

"Where there is no vision the people perish"

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CONTENTS



- No More Nightingales?* M. W. Palmer 9
The Consolation of Lucifer, T. W. Ramsey 11
O Bitter Speech, Pádraig O'Horan; *Escape from Thought*, John Gabbatiss 12
The Rose of Loveliness, Jean Kenward; *The Witcher*, Phoebe Hesketh 13
In a Village Churchyard, M. Sheppard Fidler; *Vision Fugitive*, John Preston 14
Convalescence Past, C. H. Harding; *Lines on "The Praying Hands,"* by Albrecht Dürer,
 R. Garlick; *Love Lyric*, Marguerite Evans 15
For Beatrice, Eric Fryer; *German Boy*, 1938, Winifred Dawes 16
Of the Moderns Without Contempt, W. G. Bebbington 17
Ode to Rhyme, H. Broadberry Seaman; *Come Not*, Norah M. Gibbs 28
The Poetry of Charles Morgan, Aneurin Rhys 29
The Poetic Valentine, Frances Paul 34
Dust, E. Sydney-Smith 42
"Paradise Lost" as Romance, Howard Parsons 43
Lonesome Pine, Thos. Astore; *Kittens at Play*, Eleanor Glenn Wallis 54
Moonsilver, E. Barton 54 *Poets and Pretenders* 55
Winter Thoughts in Richmond Park, H. W. Harding; *On Caer Caradoc*,
 M. Tudor Williams 68
Dynamics of American Poetry: CX, Alice Hunt Bartlett 69
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: *Poetry in Education*, O. Channon Collings 76 *Redwood*
Anderson and Milton, Arthur Ball *Against the Philistines*, John Sibly 78 *Mr. Herbert*
Read's Poems, Geoffrey Moore 79 *The Autumn Day*, Christmas Humphreys *Elasticity*
in Rhyming, Herbert Palmer 82
THE PREMIUM EDITOR'S REPORT 84
POETIC DRAMA COMPETITION AWARD 86
The Tears of Things, Cynthia Palmer; *November Funeral*, Margaret Howorth 87
Misfortune, Irene H. Moody; *Retrospection*, Phoebe Hesketh 88
Notes, Reports, Announcements, Premium Competitions, ii, iv, etc.

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Of the Moderns Without Contempt

IN a recently published correspondence the intelligibility and popularity of modern poetry have been vociferously discussed, and accusations of considerable ferocity have been made. For instance, phrases like "a great sham, a prodigious bubble and a naïve hoax" have been used. The particular writer who expressed this surprising mixture of denunciations spoke simply of "modern poetry," and so far as he is concerned, therefore, all modern poetry is a naïve hoax and every modern poet is a charlatan. It is indeed a sweeping statement, but, to make matters worse, no analysis of how modern poetry is a sham, a bubble and a hoax was offered: the statement stood alone in its thundering glibness. One remembers how Martyn Skinner described "much modern verse": "vomit, nonsense, or mere deep-sea ink."

If only this particular writer (or Martyn Skinner) were concerned, however, there would be no cause for any modern poet or any student of poetry to be alarmed. But he is not alone. Unfortunately, there are all too many like him to-day making similarly unsupported and vulgar attacks on modern poetry, and all too many idle readers prepared to enjoy the saucy manner in which their attacks are made, and to accept their crude statements as true.

As Henry Reed, a protagonist in the correspondence, observed, such attacks on contemporary poetry are not new: history shows that many an artist's work must wait, often until after his death, for a true public valuation of it. T. S. Eliot's and W. H. Auden's poetry, Louis MacNeice's and C. Day Lewis's, is not inevitably destined to be forgotten merely because it has some noisy enemies to-day; nor does the fact of its present mass unpopularity necessarily mean either that it is not poetry at all or that it will never become widely respected and influential.

