



LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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POETS IN WAR

Where are the poets of the war? This question is often asked by those who remember that the last war threw up a fair amount of notable poetry. And that is true; for there were then living several highly skilled and experienced poets—Bridges, Kipling, Hardy, and there can be added Doughty, all of whom had something eloquent to say about the war or about aspects of it. But they, and others, were established writers; they viewed the war through the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of years; they were not soldiers, neither were they liable to be called up. Nor, when one thinks of it, have there ever been many poets of war who have been at the time of writing on active service, though the last war produced several poems by fighting men, like Julian Grenfell and Rupert Brooke, which are not likely to be forgotten. The fighting man, however, who writes about war is exceptional, and none too common is the soldier who sings of war years afterwards. Full of war as European poetry is, the singers of war have been for the most part not soldiers. Aeschylus, it is true, is said to have taken part in Salamis, and his narrative of that battle reads like a participant's. Nearly all the epics are of war; and Homer's audience clearly delighted in it, but to the humane Virgil it was essentially a matter for sorrow and pity. Pyrraeus, the Greek elegist, was certainly a warrior; and he appears to have seen war at too close quarters to glorify it.

Thoughts such as these are almost inevitable when "Poems of this War" reviewed on another page, invites attention. The contrast is great. For this anthology is not the work of old hands, exempt from the liability to serve, but of the younger writers, all presumably of military age, whether, as some of them certainly are, actually serving or not. The anthology then shows how the war affects the youngest generation of those who make poetry: the vehicle of their thoughts. Or, to be cautious, how it affects particular representatives of that generation picked by particular editors. That they write with complete sincerity is not to be doubted; they say what they wish to say in their own language, and yet, as Mr. Blunden in his introduction implies, there is such that is traditional in war poets which is not to be found in them. There is "no militarism, or personal claim, or study of revenge." This is a remarkable comment to make. Militarism is no doubt offensive even in professional soldiers, many of the best of whom have been free from it. Personal claims, again, may be sheer egotism. Revenge may be an injurious study. But is there no such thing as righteous indignation? May not a dear homeland be in imminent danger? That war is a foul way of living, that all things pleasant and legitimate are shattered by it, that soldiering, even in the best cause, may be at times and to some temperaments an unmitigated bore—all this is true; and there is a middle generation living which

has been through it all. No doubt, however, war was to that generation more of a novelty than it is to the latest, which was born in its atmosphere and bred up in its aftermath. These poems, Mr. Blunden tells us, have been written on the principle of the "innocent eye." The mood of this volume is "seeing where the truth is." So far, so good; but may not the eye in the innocence of youth miss things which older commentators, equally innocent, will have acquired the habit or the power of discerning? Can anything like the whole truth about so vast a subject, so ubiquitous a presence, as universal war, be revealed to any eye? The facts here are admittedly in various moods. Some of them are in the trenches or entering battle; others share the common danger of being bombed; others meditate on natural beauty, on love, on friendship, on death and life. They are quite candid. They are oppressed by the calamity which has befallen the world. In vain to remark that they are not old enough to look back on much in tranquillity. Yet they must be taken for what they say and for what they do not say, as a symptom, because they express themselves without labour. To read them is to infer that, were there no war, they would still be poets, but poets compelled, like all too many of the children of this age, to think, observe, and write within a narrow living-space.

Drama and Doctrine

For the critic the thing to remember about imaginative literature is always that it is imaginative. There are two common penalties of forgetting. One is, of course, the attribution to the author of a novel or a play of the opinions or sentiments of his characters. The other, perhaps less frequent, is the discovery in novel or play of a type or degree of intellectual consistency which the very nature of fiction or drama rules out. It is the second of these penalties that has overtaken the author of a book entitled "Bernard Shaw: Art and Socialism," which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. What Mr. Strauss has done in the book, which is not concerned with questions of artistic merit, is to extract from the Shavian drama in chronological sequence the development of Mr. Shaw's socialist attitude. He finds various inconsistencies in this attitude at different times. But he is nevertheless able to distil from each of the plays, from *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Saint Joan*, from *John Bull's Other Island* and *The Apple Cart*, an explicit statement of Socialist philosophy. If one such statement differs from another, that is simply evidence of the progress of the playwright's Socialist inspiration.

