POETRY

LONDON

No. 18 · MAY 1950 · 2s. 6d.

CONTENTS INCLUDE THE TRUE CONFESSION OF GEORGE BARKER · IAIN FLETCHER'S ODE VARIENT UPON LORD HERBERT'S *Iesus Patibilis* · NEW POEMS BY GAVIN EWART · JAMES REEVES AND CRITICISM BY GEORGE EVERY S.S.M. · KENNETH MUIR

To be published on 1st May

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POETRY

LONDON

Edited by RICHARD MARCH and NICHOLAS MOORE

VOLUME 5 May, 1950 NUMBER 18

COMMENT

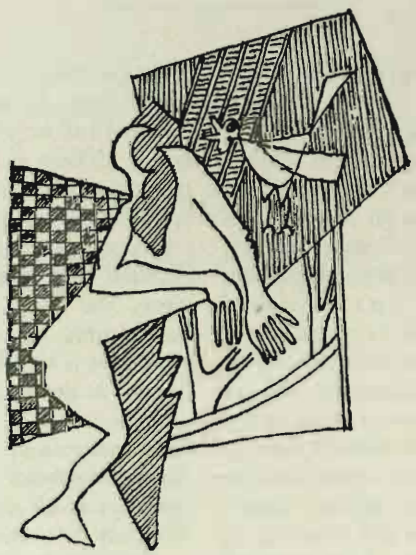
A distinguished correspondent in New Mexico, congratulating us on the January number, writes: "The poetry and criticism are excellent. Very apt to point to 'Count Orlo'. It is in the 'tradition', as you British say nowadays, and shows both imagination and fancy (which are not the same thing); and a nostalgic feeling which is not escapism, but dwelling for a while on the other side of the 'material' that engulfs us since we tasted the flavour of blood. If we must die let us do it singing. It is more becoming. Let us do it without frowning. It is more elegant."

Europe no doubt (or Continental Europe to begin with) may in certain circumstances become "expendable", as the military strategists so laconically put it. In this connection, and because the "other side" of the material has not a little to do with poetry-making, it may be pertinent to refer to an aspect of our contemporary situation which does not necessarily come within the purview of poets: "It is a question of confidence: the United States, if she is to base plans for the defence of her own people on an advanced base in Europe, must feel that Britain can be relied on implicitly to behave honourably and with rigour. If she could not do this and had to abandon the idea of such a strategy, on the following day Russia would begin by an inexorable process to seep forward and acquire control up to the Atlantic coast. There is no need to impute a base motive. From the point of view of ordinary self-interest, especially after her experience in 1941, she seeks the best possible means of defence, and from a more altruistic point of view, she may deem that her system of government, which she compares to Tsarism, would be a benefit to the peoples of Europe. *She cannot understand, nor could she necessarily be expected to take the matter into her reckoning if she could understand, that the establishment of a Russian-dominated Communism would involve the extinction of all that is most precious in Western European civilisation.*"* (Our italics.)

The introduction of problems arising out of nuclear physics might seem to be irrelevant to serious discussions of poetry. Still, poets are susceptible to mood, to situation, to the spiritual climate of the times. And output might be affected (whether favourably or adversely is beside the point) if Rathbone Place were, say, the Potsdammer Platz and the line of the Elbe an ever-present reality. In spite of this, and to show that all such matters are of

*R. F. Harrod: *The Economic Consequences of Atomic Energy in The Atomic Age:* Sir Halley Stewart lectures, 1948.

only secondary importance and can even be dismissed as trivialities, when a true poet is at work, we would ask our readers to peruse attentively, and preferably *to read aloud*, Mr. Iain Fletcher's "*Ode Varient upon Herbert's Iesus Patibilis*", a longer poem of outstanding merit such as is not often seen these days. In this breathless age, with annihilation always to be reckoned with as an interesting possibility in the not-too-distant future, long poems of sustained quality are not easy to achieve. We are fortunate in being able to present in this issue so fine an example, side by side with the remarkable confessions of Mr. George Barker.



DRAWING BY J. LITTNA

GEORGE BARKER

FROM "THE TRUE CONFESSION OF GEORGE BARKER"

O Bishop Andrews, Bishop Berkeley,
  John Peale Bishop and Bishop's Park,
I see through my ego darkly
  But all that I perceive is dark:
Episcopally illuminate
  My parochial testaments
And with your vestal vested vestments
  Tenderly invest my state.

Let Grace, like lace, descend upon me
  And dignify my wingless shoulder:
Let Grace, like space, lie heavy on me
  And make me seem a little older
A little nobler; let Grace sidle
  Into my shameful bed, and, curling
About me in a psychic bridal
  Prove that even Grace is darling.

The moon is graceful in the sky,
  The bird is graceful in the air,
The girl is graceful too, so why
  The devil should I ever care
Capitulating to despair?
  Since Grace is clearly everywhere
And I am either here or there
  I'm pretty sure I've got my share.

Grace whom no man ever held,
  Whose breast no randy hand has pressed,
Grace no lover has undressed
  Because she's naked as a beast—
Grace will either gild or geld.
  Sweet Grace abounding into bed
Jumps to it hot as springald—
  After a brief prayer is said.

Come to me, Grace, and I will take
  You close into my wicked hands,
And when you come, make no mistake,
  I'll disgrace you at both ends.
We'll grace all long throughout the night
  And as the morning star looks in
And blanches at the state we're in,
  We'll grace again to be polite.

For Marriage is a state of grace.
  So many mutual sacrifices
Infallibly induce a peace
  Past understanding or high prices:
So many forgivenesses for so many
  Double crossings and double dealings—
I know that the married cannot have any
  But the most unselfish feelings.

But the wise Church, contemplating
  The unnatural demands
That marriage and the art of mating
  Make on egoists, commands
We recognise as sacramental
  A union otherwise destined
To break in every anarchic wind
  Broken by the temperamental.

Off the Tarpeian, for high treason,
  Tied in a bag with a snake and a cock,
The traitor trod the Roman rock.
  But in the bag for a better reason
The married lovers, cock and snake,
  Lie on the Mount of Venus. Traitor
Each to each, fake kissing fake,
  So punished by a betrayed creator.

"The willing union of two lives."
  This is, the Lords of Justice tell us,
The purpose of the connubial knot.
  But I can think of only one
Function that at best contrives
  To join the jealous with the jealous,
And what this function joins is not
  Lives but the erogenous zone.

I see the young bride move among
  The nine-month trophies of her pride,
And though she is not really young
  And only virtually a bride
She knows her beauties now belong
  With every other treasure of her
Past and future, to her lover:
  But the babies work out wrong.

I see the bridegroom in his splendour
  Rolling like an unbridled stallion,
Handsome, powerful and tender,
  And passionate as an Italian—

And nothing I could say would lend a
  Shock of more surprise and pride
Than if I said that young rapscallion
  Was necking with his legal bride.

I knew a beautiful courtesan
  Who, after service, would unbosom
Her prettier memories, like blossom,
  At the feet of the weary man:
"I am such a sensitive protoplasm,"
  She whispered, when I was not there,
"That I experience an orgasm
  If I *touch* a millionaire."

