

er is more powerful than the most powerful didactic statement.

Our first aim should be clarity. Poetry by "dissociation," the stream of consciousness, "surrealism," may still find a few devotees, but these can never provide the basis for a poetry of democracy. Few of us, even with long familiarity, "get" everything that Shakespeare put into "Hamlet," but anybody can get enough out of even a single showing to want to see it or read it again. Better for poetry, and possibly even for the poets, to fall short of perfection in essaying an ambitious theme, than to refine a cameo. The forms of narrative and dramatic poetry, whether for the stage, the screen, the airways, or the bedchamber, must be mastered. On one level at least—the level of the story, the action, the general purpose—the poem or play must be perfectly clear to anyone with normal intelligence.

But writing lucidly, ambitiously, and dramatically will only be a beginning; they are not enough in themselves. An objective, supra-personal poetry can only be written by poets with deep roots in the material and way of life they are celebrating. We should know our folkways, but we cannot write folk poetry. It is too late. Those who try to be "naive" will

be "quaint"; those who strain after ancient virtues will succeed only in being antique. Neither "regionalism" nor "nationalism" will be sufficient. The modern world is too interdependent; poetry can have no Maginot Line. To know oneself, one must know one's family. To know one's family, one must know one's region. To know one's region, one must know one's country. And to know one's country, one must know the world.

Poets who have succeeded in speaking for their time, and to the world, have been more than poets. Aeschylus was a soldier. Dante and Milton were statesmen. Shakespeare was an actor and stage-manager. Goethe, among many professions, was a biologist. Donne wrote his greatest poetry after he became Dean of St. Paul's. It was with Alexander Pope that literature for the first time became a profession; with the romantics and symbolists a hundred years later it was on the way to becoming a vice. Rimbaud, who gave up a promising career as a poet for East African trade and gun-smuggling in 1875, was the first to rebel against this ingrown preciousness. But he was too unbalanced by the tension of his conflict to go on writing.

There is none of this conflict between action and contemplation in sculpture. A good architect knows every inch of the ground before he retires to his drafting board. Painting is hard work. Even composing demands mastery—physical mastery—of one or more instruments. Is there any conceivable reason why writing, which takes in more territory than any of the other arts, should be confined to pushing a pen? Would Thomas Wolfe, if he had had any other outlet for his vast energy, have filled shelves of notebooks, not to mention his novels, with such a furious formless outpouring?

But there are other reasons why the poet should be a specialist in something beside his poetry. A Virgil, a Dante, even a Goethe could understand the work of his world as a whole. Today the world is too com-

plex. The attempt to understand it, as it were from the top down, can only lead to confusion, to further "dissociation" in the mind of the artist. The poet must understand some part of his world well. He must be of his world in order to speak compellingly either for it or to it.

There is a hint of it in Eliot's plays, though Eliot can never belong to our world. There is more than a hint of it in MacLeish's epoch-making radio scripts. It is suggested in the method of Louis MacNeice's "Autumn Journal": the parts about his work in the Greek classroom and his trip to Spain are the best parts. I see it in the unpublished poetry of A. Fleming MacLiesh. I see it in James Agee's tremendous "Three Tenant Families," to be published this fall.

What I am here trying to formulate as a theory, I have myself endeavored to practise. I have been working on a narrative poem, "The Airmen," for some time. Its value, I feel, will depend to no small extent on how well my understanding of history, my ability to report, and my instruction in flying have equipped me for the job. I know it would be better if I were a better social philosopher, a better reporter, and a better flyer.

Antoine de St. Exupéry, whose life and writings are the living record of our search for a new world, loved the earth but was far enough removed from it to speak with complete integrity. The message he flashed may be capable of guiding us out of the Cone of Silence:

Moral greatness consists in responsibility. . . . To feel ashamed at the sight of what seems unmerited misery. . . . To take pride in victory won by comrades. . . . To feel one is contributing to the building of a world. If death comes, hooked by a cliff, it will not be for the tradesman but in obedience which enobles sacks of mail once stowed. . . . Loving not danger but life, renouncing the "choice" of what night club to visit. . . . Love is not in gazing at each other but outward together in the same direction.



The Unquiet Field

by Beatrice Kean Seymour

In this fine example of the *chronicle novel*, Mrs. Kean Seymour shows the reappearance, over a hundred years, of that "modern" spirit which inevitably conflicts with the contemporary. This book, the latest in a long list of fine stories, contains a complete double romance (one for each generation). \$2.50

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Lines for a Little House

By Thomas Caldecot Chubb

HERE where the clean and salty strong sea breeze
Blows steadily and sure, day-long, night-long,
Making, in feathery, gale-wrenched tamarisk trees
Slow tranquil speaking, slow and soothing song;
Here under the white and healing Bermudian sun,
Here in the warm and soft Bermudian rain,
Ease dwelleth; calm a fine abode hath won;
Life is excellent; life is whole and sane.
And hospitality and warm-hearted grace
The guardians are of this Hesperides.
O ye great gods, be good to this good place.
Grant it prosperity. Grant it ever peace.