Can we with advantage interpret any sort of dramatic art, even the Shavian sort, along these lines? No doubt every playwright gives expression in his plays, subconsciously if in no other way, to a considered philosophy, even a considered political philosophy. The Socialist belief that informs the argumentation of the Shavian drama, at any rate, is not in question. But how much farther can we go in defining Mr. Shaw's precise Socialist attitude in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* or *Saint Joan* than he himself takes us in so many words? What specific and schematized philosophy can you fasten, indeed, upon any play? Look at the interpretations of Ibsen's philosophical standpoint in *The Wild Duck*, and then bear in mind the frosty indignation with which he rejected them all. The philosophy was there, as indeed it was in every other play of Ibsen's; but this was a playwright, a dramatic artist if you like, not the exponent of an intellectual attitude. Is Mr. Shaw, Fabianism or the later and more romantic flirtation with the *Führerprinzip* notwithstanding, in very different case? There is nothing for which we would to-day exchange the early Shaw prefaces, but what a lot of misunderstanding they still appear to produce concerning the dramatist Shaw!

There are, in fact, good grounds for thinking that the only kind of imaginative literature or drama which will yield a consistent intellectual attitude is the inferior kind. Only a playwright with an enthusiasm for ideas more devouring than his gift for drama will illustrate in his plays the development of a Socialist or individualist attitude or of any attitude in between. Shaw is a playwright, as Walkley taught everybody else to say, not because of his ideas but in spite of them. In so far as you can extract a systematized political gospel from the plays, that is a measure of their artistic shortcomings. It may sound a hard saying, but high dramatic art and a coherent intellectual doctrine do not go together. It is enough to mention Shakespeare and Chehov.

Letters to the Editor

"MURDER FOR PLEASURE"

Sir,—Whether there is any accepted or authoritative definition of the "detective story" I do not know, but I am interested to inquire if Ainsworth's fine romance "Rookwood" (1834) may be regarded as falling into this category? The point is not unimportant, since if the answer is yes we have what is obviously a "cornerstone" novel published several years before the "Tales" of Edgar Allan Poe. "Rookwood" presents more than one murder, robberies not a few, a burglary, the mystery of a marriage certificate, the pursuit of a thief, and among the characters detectives, or at any rate the predecessors of detectives, are prominent. There is, moreover, a certain amount of deduction. In his Preface Ainsworth says that he conceived the idea of his story in 1831, and that he deliberately modelled it in the telling upon "the bygone style" of older authors. If "Rookwood" is to be admitted as "Paul Clifford" (1830) or "Jack Sheppard" (1839) or indeed any of the "Newgate novels" be excluded? Certainly we must include Ainsworth's "Old Court" (1867) and "Chetwynd Calverley" (1876), the latter to a great extent suggested by the notorious Bravo case, known as "The Balham Mystery."

To go back to earlier fiction, is T. R. Surr's "George Barnwell," 3 vols., 1798, a "detective story"? Could Lillo's original drama *The London Merchant* (George Barnwell), produced at Drury Lane, June 22, 1731, be regarded as a detective play? It might fairly be argued that in *The Beggar's Opera*, Lincoln's Inn Fields, January 29, 1728, Peachum and Lockit are detectives of the day; there is a capital detection scene when they entertain Mrs. Trapes; and we have an attempted poisoning on the stage.

"The Hound of the Baskervilles" is one of the best of all "detective stories." Mr. Robert K. Black has pointed out to me that "The Hound of the Baskervilles" is essentially a Gothic romance. We have the old manor house in remotest surroundings; the ghostly legend; the return of the heir; the mysterious retainers; strange happenings at night; the atmosphere of suspense and doom; and, as a climax, the explained supernatural. Ainsworth in planning "Rookwood" resolved to attempt a story in the bygone style of Mrs. Radcliffe.

MONTAGUE SUMMERS

Sir,—Your notice of Mr. Haycroft's "Murder for Pleasure" (August 1, p. 381) is accompanied by a reproduction of the wrapper of "Beeton's Christmas Annual" for 1887; a publication deservedly famous as containing the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes. But your caption describes it as "the first edition of 'A Study in Scarlet,'" which it is not. I am aware that this misnomer is applied to it by Mr. Haycroft, quoting no less an authority than the biographer of Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Vincent Starrett; but I am sorry to see further currency given in your columns to an error as persistent as it is illogical. The bibliographical distinction between a "first edition" and any prior printing in a magazine, newspaper or collection, is in general perfectly well understood. It may be that the extreme rarity of the real first edition of "A Study in Scarlet," which was published by Ward, Lock in 1888, has encouraged collectors and the trade to ignore it in favour of the much less uncommon Beeton's. But the latter is a sufficiently desirable piece in its own right to dispense with borrowed plumes.

