Vol. XVIII

POETRY for JULY, 1921

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THE shop is red and crimson. Under the forge
   Men hold red bars of iron with black iron tongs.
It crashes—sparks spatter out; it crashes again, again,
   At last the iron is bent as it belongs.

Swedes, Norwegians, Poles or Greeks—they are men:
   They grin when they please, look ugly when they please;
They wear black oakum in their ears for the noise;
   They know their job, handle their tools with ease.

Their eyes are clean and white in their black faces;
   If they like, they are surly, can speak an ugly no;
They laugh great blocks of mirth, their jokes are simple;
   They know where they stand, which way they go.
POETRY: A Magazine of Verse

If I wore overalls, lost my disguise
   Of womanhood and youth, they would call me friend;
They would see I am one of them, and we could talk
   And laugh together, and smoke at the day's end.

DINGY STREET

It is twilight by the dreary edge of town,
And the December air
Is harsh and bitter. All the trees are bare,
The leaves are scattered and trodden down
To pulp; and every house is brown.
There is no trace of beauty anywhere.

Night comes slowly, the houses hide in the gloom;
But toward the muddy street
One by one their shabby windows bloom
Like golden flowers, to shine and greet
The bundled effigies on sodden feet
Trudging toward welcome in the hidden room.

There is a magic in it. There once more,
Body and spirit, they are warmed and fed.
There, as a thousand times before,
The ancient feast is spread—
The simple miracles of love and bread.
They stumble into beauty at the door.

[178]
Words curl like fragrant smoke-wreaths in the room
From the majestic beard of an old man
Who props his shabby feet upon the stove
Recalling ancient sorrows. In the gloom
Beyond the lamp a woman thinks of love,
Her round arms wrapped in her apron, her dark head
Drooping. She has a bitter thing to learn.
His words drift over her . . . uncomforted
Her pain whirls up and twists like a scarlet thread
Among his words. He rises, shoves his chair
Back from the stove, pauses beside her there;
Shuffles irresolutely off to bed.

She is purposeless as a cyclone; she must move
Either by chance or in a predestined groove,
Following a whim not her own, unable to shape
Her course. From chance or God even she cannot escape!

Think of a cyclone sitting far-off with its head in its hands,
Motionless, drearily longing for distant lands
Where every lonely hurricane may at last discover
Its own transcendent, implacable, indestructible lover!

What is a cyclone? Only thin air moving fast
From here to yonder, to become silent emptiness at last.
TWO WOMEN

Two faint shadows of women were ascending
The pathway of a desolate hill,
Pale as moth-wings beneath the low-bending
Sycamore branches, in the moonlight paler still.

"This one is dead," said the moon; "her face is ashen,
She is dry as a withered leaf—
What has she known of beauty or of passion
To come by moonlight to the mountain of grief?"

"The other too is dead," said the earth, "yet her feet are
burning—
I feel them hot and restless as blown fire.
She has known many paths, why is she turning
Here, from the secret valley of desire?"

They passed, the moon paled, and from leafy places
Morning crept forth. At last they came
From the mountain of grief—women with tear-wet faces
Who had been withered leaf and shadow of flame.

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Good morning, madam, in your sleepy brown hair—
Twist yourself awake, blink and stare!
I am lying on the floor,
With the old rose-red

[180]
Dressing-gown you wore
When you went to bed.

Don’t look stupid with your drowsy blue eyes—
Here by the bed is your disguise!
You’re a gentle wife
And a tender mother,
And all your life
You shall be no other.

Life is a shawl to wrap about your shoulder—
Every day warmer, every day older.
In half an hour
You’ll be dressed,
Youth like a flower
Wilting on your breast.

DREAM-KISS

Moment of delight—most delicate,
Cool as a rose is cool;
Swift and silent as a pool
To mirror wings in flight;
Passionate as frost is passionate
With patterns intricate and white;
Pure as music in the night,
Far off, yet intimate—
It came
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Poignant as beauty on swift feet of flame.
It paused . . . was gone . . . most delicate
Moment of delight.

**SHADOW**

Like the flickering shadow
Of birds flying
Over a wide meadow,
Something passes;
Some forgotten or untold
Dream flies over,
Its wings brushing
Lightly against me, as rushing
Fingers of wind touch clover
And bending grasses.
I am cold
With the shadow of something dying.

**AS YOU ARE NOW**

Under golden boughs that lean and drift
You lift your head, and ripples of light
Touch the leaves till they quiver,
Reaching down in a motionless
Unachieved caress.
The branches ache with their desire,
And the wind holds its breath.
The moment dies in a shiver

[182]
Of icy fire—eternity and death.
Then leaves fall softly on your head.

NOCTURNE

The moonlit hill
And the black trees
Where a hidden bird
Sings and is still—
Even these
Leave me unstirred.

I am hidden deep,
Like the secret bough
Of a tree in leaf.
I am safe asleep—
What can touch me now
Of joy or grief?

For night and noon
The sky is shut,
The winds are dumb;
Behind the moon
No gates are cut
For the winds to come.

Could wind from the moon
Sweep down until,
Like a winter tree,
POETRY: A Magazine of Verse

My leaves were strewn
On the moonlit hill
And I stood free,

Beauty and pain
Would touch me now
With bitter cold,
As moonbeams rain
Through a naked bough
When the year is old.

Marjorie Allen Seiffert
UNDER THE TREE

THE CORNFIELD

I went across the pasture lot
    When not a one was watching me.
Away beyond the cattle barns
    I climbed a little crooked tree.

And I could look down on the field
    And see the corn, and how it grows
Across the world, and up and down,
    In very straight and even rows.

And far away and far away—
    I wonder if the farmer man
Knows all about the corn, and how
    It comes together like a fan.

THE PILASTER

The church has pieces jutting out
    Where corners of the walls begin.
I have one for my little house,
    And I can feel myself go in.

I feel myself go in the bricks,
    And I can see myself in there.
I'm always waiting all alone,
    I'm sitting on a little chair.
And I am sitting very still,
And I am waiting on and on
For something that is never there,
For something that is gone.

THE STAR

O little one, away so far,
You cannot hear me when I sing.

You cannot tell me what you are,
I cannot tell you anything.

WATER NOISES

When I am playing by myself,
And all the boys are lost around,
Then I can hear the water go—
It makes a little talking sound.

Along the rocks below the tree,
I see it ripple up and wink;
And I can hear it saying on,
"And do you think? and do you think?"

A bug shoots by that snaps and ticks,
And a bird flies up beside the tree
To go into the sky to sing.
I hear it say, "Killdee, killdee!"
Or else a yellow cow comes down
   To splash a while and have a drink.
But when she goes I still can hear
   The water say, “And do you think?”

Crescent Moon

And Dick said, “Look what I have found!”
And when we saw we danced around,
And made our feet just tip the ground.