But let us not ignore present facts. Our modern poets are not popular, any more than our modern musicians or painters; nor are they even politely spoken of by those who do not read them—and it is this latter fact which is both new and disturbing. The poet as a species has not often been an object of public esteem simply by virtue of being a poet, but at least he has not been abused and rejected as a madman, a hypocrite or a criminal. The public at large may for most of our history have regarded him as at best a harmless fellow, but still it has, almost instinctively, believed in his integrity and the integrity of those who have been so idle as to read his work. To-day, however, the term "modern poetry" has become synonymous in the public mind with such expressions as "meaningless doggerel," "cut-up prose" and "prodigious bubble." The publisher's blurb is careful to assure us that Julian Symons commands our attention because he is "one of the least obscure of modern poets"; Adam Fox in *English* (Spring 1943), writes: "the Moderns, of whom Mr. Eliot is the leader and main inspiration, are in process of being abandoned even by serious readers of poetry as too unintelligible and only faintly pleasurable"; and even so discreet a poet and critic as Edmund Blunden does not miss the opportunity to stoke up the fire on which the books of the Moderns must be burnt, when in *Cricket Country* he writes: "but the author had made his meaning sufficiently clear: I trust that this will not be too much against him at the present time." In short, to be a modern poet to-day is to be a literary pariah dog.

It cannot be denied that a considerable proportion of modern verse demands of its reader much concentration and re-reading, but no sincere student of the art of poetry

would consider such a demand in itself unjust; for poetry is not merely entertainment or even a form of recreation, it is an art—and art is not always easy either to create or to appreciate. It cannot be denied also that much modern verse is obscure, but much great poetry of the past is obscure in the sense that its subject-matter is uncommon, its imagery intricate and its vocabulary subtle (the love-poetry of Donne, for example). It cannot be denied that some modern verse is meaningless to a sufficient number of its serious readers to render its publication futile. It cannot be denied that some modern verse is not poetry at all. But to say these things is different from saying that all modern verse is obscure or meaningless or not poetry at all. For it is not the function of the critic to make glib generalisations, but to separate, analytically, the good from the bad, the genuine poem from the false verse or the “cut-up prose.”

In the correspondence already mentioned, which originated from two articles written by Henry Reed on the subject of contemporary wartime poetry, Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes, Stephen Spender and David Gascoyne were forced out of the discussion in favour of Rupert Brooke. It was argued that his popularity during the last war and the fact that a few of his lines are often quoted prove that he was a true poet who poetically expressed the general emotion of his day, whereas the modern poets of to-day are unreadable by any but a select few, and even they are as likely as not only pretending to understand.

It may be profitable, therefore, to restrict this present discussion to a comparison of two poems written during the last war with two written during the one just ended. Of the former pair one is notorious, the other is included in so popular a book as Methuen's *An Anthology of Modern Verse* (1921); both of the latter pair, written by modern as distinct from merely contemporary poets, young men one of whom has served in the Navy, have survived for a year or two already and so may receive the respect necessary for a responsible comparison.

The first of the former pair is Brooke's sonnet, “The Soldier,” whose opening lines are known by rote by countless thousands of people who never open a book of poems:

“If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.”

In *The Complete Poems of Rupert Brooke* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1932) a facsimile of the manuscript of this poem, which is in the British Museum, was printed. So soon after his death, therefore, the poet had acquired a fame irrelevant to his poetry. One of his manuscripts was already a museum-piece, its facsimile public property; his collected poems had become a conventional birthday-present, he himself the pilgrims' idol; “The Soldier” was the *pièce de résistance* of the Albert Hall festival and the school prize-giving ceremony. Did ever young poet achieve so soon such fame among the people? (Byron did not: in comparison with “The Soldier” his most popular poems reached but a small public.)

But let us look more closely at this sonnet. Is it so positively popular to-day? How long did its relevance last? Is it relevant to-day? Does it express the emotions of the young conscripts of 1939? On the assumption that it is the poet's business to give definitive, memorable expression to common feelings; on the assumption that he experiences more intensely than his fellow-men merely the same emotions; then it

may be agreed that in this sonnet Brooke did memorably express a common feeling. The majority of the young volunteers at the beginning of the last war did go to battle with a shout of exultation on their lips. They felt that they were bound for a great adventure in which they would prove the heroism of their manhood:

"Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage."

England was a vague but certain glory in their minds: they were Englishmen, the elect of God, and wherever they fell fighting would be "for ever England"; they, being English, were compounded of a dust richer than the dust of any "foreign field." So the poem became a second national anthem, and the war-hungry youth and all who, though also war-hungry, could only cheer them as they left for the front, caught their breaths with the excitement of its lines. It was the war-hymn of an hysterical nation, like the Horst Wessel song.

