

them treat of experiences or ideas which the ordinary man is too lowly to share. No poet worthy the name ever wrote a line that he didn't hope would come home to any normally intelligent reader or, better, listener, though it appears that they frequently fail. Nor can any one defend the modern cult of the incomprehensible, with its quips and cranks and insoluble symbolisms. According to me it isn't the function of the poet to discover complex laws or elaborate guiding philosophies. If a poet happens to be a great thinker he may incidentally do so. But there have been very great poets who were anything but great thinkers, though Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe would qualify as well as any Plato. The function of a poet is to make vivid and alive what is in the air in his own time, and, for that matter, if he is lucky, what is in the air of all time. "It is the heat of his feeling rather than his thought that matters." And that heat ought to bring out the human in whatever he touches. The great poets have always done this, and the little ones have not infrequently done likewise. It doesn't matter what they deal with. Love, death, youth, age, pleasure, pain, philosophy, or belief stop being abstractions when the honest-to-God poet gets hold of them. When the Cid, the hero of the great Spanish epic, parted from Ximena, there was such pain as when the nail is torn from the flesh of the finger. One doesn't have to put on horn-rimmed spectacles to see the point. Everything men and women have enjoyed or suffered or ever will enjoy and suffer is in the last two acts of "Antony and Cleopatra." All that is required to taste that beauty and terror is some little humanity and a quiet evening.

The big artificial world we ourselves have made gets between us and poetry. Shakespeare in a wonderful triplet in his wonderful threnody hit off that artificial world for all time, the world where

Truth may seem, but cannot be;  
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;  
Truth and beauty buried be.

It is a pity that we have lost or ignored them. But the condition is not permanent. Emerson knew that there was too much truth and beauty in this country to be kept under for ever. Our landscape will deliver us. And our cities may too, when they discover that to mingle with the multitude is no escape from the difficulties of the individual. One doesn't have to be Keats to hear mighty workings.

Leonard Bacon is the author of a recent autobiography, "Semi-Centennial."

## A Psychological Horror Novel

*THE SEA TOWER.* By Hugh Walpole. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1939. 307 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

MUCH blood has flowed over the fictional dams since Horace Walpole wrote "The Castle of Otranto." Here we have another Walpole bringing another innocent victim to another strange habitation beside the sea. In the eighteenth century the horror sprang from the supernatural; in the twentieth it comes from something in the natural that has gone wrong, that has been forced into evil and disease by the strength of its own nature that found no good way out. The terrors from the supernatural lay no responsibility upon the human beings involved. But today we know that back of the threats and dangers that beset Christina in "The Sea Tower" are psychological causes growing out of personal relationships that have been warped in their growing through humanly imposed conditions.

The story opens abruptly upon a returning bride and groom who have met and married without long acquaintance. They are on their way to the man's home, and at once we feel the chill of something to come. We share, without understanding why, the dread that Christina feels at going into this strange home. When the actual meeting with the family occurs, nothing is disclosed to account for the fears. The mother is a brisk little woman who receives Christina warmly, the father a rather ineffectual invalid certainly without malice,

the others suggest no evil at this first gathering. But the fears continue to press upon Christina, and little by little she realizes, partly through intuition and partly through her sharpened sensitivity, just where the danger lies. She tries to tell her husband, but he is a direct, unsuspecting character, who dislikes the thought of prying into the motives for actions or analyzing emotional responses. Christina must fight through whatever menace there is without help from others. The novel reaches its height as it describes the slow passage of the days when the bride goes hourly in fear of what she half guesses and half avoids guessing. The outcome as portrayed by Mr. Walpole will not be satisfactory to all readers; to some it will seem forced at the very moment when it most needs to seem inevitable. But the excitement and thrill are there, and it is on second thought that doubts begin to creep in.

Far removed from "The Joyful Delaneys" or the Rogue Herries series, this latest Walpole novel is more like "The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair" in being a true psychological horror tale. It is bound to be compared to "Rebecca" and by that standard to be found wanting. It does not hold its tone and tempo as did Miss Du Maurier's novel, and the complete integration of character is not nearly so skillfully managed. But with whatever slight qualifications, it is good to welcome Hugh Walpole back to the field of psychological complexity in which some of his best work has been done.

