Gardens, Houses and People

A News-Magazine

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LAST POEM

IN MEMORIAM

(JANUARY 9, 1856—DECEMBER 17, 1935)

TO AN INDECENT NOVELIST

You measure by a ditch, and not a height,
Make life no deeper than a country bin
One keeps for apples on a winter's night,
Thence prate the immaturities of sin.
You weigh by littles, by some cracked emprise.
Why not by that one thing a man has done,
In some vast hour, beneath hot, hating eyes,
When, hard against a wall, he fought and won?
The spirit still outwits the lagging flesh:
Cross but one lane, and you shall find again
That righteousness is older still than lust;
Strict loveliness of living find afresh,
Sound women, too, and reasonable men,
That not yet all the gentlefolk are dust.

■ This, so far as is known, is the last poem by Lizette Woodworth Reese.

She sent it to us shortly before the inception of the illness that culminated, after a few weeks, in her death. In the same envelope was a typed manuscript of "A Christmas Song," which appeared on our editorial page last month; it was originally written apparently for GARDENS, HOUSES AND PEOPLE some time ago, having first come to us with a note dashed off in ink in her curiously hurried and uneven script, dated December 12, 1933: "If this is sent in too late, don't hesitate to return it." It did arrive after we had gone to press and it was returned.

Whether it has appeared elsewhere in the meantime we do not know, but fancy it has not; the fact that she wanted it finally to reach the direct attention of our readers, many of whom were her warm friends, touched us very deeply and intensified the feeling of gratitude and honor that she had chosen these columns for the first appearance of a number of her later poems.

That feeling was very keen, indeed, when we called upon her—it was Thanksgiving Day—shortly after she had been taken to the Church Home and Infirmary, where as Henry L. Mencken pointed out in his fine memorial tribute in *The Evening Sun,* another great poet, Edgar Allan Poe, died.

She was looking so pitifully pale and exhausted that it was not necessary to be told that the visit must be very short, but suffering and weak as she was her courage was superb, since her spirit knew no vanquishing.

In a low but perfectly clear voice she expressed loving appreciation of the attention and concern of her friends in sending flowers and messages; then suddenly: "By the way, did you ever get those poems I sent you? I thought you might like them for your magazine;" when assured that they actually were not lost, either in the mail or editorial chaos, but were in type, she seemed very much pleased.

"How about writing you a sonnet?"—this question was asked her facetiously to cover the sadness of a farewell we instinctively felt was the last. "Especially *not* that," she replied, with a flash of her old humor and a smile, the memory of which sheds a final and strangely sweet glow over her memory.

Though the greater part of her life was devoted to the trying routine of school teaching and though after her retirement at 63, to devote herself to writing, she was always working indefatigably, she took it all in good cheer, knowing as she did, how to conquer disappointment and rise above disillusion. The long bridge of years that took her to the brink of 80 spanned a career of supreme usefulness to the circle of her family and friends and one of inspiration to the whole world because of the beauty she created.

Never was there a soul more impervious to the mercenary and otherwise debasing influences of modern times; never was there one that looked facts more valiantly in the face and took its stand once for all on its own high ground of idealism and faith in the fundamental decency and dignity of man.

She saw loveliness wherever she turned and wrought the materials of her impressions into verse that often gleamed pure gold. Many fads came and went in the world of prosody during her time and she saw the standards of versification assailed on all sides, but she never was tempted even to change her own lyric style, any more than she was impelled to condone the license, to say nothing of the

(*Continued on page 7*)

COMING

Special Flower and Garden Show Number

■ Next month's GARDENS, HOUSES AND PEOPLE will be a special National Flower and Garden Show issue. It will be devoted principally to matters of interest in connection with the 17th annual National Flower and Garden Show, which opens for a nine day season at the Fifth Regiment Armory March 14.

The editor is happy to cooperate in this manner with the committee that for months has been working to make the Show the success it merits; the Special Number will be an unofficial souvenir of the greatest event of its kind Baltimore has ever known and it is hoped that it will meet as hearty a response as the Tercentenary Issue published in connection with the 300th anniversary of the settlement of Maryland in May, 1934.

Contributors to the National Flower and Garden Show Number will include Mrs. Edward H. McKeon, president of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland; Dr. T. B. Symons, director, Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Maryland; C. Warner Price of the Towson Nurseries, G. W. Stephens of the Nursery of the Roland Park Company, Howard I. Moss of Isaac H. Moss, Inc., Daniel F. Shipley, Jr.

David Burpee, president of W. Atlee Burpee Co. of Philadelphia, has been asked to write about the remarkable success his house has had in nasturtium hybridization and there will be articles by other authorities on gardening, together with appropriate pictorial material.

LAST POEM

(*Continued from page 3*)

licentiousness, that so many contemporary poets and their readers indulged in complacently.

She did not hesitate to express her opinion on such matters very freely and emphatically in conversation, but the only time, to our knowledge, she ever made it the subject of a poem was when she wrote "To An Indecent Novelist."

Read this sonnet again, study it carefully, if you would find the dominant influence that shaped her moral outlook and kept the stream of her inspiration as a poet unsullied.

She was content to sing of the beauties of nature and of the impulses of the heart that are immune to contamination; things that spring spontaneously, as it were, from the profound and secret sources of life.

There could be no better epitaph for her than the one she wrote at the close of "Little Henrietta," (Doran, 1922), her only long narrative poem and one of her rare adventures in blank verse—and more beautiful and tender than ever it seems, more potent as a solace for all hearts that mourn, upon re-reading. In the Epitaph she abandoned unrhymed decasyllabic verses for short rhymed ones—an unconscious impulse, perhaps, as of one who, having passed through great sorrow and despair, finds triumph at last in a simple song:

Here is a music ended
A golden treasure done,
A book gone to the gust
A flower to dust,

That song may sing and call;
A hoard grow full again,
A book be read of men;
A flower blow by a wall:

That heaven may befall,
To God we render all.
Alleluia.

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