

Poetry the Censor Passed and Passed Up

Four Books of Verse

JAMES STEPHENS'S *Reincarnations* stands out in a group of four recent books of verse. He is always fantastical, brilliant and most unexpected, in his prose as well as in his poetry, and your pleasure in *Reincarnations* has much the flavor of that found in reading *Here Are Ladies*, which will be remembered by every one so fortunate as to be familiar with it as one of the most delightful books of short stories imaginable.

These poems are translations in some cases and in others "bubbles of verse blown about a phrase or line," to use Mr. Stephens's own expression, from the four Irish poets, Geoffrey Keating, O'Rafferty, O'Bruidair and O'Rahilly, all of them beggars and one, O'Rafferty, blind. With one anonymous selection and another from Pierce Ferriter these make up the collection.

A sombre but exquisite example of what Mr. Stephens has done in the case of O'Rahilly's verse, which he has despaired of translating but has used as he desired, is *Inis Fal*:

"Now may we turn aside and dry our tears,
And comfort us, and lay aside our fears,
For all is gone—all comely quality,
All gentleness and hospitality,
All courtesy and merriment is gone;
Our virtues all are withered every one,
Our music vanished and our skill to sing:
Now may we quiet us and quit our moan,
Nothing is whole that could be broken; no thing
Remains to us of all that was our own."

James Huncker has called Mr. Stephens "a genuine Irish genius, one in whose heart there boils and bubbles fantasy and tears, the irony that burns and a bitter-sweet humor that is mad." The fantasy and tears will be discovered in *Peggy Mitchell*, after "O'Rafferty," but which in its present form can no longer be called O'Rafferty's:

"As lily grows up easily,
In modest, gentle dignity
To sweet perfection,
So grew she,
As easily.

"Or as the rose that takes no care
Will open out on sunny air
Bloom after bloom, fair after fair,
Sweet after sweet;
Just so did she,
As carelessly.

"She is our torment without end,
She is our enemy and friend,
Our joy, our woe;
And she will send
Madness or glee
To you and me,
And endlessly."

War poems by Amelia Josephine Burr make up *The Silver Trumpet*. Not blood and thunder poems, but quieter ones to serve as inspiration and challenge for us at home. They are not, with a few exceptions, worthy of this author, who has done really fine work, and serve to strengthen our belief that a book of poems by one author dedicated to a single purpose can scarcely fail to be a disappointment.

There is one poem, *The Letters*, already rather widely quoted, which is among the best things that Miss Burr has done, and several which would give to a miscellaneous collection the note that is overdone in this volume. *A Poet Enlists* has no dedication, but will find one in the heart of almost every reader:

"And all the songs that I might sing—
Madness to risk them, so you say?
How is it such a certain thing
That I can sing them if I stay?"

"The winds of God are past control,
They answer to no human call,
And if I lose my living soul
That is—for me—the end of all.

"Better to shout one last great song,
Dying myself, to dying men,
Than crawl the bitter years along
And never sing again."

Herbert J. Hall has followed a habit of many poets in naming his book *Moonrise* for one of its poorest poems. His verse is not well known, but it is well worth knowing, his sea songs and those inspired by music particularly. In the group of four entitled *Cymbals*, *My Flute*, *Piccolo* and *Tympani*, he has done a most unusual and arresting thing in conveying to us the actual effect of the vari-

ous instruments in an orchestra. It would be good to quote the series, but we must content ourselves with one and have selected *Cymbals*:

"They trust me with the cymbals.
They do well.
I count the time,
I bide the time.
I hear the strings,
The wood-wind and the brass, their call.
Their calling rises like a wave—
I strike!
Above the rolling drums—I strike!
Like shields of warriors clashing in the sun.
I strike, I strike!
I tip the great crescendo with a flash of fire."

While it will be generally agreed that the musical group is the most original, there will be found imaginative and pleasing effects throughout the book.