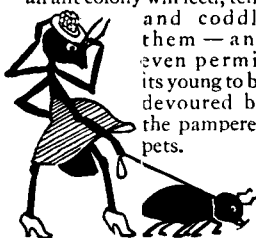
## DID YOU KNOW?

**some ants are professional racketeers . . . .**

The *Carebara* ants kidnap their neighbors, sponge on their friends for food, pillage the homes of their hosts. They're the Public Enemies of the ant world.

**these ants keep beetles as pets**

Insanely fond of pet beetles, an ant colony will feed, tend and coddle them — and even permit its young to be devoured by the pampered pets.



**the farmers grow vegetable crops**

The agricultural *Atta* cultivate tiny vegetables in underground vaults. They plant, pluck weeds, fertilize and harvest — exactly as human farmers do.



Not in many years has a popular book of science so gripped the interest of readers and critics as "OF ANTS AND MEN," by Caryl P. Haskins (Prentice-Hall, Inc., \$2.75). Here is a glamorous wonderland whose builders, hunters, fighters, queens, fascists, communists, slaves and parasites weave an amazing way of life that rivals man's own conquest of obstacles. "Fascinating," says Edwin C. Hill . . . "Tremendously interesting—" adds Ralph Thompson . . . "Unquestionably the scientific book of the year"—declares Carl Van Doren. (Strikingly illustrated with microphotographs).

# The Phoenix Nest

BY WILLIAM ROSE BENET

THE biggest space-fillers on the poetry shelf for several weeks have been five volumes of "The North American Book of Verse" (at three dollars per volume or fifteen the set) published by that undiscourageable "poetry publisher," Henry Harrison at 79 Fourth Avenue, the Village. The general impression made upon me by this row of stout, light blue volumes is that of looking around a room full of writers and failing to discover a single familiar face. I have never seen marshaled together the names of so many unknown versifiers. Each volume contains sections devoted to the poets of different states—though as the publisher says that none of the poems has appeared in any other anthology, apparently they have not been drawn from his former separate state anthologies. Any one volume contains work from eleven or twelve states. Each state is edited by a poet of that territory. I make no pretense of having read these volumes complete. I have dipped into them. I should say, from that sampling, that the general level of the work is neither good nor bad but indifferent. A great deal of it is like the magazine verse of the last quarter century. One section from Hawaii supplies a somewhat exotic touch. Altogether this is the largest collection of indubitably minor American verse that there has been for some time.

In an entirely different category is "An Anthology for the Enjoyment of Poetry" now issued as a companion volume to a new edition of Max Eastman's "The Enjoyment of Poetry" published by Scribners. The anthology is priced at three dollars and the analytical volume at two fifty. Both are worth having. The new edition of "The Enjoyment of Poetry," originally published over a quarter of a century ago and written then with adventurous excitement, is enlarged by other essays in esthetics and certain notes in refutation addressed to I. A. Richards, John Dewey, and Lewis Mumford. However much you may agree or disagree with Mr. Eastman's findings, the solid fact remains that his is one of the most intelligent contributions to the study of poetry as a living force that has been made in our time. When we come to the selections he has chosen for his anthology, "dividing the poems according as their prevailing values are of sensuous perception, emotion, action or idea," it seems to me that Mr. Eastman has written a sensible foreword—at least one with which I am, in the main, in agreement — and has made such choices as stamp the anthology with an identity of its own. That is all one can ask. No two human beings could ever completely agree as to choices, and these most certainly contribute to

the enjoyment of poetry. I cannot approve the inclusion of a fragment of a great ode by Andrew Marvell, with no explanation, as though it were a complete poem; but I rejoice in finding here, among more well known poems, Henley's "There's a Regret," Hodgson's "Ghoul Care," and Sara Bard Field's "November 2 A. M. Conspiracy."

