

shines, has been a preparation of Italy to assert effectively this desire. Surely the important thing is this national desire, not the matters Mr. Seldes stresses. Call this desire an envy of the more privileged, call it a will to power, or a will to live, it is something in peoples which was not born with any one great military dictator of the past and which has never died with one. Whatever happens to Mussolini or Hitler, it is safe to predict that this will to live, to be great, and to expand, felt by the Italian and German peoples, will not perish with either of these leaders. Nor will it die with any conceivable triumph of British or League of Nations righteousness, *i.e.*, the present *status quo*.



### *The Brotherhood of Orpheus*

BY WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE ROMANTIC REBELS, by Frances Winwar. \$3.75. 6 x 9; 507 pp. Boston: *Little, Brown*.

BYRON: THE YEARS OF FAME, by Peter Quennell. \$3.50. 6½ x 9½; 320 pp. New York: *Viking Press*.

THE LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS (Second Edition with Revisions and Additional Letters). Edited by Maurice Buxton Forman. \$5. 6 x 9; 561 pp. New York: *Oxford University Press*.

THE STRANGE LIFE AND STRANGE LOVES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE, by Emile Lauvrière. English version by Edwin Gile Rich. \$3.50. 6 x 9; 422 pp. Philadelphia: *Lippincott*.

THE passage of over a century and a quarter has made and unmade great reputations in English poetry, to say nothing of the profound changes wrought in poetry's theory and practice. Between Wordsworth's time and ours lies, of course, not merely the whole Victorian

era but a long succession of literary developments since then. And yet it does not seem peculiar to me that books are still being written concerning the lives of Shelley and Keats and Byron, or that the slightly later life of Edgar Allan Poe, perhaps America's purest poetic genius, is still being assayed. Aside from their individual literary achievements, the lives of all these writers held elements of romance and drama that seem only to be heightened in continual retrospect. They exist for us today in the youth of the life of poetry, even though just behind them loom, as elder contemporaries, such figures as Coleridge and Wordsworth, and back of these — with all due respect to certain major talents of the eighteenth century — the afterglow of that great unfading age of Gloriana's, its Hesper and Phosphor, of course, being the star of Shakespeare.

The dawn of the nineteenth century was, however, a sunrise of new great names — though none approached the marvelous playwright's planetary eminence. In the long perspective through which we now look back, many values have shifted; but Keats at his best, as the pure poetic artist, remains living and glowing; Shelley at his best a crystalline lyrical voice such as we have not found again; and Byron the creator of inimitable satirical romance.

To pitch upon a year when "great spirits on this earth" began, or had already begun, their sojourning, we may single out 1809, in the spring of which this country was publicly notified that, due to the virtue and firmness residing in Jefferson and Madison, the difficulties with England were now quite settled (so settled, indeed, that they resulted in the War of 1812!), and that American mariners and the American flag would hereafter be accorded nothing but respect upon the high seas

(maugre the successful machinations of Napoleon!). Probably in the beginning of that year of extreme ingenuousness on the part of the United States, a small, charming, and unfortunate actress, then in Boston, gave birth to a son whose name happened to be Edgar Poe. At much the same time an English boy named John Keats, in school at Enfield, was immersing himself in the Greek mythology of Tooke's *Pantheon*; another youth of England, Percy Bysshe Shelley, of bluer blood, was doubtless at work upon his first romance, *Zastrozzi*, yet to be published before he entered Oxford; and that same summer the Lisbon packet bore George Gordon Noël, Lord Byron, on his first voyage to foreign lands.

Of the above poets, Poe was to live the longest, dying at forty; Byron endured to the age of thirty-six; Shelley was thirty when he was drowned; and Keats perished of consumption at twenty-six. The death of each was dramatic: Poe's a humiliation and disaster, Byron's that of a romantic warrior fighting for Greek freedom, Shelley's on the Spezzian gulf in storm, and Keats' a wasting away in Italian exile. Of the lives they lived, that of Keats, despite his hopeless passion for Fanny Brawne, may be called the calmest — but the lives of Shelley, Byron, and Poe were all involved with affairs of the heart of various complexity. Shelley at nineteen married to the hardly-more-than-child Harriet Westbrook, out of juvenile quixotism — then his strange elopement with Godwin's daughter, and the still childlike Harriet's tragic death; Byron's many affairs, his almost undoubtedly incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta — his marriage to the strong-charactered and badly-treated Annabella Milbanke who so maddened him; Poe and his dying child-wife, Virginia Clemm — his search

for the Mother-Mistress in older women — all of these constitute extraordinary stories. All three men, as men, were what the world calls unbalanced; Shelley's deep and sincere humanitarianism being a nobler characteristic than any possessed by either Poe or Byron. And yet these latter, for all the ravage wrought by their dark angels, could demonstrate lofty motives. Nothing, of course, could be more opposite than Poe's tenderness to Virginia and Byron's remorse-goaded spasms of fury against Annabella. As for Shelley, he was constantly sublimating the natural desires of man into extraordinary platonic relationships.