JOHN CARTER

AMBASSADORS OF ENGLISH

Sir,—As one who for many years lectured abroad on English literature, approving all of Dr. Leon Roth's letter, commented on in your issue of July 18, I should like to add a further point.

There are at present countries less fortunate than Palestine in the sense that they do not get English books at all, neither can they have access to any English periodicals or papers. And in these countries many people had been accustomed of late to keeping in touch with, and earnestly appreciating, English thought and literature. I am sure they are longing to know what goes on over here in respect not only of literature but of English culture generally.

In the circumstances what else than the radio could assuage such thirst for knowledge? Do not you think it might be advisable that the radio should give once in a week or in a fortnight, through competent persons and in the language of each country, a critical survey of the new books appearing in England. I mean those of uncontested value such as, to give an example, Professor Ernest Barker's "Reflections on Government"; of the more striking current ideas; of noteworthy plays produced; and so forth?

This would be, at the same time, indirect propaganda, which is by far the best. It would strengthen the confidence in England by showing that in spite of the tremendous war stress the things of mind are not left aside.

MARCU BIZA

OLD BOOKS FOR SALVAGE

Sir,—I recently offered my services as book expert and adviser in connexion with a paper salvage drive at a small country town in order to avoid—at one place at any rate—the waste of useful books now so general. This offer (which was accompanied by an undertaking to substitute books to five times the weight of any withdrawn) was gratefully accepted.

After spending some little time in overhauling a mass of paper at the salvage dump, about forty volumes were rescued, which I recognized as eminently worth preserving, and the result would have been an addition of about 1½ cwt. to the local paper salvage and the preserving of interesting volumes.

I was then met by the statement that it would be necessary to consult the owners before any books could be withdrawn from salvage, and later was told that not a single owner agreed to any book being taken out of salvage. Moreover, the sanitary inspector (!) in charge informed me that the books were not of sufficient value or use to withdraw and could not be used as an aid to private enterprise.

It may be added that the books would (most of them) have been exported, bringing in funds from

U.S.A., and that their worth was thirty to fifty times wastepaper value. I have about forty-five years' knowledge of books and their value. Comment is superfluous!

ANTIQUARIAN BOOKSELLER

ST. CUTHBERT IN LAUDERDALE

Sir,—Mr. Johnson adopts the conjecture of the editor of the Melrose Regality Records that the true name of the chapel at Blainslie, near Lauder, is Cheildyells; but I doubt if this can be accepted without further evidence, for it is contradicted by a charter thirty-two years earlier than that on which the editor founds (see Reg. Rec. III, 340). It is also inconsistent with the rendering in Scobie's map of Roxburghshire of 1770.

I maintain that the singular form Cheildhelles Chapel more naturally reproduces the Childes-chirche of the De Nativitate than the plural form in which it is alleged that the word appears in Channellkirk. It is not without significance that, within two miles of the site of the chapel, we have the place-name Cuddie's Hall—Cuddie being, on the authority of Claverhouse in "Old Mortality" (Chapter XXXV), a Scots form of Cuthbert.

JOHN H. ROMANES

H.M.S. DORSETSHIRE

Sir,—On behalf of the Committee for the H.M.S. Dorsetshire Replacement Campaign (by War Savings) I am preparing a short book, and it occurs to me that many of your readers may be able to assist me by giving me personal accounts of the Dorsetshire, which was lost in action in the Indian Ocean in April, 1942, or of earlier ships bearing the county's name. Both the committee and myself would be most appreciative of photographs and material sent, and great care would be taken of them.

J. CREASEY, S.C.G., Hon. Publicity Secretary, H.M.S. Dorsetshire Replacement Committee, Cattistock, Fernlea Avenue, Ferndown, Wimborne, Dorset.

JANE AUSTEN QUOTES

Sir,—In my edition of Jane Austen's Letters I deplored my failure to give the reference for her statement (vol. 1, page 181): "But like my dear Dr. Johnson I believe I have dealt more in Notions than Facts." I have now found it in Boswell, Johnson's letter to him of July 4, 1774, about the "Journey to the Western Islands." I deal, perhaps, more in notions than facts.

