



—Pach.

John Hall Wheelock—"... energy."

Fifty Year Harvest

"Poems Old and New," by John Hall Wheelock (Scribners. 203 pp. \$3.50), represents a lifetime of writing by a poet now seventy-one years old.

By Winfield Townley Scott

JOHAN HALL WHEELOCK'S career as poet is a curious one. It is not exceptional for a lyric poet to be prolific in his youth—as Wheelock was—and then to run thin and dry in his forties—as Wheelock did: his "Poems, 1911-1936," published exactly twenty years ago, had the dead air of a closed cupboard, the sad air of business not so much completed as broken off. But what is really curious, and all but unique, is the revival of his talent in the past ten years; better still, the improvement of it.

Now at seventy-one, Wheelock has published in "Poems Old and New" a volume of nine sections: seven of them are selections from his earlier books (some of the poems dating back half a century), and the eighth and ninth present the new work of the last decade. There can be no question of the superiority of many of the recent pages over Wheelock's earlier performances.

This is in part by default. In the bulk of the poems there is nothing to alter the finding, made by Louis Untermeyer long ago, of "desperate sincerity lost in foggy generalities, genuine poetry floundering in a wash of rhetoric." There is something unreal and unnecessary about it: charges

which, if true, are among the most fatal one can make about poetry. The moment a poem strikes one as "made up" it is a dead poem, and repeatedly one has the sensation in Wheelock's selected pages of unexpectedly walking in on a naked, unknown corpse.

Yet there are familiar features, not wholly identifiable but as though it were a composite of half-remembered features. These poems of the beauty of life, of lost love, of the sea and the seasons, of self-pity are all couched in a language so tritely and flatly literary that one gropes about trying to discover their sources of style. Where did this poetic impulse fetch these manners? Swinburne, Henley, and Whitman have been mentioned in connection with John Hall Wheelock; but one feels also a tired Tennysonian air, the decadent air of the 1890s in general and of Oscar Wilde's poems in particular, and some coincidental resemblance to the romanticism of Wheelock's contemporary, Rupert Brooke. It seems, in any case, a *mélange* of *fin de siècle*.

There is a make-show of energy, vitiated by insistent clichés. Silences of the grave, great mysteries, far horns, love as breaking the bread and wine—these are everywhere. There is the reliance on the "romantic" word such as *oriels*—"heaven's high oriels." There is the overthoughtfulness of "sweet, silver singing of thin bells," functioning for no sake but its own. There is such sentimentality as the supposition that "The waters in between / Are doubtful—half in hope, and half in fear." And such affirmation as "Splendid it is to live and glorious to die" (here the tradition is pure Theodore Roosevelt), which is as boyish as it is meaningless.

The reader familiar with Wheelock's poetry will observe a notable amount of revision. Here, as an example, are the first four lines of a sonnet as published hitherto:

These are the hours of darkness
wont to bring
The somber revelation: heaven
betrays
Her very secret now—the starry
maze,
The forest of the worlds, where
death is king.

And as revised:

These are the hours of darkness
that shall bring
The primal revelation: heaven
betrays
Her very secret now—the starry
maze,
The splendor beyond all imagin-
ing.

The effort is to bring the language into a simpler, more natural tone; and to make, one can say, better sense. It is this effort—to abandon rhetoric, to walk without the embroidered coat—which makes the forty or more new poems in Wheelock's book so much more meaningful reading, so much more *real*. One can say "against" some of the recent poems that the pulse is low and the language meandering, but on the whole their fresher vocabulary guarantees an immediacy and poignancy never achieved in the earlier work.

Of the two sections of new poems the first is light verse. It is well turned, often with symbolic undertones of literary satire.

But what one would like to know—it would be an interesting tool for criticism—is whether John Hall Wheelock worked his revival and improvement of talent via these light verse poems? Did the cooler, more objective, better controlled serious poems arise from what he learned at arm's length in playing with verse? Did a discovery of comparative non-involvement lead him to the old man's way of speaking, as Wheelock says, "to his own heart"? I shall go out on the limb and guess that this was the case.

MISTRESS OF ALLUSION: No one—repeat no one—can handle a literary allusion in poetry with the wit, grace, and joy that Helen Bevington does in "A Change of Sky" (Houghton Mifflin, \$3.50). Phrases from Pepys's Diary, Stevenson, Yeats, Cowper, words from Isaak Walton and Dylan Thomas melt into the language of her poems, as they are indeed the language of her country. She travels. She is the delightful and delighted kind of person to whom inn-signs like "The Amenities" occur, this on the London Road in Surrey; or in Connecticut "The Mystic Power Co." Van Gogh's trees she sees are the models for the trees at Arles. "One saw everything his way." Mrs. Bevington's gift is that she knows what the poets, diarists, and novelists said of the places in that wide country of hers, and sees it their way. For us everything seeing it her way has a special shine on it.