We skipped our toes and sang, “Oh-lo!
Oh-who, oh-who, oh what do you know!
Oh-who, oh-hi, oh-loo, kee-lo!”

We clapped our hands and sang, “Oh-ee!”
It made us jump and laugh to see
The little new moon above the tree.

Strange Tree

Away beyond the Jarboe house
   I saw a different kind of tree.
Its trunk was old and large and bent,
   And I could feel it look at me.

The road was going on and on
   Beyond, to reach some other place.
I saw a tree that looked at me,
   And yet it did not have a face.

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It looked at me with all its limbs;
   It looked at me with all its bark.
The yellow wrinkles on its sides
   Were bent and dark.

And then I ran to get away,
   But when I stopped and turned to see,
The tree was bending to the side
   And leaning out to look at me.

A CHILD ASLEEP

And I looked for him everywhere
   Because I wanted him to play;
And then I found him on his bed
   Asleep, but it was day.

His eyes were shut behind the lids—
   He couldn’t lift them up to see.
And I looked at him very long,
   And something in him looked at me.

And he was something like a cat
   That is asleep, and like a dog;
Or like a thing that’s in the woods
   All day behind a log.

And then I was afraid of it,
   Of something that was sleeping there.

[188]
I didn't even say his name,
But I came down the stair.

**MY HEART**

My heart is beating up and down,
Is walking like some heavy feet.
My heart is going every day,
And I can hear it jump and beat.

At night before I go to sleep
I feel it beating in my head;
I hear it jumping in my neck
And in the pillow on my bed.

And then I make some little words
To go along and say with it—
*The men are sailing home from Troy,*
*And all the lamps are lit.*

*The men are sailing home from Troy,*
*And all the lamps are lit.*

*Elizabeth Madox Roberts*
POETRY: A Magazine of Verse

SEMPER EADEM

FOURTH DIMENSION

His life was strangely hedged about
By three, though he seemed not to know it:
One whom he loved, who shut him out;
One hid her passion in her doubt;
One was too fond and wise to show it.

The first blew on desire’s dark flame
Until he tossed with every flicker
In agonies of sad self-blame,
That left him tired, but not yet tame
Enough to cease love’s tireless bicker.

The second tried in vain to bind him,
Uncertain of what stirred in each.
Walking through labyrinths to find him,
She saw him shorn, but could not blind him;
And silence was her wittiest speech.

The third had known him since she bore him;
And suffered, though she may have smiled,
To know that barren wishes tore him,
When one was ready to adore him
As if he were not still her child.

Too wise to hate the one he wanted,
Too fond to pity her he scorned,
Her hours, like his own, were haunted
By devils that might well have daunted
A monster likewise hoofed and horned.

The first, meeting his mother, knew her
A woman very like her own.
The second wondered how to woo her,
While ever seeking to eschew her,
Fearful of what she must have known.

And so their days were all one tangle
Of this, one dropped, and that, one dared.
While he, from his peculiar angle,
Half-wished that loneliness might strangle
What they so curiously shared.

**OVERTONES**

*Keep up your talk—*
*There is no need for silence now.*
*I am content to listen, and watch you now.*
*Your voice stops while you walk.*

*You move about,*
*And toss back from your brow*
*The lock that always falls across your brow.*
*Your grin is tinged with doubt.*

*Einstein and art*
*And ranching—it goes on somehow.*

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Don’t stop, or it will be too much somehow,
And you will hear my heart.

**REFLECTIONS**

Your eyes were strange with sorrow: were there tears
That touched their color to such troubled light?
Those mirrors wherein mine had shone so bright
Refused the image, looking on the years,
Like naked runners running upon spears,
That showed so impotently few tonight—
The pageant of a passion men requite
With death, and freedom whose chief wage is fears.

I would have outstared sorrow in your eyes,
But looking on them, mine reflected yours
As the most lucid pool shows stormy skies,
Cloud facing cloud, when deepest calm endures.
And though my lips had drunk your bitter wine,
You would have tasted bitterer, touching mine.

**KNOWLEDGE**

Now there is no confusion in our love—
For you are there
With the big brow, the cheek of tougher grain,
The rougher greying hair;
And I am here, with a woman’s throat and hands.
We are apart and different.

[192]
And there is something difference understands
That peace knows nothing of.
It is the pain in pleasure that we seek
To kill with kisses, and revive
With other kisses;
For by our hurt we know we are alive.

The tides return into the salty sea,
And the sea-fingered rocks are swept and grey.
There are no secrets where the sea has crept,
But the sea
Has kept its ageless mystery.
And we,
Beaten by the returning passional tides,
Searchèd by the stabbing fingers,
Washed and lapped and worn by the old assault,
Knowing again
The bitterness of the receding wave,
With renewed wonder facing the old pain,
We are as close
As one wave fallen upon another wave;
We are as far
As the sky's star from the sea-shaken star.

Love is not the moon
Pulling the whole sea up to her.
And there is something darkness understands
These moons know nothing of.

Babette Deutsch
The sun, in wanton pride,
Drenches the country-side
With spilt gold from his old autumnal store.
But Scipio sits within the barn's thick gloom,
The merest crack of light coming in the door—
Sits and husks the corn long after working hours.
Vainly for him the autumn bloom
Is on the flowers.
The inside of the barn is velvet black
Except where a gold thread runs along a crack;
And the inquisitive sun thrusts points of light
Through chink and cranny, piercing the midnight.
The dry husks rattle, and his shuffling feet
Keep time to what he sings—an elusive tune,
Husky and monotonous and sweet,
Scarce audible, so softly does he croon
To keep away the evil eye:

Everybody
Who is livin'
Got to die.

Across the evening fields the setting sun
Richly intones toil done.
The home-bound negroes idle in the lanes,
Gossiping as they go; coarse laughter falls
On the resonant air; from a far field cat-calls
Float over, and a banjo's strains.
Shucking corn in the darkness, Scipio in reply
Sits and sings his mournful, husky stave:
   *Wid a silver spade*
   *You kin dig my grave;*
   *Everybody*
   *Who is livin'*
   *Got to die.*

**STRANGE**

We believed
That the tides of our being
Set to each other.

But when we came to speak,
There was a distance between us
More wide and strange
Than the silvery waste
Of the marsh under the moon.

And your voice came
From that untrodden stillness
Like the calling of some marsh creature
Disturbed—seeking.

And I, too, was dumb—frozen,
Like the flood-tide
And moon-silent marsh.

[195]
Into the valleys I flee, into the shadows;
But there is no peace, no sanctuary.
The hills, like elephants,
Shoulder noiseless through the clouds
And close in on me.
Where shall I hide from the tread of their feet?
I have overset the gods in the temples, and there is none
to protect me—
The little gods of jade with staring eyes,
The great gold and black gods with foolish faces.
Tell me, little gods of the North and East, and of the
South and West,
How long shall my bones wait, lying on these rocks,
To become as white as the broken plaster
Of the images in the temple?
Tell me, true gods,
Speak a swift word!—
For the clouds descend in a hot white mist of wrath,
And through them stamp the elephants . . .
The terrible elephants . . .
Trumpeting . . .

