

# Poets of the Months

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IN Norfolk, Connecticut, the publishing house known as "New Directions" instituted, about a year ago, a series of poetry pamphlets, issued monthly to subscribers at a charge of four dollars a year. Each number, which presents a "Poet of the Month," was printed by a different fine press. Single copies have sold, paper-covered, for thirty-five cents, in boards for a dollar. So far, over a dozen pamphlets have been printed under the direction of James Laughlin, and now the 1942 series has begun with a selection of some poems by Robert Herrick—for the series is not confined to newcomers.

The presses involved, so far, have included the Merrymount Press of Boston, The Harbor Press of New York, The Prairie Press of Iowa, and the Ward Ritchie Press of California, to give some idea of the range. The merit of the work included is, naturally, uneven; but the very new poets have been presented with justification.

Among the poets, mostly American, William Carlos Williams and Malcolm Cowley may be called veterans. Their work has already been appraised by American critics. Williams is the far longer established, dating from the early days of Alfred Kreyenborg's "Others" and the inception of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. By some today he is regarded as one of our finest American writers. He is caviar to the general and an outstanding independent. Malcolm Cowley reviews for the *New Republic* in his function of literary editor, and appraises much of the latest poetry. His own verse seems to be somewhat of a sideline; but he has done enough

to evince a marked talent, eclectic, still tinged by a lost bohemian existence, but also, at times, as American as a woodchuck. His most moving poem to date is "the last international" in his third section of "The Dry Season," called "The City in the Sea." This is a phantasmagoric parade of ghosts. If it had been written by Rimbaud it would still be in process of rediscovery.

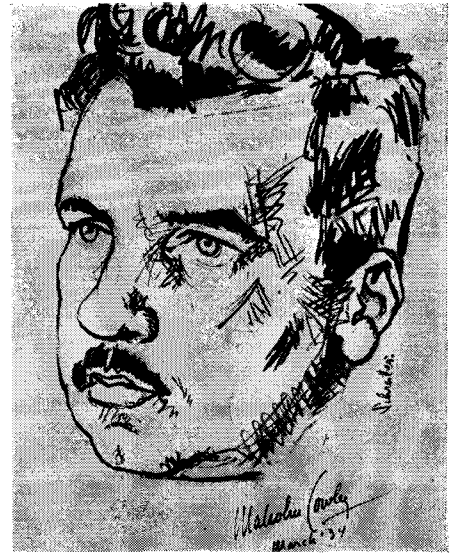
Cowley, however, closed the year's dozen of the New Directions poets. Williams had opened that year, then had come Donne, and the third choice was Harry Brown, who has just given us so fine an American narrative in "The Poem of Bunker Hill." "The End of a Decade," so far as I know, was his first book, and conveyed indubitable promise. If Brown outgrows certain mannerisms inevitable in a young man subjected to all the chi-chi that seems inextricable from "modernist" poetry, he may very likely develop into one of the best American writers of our time. He has already shown that there is power in his elbow.

Howard Baker's "A Letter from the Country" that followed (his "The Ode to the Sea" having been praised by Robert Penn Warren) was selected from work of the past ten years. It is averagely cryptic, as modernist verse goes; though the opening poem, which sees a man about a dog, is clear enough. And there is neat, biting irony in such verse (about bombed Madrid) as "Violation of Logic." That ode to the sea has fine moments, and the letter from the country at least a terse and memorable fabulous ending. Mr. Baker's forms are traditional, his speech is, in the main, remotely classical.

Theodore Spencer, our next number in the series, with "The Paradox in the Circle," I have found the most brilliant and original of the lot of poets, though within a strictly limited domain. He writes poems to be read aloud, and puts them on phonograph records. He uses the refrain as it has not been used since the days of the pre-Raphaelites. This poet is a wizard and a warlock. Proof?

Prester John had apes of gold  
To talk away the almond hours;  
King Alexander, we are told,  
Had sudden birds in golden flowers  
To bubble out music all day long,  
And ravish his dark heart with song.

"The Shell" is a marvelous little poem, and "A Narrative" as De la Mareishly amusing a string of rhymes as one could meet of a summer's day. For sheer pleasure I can heartily rec-



—Drawing by Schreiber.  
Malcolm Cowley

ommend Mr. Spencer's book. There is wisdom too.

The late John Wheelwright, whose selected poems are introduced by the critic R. P. Blackmur, possessed an odd and peculiar gift, and his poem on Amy Lowell, persisting after death in "Dinner Call," is a favorite of mine. He is for the highly literate and the Brahminical. Josephine Miles presents an enchanted artichoke in "Poems on Several Occasions." Delmore Schwartz's much-praised dramatic narrative, "Shenandoah," I have found quite remarkably inept, in that I feel Arthur Kober could have done the prose much better, and that the spirit of Shenandoah speaks in very bad blank verse. It is so ambitious an attempt, that it seems at times positively embarrassing. Dudley Fitts, whose "More Poems from the Palatine Anthology" followed Mr. Schwartz's poem in sequence, has already given us a collection like this. His translations are lively—"Rumoresque Senum Severiorum" from Marcus Argentarius is vividly amusing. There are other diversions here, and a few brevities.

