

The Phoenix Nest

THESE has been some discussion as to whether any poetry worthy of the struggle has yet come out of this war. It can certainly be said that Alice Duer Miller's "The White Cliffs," which has recently, I see, been increasingly referred to as "The White Cliffs of Dover," and is now likely to become a second "Mrs. Miniver" in the movies, was inspired by the war and the desperate position in which England once stood. Mrs. Miller's poem may not be great verse, but it expressed what many Americans felt and it was written with craftsmanship and feeling. Here before me are several other attempts by well-known writers to put into their conception of verse certain aspects of the War. Dunkirk inspired a poem by Robert Nathan, recently reviewed in these pages, and a ballad by the present writer which was printed in F.P.A.'s late *Conning Tower* of the *New York Post*. Robert Nathan has contributed other striking poems about the war to the *SRL*, the magazine section of the *New York Times*, and *Harper's Magazine*. Edna St. Vincent Millay tried her hand with "There Are No Islands Any More" (addressed to "Dear Isolationist") and other poems in her 1940 volume, "Make Bright the Arrows." Somehow, in a small poem from a Hampshire, England, newspaper, there seemed to be as good a description of what it feels

like to be bombed as any we have read. The verses are by one Carola Mills, of whom we know nothing else:

Rigid I lie,
Holding my breath—
Each thudding blow
Must end in death.
No time to think
Or to repent
Till all the stick
Of bombs is spent.
No time to fear,
Only surprise.
My body here
Unbroken lies.
A final crash
A roar like hell—
Silence at last
And all is well.
But in my heart
A rage that grows,
A debt I owe
To these my foes.

Of course, in a recent poetry number of *The Saturday Review*, we printed the poem of an actual young American flier who was killed, and several other good poems bearing upon the war. No, perhaps there have been no masterpieces yet! There has been no English poem, for instance, as definitive as Rupert Brooke's, "If I should die, think only this of me—" There has been some good propaganda work in verse. Chiefly there has been verse inspired by events, though no really good verse on Bataan or on Pearl Harbor has yet come forth.

On November 5, 1940 an ancient British armed merchant cruiser went to the rescue of her convoy, racing toward an attacking Nazi pocket battleship, a German raider,—plunging through a blast of 11-inch shells to get within range, all her guns blazing. "We realized we had no chance," a sublieutenant said, "but our captain had promised that if we ever ran

across an enemy we would get in as close as we could. So we tried to close in." "It was the navy's job," he added, "and it was done." Within two hours the *Jervis Bay* was a gutted hulk, but twenty-nine of the convoy of thirty-eight ships were saved. They had scattered in the darkness.

Gene Fowler, well-known to Hollywood, made a ballad in free verse out of Captain Fogarty Feegan and his gallant craft. He called it "The Jervis Bay Goes Down," and donated his full royalties and the publisher's (Random House) entire net profit to Bundles for Britain. In February, 1941, Ronald Colman recited the poem in a nationwide broadcast for a "Help Greece" program. But multigraphed copies had been widespread before publication. Here are some lines from a poem at least as gallant in intention as was the heroic deed:

A salvo comes with the top roll of
the battleship.
And now the ensign—
Emblem with the blue field—
Is shot away.
Enraged, bloody, rocking on his
heels,
Fogarty Feegan roars
"Hoist another ensign, damme, Mr.
Wilson, sir!
Hoist another flag,
That we may fight like Englishmen!"
A boatswain procures a flag from
the locker—
A flag used for the burial of the
dead at sea.
"Here, sir," he cries,
As to a brace he bends
The Banner of England.

In the Fall of 1941, Clemence Dane, the English novelist, published through Doubleday, Doran, "Trafalgar Day 1940" in a paperbound pamphlet. This also should be for the record, for it tells of the bombing of London. Her medium is also free verse, in partial rhyme. And why doesn't the radio use more really good stuff in this medium, written by our own poets? The idea



For Would-Be Invaders

By Joseph Joel Keith

THIS is the land of the child, dark gentlemen:
it is the land where minds of children
are as free as the flowing waters:
it is the land where children go cleanly as books,
through the green places where a sweet wild beauty
awaits the picking fingers, awaits the budding heart:
here is a road where there is time for walking and dreaming:
here is a hill where there is time for climbing and singing:
here is a meadow where there is time for growing, growing—
where each might go his separate way . . . But the chorus
of the voices of children is blended in singing of free land,
as free as the green of the summer, as warm as the summer.
This is no land of the marching children, gentlemen:
it is the young land, youth that has come of age quickly:
it utters the purpose and wisdom of age, dark gentlemen,
but it is a land that cherishes always
the freedom of youth in its heart.

that the ordinary listener can't understand it is nonsense, Lynn Fontanne made Alice Duer Miller's poem widely known, and it was perfectly understood.