SWAMP LILIES

Today I feel new-born, for I have seen
A stretch of cloistered wood thick-spread with green,
Where wet wild lilies grew on every side,
Streaming away—an immobile white tide.
Not as the sun that bursts upon our eyes
At morning, making glory of the skies,
But like the slow, pervading evening light
They filled the eye—a world of silvery white
Withdrawn and exquisite, as from the sod
They breathed the still inviolateness of God.

FORGOTTEN

How can I remember
Autumn and pain,
When trees hold dreams
In their arms again?

How can my heart break
Till it cries?
The joy of summer
Has made me wise.

I can't remember
What hurt me so—
Autumn and winter
Were so long ago.

Harold Vinal
NUMBERS

Three sheep graze on the low hill
Beneath the shadow of five trees.

Three sheep!
Five old sycamores!
(The noon is very full of sleep.
The noon's a shepherd kind and still.
The noon's a shepherd takes his ease
Beneath the shadow of five trees,
Five old sycamores.)
Three sheep graze on the low hill.
Down in the grass, in twos and fours,
Cows are munching in the field.
Three sheep graze on the low hill:
Bless them, Lord, to give me wool.
Cows are munching in the field:
Bless them that their teats be full.
Bless the sheep and cows to yield
Wool to keep my children warm,
Milk that they should grow therefrom.

Three sheep graze on the low hill,
Beneath five sycamores.
Cows are munching in the field,
All in twos and fours.

On an elm-tree far aloof
There are nine-and-twenty crows,
Croaking to the blue sky roof
Fifteen hundred ancient woes.

In a cracked deserted house,
Six owls cloaked with age and dream—
In a cracked deserted house,
Six owls wait upon a beam,
Wait for the nocturnal mouse.

In the stackyard at my farm
There are fourteen stacks of hay.
    Lord, I pray
Keep my golden goods from harm,
Fourteen shining stacks of hay!

Fourteen shining stacks of hay,
Six owls, nine-and-twenty crows,
Three sheep grazing on the hill
    Beneath five sycamores,
Fat cows munching in a field,
    All in twos and fours—
Fat cows munching in a field,
Fourteen shining stacks of hay.

At a table in a room
Where beyond the window-frames
Glow the sweet geranium—
At a table in a room
My three children play their games
Till their father-poet come.

[199]
Stop a moment, listen, wait
Till a father-poet come—
Lovely ones of lovely names,
He shall not come late.

Fourteen shining stacks of hay,
Six owls, nine-and-twenty crows,
Fifteen hundred ancient woes,
Three sheep grazing on the hill
    Beneath five sycamores,
Fat cows munching in a field
    All in twos and fours—
Fourteen shining stacks of hay,
My three lovely children, one
Mother laughing like the sun,
Sweetheart laughing like the sun
    When the baby laughers run.

Now the goal I sought is won,
Sweetheart laughing like the sun,
Now the goal I sought is won,
    Sweet, my song is done.

Louis Golding
O CHANGING ONE

Sometimes, O changing one,
Your feet are like white foam
Riding the long blue rhythms of my thought—
Like foam on a subsiding lake
In the hour next before sunset.

And sometimes your feet are leaves
Red from the first frost,
Whirling into the corners of my mind,
Whirling into the sunlight again;
Dancing, chaotic,
Gay in their brief autumn.

But sometimes
Your feet are like black velvet,
And you move without sound within the shadows;
You circle the firelight of my thought.
And I, by the red fire that fights the shadows,
Wonder what prey you seek—
I, not wholly at ease.

William A. Norris

[201]
GOLDEN DARKNESS

THERE WAS A TIME

There was a time when I was shy and lonely,
And stood in strange bewilderment apart;
And no one spoke to me, and silence only
Would fold my songs into her tender heart.

There was a time when only windy darkness
Would fan my dreams with glamoured loveliness.
But you have come, and nights are filled with starkness;
And I am lonely for my loneliness.

Oh, you have come—and silence is a stranger,
And darkness keeps aloof from my distress;
And you—oh, you are all too fraught with danger,
And I am lonely for my loneliness.

CLOUDS AND WAVES

With bent heads hidden the clouds run by,
Muffled in shadow, across the sky.

With lowered eyes, in the darkness of the sea,
The hunched lean waves scud away fearfully.

How great is the wrong, and where is the place?
What is the truth that they cannot face?

[202]
COBWEBS

Rise in the cool dim dawn
    When a mist is hung on the pane—
The loose gray cobweb of the fog
    Spun by the rain.

When the sun’s long golden fingers
    Have brushed it away—then go
And watch the sky through the tree-tops
    Fall like snow.

And after, when you are tired
    And twilight hangs on the leaves,
Listen—and the silence will tell you
    Why it grieves.

For the fog, the sky and the twilight
    Are the cobwebs that brush the eyes
When a man would enter the dusty door
    Of paradise.

GREY

A bleak wind rides on the waves,
    And the shadowy foam is hurled.
Grey rains are on the hills,
    And a grey dusk is over the world.

Bleak moods and shadowy moods
    Move like the moods of the sea;
The mist, a grey unspoken thought,
    Is looking strangely at me.

And I am lost in greyness—
    My dreams are still and furred;
For the grey rains are on the hills,
    And a grey dusk is over the world.

RAINS

In the country the rain comes softly with timid feet;
A grey silence is in her face, and strands of darkness
    blowing from her hair,
And trees are dark in her eyes, and the wind is a mournful
    gesture.
Softly the rain comes over the hills and her face is memory:
It is filled with the twilight blowing of waves and grasses;
It is filled with shadowy cloud-paws feeling among the
    valleys;
It is filled with the leap of trees that are instantly caught
    by the earth.
The spirit of all things breathes on the invisible pane of
    time,
And slowly out of the shadows the grey face of the rain
    comes into being—
Softly the rain comes over the hills and her face is sorrow.

But the rain in the city is a jazz rain:
The legs of the rain in the city are nimble—
Oscar Williams

She is loud on the stones, on the roof-tops, on the windows; Her dancing is filled with the sway and the glitter of tinsel. Behind her the street is a wide grin, showing the black teeth of houses— The street is a wicked leer dark with ugly passion. But though the laughter of the jazz rain is coarse in the gutter, Though her legs are nimble and innumerable on the pavements, Though the jazz rain speaks so loud, The brazen rain has never a word for me.

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

I know that life is Jason, And that beauty is the witch-maiden helping him. I know that the soft, luminous night of stars Is the golden fleece he is seeking. I know that in the beginning He sowed the boulders, the teeth of dead ages, And the innumerable armored cities have arisen. I know that he has thrown among them love and desire, And they have warred and shall war with each other until the end. And if you doubt the least word I have said, Come out on the dark beach some strange summer night And watch the huge quivering serpent of the ocean Still coiled around the trunk of the tree of paradise.