It was, then, a poem for an occasion, but limited to it and not able to stretch across time and have significance to another generation. For to-day, after another war, the young men, most of them conscripts in an impersonal war which they know was fought for other causes than national glory or individual adventure, do not feel that here is an expression of their own thoughts. They do not wish to spread the British Empire with their mortal remains; they do not consider their own bodies richer than the soil of France or Poland; they do not feel "blest by suns of home," but look back upon an England struggling to solve gigantic internal problems; they do not think of themselves as pulses in the eternal mind, for they are not certain that there is such a thing; "gentleness" no longer exists as an exceptionally English quality; there is no "English heaven." Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the English soldier of to-day would scoff at the old-fashioned, adolescent sentimentalism of the poem and remind you that he has lived since 1918. He knows that 1918 was different from 1914. If he knows more of the poetry of the last war than this one poem he knows that men like Robert Nichols, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon succeeded Brooke, not to strike a romantic note, but the note of disenchantment which the slaughter and the suffering struck for themselves. In their poems he reads the reality of that war: that it was no boyish adventure but a bloody tragedy in which a man like Hoad "lay at length and brief and mad

"Flung out his cry of doom."

Gone already, so far as serious, sensitive men were concerned, was the subject of Brooke's sonnet: his temporary truth was already out of date: Rosenberg and Blunden, Owen and Sassoon were expressing the truth of war as those who fight in it have always known it.

There were subsidiary themes, of course: the heroism, the cheerfulness, the nostalgia, the glorification of the dead, the description of scene; but by 1918 this main truth of the war had been definitively expressed by poets, of whom Brooke, however, was not one. He had caught a passing fever, but he had not "learnt in suffering what he taught in song."

In itself "The Soldier" is a neatly constructed compromise between the Shakespearian and Miltonic sonnets. It is graceful, quiet, and not without dignity. There is

nothing artistically original in it, however, nothing that was modern even in 1914. It expressed in traditional style a primitive attitude of mind that had lain dormant for some years but had been given a sudden awakening and was not yet wide enough awake to be imaginative. It is a merely an occasional poem written by a youth lacking imagination and artistic originality.

The second poem of the last war is Robert Nichols's "Battery Moving Up to a New Position from Rest Camp: Dawn":

"Not a sign of life we rouse
In any square close-shuttered house
That flanks the road we amble down
Towards far trenches through the town.
The dark, snow-slushy, empty street . . .
Tingle of frost in brow and feet . . .
Horse-breath goes dimly up like smoke.
No sound but the smacking stroke
Of a sergeant who flings each arm
Out and across to keep him warm,
And the sudden splashing crack
Of ice-pools broken by our track.
More dark houses, yet no sign
Of life. . . . An axle's creak and whine . . .
The splash of hooves, the strain of trace . . .
Clatter: we cross the market-place. . . .
Deep quiet again, and on we lurch
Under the shadow of a church:
Its tower ascends, fog-wreathed and grim;
Within its aisles a light burns dim. . . .
When, marvellous! from overhead,
Like abrupt speech of one deemed dead,
Speech-moved by some Superior Will,
A bell tolls thrice and then is still.
And suddenly I know that now
The priest within, with shining brow,
Lifts high the small round of the Host.
The server's tinkling bell is lost
In clash of the greater overhead.
Peace like a wave descends, is spread,
While watch the peasants' reverent eyes . . .
The bell's boom trembles, hangs, and dies.
O people who bow down to see
The Miracle of Calvary,
The bitter and the glorious,
Bow down, bow down and pray for us.

Once more our anguished way we take
Toward our Golgotha, to make
For all our lovers sacrifice.
Again the troubled bell tolls thrice.

And slowly, slowly, lifted up
Dazzles the overflowing cup.
O worshipping, fond multitude,
Remember us too, and our blood.

Turn hearts to us as we go by,
Salute those about to die,
Plead for them, the deep bell toll:
Their sacrifice must soon be whole.

Entreat you for such hearts as break
With the premonitory ache
Of bodies, whose feet, hands and side,
Must soon be torn, pierced, crucified.

Sue for them and all of us
Who the world over suffer thus,
Who have scarce time for prayer indeed,
Who only march and die and bleed.

The town is left, the road leads on,
Bluely glaring in the sun,
Toward where in the sunrise gate
Death, honour, and fierce battle wait."