Lying with, about, upon,
  Everything and everyone,
Every happy little wife
  Miscegenates once in a life,
And every pardonable groom
  Needs, sometimes, a change of womb,
Because, although damnation may be,
  Society needs every baby.

It takes a sacrament to keep
  Any man and woman together:
Birds of a forgiveable feather
  Always flock and buck together;
And in our forgiveable sleep
  What birdwatcher will know whether
God Almighty sees we keep
  Religiously to one another?

I often wondered what method
  Governed the heavenly mind when
It made as audience to God
  The sycophant, the seaman sod,
The solipsist—in short, men.
  Even the circus-stepping mare
Lifts her nose into the air
  In the presence of this paragon.

For half a dozen simple years
  We lived fluently, so to speak,
On twenty-seven shillings a week;
  And when, worried and in tears,
My mercenary wife complained
  That we could not afford our marriage,
"It's twice as much," I explained,
  "As MacNeice pays for his garage."

I entertained the Marxian whore—
  I was concerned with economics,
And naturally felt that more
  Thought should be given to our stomachs:
But when I let my fancy dwell
  On anything below the heart
I found my thoughts, and hands as well,
  Resting upon some private part.

I sat one morning on the can
  That served us as a lavatory
Composing some laudatory
  Verses on the state of man.
My wife called from the kitchen dresser:
  "There's someone here from Japan.
He wants you out there. As a Professor.
  Oh, yes. The War just began."

So Providence engineered her
  Circumstantial enigmas
And the crown of the objector
  Was snatched from me. In wars
The conscientious protestor
  Preserves, as worlds sink to force,
The dignified particular—
  Particularly one, of course.

"The hackneyed rollcall of chronology"—
  Thus autobiography to de Quincey.
And I can understand it, since he
  Lived like a footnote to philology.
But the archangelic enumeration
  Of unpredictable hegiras—
These, with a little exaggeration,
  I could adduce for my admirers.

And so when I saw you, nightmare island,
  Fade into the autumnal night
I felt the tears rise up for my land,
  But somehow these tears were not quite
As sick as when my belly laughed
  Remembering England had given me
The unconditional liberty
  To do a job for which I starved.

JAMES REEVES

LEAVING TOWN

It was impossible to leave the town.
Bumping across a maze of obsolete rails
Three times we reached the gas-works and reversed.
We could not get away from the canal;
Dead cats, dead hopes in those grey deeps immersed
Over our efforts breathed a spectral prayer.
The cattle-market and the gospel hall
Returned like fictions of our own despair,
And like Hesperides the suburbs seemed,
Shining far off towards the guiltless fields.
We finished in a little cul-de-sac
Where on the pavement sat a ragged girl
Mourning beside a jug-and-bottle entrance.
Once more we turned the car and started back.

DRAWING BY J. LITINA

GAVIN EWART

CHELSEA IN WINTER

It's a long pull down the King's Road and down to the Pier Hotel
To the Thames where the turbulent seagulls float backwards on the swell
As muffled in my duffle coat
Unruffled in my duffle coat
I walk the streets of Hell.

Intellectual introspective streets of the higher income brackets
Trodden by Mr. Eliot's feet and the leaders of the rackets*
Where artists in their duffle coats
Feel smartest in their duffle coats
Like cigarettes in packets.

The Carlyle statue, pondering, sits wrapped in gloomy thought,
And warns that Human Wisdom still may be too dearly bought—
When duffle coat meets duffle coat
Each passes like a river boat
Towards its final port!

* Refers particularly to portrait painters.

SONG

Is there no charm for the youngster,
  To give him release
From fertility's time-honoured magic
  When the rituals cease,
To fox the bright eyes of the female
  And leave him in peace?

Marriage and love and the children
  Move in like a trap
And invisible babies are waiting
  In every beautiful lap
Each time the divided of Plato
  Meet and cry "Snap!"

For through all the tennis club dances
  And the life of the gay
The principle of natural selection
  Moves in a mysterious way
And even for us, the dispirited,
  Night follows the day.

FOR A LADY

Redhead, green eyes, elegant beauty's pride,
Roll in a bed of forgetfulness, let the world be ever so wide—
The eternal love of a fox and a cat and the ships go out with the tide!

Playful bosom, lipsweet, and at each globular breast
A gay old poet like a humming-bird darts from his musical nest.
Love in the past was love in the present but always love was best.

Green eyes of a redhead—the melody old and sweet
Carries the barrel-organ charm of a dusty summer street
Rich with the individual notes that Time can never repeat.

VERNON WATKINS

PEGASUS AND THE CHILD

When you are labouring, technically proud,
Like Ajax, or that great Greek charioteer,
Caught up in dazzle of your soul's career,
Think of the child here drowned, the simple shroud;

Who played where now the blackened water blanches
For (April come) the wagtails have returned;
Yes, and the kingfisher her joy's June burned
Will come, unseen, and break familiar branches.

So near the low leaves hang to that green pond
That Pegasus discerns those milking cows
Ambling to drink there past the white-washed house
Where place and sunrise keep their ancient bond.

(They break the water, you the starry height.
Your soul transcends them; they return to Earth.
Yet your ambition and the pains of birth
Each other need, like figures in a rite.)

When you are labouring, then the secret spurs
Will press the pace, and goad the winged horse faster.
Late is the script, and early the disaster.
Great is the argument, but frail the verse.

IAIN FLETCHER

AN ODE VARIENT UPON LORD HERBERT'S. *Iesus Patibilis*

In some time, not long since past,
  A mutually disconsolate pair,
  Our discourse turned on questioning where
Love might have his end at last.

It was indeed the sad design
  Of nature, in her troubled art,
  That gave such motion to the heart
It moves in an elliptic line.

Not where we would (the centre firm),
  But where we would not it will stray;
  And, though it lie not long away,
Its absence seems without a term.

This truth my other self and I,
  In evening's still, declining light
  (When all the earth seemed to invite
Some parting blessing from the sky),

Within a shade-distilling space
  Argued so: for our intent
  Was to enjoy time and event;
Or ever to deny them place.

The wind with its soft art above
  Hung, echoing the stream's slender note;
  And all the while we were remote
From any act or thought but love.

It seemed that every living thing
  To the same Passion was inclined;
  Called, and was answered in its kind,
By movement of the voice or wing.

Yet though Love was Himself our host
  We did not tell our loving plight;
  But with eyes bending down their light
Moved either like a senseless ghost.

And she: "in this our lasting earth
  We, passing, cannot hope for much:
  But to obtain a moment's touch
As declaration of love's worth.

"No language of a fond address
  Or masked encounter can confine
  Two burning souls as yours and mine,
As no denial makes them less;

"For since the wiser sort explain
  These questions all so much discuss,
  So much material to us,
As an embryon of the brain;

"Language of pure encounter then
  (The language of the flesh) alone
  Can for all distances atone,
Give peace between ourselves and men:

"So shall we hide our double pain
  In single pleasure; and our sense
  Of double guilt in innocence,
And never see them come again.

"Speak then in no *Platonique* tone:
  As that we first love sensual ease;
  Then the Beloved's presences;
And, last, the sense of Love alone;

"But rather grant the Body's claim
  To form the person, whose estate
  None shall abstract, in time, by fate,
Since it gives wandering substance name.