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BECAUSE

Because I have not kissed as yet one burning mouth,
I have kissed a hundred.
Because I have not looked into one pair of eyes,
A hundred have haunted me.
Because I have not lived one hour in passion’s flame,
I have died in a hundred others.

MOTES

The stars are mystical motes
Delicately glimmering
In blue sunlight.
I move my hand
Through the elfin radiance,
And my fingers are strange
With dream and glamour.

THE SUBWAY IS LIT

The subway is lit like a great cathedral,
    And myriad shadows whisper and float.
But the eyes of darkness are filled with fury,
    And a scream of steel is in the wind’s throat.
The trains are moving like things of madness,
    And the eyes of men have a glassy stare.
Where is the music of holiness?
    And where the uplifted face of a prayer?

[206]
Oscar Williams

THE BUBBLE

We have kings, and the deadly sins seven;
We have lives for all things that die;
We have wars and quite a bit of trouble:
But God, ensconced in his heaven,
Watches through air blue as sky,
And delights in his beautiful bubble.

THE RETURN

In some far and lonely midnight
I shall arise as in a dream,
And part dark curtains on a strange room
Where mysterious candles gleam.

I shall open an unknown book
In that weird and wind-stirred place,
And come upon a poem
With a sad face.

I shall listen to my dead heart's cry
Faint through the years that are gone,
And I shall feel over my shoulder
The Silence looking on.

And very softly he will touch me,
And I shall turn toward the gloom;
He will take my arm and quietly
Lead me out of the room.

Oscar Williams

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WE should like to pass on to our readers a more liberal share of the "life" of the Poetry office—to introduce them to our extremely varied callers, show them scraps of our still more varied correspondence, let them read our contradictory clippings. And if only the seal of confidence could be removed, we should make them laugh by printing a few of our "museum" features—poems so amusingly bad that we could not bear to send them back without making copies for preservation.

One day, for example, the arriving editor discovers, so to speak, a foundling on the door-step—a young poet from New York or Oklahoma who has started out to see the world with a few dollars in his pocket, and who must find some kind of a job in State Street or La Salle to keep him fed and housed, and to oil the wheels of his journey. Again, an elderly poet-adventurer appears fresh from prison, where he had been tangled up in some friend's attempt at counterfeiting—a lank starveling figure, the gaunt picture of despair, but offering, to the editor's surprise, two or three acceptable poems; and leaping alive, even to a smile, at the actual receipt of a check. Or, a rainy morning is brightened with color by the visit of two quite astonishingly superb English ladies—a poet and her sister—who are speeding through the town
Here in Cass Street

with their uncle, Sir Kenneth Somebody, and who leave us édition-de-luxe books and Queen of Sheba memories. Helen Hoyt once gave us a guest book—it was while she was still Helen Hoyt, two years before her bridal New Year’s day of 1921, when she became Mrs. William Whittingham Lyman out in California and took up her abode in Berkeley. Let us look over its entries since Christmas, and pause a moment with a few of the visitors:

There are Henry Bellamann and Glenn Ward Dresbach just before the turn of the year. Southern poets both, the one from South Carolina and the other New Mexico: Mr. Bellamann a musician, as well as president of the Columbia Poetry Society; and Mr. Dresbach an efficiency expert—a rare talent for a poet!—who had been making copper efficacious at Tyrone. And with the new year comes Edward Sapir from Ottawa, where he has been gathering and translating French-Canadian folk-songs. And bluff, black-bearded Jo Davidson, sculptor of all the war-heroes, draws his inky portrait in the book. And little Winifred Bryher writes her slender name there—the quiet English girl-author who was even then on her way to New York to surprise her friends by marrying Robert McAlmon.

Sara Bard Field, the warrior-suffragette from California; and Nora Douglas Holt, the beautiful bronze-colored founder and editor of the new and interesting Negro organ, Music and Poetry—these two are neighbors in the book. A week later comes John Drinkwater, and at the

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end of March Franklin P. Adams, the St. Simeon Stylites of the New York Tribune. Next Clinton Masseck, now of Kansas, erstwhile a warrior in the most fiery battle-line of the Argonne. A few days later it is Nicolas Roerich, the big-brained, high-souled Russian painter and dreamer, whose pictures are a more vivid revelation than Lenin’s politics; and whose poems—if we could get at them in the three or four books he has published, may be as full of color and vitality.

And so it goes. The correspondence is more full of contrasts, possibly, than the visitors. Bits of it come from remote corners of the earth, but most of it bears George Washington’s familiar red portrait on the envelope. The editor is asked not only to criticize poems—that is an obvious and common request—but to advise about publishers, to prepare club programs; to write an article on Florence Kiper Frank or Haniel Long for the benefit of some college-student’s thesis; to reveal the author of some wandering poem—usually an incredibly poor one; to save some hapless poet from starvation or get him out of jail; to pass judgment on some elaborate system of psycho-analysis, or on some meticulous questionnaire which is to reveal with mathematical accuracy the ability of students in a certain great university to judge poetry—a questionnaire which so befuddles the editor’s brain that judging poetry becomes a madhouse dance. These are but a few of the demands put forth by acquisitive minds—sometimes of marvellous ingenuity, and still more marvel-
lous confidence in the editor's lavishness of time, interest and spirit to meet them.

The poets themselves are usually more reasonable than these questioners who are studying or writing about them. Of course now and then the ego flaps its wings and temperament becomes temper, but on the whole they are tolerant of the editor's shortcomings and astonishingly patient during that too-long period which usually divides acceptance from publication. They are very different—these poets: one, an I. W. W. coal-miner; another, a bedridden invalid in New Zealand; number three, a fine lady in the smartest of smart sets; number four, a plantation Negro in Georgia; number five, a Syrian rug-dealer; number six, a live-wire reporter on the New York Scald; seven, a corporation lawyer; eight, a little crippled seamstress sewing and writing in a wheeled chair; nine, a lovely red-haired siren, the heroine of an hundred romances; ten, a lonely spinster, inaccessible in her emotional desert; eleven, a half-mad starveling whose little gleam of genius may be extinguished by niggardly denial of light and air and food for body and soul; and twelve, fortune's favorite, whose gleam may be extinguished by the sheer mass and weight of his possessions and opportunities. And there are the married and the single, the too much married and too little, the much divorced and the undivorced, and the careless few who get on without any of these formalities.