Of the books before me, the most remarkable single achievement seems to me to be Peter Quennell's *Byron*. It should easily, but for its time-limits, replace that of Maurois. It is notable for concision and balance, presenting what seems very close to the whole man in the years of fame; discussing the man as poet less perhaps than might be desired; yet always it appeared that Byron regarded his practice of poetry as an avocation. A very slight tinge of snobbishness is the only defect I can discern in this otherwise admirable biography. The treatment of Byron just after his marriage, with the recurrence of Augusta and the martyrdom of Annabella, is masterly; and the summation of causes for the ruptured marriage precisely accurate. In Miss Winwar's *The Romantic Rebels*, this chapter of Byron's life is even more electrifying, though no more impressively presented. Miss Winwar is writing a book of the popular type — a book, frankly, of less distinction than Mr. Quennell's. But her material is so well organized and her sense of romance and drama so keen, that this is one of the most readable volumes of biography of the year. The interweaving of the three lives of Byron, Shelley,

and Keats, particularly of the two former, along with such lesser lives as that of Leigh Hunt, is done with a sure sense of pattern. Glance at Miss Winwar's bibliography, and note how many books have treated of these poets, although she does not list them all. Hence the freshness and vigor of her narrative seems to me even more worthy of remark. I would far rather read of these lives than dally with most novels. They present almost every facet of the artist's story.

The greatest stock of sheer common-sense — for all of youth's "green-sickness" upon which he made famous comment — was possessed by John Keats. This is again evident in the new edition of his letters edited by Maurice Buxton Forman, who, in his preface, gives proper credit to Harry Buxton Forman, and then to Sir Sidney Colvin, for "gathering and arranging the mass of Keats' correspondence". Evident also, in the poet's most poignant love-letters, is a brave delicacy; and his intensity does not completely forswear the humorous touch.

As for Lauvrière's life of Poe, I cannot commend a translation which too frequently seems to me most awkward. The title of the book is sensational, the French biographer diffuse. Rather turn back to Hervey Allen's *Israfil*. One cannot, of course, excuse much of Poe's conduct toward his guardian, Mr. Allan, no matter how badly the latter appears. There is no doubt at all that Poe was quite without scruple toward him. As for his love affairs, they seem to me largely pathetic. Gazing upon the forbidding countenance of Elmira S. Royster Shelton, Poe's *Lost Lenore*, one marvels indeed! In his struggle against penury and his life with Virginia and Mrs. Clemm, one cannot but take his part, however, no matter how many times he strayed from the straight and narrow path.

Stranger non-sexual union never existed. Its conditions undoubtedly contributed to the aberrations of Poe's imagination. But without the aberrations, where would the poetry be? It is not necessary to wish for a poet lives like those of Coleridge and Poe and Francis Thompson, in order to admit one's unwillingness to spare such poems as *Kubla Khan*, *The Haunted Palace*, and *The Mistress of Vision*. The bitter waters of the dark tarn rose to Poe's lips; but by some strange law of compensation he has left us moonlit verse of an inexplicable — but ineluctable — magic. And, looking upon his portrait, never was a more asymmetrical countenance more revelatory of a frantic struggle between two natures. Recently, at a party, a layman leveled at me point-blank the question, "What is a poet?" I can only say here that some of our greatest — inscrutably enough — have been such "men possessed".



### *Bertrand Russell's Searchlight*

BY GEORGE SANTAYANA

RELIGION AND SCIENCE, by Bertrand Russell. \$2. 5¼ x 8¾; 271 pp. New York: Henry Holt.

WHY should a mind of the highest distinction, in the van of science and social reform, stop today to repeat the commonplaces of anti-clerical propaganda, and inform us again that witches and heretics were burned and that Galileo was imprisoned? Lord Russell, I need hardly say, tells the old story admirably. He is no less scathing and witty than Voltaire, with an occasional touch of his own merrier humor, or candid despair. The whole is refreshed with a wealth of instructive facts and acute criticisms, and reduced, in its converging lines,