R. W. CHAPMAN

FABIER

Poetry in Wartime

edited by TAMBIMUTTU

An anthology of poems by our younger poets. All the poems have been written since the beginning of war, but are not necessarily about the war. 6/-

Armies on Wheels

S. L. A. MARSHALL

Ideas are as important in modern warfare as quantities of munitions, and this book by one of America's leading military writers should be particularly welcome, he is not simply an exponent of a German doctrine of war, but a critic of this doctrine. Two particularly interesting chapters are entitled "Return of the Infantry" and "Tanks can be Stopped." With maps 7/6

The Book of Revelation is History

H. S. BELLAMY

An interpretation of The Revelation of St. John. It is a story of almost unimaginable horror and grandeur. Recommended by the Book Society. 8/6

Chariot of Wrath

G. WILSON KNIGHT

This is an important book about John Milton strikingly relevant to the present state of the world and to our own particular political problems. Spectator. 10/6

The Fool's Progress

ROM LANDAU

A perceptive, warm-hearted and generous interpretation of British character. National Review. 7/6

Patricia's Seven Houses and School for Slavery

two plays by LAJOS BIRO

May group him with Franz Molnar and Melchior Lengyel, the only Hungarian dramatists who have acquired a wide international reputation and good and exciting theatre. 8/6

Theatre

SHAW THE SOCIALIST
DRAMA AND POLITICS

BERNARD SHAW: ART AND SOCIALISM. By E. STRAUSS. Gollancz. 6s.

This book comes unexpectedly from an author who a little while ago gave us an acute analysis of the social and economic development of Soviet Russia. Yet, at the start, there is not a vast difference, as it happens, between the way Mr. Strauss discussed the progress of Soviet industrial production and the way he now discusses Mr. Shaw's progress as playwright—though perhaps it should be noted that he can reach a new and exotic level of Shavian appreciation by describing the Life Force, for instance, as "a synthesis of Diotima's contemplation of Beauty, Dante's and Beatrice's view of the Empyreum, Spinoza's *Amor dei intellectualis*, perhaps with a substantial addition of Hegel's *Weltgeist*." However, foreign ponderosity of this sort is not strongly in evidence, and in his severely plain and methodically earth-bound fashion Mr. Strauss pursues an instructive thesis.

The thesis is brought home to us by an introductory stroke of candour. He started out, Mr. Strauss says, with the intention of describing the gradual abandonment by the dramatic artist Shaw (as distinct from G. B. S., the theoretical Socialist) of a Socialist attitude. In the result, he discovered that "nothing of the kind happened; that every phase of Shaw's dramatic work was determined by his experiences as a Socialist; and that he continued, in one way or another, to discuss the problems of his Socialism throughout his career as a playwright." There could have been no dramatist Shaw, indeed, without the Socialist G. B. S. Not only that, but Mr. Shaw's career bears out the profound truth of his own statement that "the most distinguished persons become more revolutionary as they grow older, though they are commonly supposed to become more conservative owing to their loss of faith in conventional methods of reform."

COHERENT GROWTH

Mr. Strauss's belief that Mr. Shaw's Socialism, far from suffering any diminution, has steadily grown more coherent, turns upon the simple identification of Socialism with "a planned and classless society." The evidence for his belief becomes apparent when he proceeds to develop, in the light of the plays themselves, the grim notion that "the realization of Socialism is essentially a question of power." Mr. Strauss turns to the plays, that is, not to consider their artistic merits but purely for their revelation of the Shavian brand of Socialist thought. In all of them, and notably in the earliest, he discerns a gulf, a discrepancy, a contradiction of some sort between the playwright and the Socialist theorist: the dramatic artist says one thing, the potential man of action seems to be saying another. This gulf, it is maintained, is never completely bridged in Mr. Shaw's work, but the whole point about its existence is that it demonstrates the incompatibility of the Socialist artist's vision with the Fabian gospel. In one play after another Mr. Strauss is concerned to prove, Mr. Shaw rejects the entire moral and intellectual basis of Fabian Socialism, with its specious doctrine of permeation and gradualness. "As he progresses from, say, *Widowers' Houses* to *Man and Superman*, from *Major Barbara* to *Hearthrob House*, so his hostility grows to the box of tricks that is parliamentary democracy. And everything in the history of the past thirty years, it is argued here, indicates the justice of his profound distrust of the democratic pieties. And the visionary Socialist Shaw is realistic enough to know that the destruction of capitalism is unattainable without political revolution. That is one reason why King Magnus, the British Führer (very nearly) of *The Apple Cart*, is more than a match for the parliamentary politicians. And that is the reason, too, it seems, why the later Shaw is more than ever before a Socialist.