"This truth, I am assured, so plain
  Is, none with reason may deny:
  Our single selves let us apply
To give it loving proof again."

There she stayed. But still her eyes,
  And still her hands, as I might see,
  Gave logics his validity;
And gave light his clarities.

And then it was I, sighing, said:
  "Consider then the ants and bees
  In their perfect societies
With neither wings nor sex displayed;

"Does Nature mean we use those means
  Which made us two to make us one;
  Does She not end the work begun,
Promoting agents as machines?

"By levelling to a common shell
  All her victims, she desires
  To dim identifying fires
That light the Body's grateless cell.

"The strings of love are apt to bind
  Us in our torment, each with each:
  Until—enamoured—both beseech,
Since both but imperfection find,

"Some fall from that infirm estate;
  And that condition of the Soul
  When with the Body 'twould be whole:
As Phoenices it needs no mate.

"Since, as in Heaven (some foretold)
  There is no marriage-table set:
  Its perfume may be guarded yet
As those sealed vases known of old;

"Yet with a generous disdain,
  Subverting all the cosmic laws
  That part Occasion from the Cause
And separate us in our pain,

"Soul Body's sitting tenant is:
  And, when those thickening bodies meet
  Beneath the ingratiating sheet,
The Soul is carnalised in this.

"And this we understand who are
  Consonant spirits, who, alas!
  Never to that fixation pass
Which rarifies them to one star.

"Though tinctured Souls and Bodies by
  Their essences, though intermixt;
  By no dubiety transfixt:
No Souls have senses; Bodies die:

"Those Souls are in themselves constrained
  By burdens of gross element:
  Indeed, it was not their consent
The stricture of these strings ordained.

"And we, who are our Bodies' guests,
  Observe a draught of light or shade,
  With the soft structure it has made
Too easily the sense molests.

"And thus Souls suffer here below
  As Bodies, but in sad degree:
  Desiring what they cannot see;
And loving what they never know.

"Nor have I some seraphique hope
  That standing pools of flesh reflect
  The starlight of their Architect,
Since the creation passed its scope:

"When that first Father first begot
  His last, his ailing human child,
  'Twas not by bodies reconciled;
By section, not by fleshly knot;

"For though, Love is His last intent,
  And He shall lead us where we will,
  It is His love that crowns us still:
No peace from other souls was meant;

"Those formal mysteries most resolve
  Are broken nuptials knit in time,
  Where Soul and Body act in crime
The mutual murder they involve.

"It is for this cause they confine
  The sullen hungers of their eyes
  In night's occult menageries,
When only stars or thoughts may shine.

"Like Grecian wrestlers, in their night
  Antagonistic lovers' arts!
  With no desire to merge their hearts.
When beauty lives in touch, not sight,

"With spongy limbs, with brackish skins,
  Within the secret cabinet
  Of some tall bedroom (closely set),
In gusts of darkness love begins.

"Yet, when the sad deluded Soul
  Would leave this elementary sphere,
  Desiring that She come more near
That First and Best and Only Whole:

"The effluvium of the passions past,
  In which the Body was concerned,
  In which She only was inurned,
Shall weigh upon her wing at last."

At this, not caring if she heard;
  Or if the water's passing voice
  Answered both argument and choice,
I had no heart to speak a word. . . .

Although I darken (I confess)
  The Image that I still admire;
  That still infuses all desire
Sight, Touch and Hearing still possess:

The lonely vistas of that face
  Still recur, until they seem
  The *Micro*-Chaos of a dream;
The properties of Time and Space:

And by informing Soul and Sense;
  Begetting still our mutual grief:
  This love seems but a sad belief
Caught in some vast intelligence.

DRAWING BY J. LITTNA

EDWIN MORGAN

THE SLEIGHTS OF DARKNESS

One nightmare after cinderfall
Idiocy in a slumber took me aside
To see my friend in his golden fell
Stumble at the handle of fiends'-hovel
By the feral riverside.

Blown like a quill to that fell lintel
He fumbled with bolts to mingle loneliness
With the waiting loneliness till little by little
Meeting by his fever the lascivious toll
He should feel fiend-homeliness.

And yet if all flesh was standing
As thick as smoke from wall to wall
And if love like gold was seen ascending
Through the valley of the blood and the understanding
What would suffice of it all

To my friend in his fleshly desolation?
Misery strides along my daydream
Whenever I re-unlatch his destruction.
His face at the fiends' sill is confusion,
Pale as the breaking stream.

Bitter vision, not of wishes!
Let me not find his heart at bay
Or laid with innocence in ashes,
Or if I must, let our lost riches
Of trust be all we must pay!

Slates flash out on the tawny gable;
Windows strain to the sinking sun;
The mavis drowses on its fable
Of the glory of day till the last feeble
Knot of its song is undone.

I strain and flash and fable too,
From the valid twilight before surrender.
Against the Night that scars the true
And mocks the lonely two by two,
Now love be my defender!

BASIL TOMLINSON

POEM IN WINTER

To shovel the winter's snow
From the garden path,
Discovering its blackness,

Is no longer to know
The town's dull grey,
The season's leaden thoughts:

Somewhere beyond the gates
Is a world of deep black
Covered in whiteness.

Happy, we think, that state
Of our lost childhood
(Was it so long ago?)

When all was in black and white,
When we hissed the villain
And cheered the hero.

But too soon comes the thaw,
Exit the villain,
Exit the hero,

Grey the melting snow,
Grey the paths, grey the houses
Grey our leaden thoughts.

LOUIS JOHNSON

SOME HELD TO LOVE BY HATE

(for Benjamin Constant)

Pity drives some to madness, but not she
Whose madness, beyond pitiable, glares
Maddening from the crux of blind conceits
Taking time by the throat, demanding, sears

Love galled and helpless in her clutch.
But pity me who holds her, beyond calm
Or any expectation to be free
Since her erratic glance predicates harm;

Pinions to madness who would hold her sane.
I would not hold her, but may not relax
The bonds that hold my hands that held her hand
Believing, in brief innocence, love makes

Low high, and heaven nearer with a hand
Sure as deliverance of the oppressed. It's clear
The oppressed suffer in innocence, and pity
Drives some to madness, while the fear

Of suffering loss of madness keeps some able
To suffer the lateral thorns of grief and thrive
Poised dangerously between the knives and murders
Such as her eyes prove, in whose fear I live.

BREAN DOUGLAS NEWTON

IN ST. ANTHONY'S HARBOUR

Blown from the hill above, where gull and bull together
Pasture the light-green airy fields of life,
A bird tips on to the harbour water and sits a-swinging
Last in a swaying row of four alike.
Their nearest view and sight
The mackerel lights a-flick o'er swarthy hulls
Waving their swarthiness as slowly as a pair of scales;
Their seat the sea
Transparent to the shadows of the floor
A thoughtful ankle-depth—deceptive mind!—below;
Soothing and flattering imperceptibly the stones,

As tremulous, as weak, as butterflies
Yet able to pull a fag-end to bits in a moment.
Each watery foray, each breast dips and makes
A fair recovery, till able just
To bear the balancing trick of it no longer.

