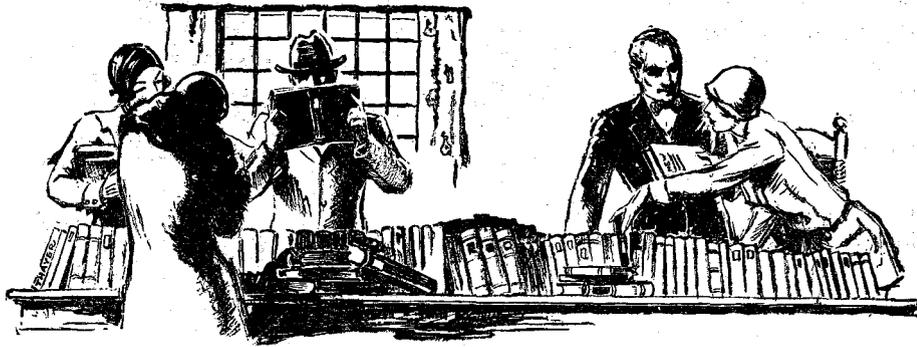


▷▷ The New Books ◁◁



The New Poetry

MORE new poetry seems to be appearing this season than in any season for a number of years, and the shelves are stacked with the work of both new and old poets. Some of it is bad—quite a bit of it—but there is more good poetry appearing today than readers are accustomed to expect. Perhaps we are having a poetic renaissance, and if so its characteristic manner will not be free verse or imagism, but lyrics in strict forms, and longer works of distinctly philosophical flavor. We are getting away from stunts in printing and in ideas, and down to concepts rather than images. A religious strain is back again in much of the poetry—even in the work of people who formerly disowned any interest in religion. Rhyme is back, and so is blank verse in some remarkably free and beautiful rhythms, conforming to definite beats of phrase as often as to beats of the accents of words. There are a good many lyrics and sonnets, but much of the work is long, complex and metaphysical, much is heavy and studied, very little merely descriptive. The influence of two men reverberates through much of the poetry published so far this fall; these men, interestingly enough, are Albert Einstein and Conrad Aiken. Metaphysics, a complex pattern or method, and formal design seem to be in the minds of all the poets, both old and new; and the result is a body of work unusually high in thought-content. One feels like adding to that sentence the exclamation “Thank God!” after all the vapid verse we have had to put up with in recent years under the name of poetry.

Rarest among the new volumes is the work of people who might be called natural poets—who write in a clear, simple and moving style that seems as easy as breathing. George Dillon has a new book out—his second—called *The Flowering Stone* (Viking Press, \$1.75), that is of this rare sort, refreshing and lovely, full of poignant beauty, entirely unstudied in expression. This book gives, in the form of lyrics and sonnets, a

youthful view of the world—of life and love and death. Whatever struggle the writer may have gone through to produce his effect, the reader has no way of knowing, for George Dillon is too good an artist to let the struggle be apparent. His lyrics seem to flow inevitably from the fulness of a poetic spirit, and they have that evanescent and shining quality almost never found except in the work of youth. Mr. Dillon’s first book, *Boy in the Wind*, was received with a great deal of praise; *The Flowering Stone* will receive much more, and deserves it.

IN GREAT contrast to the poetry of George Dillon is that of Edwin Arlington Robinson, whose *Matthias at the Door* (Macmillan, \$1.75) has just been published. This long, abstruse and darkly imaginative tale has more real poetry in it than could be found in *The Glory of the Nightingales*, but it is not the sharp and vital poetry that appeared in *Tristram*. In dour and heavy-going lines it relates episodes in the life of Matthias, once a contented and successful man, who discovers that his wife Natalie, whom he adores, had originally been engaged to marry another man, his own friend Timberlake. She had given up Timberlake and married him out of gratitude when he had saved Timberlake’s life. Matthias, maddened by the discovery that his love had been so unfairly placed, forces his attentions brutally upon Natalie, and she is horrified and frightened at the change in his attitude, and goes out and kills herself in a rocky gorge near the house, a place where, not long before this time, a friend named Garth had also killed himself. The tragedy reduces Matthias to a despondent loneliness, and he drags out his useless life until one time Timberlake turns up, ill and in fact dying. Matthias welcomes his companionship, and when he dies, like the others before him, Matthias wants to die too. But when he descends into his rocky gorge, the shade of Garth requires him to turn back into life again, and build up once more all he has lost.

This brutal and uncompromising story

is called by the publishers “a study of the underworld of emotions in the lives of four people, each of whom meets defeat in a different way.” As an analysis this does not seem very satisfactory. Natalie could scarcely be called a failure. Rather she seems stupid and frightened and finally weak; and all four people try to meet defeat in exactly the same manner, for all their mental turnings. It is a dark fable, which Robinson might have made more understandable had he chosen to unravel a little the metrical complexity of his statements, and to speak out, now and then at least, in a manner clear and plain. But he does not choose, and many of us are left in the dark, and still wishing for a return of the old Robinson, whose work was less complex, but far more moving and alive.

Witter Bynner’s new volume is called *Eden Tree* (Knopf, \$2.50). It is a story of the spiritual progress of a man under adversity, and it shows plainly the marks of the influence of Conrad Aiken in its large pattern, though not in the detail. It is written in the free ode style, with lines of any length, rhymed any way at all, but almost always rhymed. This is a hard form to manage, as it compels no compression, and tends to string the subject out, and allow the ubiquitous rhymes to lead it astray in places, giving a long, lush and rambling quality to the ideas. These effects are apparent in *Eden Tree*. Witter Bynner at his best and in his own characteristic style is polished, brief, concentrated and intense; in this looser manner he is far too diffuse, and his psychological and philosophical document, the statement of a man at middle age, lacks force because it lacks shape. Often the lines are beautiful and the figures very striking, but too often their



What to Read

FICTION

American Beauty, by Edna Ferber: Doubleday, Doran. A story of early Colonial settlement, its growth, decay, and final replacement by the new order.