MR. SHAW AND DEMOCRACY

It is unnecessary to quarrel with Mr. Strauss's definitions or choice of terms. Nor is there any need to dispute his interpretation of the development of Mr. Shaw's political attitude as it is revealed in the plays. Where he may well provoke a difference of opinion, shall we say, is in the moral value he sets upon the rejection, whether Mr. Shaw's or his own, of the tradition of democratic compromise. He points out fairly enough that "no parliamentary compromise can do away with the paramount and pressing need for fundamental social reconstruction," but he also shows that Mr. Shaw's condemnation of capitalist or parliamentary democracy has often flowered into an indictment of democracy as such. In this connexion he refers to Shaw's "incredibly superficial and very damaging attitude towards Mussolini and Fascism." For the rest, Mr. Strauss is surely guilty of fathering upon the Shavian drama a more consistent political philosophy than the nature of dramatic art permits. At all events, he overrates the *Amor dei intellectualis*, not to speak of the *Weltgeist*, of the farce and knockabout that is so important an element in Mr. Shaw's comedies, especially the later ones.

Poetry and Letters

FOUR NEW POETS
OLD WAYS AND EXPERIMENTS

THE IRON LAUREL. By SIDNEY KEYES. SOLDIERS, THIS SOLITUDE. By ALAN ROOK. THE VAN POOL, and other Poems. By KEIDRYCH RHYS. WOUNDED THAMMUZ. By JOHN HEATH-STUBBS. Routledge. 2s. 6d. each.

Of these four poets, who have been chosen to head the list in a series of "New Poets," Mr. Keyes possesses the subtlest imagination and the greatest daring in the exercise of it. Like most modern poets burdened by a conscious intellectuality, he has some trouble at times in subduing it to the essentially simple poetic act. He begins, for example, a poem entitled "The Anti-Symbolist," with a passage of abstruse sophistication:—

If one could only be certain beyond all question
That nature revolves through a zodiac of symbols
Upon an axis of creative mind:

But he ends the same poem with the lines,
May the dead and the wind and the old woman
And her dog and my over-curious mind
Meet neighbourly and mingle without question.

Generally they do. The over-curious mind gives shape and precision to a life that envelops and transcends it. It may be the life of nature, in "Pheasant" or "Plowman," which is a good example of his treatment of simpler themes:—

Time was I was a plowman driving
Hard furrows, never resting, under the moon
Or in frost bound bright-eyed morning
Labouring still, my team sleek-hided
As mulberry leaves, my team my best delight
After the sidelong blade my hero.
My iron-shod horses, my heroic walkers.
Now all that's finished, Rain's fallen now
Smudging my furrows, the comfortable
Elms are windpicketed and harbour now no singer
Of southward homing bird; my horses grazing
Impossible mountain-sides, long-frogged and lonely.

And I'm gone on the roads, a peevish man
Contenting with the landscape, arguing
With shrike and shrewmouse and my face in puddles:

A tiresome man not listened to nor lroued
By the wise housewife, not kissed nor handled
By any but wild weeds and summer winds.
Time was I was a fine strong fellow
Followed by girls. Now I keep company
Only with seasons and the cold crazy moon.

A short poem, entitled "William Wordsworth," crystallizes admirably in only fourteen lines an image and an interpretation of its subject, and elsewhere, in "Schiller Dying" and "Gilles De Retz," he achieves as revealing a portrait at greater length through imaginary monologue. But he is a poet equally conscious of the tormented questionings of his time, and his most ambitious and difficult poems, "Against a Second Coming," "All Souls: A Dialogue" or the long concluding "The Foreign Gate" are daring explorations of the contemporary spiritual landscape; the last of them touched in places by the influence of Rilke and all of them invoking, often with a tender lyrical poignancy, the eternal dream which haunts the temporal scene.