A revised edition of the late Thomas Walsh's "The Catholic Anthology" recalls to mind a classical poet of fine taste and an endearing friend of old days. This anthology (Macmillan: \$1.69) is the work of a true scholar in the Catholic tradition, a Hispanist and translator, and one whose intelligence was so large as to include in his final section a group of "Catholic Poems by Non-Catholic Poets." To this George N. Shuster has added "Additional Poems by Catholic and Non-Catholic Poets," although one would have preferred to have them segregated rather than merely arranged alphabetically. That there has been great Catholic poetry stands without question. One has only to think of Lionel Johnson and Francis Thompson. But it is Thomas Walsh's selections in translation of the early Greek and Roman, Italian and Spanish and Irish poems of the early ages of faith that make his book definitive.

Rockland Editions at 350 West 31 Street, New York, publish with an introduction and notes by Thomas H. Johnson, "The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor," this being the first volume in a series on American Literature issued in coöperation with an editorial board consisting of Professors Howard Mumford Jones and Kenneth B. Murdock of Harvard, Stanley T. Williams of Yale, Robert E. Spiller of Swarthmore, Tremaine McDowell of the University of Minnesota, and Mark Van Doren of Columbia. A limited edition has been printed by the Spiral Press and is priced at six dollars. Taylor is an almost unknown colonial poet, an orthodox Puritan minister of the frontier village of Westfield, Mass. His devotional poems are frequently distinguished by flashing original phrase. When he cries spontaneously,

Shall I be made  
A sparkling Wildfire Shop.  
Where my dull spirits at the Fire-  
ball trade  
Do frisk and hop?  
And while the Hammer doth the  
Anvill pay,  
The fire ball matter sparkles  
e'ry way

he is quite taking, and his metaphorical brilliance is unusual in poetry of the period.

A new revised edition of Arthur Guiterman's "Ballads of Old New York," with a new introduction, will appeal to all lovers of Manhattan's history, and cognate to it is Joseph C.

Lincoln's "Rhymes of the Old Cape," which reminds of his own original "Cape Cod Ballads." Both books are illustrated, Mr. Guiterman's being published by Dutton at two dollars and Mr. Lincoln's by Appleton-Century at two-fifty. The latest volume by Edgar Lee Masters, "More People," comes also from the latter firm at the same price, but though its subject-matter is often interesting, the phrase of the poems is generally undistinguished, and the rhyme and meter occasionally incredibly bad, particularly in "Barbara and Mabel," as witness:

Thus on her way she heard that  
both her daughters  
Were in Paris, so she hastened  
there;  
There's a time when life goes wrong  
and totters,  
When one care begets another care.

And this, unfortunately, is no unusual instance.

W. J. Turner, an English poet who has been writing for over twenty years, has now had his "Selected Poems" published at three dollars by the Oxford University Press. His early poem "Romance" is internationally known, and he was well represented in William Butler Yeats's late Oxford anthology of modern poetry, but few Americans know Mr. Turner's work well enough. This versatile poet, music critic, essayist, and novelist is original and exciting in a number of quite different poems. Also from the Oxford Press comes Anne Ridler's "Poems" (\$2). Her idiom is original though a bit obscure at times. At others she pleases by her precision. Victoria Sackville-West, who, in the past, particularly in "The Land," has given us some remarkable poetry, offers in "Solitude" (Doubleday, Doran: \$1.75) a much thinner effort than usual, though in a traditional manner her expression is graceful and patrician. Two American women poets worth considering, one a veteran and one a newcomer, are Jessie B. Rittenhouse ("The Moving Tide: New and Selected Lyrics," Houghton Mifflin: \$2), and Eleanor Graham, recommended highly by Arthur Guiterman ("For These Moments," Stephen Daye Press, Brattleboro, Vermont, \$1.25). Miss Rittenhouse is well-known for her many services to American poetry, while one is glad to welcome the gay, bright, and brave Miss Graham, an inspiring teacher, whose verse is fresh and simple and clear.

## SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 288)

JOHN MILTON:  
"HISTORY OF BRITAIN"

For liberty hath a sharp and  
double edge fit only to be handled  
by just and virtuous men; to bad  
and dissolute it becomes a mis-  
chief unwieldy in their own hands.  
... For the sun, which we want,  
ripens wits as well as fruits.