

THESPIAN

HE played his part hilariously well,
The critics in pronouncing are specific.

A star is found whose lustre one should tell
Dear friends about. His talent is terrific.

His ready art accomplishing the feat
Of tottering while limbs are most dependable,

To simulate the drunkard on the street,
Is vivid and exultingly commendable.

Each gesture throws more glamor on the play:
He makes his fellow-players look quite rustic.

Our merry crowd continues on its way
Exuberant with praising and prognostic.
Turning, we see our new ascended star . . .

Who staggers from the theatre to a bar.

MARIO SPERACIO.

Here are some random observations upon an American poet who is an admirable subject for resurrection.

The first book by Louise Imogen Guiney was published in 1884, when she was twenty-three. I well remember when I originally read excerpts from her work in "The Younger American Poets," by Jessie B. Rittenhouse, brought out in Boston forty-two years ago, and now excessively rare. Those were the days when a Boston paper reminded us of what Bliss Carman said of L. I. G. as she appeared "on the wintry downs, by the Scituate sea," at the hour when

. . . By the early train
Light-hearted mirth will come again
To race across-lots with a crew
Of St. Bernards . . . contagious Lou!

and a Boston paper added:

Whoso loiters along the ways that lead from sober Pinckney Street to the "long mall" of the old Common, may chance to see "Contagious Lou"—that is only one of the hundred quaint friend-names of Boston's shyest, highest woman singer, Louise Guiney—speeding light as "rifle-smoke blown on the wind," beside majestic Lillo, highest—but not at all shyest!—of Boston's St. Bernards. Something of Boston, as old Boston lives in the hearts of its lovers, is in that picture. The simplicity of large and certain achieve-

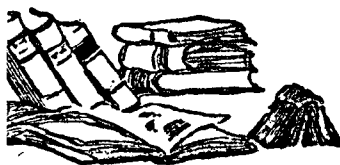
ment: the fearlessness of conventions, the life above the bondage of the accidental.

I recall that Miss Rittenhouse's quotation of a particular poem by Miss Guiney, "A Friend's Song for Simoisius"—which now, by the way, draws commendation from the editors of the recent "A History of American Poetry"—was incomplete. The editors mentioned take their full version directly from Miss Guiney's last book, "Happy Ending," but Miss Rittenhouse omitted the verse, "With foot-step separate and slow—etc." And its place in the poem was apparently shifted from after to before the following verse, later on, because, with her "passion for perfection," the poet was forever correcting and amending her work. Miss Rittenhouse also omitted the final verse. In this verse the last line before the refrain was changed by L. I. G. from the original version reading "To save us from the perishing."

That matter of refrain in "A Friend's Song" is interesting. It appears after every verse, in "A Roadside Harp" first published in 1893. Later on L. I. G. dropped the refrain, save after the first and last verses. To me, the monotonous repetition of it after each verse, as I first read the poem, lent it an elegiac value that the later version does not have. Some words Miss R. had to say of Miss Guiney's work then, should be valuable to poets now:

She uses figure and symbol with an individual freshness of conception, but always that which is structural with the thought, so that one can rarely detach a stanza or even fugitive lines of her poems without loss of value. She develops the theme without over-developing it, which is the restraint of the artist.

Scholarship with an ecclesiastical tinge finally so absorbed the Catholic poet that it impeded the flow of original composition. But what a workman and craftsman she was! This is shown best if one will examine an early pamphlet, "Nine Sonnets Written at Oxford," decorated by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and privately issued by Herbert Copeland and F. H. Day on Christmas 1895, printed by the



University Press in Cambridge, Mass.; and then look at the textual changes in these sonnets as they appear in "Happy Ending." I am indebted for the pamphlet mentioned, as I am for many reliques of and books by Miss Guiney, and a unique portrait, to the extraordinary generosity of Mrs. May I. O'Brien of Marshfield, Mass. Mrs. O'Brien has also, in the same spirit, sent me bound files of the old *Chap-Book*, published by Stone & Kimball, both in its original small monthly size and in its later larger fortnightly format. Among these many numbers, that for June 15, 1895, opens with L. I. G.'s famous "On the Fly-Leaf of Clarendon's History of the Rebellion" set in antique type, a poem rather made fun of by the editors of "A History of American Poetry," as unlikely to have been appreciated by a favorite of the poets, Lord Falkland—or by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester! But whatever Lucius Cary (Secretary of State in 1642, who reluctantly joined the King's side and got himself killed at Newbury) might have thought of the enthusiasm of the poem for the "starry cavaliers," the later Lionel Johnson, who wrote magnificently on the statue of King Charles I, would, I am sure, have applauded it. I myself hold no brief for the Stuarts, and think The Divine Right of Kings one of the worst ideas ever hatched in the human brain; but, nevertheless, Miss Guiney wrote here quite as well as most of the Cavalier poets, and that is high praise. A poem of hers that her modern historians somehow resist quoting shall end my remarks. It is from "The Martyrs' Idyl" of 1899—and, again to advert to emendations, Miss Guiney first wrote the second line of the last verse, "Nor wall in clay mine agonies and joys." It was changed, in "Happy Ending" to "And wander free amid my freeborn joys." Maybe mistakenly, I like it as printed here:

DEO OPTIMO MAXIMO

All else for use, one only for desire;
Thanksgiving for the good, but
thirst for Thee:
Up from the best, whereof no man
need tire.
Impel Thou me.

Delight is menace, if Thou brood
not by,
Power a quicksand, Fame a gathering
jeer.
Oft as the morn, (though none of
earth deny
These three are dear,)

Wash me of them, that I may be re-
newed,
Nor wall in clay activities and joys:
O close my hand upon Beatitude!
Not on her toys.

A bientot.

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

The Saturday Review

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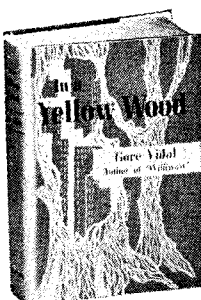
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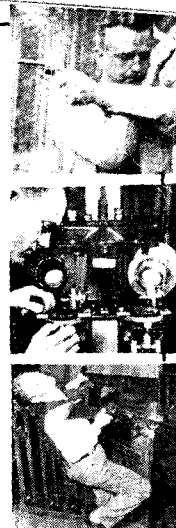


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