

of quality of feeling—or rather of thought and feeling. And here the finer subtleties of language are of such importance that it would seem unfair to judge a writer in translation were it not unmistakably clear that the translation is as good as it could be. Whatever is present in the Swedish that is not also present in the English is nothing, I am convinced, that would affect one's judgment of Lagerkvist as a writer. Indeed it is an ironic corollary of the translation's excellence that it reveals his deficiencies as plainly as his merits. I have tried to suggest why, despite a great admiration for the latter, Lagerkvist seems to me a writer to be more favourably compared to James Stephens, say, than to Hans Andersen.

I. M. PARSONS.

THE POEMS OF JOHN CLARE. Edited by J. W. Tibble. (Two Volumes, 25s. net complete).

The exhaustive collection of Clare's poems now for the first time published is intended to complete the work of restoration with which Mr. Edmund Blunden, appropriately, has been associated. But whether it will add anything actual to the reputation the 1920 selection established is doubtful. It may well have the contrary effect of reinforcing the reader's sense of Clare's limitations. There is certainly here an overwhelming quantity of genuine stuff, but a stuff that is all of the same sort, so that the ultimate effect of it in such bulk is to emphasize its own sameness. We may find, it is true, a number of precious things in it which might well have replaced some of the things in the selection. The selection was not simply a selection, but was, we are reminded by Mr. Tibble, a *representative* selection. This suggests that the criterion was not solely one of intrinsic value. It seems to have been part of the purpose to represent different phases of Clare's development. Actually what is of value in Clare's work seems to develop singularly little, and this is a radically adverse criticism to make of any poet. Certain of the Asylum poems have been seen as something different, marking a final phase, and have even been regarded as Clare's finest work. There is in these an ecstatic note and occasionally a hint that Victorian influences have filtered

through, but only the fact that they are nearer to what the nineteenth century had learnt to think poetry ought to be like could have blinded readers to their unsatisfactoriness in comparison with Clare's characteristic work, which remains essentially eighteenth century in quality.

What an edition of the collected poems does facilitate is a study of the particular influences which formed and later informed Clare's work. In his earlier work the influences of Thomson, Shenstone, Collins, Gray, Cowper and Crabbe separately are explicit, and the 'literary' eighteenth century remains implicit throughout his work. The following lines come comparatively late:

From every nook the smile of plenty calls,
And reasty flitches decorate the walls,
Moore's Almanack where wonders never cease—
All smeared with candle-snuff and bacon-grease.

It would be impossible to mistake these lines for Pope, but it is equally impossible not to recognize that but for Pope they would not have existed as what they are. This relationship between Clare's characteristic (which is also his valuable) work and the 'literary' eighteenth century is what distinguishes him from Burns, with whom, as a 'peasant poet,' he has often been compared, and whose work provoked him to one or two imitations. Clare's very revealing autobiographical fragment¹ helps to explain the difference. His parents he tells us were illiterate, except that his father could read a little in the Bible, but his father was 'fond of Ballads, and I have heard him make a boast of it over his horn of ale, with his merry companions, that he could sing or recite above a hundred.' At the age of thirteen (he thinks it was) a fragment of Thomson's *Seasons* fell into his hands. From that time he educated himself as a poet solely through frequentation of the 'literary' poets of the eighteenth century, and even learnt rather to despise as 'trash' the Ballads of his father. At the same time, though he thus became a 'literary' poet, he continued to share even as such a poet the traditional life of the countryside. Also he is notably free at his best from the Miltonic inversions

¹*Sketches in the Life of John Clare by Himself*, edited by Edmund Blunden.

and diction of his 'literary' masters, though there are traces in his work of the *L'Allegro* Milton as well as of the blank verse Milton who so tyrannized over the later eighteenth century. He even draws considerably upon the vocabulary of peasant speech. To this extent he has indeed a certain affinity with Burns. But I notice that Mr. Adrian Bell deals with this aspect of Clare's work in his review in the *Spectator*.

It is easier to see why Clare is a poet than why he is not a great poet. His poetry, and that considering his facility is a surprisingly large proportion of his work, is the product of an extraordinary intimacy with the nature that surrounded him, particularly with the *minutiæ*, insects, blossoms, of the inexhaustible meadow-life. He is a nature-poet as Wordsworth is not, for Wordsworth is a psychologist interested fundamentally in the workings of his mind. What Clare's poetry evidences is a complete absorption with that other life, not felt as another life. It consists of perceptions crystallized richly and presented with a particularity and concreteness which are a warrant of their absolute authenticity. Yet it is a profusion that is spilt, almost one is tempted to say let run to waste. Clare has no hard core of individuality compelling his perceptions to serve an inner purpose. He has no inner purpose. He is scarcely even conscious of himself. It is this which distinguishes him from Mr. Blunden as a poet. Mr. Blunden's is a poetical world specially created with the aid of the 'literary' eighteenth century from memories of a world known in boyhood but more than half passed away; it suggests a poet who is extremely self-conscious, but sure neither of himself nor of the world he now lives in. It is what distinguishes Clare also from the great poets¹ Wordsworth and Keats (Clare's poetry is often just as rich in sensation as the *Ode to Autumn* of Keats) who begin from particular observation whereas Clare both begins and ends there.

JOHN SPEIRS.

¹Even from the Coleridge of *This Lime-Tree Bower* and *Frost at Midnight*.

MARIANNE MOORE

SELECTED POEMS, by Marianne Moore (Faber and Faber, 7/6).

This volume of Miss Moore's verse leaves me defeated and exasperated. When it arrived I remembered that I had imported when it appeared, ten years ago, a copy of her *Observations*, from which a large portion of the present selection comes ; investigation, prompted by a guilty misgiving, revealed that not half the pages had been cut. Mr. Eliot's introduction to the present volume is calculated to ensure a really stubborn assault :

' My conviction, for what it is worth, has remained unchanged for the last fourteen years : that Miss Moore's poems form part of the small body of durable poetry written in our time ; of that small body of writings, among what passes for poetry, in which an original sensibility and alert intelligence and deep feeling have been engaged in maintaining the life of the English language.'

So runs the impressive conclusion to an interesting and persuasive commentary. And one has been led to expect that a considerable effort will be required of one :

' The bewilderment consequent upon trying to follow so alert an eye, so quick a process of association, may produce the effect of some " metaphysical " poetry. To the moderately intellectual the poems may appear to be intellectual exercises ; only to those whose intellection moves more easily will they immediately appear to have emotional value.'

I am forced to conclude either that Mr. Eliot is specially advantaged by familiarity with the background of Miss Moore's poems and, perhaps, by having heard her own rendering and elucidation of them, or else that, if I am intellectual at all, it is very much less than moderately. For I have worked hard at them, applying myself to most of the book again and again at different sittings, and there is not one poem of which I can confidently say that I see the point. In some places where I think I see the point locally, what I see looks to me decidedly ponderous—as, for instance, this opening of *The Labours of Hercules* :