Here we are in the presence of an adult mind and an artist. As he describes the battery moving through the town the poet is conscious of his readers. He gives us precise detail. He is not concerned merely with lyricising an emotion in a hurry. We must wait for the message of the poem to develop. In the meantime all is quiet and dark, things happening in a kind of isolation—the tingle of frost, the dim breath of the horses' nostrils, a sergeant trying to keep warm, the cracking of ice-pools—the poet using a broken rhythm within the framework of the regular octo-syllabic line to create the scene for us. And then the bell tolls and we feel that the poem is about to tell us what we have already felt it must. There has been the certain breath of tragedy and pathos in this staccato description: we have known that this is no merely descriptive poem. And so, after the odd noises of axle, hoof and lurching bodies, "peace like a wave descends," and in the dark hushed town the column stops so that we may be made aware of what is really happening to it: it is moving into battle, and it is composed of men who must soon be slaughtered.

The poem is indisputably one of the best from the last war, moving, wrought from sincerity, written with full dignity by a serious adult poet who wished not to worship England or appeal to the ignorant chauvinism of the people, but to teach the fond multitude that what was happening "over there" was anguish, mutilation, death—these things first. Yet it too stands in contrast with any modern poem. For it was composed in no consciousness of poetic experiment, after no recent "poetic

revolution." Its quatrain had been a familiar form for a long time (Blake had used it frequently); its rhymes are mostly monosyllabic and, though honest and unobtrusive, in no way original or distinguished; and its later stanzas sound all the traditional chords of the nineteenth-century English lyric. There is no novelty of word, rhyme, metre or image at any point in it.

It was, moreover, written nearly thirty years ago in a different world. The killing and the destruction were perhaps much the same then as now, but the men who lurched through that town and the poet who was one of them were not the men of to-day. No modern war-poet calls upon his public to bow down and pray for him and his friends, for such prayer has small place in our modern war. The king may dedicate such-and-such a day as a national day of prayer, but most of us to-day consider it a silly idea which may yet have some sinister political motive.

So we have by now touched upon some of the numerous questions which, for a full understanding of the differing positions and attitudes of the poets of 1914-18 and the poets of to-day, must be asked and answered. Here we can do no more than select a few of these questions, for even standing alone as questions they indicate the directions in which we ought to think when we make comparisons.

We have to survey English poetry since 1914, but that cannot be satisfactorily done without considering still earlier poetry—in fact, all English poetry—and some foreign poetry, particularly French. We have then to ask in whose hands this poetry has been, and to what influences, moral, social, political, literary and technical it has been subjected. We have to study these influences themselves. Why, for instance, does the modern poet not feel it in him to call upon the people to worship England or to bow down and pray for the fighting men? What has happened to men that prayer has become meaningless? We have, too, to know how our war is different from the last: why the young men who fought in it have never felt as Brooke felt; what it was fought for; its vast implications; the effect it has already had on men. We have, in short, to study and analyse a crisis in Western civilisation and see how the war-poet can, let alone does, fit into the picture.

This is no small task, but it must be undertaken if we are to be honest with the modern poet and avoid the merely talkative rôle of so many contemporary critics. And when we have made this study and this analysis we shall have to return to the specific question of the literary and technical differences between modern poetry and the poetry of, say, twenty years ago. We must be literary critics as well as historians and philosophers. We must know what we mean by "poetry." We must know the functions of metre, rhyme, image, symbol and poetic figures of speech; the influence of poet on poet. We have to be students of the art of poetry. No less is honourable, and it is time that the critic should again be an artist himself. Perhaps never before in our history has public literary criticism been so curt and unscholarly. Like everything else it has become a victim of speed, and editors, reviewers and public seem to be content that several books should be discussed in a single short article and the last word upon them be pronounced in a few snappy sentences.

The first of the two modern poems with which we are concerned here is David Gascoyne's "A Wartime Dawn":

"Dulled by the slow glare of the yellow bulb;
As far from sleep still as at any hour

Since distant midnight; with a hollow skull
 In which white vapours seem to reel
 Among limp muddles of old thought; till eyes
 Collapse into themselves like clams in mud. . . .
 Hand paws the wall to reach the chilly switch;
 Then nerve-shot darkness gradually shakes
 Throughout the room. *Lie still.* . . . Limbs twitch;
 Relapse to immobility's faint ache. And time
 A while relaxes; space turns wholly black.

But deep in the velvet crater of the ear
 A chirp of sound abruptly irritates.
 A second, a third chirp; and then another far
 Emphatic trill and chirrup shrills in answer; notes
 From all directions round pluck at the strings
 Of hearing, with frail finely-sharpened claws.
 And in an instant, every wakened bird
 Across surrounding miles of air
 Outside, is sowing like a scintillating sand
 Its throat's incessantly replenished store
 Of tuneless singsong, timeless, aimless, blind.