In Captain Rook's lyrics, too, we could fancy an occasional echo of Rilke:
O tree ascending, free of my heart's harvest!
O Orphic song and sweetly petulant, where
Where is that strange beginning from the farthest
Bounds of remote singing?

SONGS OF EMERGENCY

POEMS OF THIS WAR. By YOUNGER POETS. Edited by PATRICIA LEDWARD and COLIN STRANG. With an Introduction by EDMUND BLUNDEN. Cambridge University Press. 5s.

The tone and temper of the poetry so far published during this war are inevitably distinct from that of a quarter of a century ago. But this anthology provides plenty of proof, if it were needed, that once again war has quickened the pulse of young English poets rather than deadened it. The fact is perhaps all the more impressive and heartening in the long view, as reflecting the essential spirit of the country which has nurtured them, since of war-ardour, of defiance or combativeness, there is hardly an echo in any of the hundred poems collected here. The tragedy of these days, as the young see it and suffer it, is too grave for "militarism, or personal claim, or study of revenge," to quote Mr. Blunden's words. There is little irony either, and when cynicism suddenly breaks in, as it does in Mr. Sewallier's "The New Learning," it comes almost with a shock. The intellectual sophistication, too, of the pre-war years has faded away, but the psychological subtlety remains, if generally indrawn into "the innocent eye" which Mr. Blunden names as the principle of this poetry. The mood of "the innocent eye," as he defines it, "is that of seeing where the truth is, or recording things observed and apprehended which may open the way thither." It is a turning away from the loud and large abstraction, the sensitive search for the hidden and the human meaning lost beneath the clang and clatter of ruthless mechanism. "The little things are the happy things," writes Mr. Whistler; yet there is no sense of littleness in what Captain Rook calls "the silent faith to unite with life, ignored by the selfish," which is felt as perhaps the deepest characteristic of these verses, under-

But his best poems are not those with Oxford as their background or in the section entitled "The Clouds Darken," though many of these reflect sensitively the recoil of strong youth from the sickly negativity of the pre-war era. They are the verses in the last section, entitled "War," which, if less poetical than the earlier ones, attest a new reality even if it dictates a too didactic announcement of meaning; as in "Dunkirk Pier" or "The Retreat":—

So now, leaning against my gun, in these fields and
Plains of Belgium, conscious of the warp and fret
Of spring on the hedges and forests, I accept! I accept!

For there lies all our power; the power of the young
and the lonely,
I know that the past is lies, and the present only
Important. I see in life service and in dying an end
Of loving. I know that the evil in our nature
Is our fear of history, our incapacity to suffer,
And our poor cold dread of the crises of the future.

Many of Mr. Rhys's poems have also been written on active service, and in all of them he is essentially a colloquial poet and a Welshman. As he writes at the end of his volume, I know no love for disembodied principles, improbable tales. The strength of the common man was always the strength of Wales,

Unashamed of her race.
I have felt in my bones comradeship and pity,
I have seen wonders in an open door blitz city.
Amid tremendous history, new pity.

His verse is human, casual, intimate, whether he is recalling his own Welsh hills and farms, writing to his wife or appreciating the quiet, sure manhood of "General Martel." The journalist and the poet combine in it, often in a kind of impressionistic shorthand which is apt to lire but is close to the rough texture of life.

Mr. Heath-Stubbs is as cultivated a poet as Mr. Rhys is colloquial. As he writes at the beginning of his beautiful elegy, "Autumn Rite":—

This is that dying season when the Dead
Thicken the air, out of the still-born night
Wandering with yellow leaves, drifting with thin
Spun webs of spider-silk; now should be said.
In the old way, for them, some litany, some rite.
I have no strength, but yet will I begin.

It is difficult to speak "in the old way" without falling into precisosity. Mr. Heath-Stubbs overloads his lines at times with the exquisite—for example:—

And still the stream flowed on
Through the embowering darkness, a glittering
Great ring of glow-worm milk, trembling and
swirled
By moonlight-bellied violins, a dance
Of swansdown, whirling with noiseless feet
Over a water-smooth, sedge-mirroring floor.

Yet despite occasional echoes and a rather too dulcet richness, his music is his own and he is a very talented singer, who can vary his rhythm from the melting to the impassioned.

