



LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Saturday August 8 1942

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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. I, 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, good and exciting theatre. 8/6