Draw now with prickling hand the curtains back;
 Unpin the blackout-cloth; let in
 Grim crack-of-dawn's first glimmer through the glass.
 All's yet half-sunk in Yesterday's stale death,
 Obscurely still beneath a moist-tinged blank
 Sky like the inside of a deaf-mute's mouth. . . .
 Nearest within the window's sight, ash-pale
 Against a cinder-coloured wall, the white
 Pear-blossom hovers like a stare; rain-wet
 The further house-tops weakly shine; and there
 Beyond, hangs flaccidly a lone barrage-balloon.

An incommunicable desolation weighs
 Like depths of stagnant water on this brink of day.
 Long meditation without thought.—Until a breeze
 From some pure Nowhere straying, stirs
 A pang of poignant odour from the earth, an unheard sigh
 Pregnant with sap's sweet tang and raw soil's fine
 Aroma, smell of stone, and acrid breath
 Of gravel puddles. While the brooding green
 Of nearby gardens' grass and trees, the quiet flat
 Blue leaves, the distant lilac mirages, are made
 Clear by increasing daylight, and intensified.

Now head sinks into pillows in retreat
 Before this morning's hovering advance;

(Behind loose lids, in sleep's warm porch, half hears
 White hollow clink of bottles—dragging crunch
 Of milk-cart wheels—and presently a snatch
 Of windy whistling as the newsboy's bike winds near,
 Distributing to neighbours' peaceful steps
 Reports of last night's battles;) at last sleeps.
 While early guns on Norway's bitter coast
 Where faceless troops are landing, renew fire:
 And one more day of War starts everywhere.

April 1940."

In considering this poem we are immediately faced with a difference between the civilian war-poet of the last war and his modern counterpart. For modern war-poetry has to deal with other things than the soldier and the fighting-line. During and for a short time after the last war the civilian poets had only two main themes: glorification of the dead soldier and reminding the public of his sacrifice. So Chesterton in his "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" and "The English Graves," Binyon in "For the Fallen," Walter de la Mare in "Peace":

"All is at peace. . . . But, never, heart, forget:
 For this her youngest, best, and bravest died,
 These bright dewes once were mixed with blood."

But to-day the civilian poet has himself met the full tragedy of war without necessarily seeing a single German, for now the war is not only "over there," it is here in this quiet room. The alert has been sounded and the poet lies in his hotel bed looking at the "flowering wallpaper Which rings in wreathes above," and thinking what we have all thought:

"Yet supposing that a bomb should dive
 Its nose through this bed, with me upon it:"

Thus in "Thoughts during an Air Raid," Stephen Spender records in modern idiom a common experience which has persisted for five years.

Similarly in "A Wartime Dawn" the poet has recorded in modern idiom the coming of dawn in this modern war to a modern town drooping beneath the weight of our modern faithless wonderment. He expresses his own adult meditative melancholy as he contemplates that present which he has elsewhere called a "bleak and rocky plain."

As he lies unable to sleep he is not a mere body nor are his thoughts on the war: he is a single individual experiencing his single state. Yet the description in lines 3 to 6 is impersonally real also. It is not a description of and for every man, for the poet does not write merely about every man or to him or to be understood by him (when he tries to, as Wordsworth tried, he fails); but by those who can assimilate it as it is offered the description by reason of its novelty is seen as an exact analysis. It will be meaningless only to those who are intellectually incapable of being taken by the poet through the experience.

Much great poetry cannot be understood and enjoyed by every man. However sensitive one is, however responsive to a simple lyric, unless one understands the words which the poet uses and has the knowledge to recognise his allusions and the intellectual capacity to grasp the points of his imagery, one cannot read much of

Shakespeare, Donne, Shelley or Yeats. Brooke's sonnet and Nichols's lyric make little demand on intellect or imagination, but Gascoyne's poem makes considerable demand on both—and so do "The Phoenix and the Turtle," "A Nocturnall upon St. Lucies Day," "Prometheus Unbound" and "The Tower." Are, then, all these also "meaningless doggerel" and "naïve hoaxes," deemed great nevertheless because they were written by Shakespeare, Donne, Shelley and Yeats?