In short, there are today five hundred and ninety-six
names in POETRY’s card-index of accepted poets; and a history, thrilling but never to be fully revealed, goes with each card. Nearly a score of nationalities are represented either directly or through immigration, and forty-one of our forty-eight states, besides the District of Columbia and Hawaii. One of the severest shocks of the editor’s career is the discovery that Indiana is not among them. Are there no poets left in Riley’s own state, the state where they were wont to foregather and go on pilgrimages? Or have the poets of Indiana, one and all, boycotted POETRY? Anyway, Indiana is missing from our list, along with Delaware, Idaho, North Dakota, Mississippi, North Carolina and Utah.

It’s a long and crowded trail we have travelled these eight-and-a-half stirring years.

H. M.

THE NEBRASKA LAUREATE

The legislature of the state of Nebraska has fitly honored its most conspicuous poet-citizen by appointing him Poet Laureate of the state. Mr. Neihardt earns this distinction not only by his artistic achievement in general, but also by the fact that, as the resolution puts it, he “has written a national epic wherein he has developed the mood of courage with which our pioneers explored and subdued our plains, and thus has inspired in Americans that love of the land and its heroes whereby great national traditions are built and perpetuated.”
We congratulate Nebraska upon its gracious decree, and Mr. Neihardt upon the official appreciation of his state. The appreciation might have been further emphasized by a salary or some form of financial award, but perhaps that is too ideal an expression of truly poetic justice to expect at present.

We have criticized Mr. Neihardt’s artistic principles and methods in the writing of his epic narratives, but a difference of opinion in detail does not prevent our appreciation of his artistic sincerity and quality, and of the value of his exploration of a field too little recognized in the arts. It will be remembered that one volume of the projected trilogy, *The Song of Three Friends*, shared last year with the *Poems* of the late Gladys Cromwell first honors in the P. S. A. prize award for the best book of verse published by a poet of the United States during the year 1919.

The New York *Evening Mail* discovers “subtle Sinn-Fein propaganda” in the new Nebraska laureateship. This would seem to be straining a point, even if Mr. Neihardt were an Irishman, which no one ventures to allege of a poet born in Illinois of middle-western ancestry. However, this laureateship is not quite the first, the *Nebraska State Journal* to the contrary notwithstanding; for in 1919 the legislature of California bestowed a similar honor upon Miss Ina Coolbrith in declaring her, by official decree, “The Loved Laurel-crowned Poet of California.”

*H. M.*

Mr. Masters is both a lawyer and a poet—a fact which has advantages and disadvantages. As a lawyer, it makes him one of the shrewdest, most keenly imaginative cross-examiners who ever turned inside-out the soul of an unfortunate witness; and, on the other hand, it probably tempts him away from legal drynesses and asperities. As a poet, it gives him a comprehensive and sympathetic experience of the "innards" of life—the human motives and processes, enforcing upon him respect for the truth, for all the aspects and values in any given "case"; and, on the other hand, it carries these qualities too far toward absolute legal justice, involving the precision and prolixity of an argument or brief, with its thorough and searching statements of all aspects of a given question.

The mere use of a ten-syllable iambic line through hundreds of pages of course does not make a poem; it may as well be admitted that many of these monologues are throughout the baldest prose, and that even the finest of them have passages which strain the rather liberal amenities usually accorded to the epic bard. Indeed, a more exacting taste would have struck out quite a number—the statements of people whose tangent touch upon Elenor Murray was too remote to be artistically relevant.

However, after granting the numerous and manifest
A Census Spiritual

deductions, *Domesday Book* establishes its epic claim. Not by accomplishing its specific charge, to be

\[ \text{a census spiritual} \]

\[ \text{Taken of our America—} \]

although perhaps it comes nearer than any other book to such a prodigious achievement—but by the sheer immensity and weight of its masses, the depth and richness of its colors, all thrown together into a rough shapeliness, and charged with a rude glamour, like a mountain lifted against the sunset fires of the sky. The mountain has not been molded and perfected by art, in all details it is faulty; yet there it stands, of a truth and beauty formidable and unquestionable.

Mr. Masters’ book, whether a complete “census spiritual” or not, is life—modern life, unfaltering, uncompromising and unashamed; not a mere photograph, moreover, but a transfigured vision presenting the beauty and terror inherent in the human tragedy—in our modern human tragedy, which always seems half wrought out, infinitely complicated, unachieved, a thing to laugh as well as to weep. Like all artists of power and sweep, this poet neither palliates nor apologizes. He carries his heroine and her friends through deeds of vulgar disrepute and even crime, and yet brings them out unbereft of piteous dignity and beauty. He accepts all, with understanding and sympathy for human frailty and aspiration.

Certain of the actors in the ever-widening circles of this drama confess themselves with ruthless precision, so that
we know them completely and recognize their hard dilemma. Henry Murray, for example, the ineffectual father who sees his girl slipping away and agonizes because he is powerless to hold her:

This daughter and myself, while temperaments
Kept us at swords' points, while I saw in her
Traits of myself I liked not, also traits
Of the child's mother which I loathe, because
They have undone me.

And Gregory Wenner, futile both as business man and lover. And Gottlieb Gerald, absorbed in making pianos and dreams. And the slap-dash Alaska man and the cheaply second-rate Barrett Bays—both accepting all they could get for as slight a return as possible. And finally Elenor Murray herself:

Who was this woman?
This Elenor Murray was America.
Corrupt, deceived, deceiving, self-deceived,
Half-disciplined, half-lettered, crude and smart;
Enslaved yet wanting freedom; brave and coarse,
Cowardly, shabby, hypocritical;
Generous, loving, noble, full of prayer;
Scorning, embracing rituals, recreant
To Christ so much professed; adventuresome;
Curious, mediocre, venal; hungry
For money, place, experience; restless—no
Repose, restraint; before the world made up
To act and sport ideals—go abroad
To bring the world its freedom, having choked
Freedom at home: the girl was this because
These things were bred in her—she breathed them in
Here where she lived and grew.
Yet that word, however searching, is not all. One of the jurymen protests:

> Look at her—she's brave,
> Devoted, loyal, true and dutiful.
> She's will to life, and through it senses God,
> And seeks to serve the cosmic soul.

And with all potencies clamorous but impotent within her; giving herself away generously, passionately, but always wastefully, she passes by and goes out like a little flickering torch borne by Fate through the high winds of Time.

Does the poet prove his thesis? Does he make this girl—restless, sterile, erotic, but somehow clinging to, even while violating, a certain integrity of soul—a symbol of our country of tireless searching, immense achievement and fertile dreams? Probably most of us will deny the authority and completeness of the picture; probably the most searching critical challenge to this epic bard would be a demand for a hero, or heroine—for a single luminous soul to whom our hope and faith might cling. The heroic is found in life, and in all the great epics of the past. Perhaps it is not justly evident here.

However, whether we grant the main thesis or not, the book has immensity of scope and power. It is a modern tale of psychological adventure; grouping somewhat with *The Ring and the Book*, no doubt, but taking an every-day American life, through peace and war, as its text, instead of a mediaeval Italian crime. It is a rounding-up of our
modern human democracy by a poet of profound experience and insight.  

