

Two Recent Volumes of Verse

Collected Poems.

By V. Sackville-West. 10s. 6d. (Hogarth Press.)

To pick up a book of this author's poems is like escaping from the Sunday turmoil of the main Hastings road into the quiet among her ancestral beeches at Knole. Indeed, if one did not know otherwise, he might be forgiven for concluding that Miss Sackville-West had rarely ventured beyond the rural surroundings of her home; so far and so peacefully remote is she as poet from the major disturbances (can we yet justly call them movements?) of her time.

For this reason few violent passions or controversies will be aroused by her work, and as few will quarrel with it. Aloof from contemporary movements in poetry, she writes, one feels, more for her own pleasure than for any audience she may find, and her poetry derives at its best from the slowly changing life of the country. We can no more expect of her any sudden and startling departure from tradition than we would from oak or elm or beech, and her poetic progeny, if any, will be as haphazard as the springing and survival of one oak from a season's broadcast of acorns.

But she needs no successors, even if the life of which she writes as no other can is about to pass away for ever. Such of her poetry as will survive (apart, that is, from a few scattered lyrics) is sufficiently unique to satisfy all that we might desire of its kind. As Housman in his very different way, so she in "The Land" and her other bucolic poems has tapped a spring from which there flows something akin maybe to Virgil, but in her case wholeheartedly and unmistakably English. No other poet in our tongue has brought together so great a wealth of these varying tangible and intangible essences which, to all who have suffered exile from them, spell England and can spell nothing else.

It is perhaps a little disappointing, as one looks through these "Collected Poems," to find so little else in her book equal to the bucolic poems in quality. One had hoped maybe for more than will be found here of the rare and fantastic delicacy which one meets in "A Dream" or "Encounter." While she writes of what she knows, the scenes and the things that are her inheritance and from which her generous nature springs, her work possesses a character and deep-rooted strength compounded, like everything that is most English, from a great variety of opposites, and richly flavoured with emotion. Elsewhere she seems to remain on the surface.

To labour the point would be ungracious. After all, as has been said, she has given us much that is hers alone, and whether at home or abroad, one returns again and again gladly and gratefully to "The Land."

John Linnell

Summer Harvest: Poems, 1924-1933.

By John Drinkwater. 5s. (Sidgwick & Jackson.)

You will not hurt yourself if you fall down in this world, you will fall soft: besides, Mr. Drinkwater affirms that you will never fall down. The consistency of cotton wool yields and is a barrier to all the senses. Within the structure of a romanticism such as this it is impossible to be concerned. It is the dull finality of safety.

Now Mr. Drinkwater is a poet versatile in his themes. A glance at the book makes it clear that his personal contacts are diverse and admirably unrestrained. "The King's Birthday," "June Midnight," "Song for the City of Oxford School," "American Vignettes" and "Egyptian Idylls" are titles of poems and of sections taken at random. He is conscious of responsibility as a commentator on the events of his time. Moreover the most portentous and the most paltry of events fit comfortably into this world. There need be no hesitation or difficulty in dealing with such a matter as the slums where the final verse of "A Slum Piece" so nearly retards our responsibility to the next world:

"Brothers of England, how shall we meet him then—
little boy of the street;
we who have made him suffer among men
to uttermost defeat?"

The faint muster of sorrow and ugliness brought together in a poem such as this is the selection of the sentimentalist using these qualities as furniture for his theme. I question whether it is possible for a writer of this kind of poetry to be sincere. Sincerity is a simple but quite final demand. It is immediately concerned with the poet's vision, the relation of his experience with the act of expression: it finally controls the experience of the reader. To reproach this poetry with this insincerity is to find a deficiency in every aspect of it. When a writer expresses himself in the terms of a world unrelated to living men he misinterprets every image that grows. The process is facile, the imagery on any page of "Summer Harvest" is abundant: Mr. John Drinkwater is simple, pictorially charming: but of what value is his versatility in these qualities in his world of cotton wool?

John Pudney

CORRESPONDENCE

"Cheap Music"

SIR,

I do not propose to argue further with Mr. Warren, for reasons that will be obvious to any musicians amongst your readers. However as few of these would, we may suppose, when reading his article in your October issue, have at hand the earlier issue, with my article to which he is replying, it is perhaps admissible to state that I did *not* say: "Children must be taught harmony and orchestration"—or even hint at any such absurd suggestion.