Gradually in "A Wartime Dawn" the poet creates a full impression of the empty morning when every bird's twitter is aimless, an irritation, failing to console men in their search for a purpose. The birds still sing but the people in this modern town do not hear them as more than a tuneless singsong. It is one of the tragedies of our time. But morning has come at last, and no comfort with it. Like the consonants the first light is hard and unfriendly: "Grim crack-of-dawn's first glimmer." The pear-blossom is as vacant as a stare in its black environment; behind it the barrage-balloon signals its modern context. By now the impression is complete; and yet not complete. Reality is not so simple, nature is more varied than this and life is mysteriously rich even in nearby gardens. The morning hovers nearer and the world at war comes back. And with the return of normality—for the young war is already just that—the poet's anguish, our anguish, rests, rests at the very moment that the guns on "Norway's bitter coast" begin firing and troops, their faces blackened and their individuality lost, land on enemy soil. Only another day of war has come.

The poem's contemporary significance and the exactness of its commentary are made real by the modernity of its imagery set in the framework of the loose unrhymed pentameter, a form not new in English poetry (the Jacobean dramatists had used it) but one which modern poets have used extensively and to which they have given a new purpose. The imagery of Nichols's poem is external and decorative, photographic and commonplace; Gascoyne's is internal and analytical, each figure, each epithet emanating from the imagination and not addressed to it. The switch on the wall is "chilly," even so ordinary a thing is personalised as an extension of the poet's mood. The darkness is not "impenetrable" or "deep" or "dazzling" but "nerve-shot," for it is the poet's own darkness. The ear has a velvet crater; the notes of the birds are not merely heard, they pluck at the strings of hearing with claws; the sky has all the monstrous meaninglessness of a deaf-mute's mouth; the clink of the bottles is colourless, white. The later, external images are not romantic and traditional—church and bell and merely flower—for the modern poet needs objects more expressive of his message than those which, however original once, "having," in E. E. Cummings's words, like razor-blades,

"been used and re-used
to the mystical moment of dullness
emphatically are
Not To Be Resharpenerd. . . ."

The over-all effect of this poem is modern. One can analyse its vocabulary, imagery and form, and its purpose, to understand how, but if one reads poetry of all periods and types regularly one can feel its modernity spontaneously. No more than a single reading aloud is sufficient to demonstrate the difference of its tone and idiom from those of Nichols's poem. But that it is so different means neither that it is a better poem nor that it is a worse. To some of us an analysis of its content proves it to be the

better of the two, nevertheless, for although its effect may be no more intense and its sincerity no deeper, it is more skilfully and originally constructed, more exciting and rewarding.

The second modern war-poem to be considered here is Roy Fuller's "Spring 1942":

"Once as we were sitting by
The falling sun, the thickening air,
The chaplain came against the sky
And quietly took a vacant chair.

And under the tobacco smoke:
'Freedom,' he said, and 'Good' and 'Duty.
We stared as though a savage spoke.
The scene took on a singular beauty.

And we made no reply to that
Obscure, remote communication,
But only stared at where the flat
Meadow dissolved in vegetation.

And thought: O sick, insatiable
And constant lust; O death, our future;
O revolution in the whole
Of human use of man and nature!"

This poem presents us with an interesting example of a modern poem in a comparatively traditional form. The slight variation on common metre is not new; the tetrameters are as regular as any enemy of *vers libre* could wish; and the rhymes are for the most part familiar, only in the last stanza showing that use of assonance with which modern poets have opened up vast new rhyming possibilities. There is little in the form, metre and rhyme, therefore, to distinguish the poem as modern, and yet its tone and idiom, its texture, are as modern as those of Gascoyne's poem or those of the poems of Henry Treece or George Barker. Without the subtle imagery and original description of "A Wartime Dawn," the poem is yet written in the modern conception and has a modern effect; for all its verbal and metrical simplicity (there is surely nothing unintelligible here), it is not classifiable with the traditional English quatrains of Herrick, Emily Brontë or A. E. Housman. Its music is different, its attitude is different. It is modern in its conversationalism (the first stanza), its suddenness of point (the last line of the second stanza), its linguistic intonation (the second line of the third stanza), and, above all, its precision of imagery (the third line of the first stanza) and its severity, a quality which comes to the fore in the last stanza.