O sunstruck harbour clanging like a gong,
O chessboard terror of the present day!
The black-and-white cut-paper towns
Of summer, stark before
The senses, instigate
Bewilderment, stepping over and over again
His dropping voice through grottos remote down the cranium.
The sea
Roars in a narrow cave, the other side of the wall.
While the bay rolls, while black
Gulls' beaks beat up the mackerel to confusion,
Do the masts crucify?
They rack the mind.

This afternoon,
More lovely than a girl of painted stone,
Frets, as her beauty frets, to adulteries of disorder.
Tell me! what saint's-day celebrates the things?
O world-sized wave, you'll slop and scatter globes
Each pearly with a glowing attribute.
The bay, the birds, the water and the boats,
The claws and shells of crabs, the nets and rocks,
A little crowd, the shuffle of the sea:
Heat cracking up to pieces this to-day
Hitches the bits of light to tags of memory:
A calf's head on the pavement, chamber-pots,
A bonfire, christmas-trees and lobster-floats,
A silent giraffe in a grey still gothic hall,
Calls of an interlacing polyphonic mass—
To think of the weight and the grandeur and beauty of them all
Gloria
gloria in excelsis deo!
gloria

Too sweet—too deafening sound is a pursuit:
Dive, let me dive—the depth
Envelops me and licks me down, away,
Blind eyes!

Rolling through water as a marble bowled
Snowflake thought in the head be soundly whirled
In topsyturvy circles—scours around and round
Further and deeper dull mind bears, full into numb cold,
Is green, sonorous, glowing, due to burst—

But no, oh ever no—no,
I breathe and see,
And I'm in air again. A chorus praise.
The steady water,
Flaking like flint in the shade of the harbour wall;
The rocking harbour,
Printed with rings by drips from oar or gull;
The muscular sea,
Flexing with smoother grace than a leopard will
The large black patches which mingle and close again;
The solid ocean . . .
Where tardy snails of ships upon their dark green plain
Leave tracks like silver, seen from high off hills.
O block of water, you'll not take me in;
Your lucid bulk's no solitude for man;
Your silent depth for me's the desert cave
Which vomited such foaming images
Before an Egyptian saint that he became
Blind as the man who in the thundering blast
Of a threshing-machine has to huddle aside the chaff.
And I'm in air once more, and a choir carries out amens.

Across my view the bird that's able
To bear the balancing trick of it no longer
Suddenly wings unfurls and splashing havers
Suddenly, large as vultures or old ladies,
And, ready, springs
To join the viragos of the briny rocks
And glides to christmas gull-hung rocks where crowds
Sit yapping away like pekingese, for nothing.

POINTS OF VIEW

THE TWO VOCATIONS

In the thirty years since the *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* were first published, comment on the poetry, with individual and important exceptions, has followed one of three general lines. Their first editor, Dr. Robert Bridges, regarded his friend as a fascinating personality, whose genius was more evident in his letters, and in conversational flashes, than in the poems which offended his strong sense of "continuous literary decorum". This judgment was carried to a further extreme by Coventry Patmore, and upheld in a milder form by Professor Abbott, the editor of the *Letters*. Moreover, it is important to observe that it seems to have been in substantial agreement with the judgment of his own order on Hopkins as a writer and preacher, during his lifetime. No doubt his superiors and Patmore differed fundamentally from Bridges as to the reason why the brilliant Oxford scholar never seemed to accomplish anything, but they clearly found it very very difficult to find work that he could do to the common satisfaction. They appreciated him as a person in his primary vocation, but his own intense self-depreciation may have led him to wonder whether they regretted his acceptance into the order. This is suggested by the pathetic welcome that he gave to crumbs of expressed encouragement, not only from outside friends, but from his superiors and brethren.

In a letter to his Anglican friend Canon Dixon, who as an ecclesiastical historian was interested in the subject, Hopkins gave a brilliant thumb-nail sketch of the literary characteristics of Jesuit writing and preaching through the ages, ending:

> Show and brilliancy do not suit us . . . we cultivate the commonplace outwardly, and wish the beauty of the king's daughter the soul to be from within.*

**Letters*, vol. ii, p. 96.

Tension between his singularity and the ordinariness of his order, as well as between priest and poet in Hopkins, himself provided a basis for the second view of Hopkins which became common in the nineteen-twenties, when critics hailed him as a modern poet born out of due time, a frustrated naturalist, whose attitude to his religion was deeply if unconsciously ambiguous. No doubt a terrible lot of nonsense has been written from this point of view, particularly by critics interested in psycho-analysis. Nevertheless two truths were told; first, that Hopkins possessed more than any other Victorian poet that sense of his age which is as evident in his passion for natural science as in his objections to archaism in poetic diction; and second, that this modernity of his made him impatient of archaising not only in art but in religion, and not only in Puseyism. These tensions have been misunderstood by critics occupied with Marx and Freud, who missed the clues provided by Duns Scotus and the Irish Home Rule movement, but they are there nevertheless.

A third school of critics has lately arisen who insist with good reason on the theological character of all the poetry, even the poetry of scenery, of weeds and wildness, woods and the sea. These critics either minimize the conflict between priest and poet, or interpret the sufferings and desolations entirely in terms of ascetic spirituality. They stress the dependence of the poems on such Jesuit classics as the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. I would not deny that there is more truth in this than in the "profane babblings" of great critics such as Dr. Richards, Mr. Empson, and Mr. Herbert Read in face of material which they over-interpret, and therefore misunderstand; but what may be called the Jesuit school seems to me to fail again through an over-vehemence in contradicting the truth in Patmore's and Bridges' censures, and Mr. Empson's ambiguous readings.

Mr. W. H. Gardner is a moderate example.* His second volume seems to me much more reasonable than his first, which so dazzled critics with the range of its learning that they overlooked the injustices of the last two chapters, where he belaboured Miss E. E. Phare for six pages on end, because her commentary of 1933, sympathetic on the whole to the religious attitude of Hopkins, and for the time surprisingly sensitive to the importance of Duns Scotus as an influence, shows deference to Dr. Richards and some initial prejudice against Jesuits. The choice of verse for the last chapter on "Hopkins and modern poetry" showed little discrimination. Dylan Thomas, George Barker, and Charles Williams were ignored while much space was given to some singularly inept imitations of the Hopkins manner.

Mr. Gardner's new volume shows the same massive learning, with more caution, including some amends to Miss Phare, but we still have reason to doubt his discretion. On the history of sprung rhythm, and on Hopkins as a classical scholar, I find more prudent judgments in the essays of two American Jesuits in a new symposium, *Immortal Diamond*.† It is characteristic of Mr. Gardner that while he cannot believe that Hopkins had never read Donne (whose reputation had hardly begun to revive in his Oxford days) he thinks the Virgilian reference at the culminating point of *Sibyl's Leaves* "probably unconscious". Fr. John Louis Bonn on the other hand is commendably candid about the misunderstandings of Greek measures in Hopkins's metrical theories, some of them borrowed uncritically from other scholars, while others were rooted in an idiosyncrasy:

> He was not only tortured by decisions between fifths of a point in examination marks but fascinated by the idea of mathematical precision.

Fr. Ong's essay on sprung rhythm is in its way a masterpiece, strong where Mr. Gardner is weak in concentration on what Hopkins found and developed in English speech, in the language as living literature has made it and has been made out of it, not in books that he may have glanced at, but certainly had no time to read with any thoroughness in the manifold occupations of his life.