POETRY IN AMERICA

(Continued from page 4)

that is not quite so simple as reading prose. But that is no reason why you should give it up as a great mystery. The best poetry says something clearly. The rhythm, the rhyme, and the metre—though in a great deal of modern poetry you will not find them—are designed to enhance the expression. In fact rhythm is the foundation of all human expression, as it exists in the beating of your heart. And more and more, I believe, that modern poets are returning to contact with the public, are turning back from the blind alley and dead end into which overintellectualization led them, and desiring to be understood by the people. I think that is the latest trend, and high time too.

Also, in the last twenty years in this country, there has been evident a desire on the part of the poets to

explore human history, and particularly American history, in verse; to tell stories about this world, and this country, either of the past or of the present. This is welcome. Every full-fledged poet desires to try his powers in narrative. Novels in verse are now a recognized form; though, of course, they go directly back to Chaucer. Yet it still remains for a poet of our time to give us any such *comédie humaine*. In fact, no matter how modern any trend may seem, it is usually involved with the rediscovery of something lost. Hart Crane and Stephen Spender, both moderns, rediscovered the work of a recluse Jesuit poet of a former century, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Seventeenth century John Donne, the Dean of Saint Paul's, has had a considerable influence upon American poetry in the twentieth century. But there is also this. Five years ago one of our most notable American poets, Horace Gregory, spoke of "that indigenous vitality that has always fed the veins of American poetry." It has triumphed

finally, I think, over foreign influence, and gives today a noticeable flavor to the best American verse, which has assimilated what it needed from other literatures. After all, we are a polyglot nation. In that lies our greatest weakness and greatest strength in this challenging hour. But what we need above all, to face the hour, are order and precision, and these are exactly the qualities which poets have always endeavored to cultivate.

And, in very truth, our poets are continuing to write, and endeavoring to interpret a time of the most bewildering and cataclysmic change. It is they who will keep us in touch with fundamental wisdom and virtue and the values that do not alter. Listen to them now, and draw strength and sustenance from them, for their work is a rampart against barbarism and they hold no truck with the tyrants of the bloody hand! Even in this darkest of all days, beleaguered England must take heart from the words of one of her great poets of the stoic spirit:

The kings with half the earth at
heel have marched from lands
of morning,

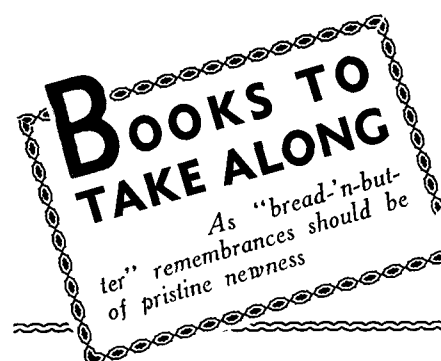
There stallions drink the rivers
up their spears benight the air,
And he who falls will die for naught
and home there's no returning—
*The Spartans on the sea-wet rock
sat down and combed their hair.*

War of Nerves

By Leonard Bacon

OUR role is middling
As one discerns.
America's fiddling
While Europe burns.
Times are contrarious,
There's no gainsaying.
It's no Stradivarius
That we are playing.
And the air we are mangling
Could be sweeter.
We are not untangling
A Bach partita.
Ah no! We are pounding
Politically
At themes ill-sounding
From Tin Pan Alley
What was achieved in
Times gone by
Is not believed in
By low or high
Who cherish a theory
That they can live
In an empty, dreary,
Negative,
And thoroughly boring
Continuum
By simply ignoring
What is to come.
We shall, we chuckle.
Get by perhaps,
If we only knuckle
To the Japs.
And no doubt we shall
Escape with a scare,

If we speak total—
Italians fair
Who view us indeed
As simply a finer
"Hog of the breed
Of Poland-China."
The knaves will desert you
In the hour of the terror,
Who brag of your virtue,
Gloss over your error,
Flatter inanity,
Say you're too moral,
And have too much humanity
To take up a quarrel.
Where shall we find it,
The spirit sound,
With the truth behind it
No words confound,
That doesn't sit tight,
That is not smug,
Whose hearing and sight
Are not dulled by a drag?
We must have leading
Less suspected
Than place-hounds pleading
To be elected,
Know instincts urgent
As those that call
The salmon resurgent
Up the white fall,
And get a guiding
That will take us forth
Like the wild geese sliding
In the Spring sky North.



ANYA

by Joy Davidman

Glowing, sensuous, alive, this story of a Jewish maid, wife and mother in a Czarist Russia "pale" of seventy years ago will recall to your mind D. H. Lawrence at his best. There is poetic artistry in this story, and all the five senses alert to warmth, color and feeling in the heroine and her setting.

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