The different attitude of the modern soldier poet to the war in which he fights is also seen here. Rupert Brooke would not be able to understand it, though Wilfred Owen would see in it the modern fulfilment of his own attitude. For there are more and other things to talk about now than the sacrifices and the glory of the dead, the wounds and the trenches, the front-line farm and the individual episode. There is no longer a fond multitude to call to. Instead, there is commentary on the context of the war and analysis of unprecedented wartime experiences, analysis which commands

new modes of expression, for when men speak of new things there is no pattern or predecessor to copy. So when the chaplain, himself quiet and sincere, speaks of "Freedom," his conscripted audience, which is conscripted to fight for whatever that word may mean, stares at him as though a savage spoke. His communication is remote and irrelevant. For this war is no old-time crusade; nobleness does not walk in our ways again. We have lived through the disillusion which Brooke did not know and we have learnt to expect nothing. We do not sing of honour; we do not ask men to remember us and our blood. We think of the insatiable lust that demands our blood and of this revolution in the whole of human use of man and nature, of this mystifying world in which we destroy and maim and burn and still men speak of freedom, good and duty, seemingly special men who play a specially articulate rôle, for ordinary men no longer speak of such things.

So from these two modern poems, both of which have already secured memorable places in the range of contemporary war-poetry, yet neither of which is known to the general public or is widely quoted, the essential newness of modern poetry can be assessed. The modern poet has set himself the task of writing a new poetry, new because its themes are new, new because new ideas of verse-making and imagery have been formed, new because he himself is new. Perhaps poetry is fundamentally always the same in origin, perhaps fundamentally man is invariable. But so far as revolution is possible, we are now living in the most widely dispersed and influential revolution in the history of Western civilisation. Man's conception of art no less than his conception of government has changed and still is changing. "All is flux, nothing is stationary." The very fact that the future of everything is so enigmatic is proof of this. In 1918 the most disenchanted man was on comparison certain of the future; but in 1940 we were what we still are, certain of nothing. In former times the individual poet could be the complete sceptic, as Byron was, but he had not to add to his own inability to foresee a future and expect answers to his questions the same inability in the whole of the civilisation in which he lived. This the modern poet has to do; or, rather, his own uncertainty is known in its roots to be only part of a universal uncertainty, and so it becomes of double intensity. It becomes, indeed, almost a new certainty, a new faith, and so there has to be a new poetry of this strange new faith. Individual poets of the past have anticipated it, but there cannot have been an age of it before. And so there exist to-day poets who are not modern—Masefield, for instance, Blunden and de la Mare. They are the new exceptions. It is not simply that they do not write in the modern style: they have lived in our time but remained comparatively exempt from its disintegrating influences. They do not share to the fullness of poetic feeling the modern disposition: what Auden has written in "For the Time Being" they have not experienced:

"We are afraid
Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare
Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void."

So their poetry is different, belonging to an older order, expressed in an older idiom, quieter, less severe, less analytical, less subjective. They are our modern cavalier poets, still writing for a court which has by now been almost wholly destroyed. They may not wish to recognise the destruction, but it is real enough to other men who are already seeking to build a new and very different court. Time will show whether

it is ever to be built, and, if so, whether it will be a better one; but time takes time. The wise critic, the honest reader, will not be misled by the crowd which scrambles to throw up hasty temporary shelter for itself, crude little hovels, and will watch patiently the true artists at work on what may or may not one day be at least an annex both to the Hall of Fame and to that "very stately palace," the name of which is "Beautiful."

W. G. BEBBINGTON.

Ode to Rhyme

(After Sainte-Beuve)

RHYME, you are like white swan's wings
 Strong beatings;
 With measured rise and fall you span
 The distance from Mount Parnassus
 Nebulous,
 Euterpe's messenger to man.
 Rhyme, you are the nautilus
 Venturous,
 That holds within its chambered shell
 The haunting boom of distant seas—
 Harmonies
 That in the mind for ever dwell.
 Rhyme, you are the moan of doves
 In alcoves;
 Rain song; and leaves soft whispering;
 Wind whine and sigh; echoing bells
 Peals and knells;
 Night stars and dawn pearls glistening.

H. Broadberry Seaman.

Come Not

ACROSS the undelighting field,
 When noon-blaze burns, oh, never pass,
 Since naked feet more beauty yield,
 Stealing the dew from morning grass.
 Full-rounded though the moon arise,
 Drowning in glory every star,
 More magical Love's dreaming eyes,
 Lit by the crescent's scimitar.
 So, stranger to my present bliss,
 Come not again, lest now you seem
 Reality, and only this—
 No more youth's rare, immortal dream.

Norah M. Gibbs.