H. M.

LITTLE THEATRE RHYTHMS


There are certain Broadway critics, using the term generically, who decry the potentialities of the “Little Theatres” because they do not function like Big Theatres. Without considering the medium, or the plays written and produced through this medium, these critics damn them as piffling. It will require a new hatch of critics to handle this art of the Little Theatre.

Because a small group gathers to hear subtleties in humor, minute shadings in tone, experiments in rhythms; to concentrate on complexities or relax to simplicities, one may not necessarily infer that its blood is thin. A healthy audience functions in various ways; it does not always wear its heart on its sleeve, or stand in a ten-acre lot to hear its soul bellowed to the highways.

Alfred Kreymborg’s soul would feel cramped in a ten-acre lot, whereas it expands in intimacy. He has accepted the Little Theatre as his natural medium, accepted it also as a form of art to be expressed through poetry, music, and dance. We have here no note-book jottings from real life, dialogue heard in passing, sketch life-class work. In the Plays for Merry Andrews, the use of sug-
gestion is not so remote as with many of the Fifth Avenue school of “opacity.” In a play the poet must consider that the auditor does not register with the same concentration as the reader. Mr. Kreymborg’s simplicity appears to be guileless, but there is always the suggestion under his naive surfaces. His rhythms and images are easy to imitate, but not his charm and his humor; and to capture his agile handling of suggestion is a challenge—the quiet glance with a keen edge back of it which points up to a dart and shoots through so deftly that we are unaware of its awareness.

In the matter of rhythm, he is not an “eye poet.” He is a musician arranging and combining words as notes and musical phrases. He writes gavottes, scherzos, minuets and fugues; and he sings and dances his thoughts about the stage. Often his verbal attempts at polyphonic musical forms result only in the husk of tone. His words do not always vibrate, but on the whole there is a blending of tone through the combining of vibrations from his succession of sounds. His rhythms riot in their variety through all of his plays, which helps to promote the feeling of dance. When his staccato verges on the monotonous he gives it a fillip with a sudden turn or lift. One culminating effect which he uses is to lead us up to the height of expectancy, and leave his suggestion suspended in mid-air while we go soaring on the impetus.

The rhythms of his prose are neither “intentionally odd” nor “intentionally dark”; they are patterned to
express his whimsical personality according to the varied meanings of his fanciful plot. Take a passage of staccato from *Vote the New Moon*. The citizens are voting, they are definite and determined, and although their hammers have been dropped the concise rapping is continued in the speech:

*Crier.* Burgher, what do you mean by “One for the red”?—
*Burgess.* you by “One for the blue”?  
*Burgher.* I mean—
*Burgess.* I mean—
*Crier.* What do you mean?  
*Burgher.* We mean—
*Burgess.* We’re tired—
*Crier.* Tired?  
*Burgher.* Of old moons—
*Burgess.* We want—
*Crier.* You want?  
*Duo.* A new moon!

He also uses his staccato to convey his numerous sprightly moods. Again in *Vote the New Moon* the harmonized resolve to vote for the purple is expressed in a fine blending of resounding vibration:

*Burgher.* One for the purple—
*Burgess.* One for the purple—
*Burgher.* One for the purple—
*Burgess.* One for the purple—

ending in a strong chord from the Crier—

*Crier.* Blasphemous!

Although this volume is freer from the fault shown in his earlier group of *Poem Mimes*—the fault of assembling

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poems more or less related into a play instead of conceiving the play as a whole poem, in quality it falls short of the earlier book, which is consistently fanciful, poetic, musical. The *Plays for Merry Andrews* is made up of two plays in this earlier manner—*Vote the New Moon* and *Monday*—whose quality is up to his standard while they have developed in form. The two attempts to mix the reality of farce and burlesque with the fanciful result in *At the Sign of the Thumb and Nose* and *Uneasy Street*. Of these the first is the more successful, the second being a rather doubtful experiment for the Little Theatre. The bulk of the coffin would crowd the humor off the boards. It begins in irony and ends in farce. The first half is nicely pointed and balanced, but this is lost in the later confusion of a rather commonplace dialogue and a bizarre ending. *The Silent Waiter* is a topic discussed with some new angles, but it is not a good play. The handling of the window panels, the hands, and the headless waiter, while piquing the interest at first, proves tricky. The end of the discussion is trite.

The danger of the subtleties of the Little Theatre becoming effete is obvious, but then there is the danger of the Big Theatre becoming banal. The two theatres cannot be paralleled—they are two different mediums.

Alfred Kreymborg’s danger lies in his facility to sing, to be whimsical, to charm; in the temptation to spread his material too thin and caper for the fun of capering.

*Laura Sherry*
POETRY: A Magazine of Verse

NIGHTMARE FINGERS


The New York Times, quoted on the jacket of the first of these books, recommends it as follows:

Michael Strange is a signature underneath which can always be found images, phrases, the embodiment in colorful words of things seen or felt or thought, so unusual and so outstanding that they strike the attention at once and remain in the memory.

Benjamin De Casseres says of it:

The poems of Michael Strange do not “fly to the eyes.” They touch you remotely at first as with nightmare fingers. You go back to study them, to concentrate on them, to marry them.

In the light of such praise, it is only fair to give an example:

O those vast limbs in the chrysalis of me—
O this titanic aerial being so fettered yet
In the slime of my defective understanding—
This God with spheres nestling in His palm
Asleep in me yet—
And veiled in the stupor of my fear of things
Concerning this one tiny world.

However, in case one quotation is insufficient, and because the poems have as yet only touched us “with nightmare fingers” whereas someone else may want to “marry them,” it may be reassuring to quote Vision in its entirety:

I will follow the inward chime
Back through empurpling cups of concave hills—
Back through a swaying clot of drowned faces—
Nightmare Fingers

(All fastened and by nightmare pain into the sedges of memory)
Back through those negative rivers stilled past egress—
And out at last beyond brightening grasses—
Grasses rushing up into hills—peaks—
And up through these through a fume of clouds—aye at last into ether—
Ether—bright with those silver tracks of planet-visiting angels—
And austerely fragrant from the trailing of their doom-lined scarves—
Aye—out into ether humming from the dart of stars
Shaken by a choral thunder—
Until at last appearing among arching naves—
These ascending in architectural jet—
And arrested in vast foaming coils of livid lace—
And where—enlarging at the farthest end of distance—
The Eucharist—chromatic-rayed
And holding forth its Mystic Tenant—
Of Transfigured Rest.

Clair de Lune, the play by this author which John Barrymore produced recently in New York, is at least written in prose. 