Songs of Sunrise is a rather large collection of what may be termed "newspaper verse," written by Denis McCarthy. It is much the sort of poetry that Edgar Guest writes so profusely and has nothing distinctive or memorable about it. Good old fashioned, serviceable verse it is, with an occasional didactic poem, such as *Not "Can't" but "Will,"* giving you the feeling that it has been written in great quiet and content by the fireside after the evening meal. Mr. McCarthy has very evidently been spared the strange and eerie throes which we think of poets as suffering, and the result, to be unpoetical, lacks "kick."

REINCARNATIONS. BY JAMES STEPHENS. The Macmillan Company. \$1.
THE SILVER TRUMPET. BY AMELIA JOSEPHINE BURR. George H. Doran Company. \$1.
MOONRISE: A BOOK OF POEMS. BY HERBERT J. HALL. Moffat, Yard & Co.
SONGS OF SUNRISE. BY DENIS MCCARTHY. Little, Brown & Co. \$1.25.

"Hours of France"

HOURS OF FRANCE, a group of poems by Paul Scott Mowrer, war correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News*, is divided into two sections, *Hours of Peace* and *Hours of War*, and although his work is very uneven and in many cases disappointing there is real poetic feeling and freshness of outlook to be found frequently, most noticeably in the nature verses from which we select the naively charming *Order*:

It is half past eight on the blossomy bush:
The petals are spread for a sunning;
The little gold fly is scrubbing his face;
The spider is nervously running
To fasten a thread; the night-going moth
Is folding his velvet perfection;
And presently over the clover will come
The bee on a tour of inspection.

In the more serious work his "reach exceeds his grasp," which, so far as later accomplishment is concerned, is a promising sign, but for the present this prevents such an effort as *The Cause* from being the satisfactory achievement that it so closely approaches. Mr. Mowrer is decidedly more successful in the things which require a lighter touch, as in *Fête-Day at Plou*, a few verses of which are quoted:

If your faith is as rich as your pocket is poor,
And you travel all night on a broken sea-moor,
You may happen by luck—though it's not very sure—
To be present at Plou on a fête-day.

I will leave my old living and shoulder my sack
And take to the moor by the crooked goat-track.

If I have any luck I will never come back,
For I'll settle in Plou until doomsday.

O the country of Plou is the country for me!
I'll sail with the fishermen over the sea,
I'll grow a long beard and drink bright eau-de-vie,
And wear a black coat on a fête-day.

HOURS OF FRANCE. BY PAUL SCOTT MOWRER. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.

"Desire"

A LARGE number of poems by Charlotte Eaton have been grouped very suitably under the title *Desire* and are given over frankly and joyfully to love, spiritual and physical, but chiefly physical. Like one of her sister poets who writes sometimes of love, though never so simply, Charlotte Eaton meditates on *The Bath*, and in this poem we

may become familiar with the form in which most of the verses are written as well as the spirit to a large extent underlying them:

Without aid of soaps, or sweet smelling lotion,
Each day do I bathe in the clear Croton water,
Remaining submerged for long, that my body may absorb its invigorating properties,
Stretched at ease—singing to myself—or exercising for mere delight in untrammelled action;
After which I walk, breathing deeply the fresh air, caring not whether I go,
Or sit meditating, the sunshine playing upon my loosened hair;
And thus do I pass my time, careless of those intellectual pursuits that once engrossed me,
For although he whom my soul loves is an adept at many arts,
Understanding well the euphonistic tongues of the Orient—
And fain would I converse comprehensively with him on these subjects,
Yet well do I know that neither skill, acquirement, nor any native excellence,
Can prevail over the heart of man like the possession of physical beauty.

DESIRE. BY CHARLOTTE EATON. Duffield & Co. \$1.50.