I wish I could speak as favourably of other essays in *Immortal Diamond*, but for the most part they are marred, much more than most of Mr. Gardner's book, by an unnecessarily aggressive tone, not only towards any criticism of shortcomings in the poetry, but towards agnostic or Anglican misreadings of the poet's religion. The analysis of *The Windhover* by Raymond V. Schoder is important, for I am sure that he has discovered something that other critics have missed in the last lines, where he takes "buckle" as imperative, "buckle to it", and makes them an exhortation to the poet's sluggish spirit; but the weakness of the book's general approach is most clearly revealed in the same essay when ambiguity is considered:

> Hopkins is for ever teasing us by this almost unconscionable ambiguity, a fault we would not easily put up with in a lesser poet. Clearly, however, Hopkins does not intend both alternatives in these ambiguous words. The fad in certain schools of recent criticism, of reading all possible connotations into every word of a poem, is surely unsound and dangerous. It is true that the Metaphysical poets seek their effect by means of ambivalent words intended to suggest two or more simultaneous but different levels of meaning—what they call "wit". But one should not force other types of poetry into this mould. The words may bear, indeed, a wealth of associated and secondary meanings clustering round the poet's basic intention and that, its opposite or even contradictory, is lending it fullness of content, like grace notes playing about a musical theme. But to say that they mean both this thing and to confess ignorance of the real meaning, and to weaken the concentrated vigour and directness of the poet's thought.

**Gerard Manley Hopkins, a study of poetic idiosyncrasy in relation to poetic tradition*, 2 volumes, by W. H. Gardner (Secker and Warburg) 1944 and 1948, 25/– and 30/–.

†Edited by Norman Weyand, S. J. (Sheed and Ward) 21/–.

This rejection of ambiguity is far too extreme. Firstly, Hopkins is a Metaphysical poet, nearer to Herbert, Crashaw, and T. S. Eliot than to any others. Secondly, ambivalence is not a Metaphysical peculiarity. In a sense it is characteristic of all serious poetry, of much in the Bible, for instance, of Shakespeare, Virgil, Dante, and even Ovid. There is no one right way of reading and producing *Coriolanus* or *King Lear* or *Murder in the Cathedral*. All interpretations of great poetry leave out some element in its greatness. All put in something that belongs to the critic's, not the poet's mind. Hopkins, like Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and the Apostle Saint Paul, has suffered from such exegesis in proportion to his depth and his difficulty, and (we may add) to the requirements of modern higher education. His poetry survives praise and blame.

Mr. Gardner in a footnote* gives us an Irish legend about him:

> It is said that Hopkins, while lecturing on Homer, gave a practical illustration of the spite of Achilles against the slain Hector by dragging a supine student feet-foremost round the room.

It would be a pity if all such legends should be expurgated from a life that seems to be assuming the outlines of conventional hagiography. His obstinacy at school in refusing to drink has now become the occasion of his first martyrdom at the hands of heretical authorities. In what context, I wonder, was it first said that he "would scarcely take a cup of tea without permission"? He was a great poet and a greater man, very probably a saint, but the lives of saints should be written with a proper discretion.

If Hopkins suffered as a poet from want of a human audience (apart from Canon Dixon, for Bridges was of no real use to him), the blame does not lie with the editor of *The Month*, who rejected what any other editor of the time would have refused. "The only tragedy for a poet," said Mr. Spender lately in another connection, "is not to write his poetry." In this case the poetry did get written, in ill health, with many other things to do, in thirteen short years between 1876 and 1889. Gerard Hopkins wrote to Dixon in December, 1881:

> Now if you value what I write, if I do myself, much more does our Lord. And if he chooses to avail himself of what I leave at his disposal he can do so with a felicity and with a success which I could never command. And if he does not, then two things follow. . . .*

This faith proves all things and is its own apology.

GEORGE EVERY, S.S.M.

*vol ii, p. 231

**Letters* vol ii, p. 93.

CAN CRITICISM BE SCIENTIFIC?

Science and Literary Criticism by HERBERT DINGLE. (NELSON, 7/6.)

Professor Dingle, who occupies the chair of History and Philosophy of Science in the University of London, examines in this book various attempts which have been made to create "some kind of scientific criticism based on objective principles and objective standards". Trained readers will agree that a poem by Alfred Tennyson is better than one by Martin Tupper, though Queen Victoria is said to have preferred Tupper, and though his sales were for a long time larger than Tennyson's. But is there any way of proving that one is better than the other? The reader who starts from Miss Stitch and trains himself to like Mr. Eliot is not likely to lapse from grace; but the admirer of Miss Stitch might reasonably retort that those who desert ginger-beer for alcoholic liquors seldom return to their previous, less harmful, taste. Where two poems are both good it is even harder to prove that one is better than the other. Even Housman's test of poetry—that which made his skin bristle so that he could not shave—could not be used to distinguish between Milton and Shakespeare, and some skins would bristle at the recollection of a line by Mrs. Hemans.

Various critics have sought to be more objective. Professor Dingle begins with Sainte-Beuve who hoped by examining all the biographical data available to reconstruct a portrait of the author, "a creative being of which the literary work . . . was the almost automatic consequence". Taine went further, and argued that every author was the product of the race, the milieu, and the moment. Criticism "was absorbed into sociology". Now it is obvious that knowledge of the Elizabethan age is necessary before we can fully understand Shakespeare; but to read Sainte-Beuve and Taine one might suppose that *Agnes Grey* was as good as *Wuthering Heights*. Kipling's parabolic story, "Wireless", in which a consumptive apothecary, in the same circumstances as Keats was in 1819, just fails to write the Ode to a Nightingale, is the best comment on this kind of criticism. Even the use of modern psychological theories, as in Herbert Read's *In Defence of Shelley*, though it may throw some light on the author's personality, does not explain why other people of the same psychological type remain mute inglorious Miltons. Nor need we hope that criticism will derive much assistance from a study of chromosomes or of the endocrine glands.

After a glance at Moulton, who dallied with the idea of an inductive criticism entirely freed from question of merit, and was happily unsuccessful, Professor Dingle passes to a scrutiny of Mr. I. A. Richards, who has at least realized the importance of the psychology of appreciation. But his theory of communication, Professor Dingle claims, is vitiated by the fact that much literature is anonymous:

> We cannot be satisfied with any definition of criticism which makes it invalid to present a critic with a piece of literature which he has never seen, and of the authorship of which he is totally ignorant, and ask for his comments.

It is difficult, however, to see the force of this complaint, for Mr. Richards used precisely this method with his students, as he describes in *Practical Criticism*. He thinks that the language of poetry is that of "pseudo-statement", and Dingle retorts that his theory of criticism is a set of psychological pseudo-statements. But when Mr. Richards states that only the person who has had an approximately similar experience occasioned by the poem to that "of the poet when contemplating the completed composition" can be said to have *read* the poem, the real objection is not that anonymous poems would be placed outside criticism (as Dingle complains), but that there is no means of knowing the reactions of Shakespeare after writing his

twenty-third sonnet, and no means of testing whether ours are similar to his. It may be true that

> it is not the intensity of the conscious experience, its thrill, its pleasure or its poignancy which gives it value, but the organisation of its impulses for freedom and fullness of life.