Yours, etc.,

PERCY A. SCHOLLES.

Cornaux, près Chamby

sur Montreux, Switzerland.

"Modern Sculpture"

SIR,

In his note on my book, "Modern Sculpture," in your Christmas number, your reviewer writes: "All the bad sculptors . . . will be found in Mr. Maryon's book. . . . Most of the good sculptors are here as well (even Henry Moore), but *all are equal in Mr. Maryon's eye*" (my italics).

Surely my eye must fail me, for I cannot read anything of the kind in the book, which I thought was an attempt to show the wide range of "subjects" which interest contemporary sculptors. In fairness to their authors and to my readers, I tried to give a representative collection; I do not admire all the results, and I say so.

But my eye must have failed me after all. In the reference to Thornycroft's "King Edward I," quoted by your reviewer, I must plead guilty to having passed a misprint. I had written "kingly," nor "kindly," but failed to notice the mistake in the proof. Your reviewer also is guilty of a similar slip. The Swedish sculptor referred to is Carl "Milles," not "Milts" as printed.

Yours, etc.,

HERBERT MARYON.

Armstrong College,

Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Mr. Geoffrey Grigson writes:

I apologise to Mr. Maryon for not being more explicit. I should have said: "all men seem equal in Mr. Maryon's eye." If Mr. Maryon regards this as unjust, the fault is his own, for it was not possible to find from his book that he judged his extraordinary mixture of sculptors and examples by any critical standard. Worthless and valuable were written of at least on the same level.

Dr. Thorndyke Intervenes.

By R. Austin Freeman. 7s. 6d.
(Hodder & Stoughton.)

The Empty House.

By Francis D. Grierson. 7s. 6d.
(Thornton Butterworth.)

Who Goes There ?

By Derek Vane. 7s. 6d. (Eldon Press.)

The Park Mystery.

By H. Lawrence Phillips. 7s. 6d. (Nelson.)

A Woman of Destiny.

By Stephen Maddock. 7s. 6d. (Collins.)

Gallows Parade.

By Froom Tyler. 7s. 6d. (Lovat Dickson.)

The Sherlock Holmes Tradition

Since Sherlock Holmes, still the most famous of all detectives in fiction, made his final bow there have been a number of followers in his footsteps. Brass plates, neatly lettered "Criminal Investigator," have been set up in opposition to Scotland Yard, and various authors have attempted to obtain a hearing for their pet sleuth's exploits.

Many of these fictional detectives are short-lived. Some never become the fashion and disappear into obscurity; others, like Mr. E. C. Bentley's Paul Trent, retire on the kudos obtained from one brilliant case; the remainder continue to attract clients (and consequently readers) in some degree.

The private detective in fiction has a rival in the more solid Yard man. Some authors specialise in the C.I.D. Mr. and Mrs. Cole, for instance, attend on Superintendent Wilson; Mr. Wills Crofts gives the reader the cases of Inspector French.

This system of carrying a central figure through a series of books is particularly suited to the thriller. It is true that the author who strikes new ground with each novel is less constricted in his choice of a plot and setting, and he does not run the risk of boring a section of his readers who might turn against his detective. Against that however can be put the publicity value of the reiteration of a single name. Lord Peter Wimsey, Hercule Poirot, Roger Sheringham—we all know them and associate their respective authors with them (which incidentally makes it the more reprehensible on the part of Miss Sayers that she should spring an individual called Montague Egg on an unsuspecting public. How all the Wimseyites shuddered!).

But pride of place among those in the Holmes tradition belongs without question to Dr. Thorndyke. He was one of the first in the field and he remains pre-eminent. Dr. Freeman's medico-legal expert is more human and less showy than his great predecessor; his knowledge of forensic medicine and his use of scientific deduction are fully as sound. An Austin Freeman book has a flavour as precise and individual as had the Conan Doyle series, and it is not surprising to find his novels on the bookshelves of serious students of crime.