Marion Strobel

THE SILVER STALLION

Young Girl and Other Poems, by Hildegarde Flanner; with an introduction and decorations by Porter Garnett. H. S. Crocker Co., San Francisco.
Star-drift, by Brian Padraic O'Seasnain. Four Seas Co.
Poems and Essays, by Alfred Hitch. Privately printed, Stockton, Cal.
The Blue Crane, by Ivan Swift. James T. White & Co.
Wading through these young first books reminded me of a time I had last summer looking for a run-away horse in the Maine woods. The silver stallion appears for an instant, now and then, but it is an uncomfortable business looking for him through the uncouth growths.

Possibly Hildegarde Flanner offers us freer and wider glimpses through the leaves of her little volume. Indeed, her book is a small wood of white birch-trees, pale and slender and frail. The poems are delicate, and in This Morning she offers us a moment like this:

After the emotion of rain
The mist parts across the morning,
Like the smile of one
Who has laughed in sleep
And cannot remember why.

There is a quaint simplicity in Discovery, but in the main the book lacks music, though one finds a hint of music and even strength in Communion. Young Girl received last year the Emily Chamberlain Cook Prize at the University of California; and she is almost, if not entirely, worthy of the beautiful dress and golden ornaments which Porter Garnett and the Crocker Company have so generously given her.

Mr. Austin's Poems for Men, if more virile, are full of a cold reserve, and a traditional and hampering growth of words; and coming, as they do, in the newer and freer
forms, they are but the wolf in sheep's clothing. The book is studied stuff, impersonal and unstirring, but in the rhyming verses the poet confesses a little, and in *A Bedroom* one comes on—

The fancied forest of Desire,
Among whose unseen leaves
Flits the golden-feathered bird.

I have read and re-read *Star-drift* and *Poems and Essays*, trying to be convinced that they are poetry. I cannot doubt that Mr. O'Seasnain and Mr. Hitch appreciate the glittering of great cities at night and the beauty of a dawn over the mountains; I cannot doubt that the wonder of earth has a word for them, that they have ideas, that Mr. O'Seasnain is "furious with the littlenesses of life," and that Mr. Hitch sees "his old age with its white hair—a signal of distress, white flag of surrender," and is sometimes struck with the futility of his own too many words. But what has all this to do with the great silver stallion whose hoof-beats are shaking the unknown winds like curtains over the hills?

Somewhat removed from forests and the mythological silver stallion, is Miss Kueffner's *Moods of Manhattan*. In *Afterword* she begs us not to ask, Is it prose?—is it verse? And we shall spare her the inconvenience of asking her, Is it poetry? We shall not compare or contrast her with Whitman or Sandburg whom she has obviously imitated, and the only little comment we make is, that her work is very much like Oppenheim—at his worst.

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The Blue Crane, by Ivan Swift, is crammed with respectability and politeness, and a triteness that sometimes washes its face. Old-fashioned words like yon, thy, full sure are found all over the book. And for Mr. Swift "A quiet place is full of eloquent whispers," a tree is "a trim sentry," and "I fain would laugh," if you please!

Captain Harry Lee probably realizes that his High Company is shredded prose, as he subtitles it Sketches. Some of these are good war sketches, simple and sincere, and there is sympathy and drama in Winged Heels. Others are sentimental and melodramatic, and through the whole book runs the so-called free-verse style of certain cigarette advertisements. John Burroughs, who in a recent issue of Current Opinion called Mr. Sandburg’s poetry “Bolshevic trash”, wrote on the cover of High Company, “These poems have great merit; they strike me as about the best free-verse poetry I have seen.”

I have saved the last book for a little relief. One finds in Mr. Bellamann’s poems a precision and a choice of words that give a mood without any fringes, or “muddle, mist and moonshine”—as in Yellow Leaves:

Yellow leaves among the green,
Like gold coins
Deep in old fountains.

In Dans Le Sillage, the poet touches off some of his contemporaries:

There’s Fletcher,
Painting with frost
On silk watered like an opal sea.

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The Silver Stallion

Amy Lowell rides like Joan
Under colored banners,
Flashing a thousand lights
From her two-edged sword.
Ezra Pound mutters darkly
Behind a Chinese veil.

And here one strikes the gravest fault in the book: there is too much of Fletcher, Amy Lowell and Ezra Pound in the poems.

If these first books are a bit discouraging, still
The winds are neighing
Amid the monotonous hills—

and the silver stallion may be not far away.

Oscar Williams

WHO WRITES FOLK-SONGS?


Just when and how the theory of the communal origin of folk-song, and hence of poetry itself, came to be evolved, I do not know. But for many years students of folk-lore have held tenaciously to the idea that folk-poetry is of crowd origin—i. e., the spontaneous improvisation of many minds, preferably during a dance or some community festival.

The idea is very like, and no doubt based upon, that similar "play-instinct" theory of the origin of art—a theory which saw nothing incongruous in the analogy between creative effort and a sportive calf's jumping!

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To me the belief that the genesis of poetry, or of rhythm, was in the "hand-clapping and thigh-slapping" of primitive people during a dance has always seemed unnecessarily far-fetched. As if man were outside creation, and some special arbitrary means had to be devised for inculcating in him the laws of that world of which he is a part! And also, how account then for the genesis of space-rhythm? Did the primitive potter and artist evolve their volumes and lines to a similar bodily accompaniment? And should the artist today, who wishes to regain the old simplicity, take a twirl or two and jump like Nijinsky between each stroke that he gives to his canvas?

Miss Pound does not attempt to explain psychologically the beginnings of poetry. Her method is historical, and she adheres very strictly to the task she has set herself, which is to show: that the classic English and Scotch ballads, such as are preserved in the Percy and Child collections, could be only the work of individual poets, and not of a crowd or "festal throng"; and that the accepted belief in the communal origin of folk-poetry thus falls down, so far as it is based specifically upon these ballads. Miss Pound then uses the evidence of the living folk-poetry nearest at hand—that of the American Indian, the Negro, and the cowboy—to show that it too is almost always of individual authorship (and most markedly inferior when, presumably, it is not); but that it is, in any case, of a character essentially different from the Child ballads, these latter being of a much higher artistic
Who Writes Folk-songs?

order and obviously the work of individual poets above
the peasant average, whether in that time or this.
One chapter seems to me to be missing from Miss
Pound's book which would make it finally conclusive: a
chapter on the medieval troubadours of the Continent.
With this as a background, the conviction that the Percy
and Child ballads must have been the work of individual
authors, who held as stock-in-trade the poetic traditions
of an older guild of minstrels and entertainers, would be
inescapable.
Apart from the specific problem of comparison involved,
Miss Pound's summary of the origins of our indigenous
folk-poetry is exceedingly interesting. Beginning with
the poetry of the American Indian, she shows that the
individual poet is as well known in the most primitive
tribe as in our own more sophisticated society; and
that there is no evidence that Indian poetry, although
communally sung, is so composed. She shows also that
many of the Negro spirituals are based upon the white
man's hymns, from which their form and substance are
largely derived. Thus although the individual authorship
of the spirituals may be lost sight of, their parentage at
least is not of crowd origin; and the additions made by
the Negro congregation in singing these songs are mostly
in the nature of refrain.
As for the American cowboy songs, for which Mr.
Lomax has claimed a communal origin, Miss Pound shows
that almost all of these are of known authorship; although
she does not on this account deny their genuine folk character, nor (as Professor Gerould in the New York Evening Post implies) discount them as mere "derelicts" because they have been based upon earlier songs or adapted to familiar tunes. On this score one would have to call many of Burns' poems mere derelicts, and discard with them as well a large body of accepted folk-songs.