Biography

MIRROR-BEARER
A NOVELIST'S NOTES

LIFE WITH TOPSY. By DENIS MACKAIL. Heinemann. 12s. 6d.

There must be some 200,000 words in this book; what are they about? They are not—not many of them—about Topsy, a Peke; though she and sundry other animals yield pages in which Mr. Mackail earns the goodwill of his readers by drawing pets as contributing to the pleasures of the normal human being, and also, in the course of nature, to his griefs. If it be maintained that they are about Topsy, it is not so much as a Peke but as a symbol, in an autobiography of the years from 1927 to 1939, of the playthings with which he and his likes found relaxation, before all amenities vanished in the blackout. Again, as we have his authority for stating that "Of course it was very much easier to write a book with a Peke," it may be that Topsy is an apology for an autobiography from a writer who says of himself, when recounting his hesitation to undertake the Life of Barrie, "I wasn't a biographer, I was a novelist."

This is not the place to enlarge on the distinction, and we must confine ourselves to the opinion that the autobiography confirms his own appraisal of his literary gifts. An autobiography, unless dominated by some specific achievement, demands a robust egotism which is not to be ascribed to Mr. Mackail. Moreover, when he writes—as he does—of the many people of literary eminence with whom he has had to do he is too careful of their susceptibilities to be informative. Indeed, he forestalls the reader when, after naming two friends, he adds "for whom there must be a familiar adjective again. Kind." It might give a false impression to cite Barrie as an exception, for his affection and admiration for him are emphasized. But Barrie—about whom, of course, he has already said his novelist's say in the Biography—is done more in the round: one takes away a picture of Barrie, the talker, with all the hearers enraptured and especially Barrie.

SOME MEETINGS

What then is there in a symmetrically constructed autobiography in which to each of thirteen years some thirty pages are accorded? It reads as an amplification of a series of diaries and account-books: all in all, much space goes to social engagements; for example, "Plum dining at my more venerable Club again. Plays—two night running. I see—with Dot as our sympathetic companion. Dinner with the Guedallas. Dinner with the Milnes." Such recollections may well have their interest for the writer, but for the public have they any significance that a novelist of his skill could not express in general terms? Is there nothing else? There is something else—if the reader, assuming from what he knows of Mr. Mackail, the novelist, that there must be, will exercise patience and look for it.

There emerges a type, and it may be that the elaboration of details in themselves repetitive and without consequence is the most suitable medium for rendering its sense of duty and of order, its conformity to a code fundamentally salutary, its observance of a fossil ritual—a ritual that prescribed a coming-out party that would have been oppressively costly even without the hotel-charge for fifty, gate-crashers.

The type stands for the upper middle class in the years that have been indicated. Mr. Mackail is, of course, too good a novelist to present himself without individuality; the pleasures of the devoted husband and father, the problems of the householder in a period of increasing taxation, the anxieties arising from the illnesses of children—for all these he has the pen; for him, as an individual, it will suffice to state that he would be appropriately housed in "Greenery Street." It is as a mirror-bearer that he is most significant to members of his own class. In the mirror each one of them may see himself, and behind him, growing more distinct with each year, the shadow of the coming destroyer. What Kipling foretold with the inspiration of the Hebrew Prophet in poems such as "The Dykes" will be found here in retrospect in the fragmentary form in which it aroused their forebodings.

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to such themes as Suspense, Battle, In Memoriam, Songs, Love and Friendship, and the vindication of life suggests the development of a basic theme and gives some degree of shape to it as a whole. If in their lack of finality or technical sketchiness these are "songs of emergency," they are sensitively near to life and in the midst of war reflect that singleness which, as Miss Margery Smith writes, is the secret of peace:—

Peace enters singly as she always came
When she desired Eternal rest:
It is her singleness impressed
Upon a soul, a soul, a soul,
That shall in time give wisdom to the whole.

Out of the ruins of despair and time,
Unpatterned history, destruction, fear,
The goad of money, hate, the tyrant's hour,

or Mr. Litvinoff when he prays for a future which is not revenge, but resurrection. But for the most part both the faith and the burden are conveyed indirectly, and by what is not said, perhaps, as much as by the intimate, informal, though seldom unformed, style of what is said. In a short review it is impossible to pick out any of the thirty-six contributors for special notice. Nor does the anthology tempt us to do so. It has an unusual unity of spirit, and the arrangement in sections devoted—

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