The whispering spirit of Nelson runs through Clemence Dane's poem, and the refrain, "How dangerous it is to wake the dead!" Miss Dane comes nearer real poetry than Fowler, but a fine spirit burns in each.

Our own Alfred Kreymborg, friend of all American poets, has turned to American themes in ballads of his own. The book is paper-bound and published by the Dryden Press, 103 Park Avenue, for the very modest sum of ten cents. All these ballads were written since Pearl Harbor. They would be good songs for our armies to sing. The "Ballad of Valley Forge" has a great ending, fit for a great tune:

And you were there and I was there
And every father's son
Was born in that white wilderness
Beyond oblivion.
And Valley Forge is in us all
As Winter strikes again—
The twenty thousand living feet
A hundred million men!

Mr. Kreymborg's "There's a Nation" has been set to music by Alex North (published by the Edward B. Marks Music Corporation), "Ballad of the Lincoln Penny" by Elie Siegmeister.

In her latest book, just recently reviewed in this periodical, Genevieve Taggard has some very interesting experiments in communal chants, which have been set to music; and in her "Plain-Chant for America," Katherine Garrison Chapin has several striking "Ballad-Poems for Chorus."

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.


CYCLES IN PRISONDOM

(Continued from page 9)

tary importance, fascism curtails the ceremonial of prison life, a thing which no reformer had ever done. Also, the jaw-dislocating beatings that went on in the Sevilla prison seem to prove that fascism, while reviving the ancient craft of the torturer, has robbed it of its ceremony and its skill. Time was when a long apprenticeship had to be served before a man might become a licensed torturer. As he progressed in his studies he was protected against perversion by a tradition as rigid as that which governed the training of the Valencin fan makers and the Barcelona painters of altar pieces. In the moment of exercise passion was disallowed. A torturer who persistently laughed at his patient or who invariably gave an extra twist to the wheel would have been disbarred or unfrocked. Today, however, a Spaniard has only to profess certain doctrines to be admitted to Falange, the Spanish fascist party. The merest profession of contempt for democracy, together with the shouting of stereotyped phrases about the rebuilding of the Spanish empire in South America and your natural sadist is admitted to the Mystery. He may walk into a prison and exercise his vocation without having even the least desire to extract the truth from his patient. This is degrading to the gaolor's trade. If, as an English-writer has said, the hangman's profession at five pounds sterling a drop must be largely a labor

of love, then the rewards of gaolory must be chiefly psychical and therapeutic. It must give him a sense of superiority or nothing at all. Fascism, then, renders Prison a disservice. It is its own reduction to an absurdity.

These are the lessons of Brother Koestler's book. But yet another profit you will derive from it. Your anger at having allowed yourself to be fooled into betraying Spain, all Europe, and all the world, will give power to your bayonet. Perhaps you will fight to avenge little Nicolás. Perhaps "Dialogue with Death" will help you to save yourself.




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SCRIBNERS



The Criminal Record			
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Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
TINSLEY'S BONES <i>Percival Wilde</i> (Random House: \$2)	Rural Conn. conflagration destroys farmhouse and author resident. Coroner Slocum and jury do the rest.	Translucent as mystery but uproariously funny, gorgeously characterized and a joy from start to finish.	Yes sir!
NO COFFIN FOR THE CORPSE <i>Clayton Rawson</i> (Little, Brown: \$2.)	New York millionaire shot in mansion haunted by another gent who won't stay dead. Enter Merlini.	Liberal education in spiritism racket as well as closely knit and exciting yarn with wind-up that's nearly unguessable.	Top billing
FOLIO ON FLORENCE WHITE <i>Will Oursler</i> (Simon & Schuster: \$2.)	Harassed girl, out of jail for theft, accused of slaying ex-office associate. Manhattan lawyer saves her.	Refreshingly different in manner of telling, capably plotted, but over-emotionalized, and with some specially gruesome bits.	Better grade
THE BODY IN THE BARRAGE BALLOON <i>Colin Curzon</i> (Macmillan: \$2.)	British officer slain by member of far-flung spy organization, which is tracked down and broken up by other Britons.	Murder is convenient peg on which to hang extravagantly amusing mixture of fun and thrills with hair-raising finish.	Fantastic

Shear the Black Sheep

is David Dodge's new thriller which mystery fans have at once placed on their A-1 shelf beside his "Death and Taxes." James Whitney, battling CPA, again is the hero of a hectic week-end and Kitty McLeod adds romantic interest.

\$2.00

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