

THE PLOUGH

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

HE sniffed the clean and eager smell
Of crushed wild garlic, as he thrust
Beneath the shallows: and a spell
He stood there munching a thick crust—
The fresh tang giving keener zest
To bread and cheese—and watched a pair
Of wagtails preening wing and breast,
Then running—flirting tails in air,
And pied plumes sleeked to silky sheen—
Chasing each other in and out
The wet wild garlic's white and green.

And then remembering, with a shout,
And rattle whirring, he ran back
Again into the Fair Maid's Mead,
To scare the rascal thieves and black
That flocked from afar and near to feed
Upon the sprouting grain. As one
They rose with clapping rustling wings—
Rooks, starlings, pigeons, in the sun
Circling about him in wide rings,
And plovers hovering over him
In mazy, interweaving flight—
Until it made his young wits swim
To see them up against the light,
A dazzling maze of black and white
Against the clear blue April sky—
Wings on wings in flashing flight
Swooping low and soaring high—
Swooping, soaring, fluttering, flapping,
Tossing, tumbling, swerving, dipping,
Chattering, cawing, creaking, clapping,
Till he felt his senses slipping—
And gripped his cornerake rattle tight,
And flourished it above his head

Till every bird was out of sight:
 And laughed, when all had flown and fled,
 To think that he, and all alone,
 Could put so many thieves to rout.

Then sitting down upon a stone
 He wondered if the school were out—
 The school where, only yesterday,
 He'd sat at work among his mates—
 At work that now seemed children's play,
 With pens and pencils, books and slates—
 Although he'd liked it well enough,
 The hum and scuffling of the school,
 And hadn't cared when Grim-and-Gruff
 Would call him dunderhead and fool.

And he could see them sitting there—
 His classmates, in the lime-washed room,
 With fingers inked and tousled hair—
 Bill Baxter with red cheeks abloom,
 And bright black eyes; and Ginger Jim
 With frecked face and solemn look,
 Who'd wink a pale blue eye at him,
 Then sit intent upon his book,
 While, caught a-giggle, he was caned.

He'd liked that room, he'd liked it all—
 The window steaming when it rained;
 The sunlight dancing on the wall
 Among the glossy charts and maps;
 The blotchy stain beside the clock
 That only he of all the chaps
 Knew for a chart of Dead Man's Rock
 That lies in Tiger Island Bay—
 The reef on which the schooners split
 And founder, that would bear away
 The treasure-chest of Cut-Throat-Kit,
 That's buried under Black Bill's bones
 Beneath the purple pepper-tree . . .
 A trail of clean-sucked cherry-stones,
 Which you must follow carefully,
 Across the dunes of yellow sand,
 Leads winding upward from the beach
 Till, with a pistol in each hand,
 And cutlass 'twixt your teeth, you reach. . .

Plumping their fat crops peacefully

THE PLOUGH

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Were plovers, pigeons, starlings, rooks,
Feeding on every side while he
Was in the land of storybooks.
He raised his rattle with a shout
And scattered them with yell and crake . . .
A man must mind what he's about
And keep his silly wits awake,
Not go woolgathering, if he'd earn
His wage. And soon, no schoolboy now,
He'd take on a man's job, and learn
To build a rick, and drive the plough,
Like father . . . Up against the sky
Beyond the spinney and the stream,
With easy stride and steady eye
He saw his father drive his team,
Turning the red marl gleaming wet
Into long furrows clean and true.
And dreaming there, he longed to set
His young hand to the ploughshare too.

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

BY EDITH WYATT

IN *Real Conversations*, Stephen Phillips is reported as saying to Mr. William Archer:

“The English nation is suspicious of anything in which the effort is not rendered obvious by partial failure.”

The saying might apply as truthfully to that jealous American dislike of all counsels of perfection which is one of the meanest characteristics of democracy.

In this country the fame of Stephen Phillips has had a singular history—the history of a repute which may be said to have been hung for its good name. An observant American publisher once remarked that in his view prestige in letters followed somewhat indiscriminately the way of the Sun-Worshippers, from East to West. In this well-known course, the poetry of Stephen Phillips was admired in New York mainly because of its London vogue: and admired in Chicago mainly because of its metropolitan celebrity. Received here in this fashion less from an informed taste for the separate works of the poet than from a mere pastoral gregariousness, his several poetic productions were, at least so far as this observer has known them and their reputation, very widely praised for certain elements they never possessed—as, for instance, the power of creating character.

On the other hand, their extraordinary faculty in the use of fresh lyric form and rhymeless verse, passed unnoticed. The poet's most standardized and lifeless performance, *Paolo and Francesca*, has always been his best-known composition here. It is not surprising, then, that work which had never been really considered for itself should have been rapidly disparaged for us without reference to its actual quality by a London reaction apparently akin to that of the voter against the candidate ceaselessly known as the just.

“The complacency of the critics is so universal as to be