But there is, in fact, no means of scientifically measuring the existence or extent of such organisation. Mr. Richards wants us to cultivate "something like a technique or ritual for heightening sincerity", but he is undeniably vague in his description of this technique.

There is also much justice in Professor Dingle's complaint that we are never given "the objective means by which we are to discover value in any particular case", and that when we remove the psychological trimmings—appetencies, coenesthesia, etc.—we are really left with our old friend Universal Qualified Opinion.

Professor Dingle proceeds to show that Mr. Eliot, though he too demands precision in the use of language, does not share Mr. Richards' views; and he turns the tables on both critics by arguing that though they

> make known their intention to avoid ambiguity and to adhere to statements that have definite, objective meaning . . . no sooner do they began their job of criticising than they "pseudo-state" like the most Blakeish of poets.

He is not altogether fair in his particular criticisms of Mr. Eliot, because he does not seem to realise that language can be used precisely even though the individual words are ambiguous. For example, he takes Mr. Eliot to task for saying that Arnold's poetry is "too ruminative, to rise ever to the first rank", and that he was "not . . . quite a pure enough poet to have . . . sudden illuminations". How, asks Dingle, is the degree of ruminativeness to be measured above which poetry cannot be great, and what is "purity" in a poet? But Eliot's verdict is plain enough —that Arnold's meditations were not always imaginatively transformed, and that his poetic impulse was often impeded, even when he was writing verse, by a desire to instruct and reform, so that he became like his own River Oxus, "a foiled circuitous wanderer".

Professor Dingle goes on to argue that psychological criticism is a blind alley because criticism should be concerned not with the author but with the product, and because the critic is in any case hampered by lack of knowledge of what may be the most vital biographical facts.

The besetting illusion of criticism is one which both Galileo and Newton attacked in bad scientists—the illusion that one explains things by expressing the facts of direct experience in terms of "occult Qualities". As Newton puts it:

> To tell us that every Species of Things is endow'd with an occult specifick Quality by which it acts and produces manifest Effects, is to tell us nothing.

Almost all critics falls into this error, and yet it is one which might with a little care be avoided. Critics might learn from science that a point is invalid unless a general principle holds; and Professor Dingle concludes, they might profit from the use of certain scientific methods, such as the use of hypotheses. But scientific criticism will be impossible unless and until "through progress in physiology or psychology, the requisite criteria should be found to exist".

In the meantime Professor Dingle offers us with due apologies his own essays on Wordsworth, Browning, and Swinburne, in which he seeks to study their works "as data from which general characteristics are to be extracted in a manner familiar in science". This method, as Dingle admits, "leaves us at the threshold of the critic's proper task, which is to study his (*sc.* the poet's) actual productions". The originality of the method is that it deliberately omits all biographical knowledge, as indeed a critic is bound to do with Homer or Meleager. Professor Dingle makes some interesting points, as when he

points out that Wordsworth's descriptions never contain "personal, individual detail"; but we are as far as ever in these essays, as the author would be the first to admit, from an objective standard of value.

This book, therefore, is valuable in a negative way. Its criticism of criticism from the standpoint of science is often penetrating, as when he plays havoc with Mr. Connolly. But one is inclined to doubt whether it would be a good thing for critics to make themselves impervious to knowledge of the author derived from sources other than his poetry. Certainly a good deal of criticism of Shelley, including Eliot's and Arnold's, has been vitiated by "chatter about Harriet", and it might be argued that *The Tempest* has been misread by those who identify Prospero with Shakespeare. But the critic who did not read Keats's letters for the light they threw on his poetry would be foolish indeed, and once this is admitted the door is thrown open for the poet's table-talk and even for biographical details. Poetry does not exist in a vacuum; and if only because very few poems are completely "pure" (if Professor Dingle will forgive the word) we should not despise adventitious aids to criticism. If Professor Dingle knew absolutely nothing about Keats's life he would be baffled by the opening lines of the third book of *Hyperion*, and if he knew nothing about Milton's life he would miss half the point of *Samson Agonistes*.

KENNETH MUIR.

THE FALCON IN THE SKIES

The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell.
(BODLEY HEAD, 15/-)

When sparrows loudest raise their twittering cries
We know there is a falcon in the skies.
(*The Georgiad.*)

Who, then, is this rhyming pugilist, this hooting cowboy from the South African backveld and salt bogs of the Camargue? Some years ago two infuriated poets publicly tore up and danced upon one of his books in the Café Royal. And if you look up his name in *Who's Who*, you will find him described as a horsebreaker.

He is Mr. Roy Campbell, the poet. He is the unaccompanied equestrian who unfashionably fought the Communists in Spain, and in the recent war the Fascists, first as a secret agent and later as a N.C.O. in the British Army until he was disabled and given a pension. He is the bullfighter who wrote *Tristan da Cunha*, *The Flaming Terrapin*, and the best satirical poem of the first half of the twentieth century. He has had the distinction of being the only poet of our time whose books have been banned from public libraries, and not on the ground of salacity. Like Mr. T. S. Eliot, he has never joined a political or a poetical football team. He is a Don Quixote who tilted at windmills before it became evident they were giants, and at giants before it became evident they were windmills. He is a baroque eighteenth-century folly stranded between a couple of functional concrete and Vita-glass factories. Invariably his conduct has been inexcusable.

When my Irish and north-country forebears landed with the 1820 settlers in Algoa Bay, they found Mr. Campbell's ancestors, who had fled from Britain at the first whiff

of the nineteenth century, already well-established in South Africa. Mr. Campbell once made the point that the nineteenth century and the industrial revolution had been by-passed in South Africa (where in fact it has only just begun) and this is a key to much of what he writes. It is important to remember that Mr. Campbell is a South African: and I do not say this merely because I am one myself, with a Scotch ancestry similar to his, but because the South Africans possess national characteristics more sharply marked than those of any other Dominion (it has had a longer and bloodier history than most) and it is these characteristics that Mr. Campbell expresses in his poetry. For instance, it is well known that South Africa is a country dismembered by hatred: a land where Afrikanders hate the English, who both combine to loathe Jews; where all Whites fear the Bantus, and where everyone despises Indians and half-breeds of the coast. South African politics, therefore, are conducted with an unbelievable ferocity, which has a parallel in eighteenth-century England. We find this reflected in Mr. Campbell's satires, where he seldom pulls his punches. The South Africans are touchy and easily hurt; and they believe in class distinction (the colour bar). Although Mr. Campbell had to leave the Union in 1928 (after standing siege in his house for attacking the colour bar in his magazine, *Voorslag*), he does believe in hierarchies. Again, most White South Africans enjoy a happier (because uncircumscribed and free) childhood than most Englishmen, whose early years are spent cabined in urban areas or cribbed in elementary and public schools. A happy childhood often induces a fundamental innocence and forthrightness, which is a characteristic of Mr. Campbell's best lyrics. Yet it is the South African and Scotch heritage of anger that makes him a better satirist than that cleverer poet, Mr. W. H. Auden.*

* In stressing that Mr. Campbell is a South African, I don't wish to imply any belief in provincial poetry as such, or that Mr. Campbell is himself a provincial poet. In fact Mr. Campbell's poetry is, like that of the American-born Mr. T. S. Eliot, in a sense more cosmopolitan than the work of most of his English contemporaries.

