude is oblique, and always his own.

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MATTHEW PRIOR—  
THE SECRETARY

While with labour assiduous due  
pleasure I mix  
And in one day atone for the busi-  
ness of six,  
In a little Dutch chaise on a Satur-  
day night,  
On my left hand my Horace, a  
nymph on my right,

I drive on my car in processional  
state.