But Miss Pound's definition of folk-poetry is perhaps wider than many folk-lore scholars will accept. She says:

All types of song are folk-songs, for the literary historian, which fulfill two tests: the people must like them and sing them—they must have "lived in the folk-mouth"; and they must have persisted in oral currency through a fair period of years. They must have achieved an existence not dependent upon a printed original. . . . Whatever has commended itself to the folk-consciousness, and has established currency for itself apart from written sources, is genuine folk-literature.

By this she does not mean, of course, that the song must never have had a printed origin, but that it must have become independent of this by being transplanted into the folk-memory. If the folk-lore scholars object to the inclusiveness of this definition, they will have to admit that many of their own restrictions would, if collectively applied, rule out practically the whole body of accepted folk-song, including the classic English ballads.

Thus, if known authorship discounts the term "folk-poetry," then the poetry of the American Indian is not folk-poetry. If printed sources are not allowed, then all the old ballads collected in broadsides or chap-books must go. If the fact that The Cowboy's Lament was adapted
from a popular Irish song of the eighteenth century makes its folk pretensions insecure, then *Barbara Allen*, which was also a stage song, will have to be discarded. In fact, if all the arbitrary barbed-wire fences of the folk-lorists are heeded, what will be left of the open range of folk-song? The professor of folk-song, like the melancholy cowboy, will have to go.

We are faced then with the necessity of accepting a wider definition of folk-song; or we may be brought to the pass of confessing that there is no such thing—there is only poetry, of various kinds. Also it may as well be admitted that folk-songs are as diversified in character as any other kind of poetry; and it is impossible to make any one type the "norm" to which all other examples must conform. Certainly the classic English ballads can not—as is too often done—be made the touchstone of what is or is not folk-poetry. Theirs is a highly specialized form; their authors were undoubtedly fairly sophisticated poets; and we have every right to believe that the ballads became folk-songs by the well-known process of descent.

In other words, we must recognize two broad sources of folk-song: one of the soil, as with genuinely primitive people like the American Indian (though none the less of individual origin); and the other of the stage, the church, the court, or the city, descending again to the soil and the folk, there to be rediscovered as folk-song.

Such ideas as these, presented by Miss Pound, are sufficiently radical to meet much opposition from the
adherents of the accepted belief in the communal "crowd" origin of folk-song. But just one thing is needed from Miss Pound's opponents to prove her theory a house of cards, and that is some evidence of a crowd or group improvisation of the ballads, or of any poetry higher than the nursery-rhyme type used in games. Did anyone ever see it happen?

A. C. H.

CORRESPONDENCE

PROFESSOR PHELPS AND ROSTAND

My dear Poetry: William Lyon Phelps has set my nerves cringing—is it possible that a Yale University professor should write the silly pompous windy stuff about Edmond Rostand which appears in the April Yale Review!

What a pity, when the whole world is trying to get a clear insight into things, to read such trashy stuff! Fortunately we know better, but some Frenchmen may judge American criticism and clearness of perception by Mr. Phelps' oracular utterances. Note the wisdom of this:

Creative genius is the most valuable gift that man can receive.

Isn't this a wonderfully stamped medal?—

He is a poet and a playwright, but above all, he is a magician.

But I wouldn't care about Mr. Phelps' platitudes if he didn't pretend to judge France and French drama with the same sweeping alacrity. I shall not trouble you with a reply en forme. Suffice it to say that nobody here with
Professor Phelps and Rostand

a sane mind thinks Rostand a "national" poet; and that anyhow poetry had nothing to do with our aching backs, our smarting feet—and final triumph. Nobody but dusty mediaeval people can foster such illusions.

The article contains such luminous ideas as these:

We must go back to La Fontaine for anything approaching the human manipulation of the animal kingdom.

No modern dramatist has reached the Shakespearean level except Rostand.

If Mr. Phelps wants to understand our modern drama better, let him come to Le Vieux Colombier with Copeau as a director, to Le Théâtre des Arts and a few others. Let him not forget, above all, that what we applaud is a dozen immortal masterpieces, among which we do not count L'Aiglon, Cyrano, or Chantecler.  

Jean Catel
Paris: April 25th, 1921.

NOTES

Marjorie Allen Seiffert (Mrs. Otto S.), of Moline, Ill., has appeared frequently in Poetry, and in 1919 her dialogue, The Old Woman, received one of our annual prizes. Her book, A Woman of Thirty, was published the same year by Alfred A. Knopf.

Babette Deutsch (now Mrs. A. Yarmolinsky), of New York, is the author of Banners (Geo. H. Doran Co.). Harcourt, Brace & Howe will publish next autumn an anthology of Russian poetry selected and translated by Mr. and Mrs. Yarmolinsky.

Mr. Oscar Williams, a Russian by birth, resident in New York but now sojourning in Chicago, will publish next autumn, through the Yale Press, his first book of verse.

The other poets of this month are new to our readers.

Miss Elizabeth Roberts, of Chicago, who has appeared in various magazines, will soon publish a book of poems, *Under the Tree*.

Ditto Mr. Harold Vinal, of Boston, whose book will be entitled *April Flame*.

Miss Josephine Pinckney, of Charleston, has published little as yet. Her poem, *In the Barn*, received recently a prize from the Poetry Society of South Carolina.

Mr. William A. Norris is a young poet of Milwaukee, Wis.

**BOOKS RECEIVED**

**ORIGINAL VERSE:**


*Spanish Moss and English Myrtle*, by Margaret Dashiell. Stratford Co.


*Souvenirs*, by Badry Farkouh. Privately printed.

*Ireland, Broadway and Other Loves*, by Mary Fleming. Guido Bruno, New York.

*The Mystic Warrior*, by James Oppenheim. Alfred A. Knopf.


**PLAYS:**


*The Cult of Content*, by Noel Leslie. Four Seas Co.

**PROSE:**


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The New York Sunday Tribune of Jan. 9th, 1921, said editorially, in quoting seven poems from our January number:

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"We need not linger over the many English and French contributors to this periodical... We do have to note that it has published, as it honestly claims, much of the best experimental poetry written by Americans in the past eight years... They have succeeded in their primary design—to create a poetry which should be American in thought, feeling, subject, and form. That is, after all, a distinct achievement."

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—Whitman

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