F. T. Prince is a young English poet, originally introduced by T. S. Eliot. His longer poems seem to me very much like "double talk." I am always upon the verge of knowing what they mean, and yet, for all their intense literacy and erudite suavity, they make Jabberwocky seem plain. On the other hand, some of the shorter poems are simple and moving. The general tone of this pamphlet is sensitive and melancholy, somewhat hermaphroditic. A fine ear for the music of language. The series closed with some poems from "Das Stundenbuch" by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Babette Deutsch. Translations from the German always seem to me singularly unmemorable. And they do not sound at all like the German language.



—Drawing by Naar.  
Rainer Maria Rilke

JANUARY 17, 1942

# Issues and Problems of Today

*THIS AGE OF FABLE.* By Gustav Stolper. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1941. 369 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by GUENTER REIMANN

DR. STOLPER has written a book dealing with almost all issues and pertinent economic and social problems of our world today. He writes on capitalism and socialism, on competition and planning, on democracy and totalitarianism, on inflation and deflation, on Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Russia, and last but not least, also on the United States. His book is stimulating. Dr. Stolper writes in a fluent, journalistic style even on complicated problems—often too journalistic—for which Dr. Stolper apologizes in his introduction: "This book does not pretend to open new vistas of scientific knowledge. Most of what it tells has been told by others, and I am sure in a better and more profound way."

Dr. Stolper tries to destroy the "fables" created by the defenders or apologists of totalitarianism as well as by all those who "propose to reduce the complexities of our time to simple, plausible formulas." In the first part of his book he deals with the various arguments which have been popularized with the assumption that capitalism no longer works. His chapter on "Capitalist Automatism" is written in the style of Adam Smith. Describing the complex gold problem, the author explains that "the tie between the gold price and commodity prices is completely cut," but he also believes that the international gold standard will be reintroduced in case of an Allied victory, while an—improbable—Nazi victory would compel the United States to give up buying foreign gold. In his chapters on "Production For Profit vs. Production For Use," and "Poverty amidst Plenty," the author asserts that Government interference and State "planning" have created more economic evils than the competitive economy, and that the latter would have achieved better results if left alone.

In the second part of his book Dr. Stolper takes up the "fable" of "Lebensraum" for the "have-not nations," and makes a special point that bankers as well as big industrialists were taking part in foreign ventures which were part of the imperialist program "only under pressure of their Government." He defends the British system against the "fable" of degeneracy. The Russian system was able to build up a powerful military machine, but it cannot effectively work in peace time. In his final chapter, the author makes

a passionate appeal for the resumption of "a new faith" reviving old ideals.

This short survey is inadequate. Many problems are posed and disputed which cannot be described here. The reviewer does not feel satisfied with some of the answers the author gives, and even feels that not only did he not destroy many of the old fables, but created a number of new ones. This was perhaps to a certain extent inevitable, because Dr. Stolper defends principles that cannot be tested.

Sometimes Dr. Stolper simplifies his arguments too much. Thus he writes that every producer who wants to make a profit must produce something that is "useful." Therefore, capitalism is production for use, and insofar fulfills the ideal of the socialists. But it is not enough that this product can be "used" or consumed; it also must be exchangeable or saleable. This dual character—production for use and for exchange—disappears in the author's argument.

Dr. Stolper seems to believe that "the political environment" (Washington-New Deal?) was responsible for the reluctance of capitalists to make new investments and therefore the Government must be made responsible for the absence of a new investment boom. Of course, it will never be



Gustav Stolper

possible to find out what would have happened if the Government had not interfered.

"This Age of Fable" is a provocative, partisan work, in defense of the views of "liberal conservatives" who are against Governmental interference in economic life, and who believe that this war must be won for ideals "fitting the great world power to which all mankind looks for leadership and salvation."

## Tiny Refugee

*JOURNEY FOR MARGARET.* By W. L. White. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1941. 256 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by NYM WALES

THIS is one of a plethora of Britain-takes-it books, yet it is a charming and unusual human-interest story, centering around the actual adoption of a war orphan. W. L. White, the journalist from Kansas, whose first book was "What People Said," sailed to England on one of the fifty United States destroyers transferred to the British Navy. In addition to reporting the war, his wife had given him a personal commission to adopt a refugee child. He decided upon Margaret, three and a half years old, with big black eyes that looked at life "with piteous intensity." All during his stay in bomb-torn London, White visited the little girl at the Anna Freud rest home, and became fascinated with her not only in an individual way but as a study in wartime child psychology. With his charge now safe in New York, the author writes: "No longer do we have to make the

blackout in Margaret's room, closing every curtain tightly before she will go to sleep, as we did the first month. And she understands that nothing ever drops out of the shiny transport planes that glitter overhead, hardly looks up from her play as they buzz over Central Park on their way to La Guardia field."

The book is humorous in its crisp journalese style, and not too heavy on the sentimental side. It is also an exciting diary of adventure and incident, including a mine-sweeping experience in the English Channel. Of the bombing, he remarks that the Nazi victims were "only 1,500 a week, which is a negligible rise in the death rate for a city of 6,000,000. You are infinitely safer, living in London, than you would be if you were a Negro infant living in rural Mississippi." White is very American in his reactions, and it is interesting that he should record: "Never in any country have I seen the various social orders mixing with so warm an enthusiasm. When Joe Kennedy says democracy is dead in Great Britain, I can't for the life of me think what he means."