Mr. Campbell is not a great satirist, but he is a good one. Perhaps he made a mistake when he chose to use the heroic couplet, which was exterminated by Alexander Pope,* buried by George Crabbe, and the bell tolled by Samuel Johnson. Yet his style, especially in *The Georgiad*, derives from John Dryden rather than Pope : he has Dryden's knack of giving the gong of rhyme a swinging bang, the same love of persuading short vulgar monosyllables from the vernacular to enlist ; and like Dryden, he is better to read whole, than in bits and quotations. With the profoundest of salaams in the direction of Twickenham, I submit that Mr. Campbell's *Georgiad* is a lineal descendant of *Mac Flecknoe*, unlike *The Dunciad*, its over-brilliant cousin. For, like Dryden, and unlike Pope, the objects of his attack are generalised rather than particularised. The "Squire" of the following extract from *The Georgiad* can refer just as well to any of the New Spasmodics of our time (I mean the panting hounds of the Apocalyptic paperchase) as to the editor of *Poems of To-day*:

> Nor at his football match is Squire more gay—
> Heart-rending verse describes funereal play;
> While swarming adjectives in idle ranks
> As dumb spectators, load the groaning planks,
> See the fat nouns, like porky forwards, sprawl
> Into a scrum that never hooks the ball—
> A mass of moving bottoms like a sea,
> All fatter than his head, if that could be;
> While still attentive at their clumsy calves
> The adverbs pine away, dejected halves,
> The verbs hang useless by, like unfed threes,
> With trousers idly flapping in the breeze,
> And while they strike their arm-pits for some heat
> Or idly stamp their splayed trochaic feet,
> The two full-backs of alternating rhyme
> Walk sadly up and down to kill the time.

Fashions in verse may change, but crimes

* In the same sense that Milton destroyed blank verse.

persist! The quotation above may show, too, that Mr. Campbell deserves to be called the only modern master of sustained metaphor. This sometimes leads to his worst faults: excess and length.

But as a lyric poet Mr. Campbell contains grace and passion. A sparrow hiding behind a sporran in the *New Statesman* recently stated that Mr. Campbell's poetry has "no shy layers of meaning". Unless this bird was comparing the poet to the proprietor of a metaphysical egg-farm, it was indisputably talking through its bonnet (as it certainly did in a subsequent paragraph, where it construed one of Mr. Campbell's military metaphors as an impugnment of the physical courage of the Scotch). No: poetry may be written by neurotics, but never for them. Here is an example of Mr. Campbell's lyric style:

> This mast, new-shaved, through whom I rive the ropes,
> Says she was once an oread of the slopes,
> Graceful and tall upon the rocky highlands,
> A slender tree as vertical as noon,
> And her low voice was lovely as the silence
> Through which a fountain whistles to the moon,
> Who now of the white spray must take the veil,
> And, for her songs, the thunder of the sail.
>
> (*Choosing a Mast.*)

Or again:

> In the grey wastes of dread,
> The haunt of shattered gulls, where nothing moves,
> But in a shroud of silence like the dead,
> I heard a sudden harmony of hooves,
> And, turning, saw afar
> A hundred snowy horses unconfined,
> The silver runaways of Neptune's car
> Racing, spray-curled, like waves before the wind.
>
> . . . Still out of hardship bred
> Spirits of power and beauty and delight
> Have ever on such frugal pastures fed,
> And loved to course with tempests through the night.
>
> (*Horses on the Camargue.*)

How is it that, using forms and a vocabulary with which most of the Georgian versifiers failed to produce effect, Mr. Campbell manages to take a seat at table with Dryden and Lord Byron, with contemporaries as distinguished and different as Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr. Dylan Thomas? The answer is simple and unhelpful. He is a poet too. He can make familiar words look surprised to encounter one another.

Mr. Campbell has many faults; he is, for example, sometimes over-boisterous; but his faults are of fecundity, rather than poverty. Unlike the victims of his famous squib, he doesn't handle the snaffle and the curb as he ought, but at least he has a horse. How good he can be when he does, I shall demonstrate by quoting this sonnet:

> Camões, alone, of all the lyric race
> Born in the black aurora of disaster
> Can look a common soldier in the face:
> I find a comrade where I sought a master:
> For daily, while the stinking crocodiles
> Glide from the mangroves on the swampy shore,
> He shares my awning on the dhow, he smiles,
> And tells me he had lived it all before.
> Through fire and shipwreck, pestilence and loss,
> Led by the ignis fatuus of duty
> To a dog's death—yet of his sorrows king—
> He shouldered high his voluntary Cross,
> Wrestled his hardships into forms of beauty,
> And taught his gorgon destinies to sing.

I do not want to end this review without mentioning two of his translations from St. John of the Cross, one of which has hitherto never appeared in a book. My ignorance of Spanish possibly qualifies me to speak of Mr. Campbell's renderings as particularly good English poems. Here are the closing verses of *En Una Noche Oscura:*

> Within my flowering breast
> Which only for himself entire I save,
> He sank into his rest,
> And all my gifts I gave,
> Lulled by the airs with which the cedars wave.

Over the ramparts fanned,
While the fresh wind was fluttering in his tresses,
With his serenest hand
My neck he wounded, and
Suspended every sense in its caresses.

Lost to myself I stayed,
My face upon my lover having laid
From all endeavour ceasing:
And, all my cares releasing,
Threw them among the lilies there to fade.

This is the kind of thing at which Mr. Campbell is at his best. And however many times he may throw down a gauntlet to *épater les Bohemiens*, it is as a great and sustained lyric poet he will be remembered. Whatever his ultimate place may be in the histories of English literature which, we faintly hope, may be written a hundred years from to-day, it is at any rate certain that he is the first Colonial poet to enter the arena of letters with his own sword, picadors, and glittering banderillas. DAVID WRIGHT.

SPENDER

The Edge of Being by STEPHEN SPENDER.
(FABER AND FABER, 7/6.)

Mr. Spender's publishers claim that the present volume "will fully support his reputation and satisfy his admirers". To more critical readers it will be added ground for asking themselves what exactly Mr. Spender's considerable reputation rests on, and what his admirers find to admire.

In a poem called *Word* Mr. Spender gives us an interesting revelation of his poetic method:

The word bites like a fish.
Shall I throw it back free
Arrowing to that sea
Where thoughts lash tail and fin?
Or shall I pull it in
To rhyme upon a dish?

There are many words in this book which one could wish Mr. Spender had thrown back into the sea of haphazard and imprecise verbal experience whence they were fished. What, one may ask, does the admirer make of such lines as:

O, thou O, passing beyond
Light, into sound,
Where one trumpet sustains
Concentrated symphonies
On the peak of one note,
. . . . . .

and

The wet tears on your face gleam
Down spires of the cathedral,
And in the crowded squares your lament
Makes a great angel whose instrument
Is strung on the heart behind the face of all.

and

Oh, though the Past dissolve, may all that was
Once idea integrated into stone
Enter my secret mind at the whirling centre
Of the external storm: . . . . . .?