"Doctor Thorndyke Intervenes" is as fascinating as anything this author has given us. It opens with the discovery of a human head in a package left in a cloak-room at a London terminus, and in the elucidation of this mystery two further plots are ingeniously dovetailed—the theft of a valuable consignment of platinum and an attempt to substantiate a romantic claim to an English peerage. Dr. Thorndyke's reasoning is logical and irrefutable; the excitements that occur in the course of the book are sufficiently gruesome to rivet the reader's attention; and the whole case is worked out to the last detail. This is a book to read once—and then again.

"As the cupboard door swung back the figure of a tall man lurched slowly forward and crashed on to the bare boards at their feet. The handle of a knife protruded from his back."

That is what Jack Vane and the house agent's clerk discovered in "The Empty House," and hard on the heels of this unpleasant shock came other mysterious happenings. Who was the horrified girl whom Vane saw for a second before she vanished? Who had been occupying the attics? The dead man turns out to be a repulsive type of

money-lender; the missing girl is his typist, Eve Page. So there are two search-parties in this book. One, led by Inspector Blyth, is on the tracks of the murderer; the other is Jack Vane's affair and is

prompted by love at first sight. Both searches are prolonged. Indeed the inspector eventually calls in Dr. Marriable, a criminologist of international repute, to help him. Nevertheless another murder is committed before the book ends with a disclosure that should surprise the most hardened reader. Mr. Grierson's characters are alive and for the most part likeable, and he can skim over the sentimental passages with the lightest of touches. Both Inspector Blyth and Dr. Marriable thoroughly deserve the wider reputation that their exploits bring them.

Mr. Derek Vane uses the rather hackneyed murder-at-the-house-party *motif*. Usually the host is chosen as the victim on these occasions, and Roderick Chester is no exception to this rather ungracious rule. Among the suspected guests at the party in "Who Goes There?" were Venetia Falmer, who was being discarded by Chester for a new love, and Philip Louvray, an ex-diplomat who adores her to the extent of concealing incriminating evidence. Other possible murderers are the dead man's valet and that most perfect of housekeepers, Miss Druce. It is left for Inspector Blake and the reader to guess which of them stabbed Chester in the back. There is perhaps nothing very original about this book, but it is a well written and interesting piece of work.

Is it not time that two stock characters were banished for ever from crime fiction? One of these is the charming girl who is innocent itself for three-quarters of the book, and then quite suddenly turns into a hard-faced, foul-mouthed virago of sadistic tendencies and nasty acquaintances. The other is the idiot hero who on receipt of a

scribbled note or urgent telephone summons rushes off into an obvious trap, where instead of his lady love he meets a hearty biff on the head. Unluckily the blow is never quite hard enough to kill, and he recovers to give the police a deal of trouble before they can rescue him.

Both these characters appear in "The Park Mystery," which concerns a missing document of international importance. Violence, robbery and murder follow hard on its disappearance, and only the greater idiocy of a gang of villains who go out of their way to call attention to themselves saves that painfully breezy young man, Basil Lockyer, and his girl from a very nasty time. But the police arrive at the last moment and all is well.

Mr. Stephen Maddock's "A Woman of Destiny" deals with secret service adventures. Joan Meredith finds an injured pigeon on Wimbledon Common and discovers a cryptic message tied to the bird's leg. The same night her room is burgled by a masked man who threatens her with a revolver. But Timothy Terrel, of the British Secret Service, is watching over her. Under his tuition she embarks on a brief career as a British agent in Germany, where she meets a mysterious Fräulein Weiss. But, before she can let Tim know of the information she has gathered of a stupendous Bolshevik plot against Britain, she is abducted and shipped to Russia. There this swiftly moving book brings Joan, Tim and the mysterious Fräulein together again in an exciting climax. A brisk and entertaining book.

The last book on my list, "Gallows Parade," sets out to show that fiction does not have matters all its own way. And very well it does it. This is a collection of real-life murder stories presented in a readable and sometimes wittily sardonic manner. The author has wisely chosen to search for lesser known criminals than to retell the hackneyed exploits of the "big guns" in the murder business. A few classic crimes are included, but most of the stories are refreshingly novel. I particularly liked "The Case of the Green Box," in which a Mr. Henry Piper was rewarded for his assistance in bringing a double murderer to justice by the sum of fifty pounds and a ticket for a front seat at the execution!

by Marcus Magill