First Person Singular, by Somerset Maugham: Doubleday, Doran. Worldly and brilliant short stories.

Finch’s Fortune, by Mazo de la Roche: Little, Brown. The third book about the Whiteoaks family of Jalna.

A Calendar of Sin, by Evelyn Scott: Cape & Smith. An absorbing chronicle in two volumes of American manners and morals.

The Dutch Shoe Mystery, by Ellery Queen: Stokes. A good yarn for those who like puzzlers.

NON-FICTION

The Epic of America, by James Truslow Adams: Little, Brown. The growth and prospects of the American dream; an interpretation of the rise of American civilization.

Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw. A Correspondence: Putnam. Interesting, charming, witty.

Savage Paradise, by Margaret Matches: Century. An American girl in New Guinea; something really different in a travel book.

America Weighs Her Gold, by James Harvey Rogers: Yale University Press. For those who want a clear explanation of the effect of the gold supply on economic problems today.

Mahatma Gandhi at Work, edited by C. F. Andrews: Macmillan. The second volume of Gandhi’s autobiography, giving a complete view of the man and his philosophy.

author drops you suddenly into the banal of sound and sense.

The story is that of a man who, having lost the woman he loves, turns to the world to see what it still holds to console and distract him. He turns to a friend, to a prostitute, to drink, to God, and to Nature; and he finds most comfort in the last. During the space of his search he relives the life of Adam, and takes Lilith and also Eve into his arms.

But we have heard too often of the prostitute glorified, and of Lilith and the snake, to believe that they symbolize important discoveries in any very mature philosophy. Middle age, according to *Eden Tree*, offers little more to the mind and heart than does early youth; which is interesting, but leaves the reader somewhere between belief and unbelief.

American Poetry from the Beginning to Whitman (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.50), edited by Louis Untermeyer, is an excellent volume for the student and the library. This anthology is a companion volume to Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry*, and it is full of well-ordered information and well-chosen poems. The collection is frankly critical, and concerns itself with reestimating the older poets who fell into disfavor when Victorianism became unpopular, and in making new choices from their works, so that much that was popular and bad in the average anthologies has been culled and much that was almost unknown but good has been reinstated. A general preface describing the beginnings of American poetry, and tracing its authors and its trends as far as Whitman, opens the book; and there is a biographical introduction to each author besides. The order of material is chronological, and the editor has included a goodly quantity of the work of obscure poets such as Joel Barlow, George Hill, Edward Coote Pinkney, Thomas Holley Chivers, Jones Very, and a number of others, with the result that his collection is meaty and well rounded; and it is put together with good sense and careful judgment.

Full reference lists and indices complete the volume, which is altogether an excellent and scholarly piece of work.

BERNICE KENYON.

The Week's Reading

Leonard Wood, a Biography
By Hermann Hagedorn
Harper & Bros.
2 Vols., \$10.00

Whatever his virtues and faults, Leonard Wood had one outstanding quality. He suffered cruel disappointments and more than his share of ill-fortune, but he never gave way to vain regrets. He was never crushed. He found some task to do and so kept on with the

task of living. If a moral must be found in the life of an important man, this is the moral in the life of Leonard Wood. Mr. Hagedorn's biography is, obviously, "official" in the sense that it was written with the cooperation of the family. It must be judged with this in mind and with, perhaps, the realization that the author is sometimes counsel for the defense rather than historian. Mr. Hagedorn would doubtless be the first to admit this and the admission detracts in no way from the story of a brave and intelligent soldier whose fate it was to win great victories for every one except himself.

A first duty of the biographer, after all, is to make vivid and clear the life epic of his subject. He may choose to do this with overtones of criticism or appraisal or praise. Mr. Hagedorn has selected praise, but he has written a moving story with full appreciation of the undernote of tragedy in the career of General Wood. It is a full-length biography, based on exhaustive research, upon painstaking examination of all the available material. It starts with the boyhood of Leonard Wood on Cape Cod and moves swiftly through the years at the Harvard Medical College, through the Apache campaigns in Arizona, the Spanish War, Governor of Cuba, labors in the Philippines, duties as Chief of Staff in Washington and then through the work of impressing upon America the need for preparedness. The climax lies in General Wood's rejection for leadership in France and in his defeat for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1920.

General Wood was never merely a military man. His outstanding achievements, of course, were as colonial administrator and Mr. Hagedorn demonstrates beyond successful contradiction that his talents in that rôle were preëminent. And yet Wood—as men nearly always are—was his own worst enemy. He was a soldier. He obeyed orders. But he constantly sought to shape those orders. He was exceedingly ambitious, as Mr. Hagedorn frankly admits, but his lack of diplomacy and tact brought defeat of his ambitions in the end. More than anything else, a malignant fate pursued him. He dared to have been the friend of Theodore Roosevelt and then faced Woodrow Wilson as a commander-in-chief. It is too soon for the final verdict upon the decision of President Wilson, Secretary of War Baker and General Pershing to deny General Wood a command in France. This must wait upon publication of all of Woodrow Wilson's letters and a more detailed explanation by Mr. Baker. But Mr. Hagedorn makes it amply clear that General Wood, although he may have disqualified himself for service abroad, was shabbily treated.



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