"The Burglar of the Zodiac"

IF we didn't know Gertrude Stein's poetry we should be inclined to think Wilham Rose Benet's unconventional, but since she has shown what can be done in the way of real raving, we must consider *The Burglar of the Zodiac* more leniently than we might have in the years before *Tender Buttons* made its appearance and free verse became rampant. The best thing to do is to take such poems as these humorously, but Mr. Benet makes it very hard by adding weak and halting rhyme to his already overburdened verses. In *The Quick Lunch Counter*, for example, the rhyme is perhaps the most unpleasant feature. We quote the second section:

Clerks crunch a roll or two.
Pimpled salesmen spread
Raw mustard on their bread.
Small tradesmen, with a bowl or two
Of milk and crackers floating,
See scare-heads black and gloating.
And guttural foreign voices
Dispute 'mid other noises
A dozen fruitless themes . . .
Meanwhile his bow Apollo poises,
Loosing swift-gleaming dreams:

There would be relief in having one musical and human sort of poem to prove to the reader that the man who chooses to inflict all this unpleasantness can really write poetry and is just doing this for fun, but no such proof is to be found. It may be that Mr. Benet has a kindred feeling for the people in his poem entitled *Asylum* and fears to risk even a brief sojourn among the real poets. This is very much the best poem to be found in the book, but it is too long to give more than the last two verses:

So one wears a crown,
One piles his gold in rows,
One balances a feather
On the end of his nose.
One's a sword-swallower.
One mumbles One-Two Three.
And all in our asylum
Are unhappy as can be.

For, you see, the whole trouble
(Though we're absolutely mad)
Is, we fear a strange sensation
We have sometimes had.
So sometimes we huddle close
And clutch at heart and brain.
For I'll tell you what's the trouble:
We're afraid of going—sane!

THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC. BY WILLIAM ROSE BENET. Yale University Press. \$1.25.

War Verses.

TWO books for the solace of those whose hearts are at the front come to us from men who have already won the attention and loyalty of a large public. Edgar A. Guest is on the staff of the *Detroit Free Press*, where he began as of-

fice boy, and his poems, which were first published in that paper, have become regular features of newspapers throughout the country. John Oxenham has been called "the poet laureate of the war" by some of his 5,000,000 readers, and the title, *The Fiery Cross*, gives the keynote of his new book. He believes that the soul of the world is being purged of evil by the war and a large proportion of his poems are expressive of this belief.

In many minds the keenest memory will be of *Cock Your Bonnets*, printed on the poetry page of *Books and the Book World* for April 7.

More homely in character, but illumined by the same spirit of hopefulness, though lacking the extremely religious note which prevails in *The Fiery Cross*, the poems in *Over Here*, Mr. Guest's book, which attract us most are such simple and musical verses as *Spring in the Trenches*:

It's coming time for planting in that little patch of ground,
Where the lad and I made merry as he followed me around;
The sun is getting higher, and the skies above are blue,
And I'm hungry for the garden, and I wish the war were through.
But it's tramp, tramp, tramp,
And it's never look behind,
And when you see a stranger's kids,
Pretend that you are blind.

THE FIERY CROSS. BY JOHN OXENHAM. George H. Doran Company. \$1.
OVER HERE. BY EDGAR A. GUEST. The Reilly & Britton Company. \$1.25.

A sample paragraph from *Little Journeys Towards Paris, 1914-1918; a Guide-Book for Confirmed Tourists*, by W. Hohenzollern, translated by Simeon Strunsky and published at 60 cents by Henry Holt and Company:

"Fares, as intimated in our introduction, are extremely high. The French army, contrary to the usual custom, refuses to sell through tickets and insists on collecting fares while the train is under way. Return or circular tickets are obtained without difficulty in advance. The author has made use of a circular ticket during the last four years and it still has an indefinite time to run."

Doubleday, Page & Co. will publish this fall a new book of verse by Rudyard Kipling under the title *Gethsemane*, which is the title of one of the poems in it. Some of the others are *The Sons of Martha*, *France, For All We Have and Are*, *The Song of the Lathes* and *A Nativity*, written in memory of Kipling's son, John, who is presumed to have been killed in Flanders.

NEW WAR BOOKS

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