When a poet's language is as confused, ungainly and exaggerated as this, one cannot help suspecting that it is intended to conceal either a lack of experience or an experience essentially commonplace. It is worth while to examine more closely a complete poem, *Responsibility; The Pilots who destroyed Germany, Spring*, 1945.

I stood on a roof-top and they wove their cage,
Their murmuring, throbbing cage, in the air of blue crystal,
I saw them gleam above the town like diamond bolts,
Conjoining invisible struts of wire,
Carrying through the sky their squadrons' cage
Woven by instincts delicate as a shoal of flashing fish.

"They" in line one, presumably means the aeroplanes. If so, it would have been helpful to say so. The notion of a "murmuring, throbbing cage", is strange, but might be acceptable if it were not for other things we are told later about the cage. The notion of weaving something in crystal is also strange, since crystal is usually thought of as a hard substance. The aeroplanes then become, not weavers, but diamond bolts—whatever they may be—which carry through the sky the cages they previously wove. Into this mechanistic, though unpractical conception, the introduction of the organic "shoal of fish" image is perfectly incongruous.

They went. They left a silence in our streets below
Which boys gone to schoolroom leave in their playground:
A silence of asphalt, of privet hedge, of staring wall.
In the blue emptied sky their diamonds had scratched
Long curving finest whitest lines.
These the days soon melted into satin ribbons
Falling over heaven's terraces near the sun.

What is the justification for this "silent playground" simile? It would be relevant only if the highly-trained airmen who risked their lives under orders to bomb Germany had the irresponsibility of schoolboys—a suggestion which is, to say the least of it, unfair. Next, the diamonds, previously bolts, have by now cut white lines in the sky, which miraculously "melt into satin ribbons".

Oh, that April morning they carried my will
Exalted expanding singing in their aerial cage.
They carried my will. They dropped it on a German town.
My will exploded. Tall buildings fell down.

Inside the cage is Mr. Spender's will, here compared to a lark, which explodes on a German town. Surely this theatrical assumption of guilt by a single member of a nation of fifty million is as laughable as the conceit used in the expression of it. The poem concludes:

Then, when the ribbons faded, and the sky forgot,
And April was concerned with building nests and being hot
I began to remember the lost names and faces.

Now I tie the ribbons torn down from those terraces
Around the most hidden image in my lines,
And my life, which never paid the price of their wounds,
Turns thoughts over and over like a propeller,
Assumes their guilt, honours, repents, prays for them.

Apart from the satin ribbons, of which Mr. Spender makes the most bizarre use, gone is now the exaggerated imagery of the opening lines, presumably because he now feels he has something to say: the poem finishes with a threadbare paraphrase of an idea which, whether we find it attractive or not, might just as well have been expressed in prose.

Is this what Mr. Spender's admirers have learnt to expect—the confessions of someone prepared to suffer on their behalf for the sins of humanity, dressed up in highly coloured, ill-matched and pretentious scraps of poetic diction?

JAMES REEVES.

THE KING'S SPEAR

The Common Asphodel by ROBERT GRAVES. (HAMISH HAMILTON, 15/-.)

The Common Asphodel (an edible plant!) is a collection of re-written essays drawn from four separate books: *On English Poetry* 1922; *Poetic Unreason* 1925; *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*; *The Future of the Art of Poetry* 1926, and certain pamphlets written with Laura Riding, together with essays taken from *Epilogue* which they edited 1934-36. Concerning these earlier volumes Robert Graves writes: "I no longer use psychological or philosophical terms when writing about poetry." He now regards the poet "as independent of fashion and public service, a servant only of the true Muse. . . ."

Like Socrates, Robert Graves believes that a true poet is "possessed". "This is proved by the rough and often almost illegible scrawl of the first draft of a poem—for instance. . . . As soon as the poet comes out of this trance and can see the poem objectively he copies it out . . . crosses every t and dots every i, and signs his name boldly underneath"(!) Mr. Graves then continues to say that a "reader of the poem must fall into a complementary trance if he is to appreciate its full meaning."

The essays as a whole vary in style and approach. Some are pursued with a microscopic intensity and ruthlessly split up until the poems roll over and divide into a 100 separate filaments: e.g. Marianne Moore's poems and those of E. E. Cummings. These are the criticisms of inspiration. With other essays Mr. Graves seems to relax against the back of his chair, then quickly takes up a thicker nib. Here the criticism is witty, strong and full of individual flavour. The enjoyment of reading such essays is contagious, but they are not nearly so penetrating, nor as serious. I did not care for *Official and Unofficial Literature*: *Nietzsche*: *Lucretius and Jeans;* and not at all for the comments on World War II, a judgment which I found to be hasty and inadequate.

In the essay on *Keats and Shelley*, Keats is somewhat destructively analysed. It is a brave exposure, and one which is justified since it is to correct the blind adoration for Keats. To lift the effects of the drug. But why in spite of all this, does Keats's position remain unchallenged? Here then, is room for a more constructive analysis. Again, the definition which Laura Riding used for Keats, requoted by Robert Graves, is far more suited to her own poetry: "He . . . disposed himself . . . towards spiritual rape by a vigorous poetic personhead imagined as in pursuit of conquests." This essay, and the one preceding it on Coleridge and Wordsworth are also interesting to compare with Mr. Eliot's essays on these two poets in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* 1932–33. That all three poets, and also Herbert Read, quote the same section from one of Keats's letters, but with different readings, proves how flexible and individual a poet's mind can be. Dr. Edith Sitwell praised an essay on *Texture* which was reprinted in *The Common Asphodel* in a lecture she gave in 1943. But when Mr. Graves writes on *Modernist Poetry* (with Laura Riding) the many references to Dr. Edith Sitwell's poetry are often biased or inaccurate. "Miss Sitwell's chief message, if she may be said to have one, is the endless, minute triviality of adult life." (p. 149). This statement should be withdrawn; or the criticism brought up to date. For her later work has shewn much depth and breadth of vision. And surely only a woman of courage would have experimented as she has, and stood up to the ridicule only if she were confident and sure of her direction. At a time of poetic poverty, we need her rich mind, in much the same way, that in an interval of extreme slackness and blurry thought we required the pruning and astringent qualities of Laura Riding's valuable contribution. So I would establish the good qualities of Dr. Edith Sitwell in Robert Graves's mind, and if necessary, with a widdershin.

Then too, Mr. Graves is a classical scholar, and has continued to study sections of primitive religion so that his work has never ceased to grow or mature. His accumulated poetic criticisms can therefore be said to represent, better than any other living poet, *the contemporary pulse of poetry*, for in it we can distinguish the passing influences of our age. Where Mr. Eliot is objective and academic in his treatment, Mr. Read personal, changing his opinion as rapidly as a neon light; Mr. Graves notices the outside trend, assimilates this, then gives his own conclusions. For this reason, quite apart from the fact that they help to clarify his own poetic work, Mr. Graves's 2 volumes, *The Common Asphodel* and *The White Goddess* are already historical documents. And they should be referred to as a reliable source for *the great imperfections of poetry*, in the same way that we use Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Though accuracy can never be possible on such an obscure subject, Mr. Graves has the intuition, poetic imagination and singular mind to sort out this complex theme.

LYNETTE ROBERTS.

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