Recognition, of course, is the pleasure in allusion. One thinks of listing her authors, then her streets, painters; then must include music, newspapers, plays, animals. And though her kind of play with allusion would lead some poets to parody and quickly hence to obscurity, never Helen Bevington. She has the sure touch and the good ear that good poets have, serious or light.

—JOHN HOLMES.

IRELAND

Maker of a Nation

"De Valera and the March of a Nation," by Mary M. Bromage (Noonday Press. 328 pp. \$4.95), is a study of one of the few surviving creators of modern Ireland. Mary M. Colum, Irish-American critic, reviews it.

By Mary M. Colum

ENTHUSIASTIC and admiring women biographers often can damage a hero more than can an enemy because of a lack of objective approach. Eamon De Valera is a great man who has done a lot for his country and other small countries into the bargain. But he is not, as Mary M. Bromage, author of *"De Valera and the March of a Nation,"* seemingly thinks, the sole, or even the chief creator of modern Ireland. That creation took many generations, many men, many battles, and many defeats. De Valera is one of the surviving figures who has helped to make it, and he happens to have a more romantic appeal than the others.

The man who formulated the philosophy and laid down the policy that made Ireland a modern state was the unromantic Arthur Griffith with the Sinn Féin policy, who was described by Austin Chamberlain as "small, quiet, drab," and by Churchill as having the air of a tired scholar. As a matter of fact, though not what was called a "physical force man," Arthur Griffith was an able fighting man with no personal ambitions that anyone could see, but a passionate desire to get his country out of the morass it was in. The commanding military figure in the group was Michael Collins, who risked his life every day and finally died at the hands of his countrymen. When, as a member of the Irish delegation, he met the great team of British statesmen he impressed them with his technical grasp of affairs, from financial relations to the disposition of naval and air forces.

Ireland is a very difficult country to write about and especially for an American, because few people know much about Ireland or Irish history here, and the educated Irish middle classes are hardly known here at all. Miss Bromage's lack of familiarity makes her write rather hazily, and she lays too much emphasis on un-

important aspects. It looks as if she had sat at a table by De Valera's elbow and taken down in an indiscriminating way all he could remember of his career—his squabbles with colleagues, every debate he entered into, every time he was in jail. In the Europe of those times and later the head of practically every government had been in jail. For an Irish leader to have been in jail for political opinions or actions was nothing.

When De Valera came to America in 1919 he was not a complete success. The foreignness of his name caused a lot of discussion among those who were antagonistic to him in Ireland and in Irish circles in America because it indicated he was only half Irish. They did not remember that several other leaders of the Irish revolution were only half Irish, with English fathers and Irish mothers. The two Pearse brothers, executed for their part in the insurrection, were the sons of an English father, a sculptor, and an Irish mother. Charles Burgess (Cathal Brugha), the most extravagantly patriotic of all of them, was of the same mixture. This attack on persons of an outside racial mixture is absurd: people are what they are brought up to be.

One noticeable thing about the leaders of Irish movements, whether political or literary, was their extraordinary courage. No matter how sensitive they were, they had nerves of iron. When he came to America, De Valera was inexperienced, and as a personality was unsympathetic to two of the most influential of the Irish leaders he had to deal with. He butted into things that he did not understand. But the American Irish leaders likewise butted into things they did not understand. The Irish literary leader, W. B. Yeats, was here at the same time as De Valera, and he also had to stand up against a great deal of antagonism; as it was the sort he was used to, it did not worry him.

This brings one to the conclusion that America, and particularly the American Irish, can hardly be said to understand modern Ireland at all with its hardy group of highly educated intellectuals. Though Miss Bromage's book has shortcomings as history, it may be enlightening because it offers a detailed account of De Valera's career.



—Culver.

De Valera in 1916
when sentenced to death.

Shamrock's Story

"A Short History of Ireland," by Roger Chauvire (translated by the Earl of Wicklow. Devin-Adair. 145 pp. \$3), is a French scholar's interpretation of a nation whose history is thickly enveloped in legend. Frank O'Connor, Irish-born writer of short stories and historical studies on Ireland, reviews it.

By Frank O'Connor

ONE of those small books of vulgarization at which the French excel, *"A Short History of Ireland,"* is now available in a distinguished translation. Roger Chauvire, the author, a Frenchman who has taught in the National University of Ireland, is clearly in love with his subject, and writes of it with feeling and eloquence. It is not an easy topic for such treatment, for the history of Ireland, as he complains, "is a sad tale, as if she were the victim of an evil spell, moving through the centuries from misfortune to misfortune, unable, it would seem, to achieve equilibrium, to reach a solution." It is the story of David and Goliath in which David always gets beaten up, and the mind does not willingly linger on the spectacle of irremediable suffering. The English Protestant version of the story is more cheerful, since David is there treated as a juvenile delinquent and Goliath as a rather heavy-fisted social reformer. But that version is

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