

TUESDAY'S HASH

THE FIFTH DECAD OF THE CANTOS, by Ezra Pound (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

OUT OF THE PICTURE, by Louis Macneice (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

THE DISAPPEARING CASTLE, by Charles Madge (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

POEMS, by Rex Warner (Boriswood, 5/-).

Poetry must be kept up—verse will still be turned out—despite the tedium and the effort. To-day we confront a depressing situation in which the elder poets seem to have spent themselves and the younger ones can achieve nothing. The present volumes under consideration give one no reason for questioning—rather they offer further confirmation of—the views expressed by Mr. H. A. Mason in a review which appeared in the last number of *Scrutiny* (*Poetry in 1936*).

Mr. Pound, for instance, will no doubt continue to produce his *Cantos* with the same admirable but uncritical persistency which James Joyce has shown in *Work in Progress*. The theme of *The Fifth Decad* is 'Usury'—usury in its various historical manifestations. But one feels as if the theme does not matter very much . . . as if any other theme would have produced much the same result.

There is the same terseness and the same unvarying invective, the same bric à brac of erudition—or rather of information—that one finds in the earlier *Cantos*. And there is much that probably only the poet's Inner Circle can fully appreciate. Mr. Pound is ferocious:

In their soul was usura and in their hearts cowardise
 In their minds was stink and corruption
 Two sores ran together, Talleyrand stank with shanker
 and hell pissed up Metternich
 Filth stank as in our day . . .

But it is the ferocity of a poseur, not of a Swift. There are betraying symptoms—a lack of sane balance coupled with an attitude of hearty familiarity with Great Men and Great Events

(Napoleon and Pietro Leopoldo are his two heroes)—of a sort of literary fascism. One might call Mr. Pound the Browning *de nos jours*.

Mr. Macneice has written a 'verse play.' The verse might well have been dispensed with. *Out of the Picture* is possibly good theatre—bad plays are sometimes good theatre—since it has a certain Hollywood slickness and all the paraphernalia of an Auden play—radio announcers, choruses, parodies of hymn tunes and card-board comic types. Indeed, but for the example of Auden, one feels that the play would certainly not have been written. Unfortunately, the wit of the dialogue only resembles Auden at his lowest levels; and the general Danse Macabre is quite unrealized. And as the comic fails to be witty, so the attempted criticism fails to achieve any real seriousness; the caricatures are ineffective. The 'satire' cannot rise above this level:

Summer is a Comen in. If there is war
What sort of summer will it be?
Will there be any green grass left at Lord's?
Will there be any horses to run at Ascot? . . .

But one cannot feel any deep dislike for this play; it is too insipid, too second-hand to evoke a pronounced reaction. Amateur companies might do well to perform it, for it is essentially an amateur's play.

Mr. Rex Warner and Mr. Charles Madge are, one gathers, among the more distinguished of our younger poets. They are certainly still very young. Mr. Warner is sometimes personal and metaphysical:

Souls are not simple, do not bleat or blossom
like silly sheep or roses in a jar
They are terribly tossed, cruelly corroded
very prone to dizziness, in need of exercise and air—

sometimes political:

Come then you who couldn't stick it,
lovers of cricket, underpaid journalists,
lovers of nature, hikers, O touring cyclists,
now you must be men and women and there's a chance.

Now you can join us, now all together sing All Power,
not tomorrow but now in this hour, All Power
to Lovers of Life, to Workers, to the Hammer, the Sickle,
the Blood—

and sometimes nature-lover-tourist :

Oriental Cairo! Splendid Alexandria!
I leave you gladly for meadows of grass
The whitening wash of willow, corn's winding waves . . .

Always he is impassioned, naïvely innocent and not unpleasant ;
in fact he is almost refreshing in his lack of sophistication.

Mr. Madge is much more profound, but writes with less élan,
and is more self-conscious in his reaching after the profound :

Fly, life, in quiet despair of empty air
Between the two-fold freezing of the poles
As still as eyesight. Fly and be found where
The cloud-coloured sea soft over the shoals
Breaks like fine hands over the numb sands.
. . . I am broken. The air is full of holes.

Yeats and Hopkins are generally the models here—models
at once easy and dangerous. Mr. Madge can imitate the simplicity
and compactness of Yeats' verse ; but the imitation is purely a
verbal-stylistic one ; the simplicity is not the result of any arduous
discipline, otherwise one would not find those occasional lapses
into the Shakespearian manner :

For we create—proud tyrants of a moment—
Bright visions born between despair and fear . . .

or those still more frequent lapses into the ridiculous :

Beyond the printed words that catch their eyes
And the chance gleam of some suspended sign
May fall the blissful moment of surprise
When the dull bourgeois can become sublime.

H. L. BRADBROOK.

THE RECOGNITION OF ISAAC ROSENBERG

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ISAAC ROSENBERG. Edited by D. W. Harding and Gordon Bottomley (Chatto and Windus, 12/6).

My criticism against this book is that it doesn't contain as introduction the essay that one of its editors, D. W. Harding, contributed to *Scrutiny* for March, 1935. Such an introduction would very much have improved Rosenberg's chances of obtaining, at last, the recognition due to him, and is the more to be desired in that the volume, being exhaustive, includes a bulk of work that isn't in itself strikingly significant. Not that it's a question of vindicating a slender talent; 'genius' is the word for Rosenberg, who has all the robustness of genius. But the history of his reputation brings home to one that it is easy to be too optimistic about the chances original genius may expect of getting recognized.

To begin with he had a measure of luck. Circumstanced as he was, how easily he might have escaped all notice, and, dying an insignificant Jewish private with a few pieces of illegible scrawl in his tunic pocket, have disappeared for good (he was killed in 1918), a total loss to English poetry. But he had gained the attention of several representative figures in Georgian letters; patrons who, though the spirit of Rosenberg's work was hardly congenial to what they themselves stood for,¹ kept in benevolent touch with him. And in 1922 the small selection of his verse made by Gordon Bottomley (it was introduced by Laurence Binyon) came out. It is disquieting now to think that that volume did not establish Rosenberg's reputation; did not, although the book was reviewed and Rosenberg became an anthology poet—one of the five hundred, and further distinguished as 'one of the war-poets.' The history is the more significant in that Mr. T. S. Eliot (it was the occasion of my noting Rosenberg's name as one to remember) mentioned him in a Poetry Bookshop Chapbook as a

¹ 'If you do find time to read my poems, and I sent them because I think them worth reading, for God's Sake! don't say they're obscure.' (page 298).—We remember Hopkins.