

RECENT POETRY

OF the several verse books before us, the place of honor should be given, perhaps, to Robert Underwood Johnson's *Songs of Liberty and Other Poems*. For the nature of the subject matter as well as the execution must be reckoned with, and Mr. Johnson essays a high and difficult kind of verse in this volume and performs his task with considerable success. Patriotic poetry, to be good, must be largely conceived, virile, and inspired with genuine fervor, otherwise we get rhetoric and unconvincing coldness. The opening "Apostrophe to Greece" has dignity and nobility; it strikes us as sincere and, still more, the following "Song of the Modern Greeks" has the lyric impulse and the note of true feeling. Some of the purely lyric and song pieces—notably the lovely "Oh, Waste No Tears"—are thoroughly good, and the

SONGS OF LIBERTY AND OTHER POEMS. By Robert Underwood Johnson. The Century Co., 16mo, \$1.00.

THE VOICE OF THE VALLEY. By Yone Noguchi. William Doxey, 16mo, \$1.00.

THE FAIRY CHANGELING AND OTHER POEMS. By Dora Sigerson (Mrs. Clement Shorter). John Lane, 12mo, \$1.25.

THE EARTH-BREATH. By A. E. John Lane, 16mo, \$1.25.

ONE WAY TO THE WOODS. By Evalene Stein. Copeland & Day, 18mo, 75 cents.

SONNETS OF JOSÉ MARIA DE HEREDIA. Done into English by Edward Robeson Taylor. William Doxey, 12mo, \$1.50.

THE SLOPES OF HELICON AND OTHER POEMS. By Lloyd Mifflin. Illustrated. Estes & Lauriat, 16mo, \$1.25.

SHADOWS. By M. A. De Wolf Howe. Copeland & Day, 16mo, \$1.00.

Servian paraphrases from Zmai Iovan Iovanovich, based on a literal translation by the electrician, Mr. Tesla, who furnishes a welcome introductory note on the Servian poet, are interesting and well done. We like nothing better in the collection than the two final very strong blank-verse poems, "The Voice of Webster" and "Hands Across Sea." The former is not only a noble tribute to the great American (an estimate too frankly eulogistic to win common assent), but displays a keen sense of the dangers facing our latter-day democracy, and its love for country rings true; while the other, in its invocation to the brother English to realize that we of the United States are one with them in blood and deed, again has an inspiring accent. Altogether, this book is an earnest of a writer who has no little art and manly vigor and whose themes only occasionally lead him into the perfunctory and the commonplace. Mr. Johnson's technique is sound, and he seems always willing to give his work the labor of the file and to produce slowly.

It is an abrupt change to the orphic rhapsodies and inchoate meters of Yone Noguchi, Japanese chanter of the Yosemite. Professor Warren's preface to *The Voice of the Valley* is also rhapsodic, and he believes that a theme like the Yosemite demands a Whitmanesque movement. This may be true. Noguchi's is, in form, just the kind of verse—sired of Whitman and represented by Emily Dickinson, Crane, William Sharp, Henley, and Carman at times—of which cheap fun can easily be made. We do not object to dithyrambs, if they are really inspired. This verse has picturesqueness and a naïve, fresh word use, due in part to the writer's origin. Now and then it is happy; the atmospheric effect is invigorating. But it is, on the other hand, nebulous as a whole; there is little or no thought-progression and no variety. It is interesting

as a phenomenon rather than satisfactory. Noguchi has the making of a poet possibly; he has not as yet "attained."

Prominence is given in *The Fairy Changeling and Other Poems*, by Dora Sigerson (Mrs. Clement Shorter), to ballad measures and the Celtic impulse and atmosphere. Indeed, this interesting verse-writer has from the first made strong use of the legendary motives of Ireland, and she has a gift for the ballad story. Yet we are not sure that we do not like best in her volume, lyrics like "Sanctuary," "An Eastern God," "A Vagrant Heart," and "The Old Maid," which have insight, sympathy, and pathos, together with a surer technique than is sometimes found in the ballads. Mrs. Shorter's hand, in fact, is not sure in her art, but she possesses poetic imagination and both strength and earnestness are hers.

Those who recall "A.E.'s" "Homeward Songs by the Way" will welcome his later *The Earth-Breath and Other Poems*, for this English poet's work has a delicacy and beauty that are unmistakable. Nature worship and a mystic spirituality characterize Mr. Russell's verse; his lyrics come like faint sweet odors, full of suggestion. The responsive soul and the quiet mind are needed to appreciate such poetry, which to us seems both rare and fine, though it will never please the crowd. Such a longer piece as "The Fountain of Shadowy Beauty" (the finest thing in the book), or brief estrays like "The Mountaineer," "Immortality," "Exiles," and the very touching "Epilogue," have a loveliness in which the vagueness hardly detracts from the charm.

Evaleen Stein, in her *One Way to the Woods*, read after Mr. Russell, seems comparatively mundane. But the change is not unpleasant, for this new singer knows Nature, loves it, and her verse catches some of its picturesque and happy moments. A good example of her felici-

tous description is the "Evening Down the Long Drift." In the more subjective lyrics too, dealing with humanity, she is at times successful, as in "Conscience." While never quite compelling, nor gifted with the magic of phrase and imagination of conception which thrills the reader, Miss Stein has written a first book of verse decidedly pleasing and promising.

Those who keep in touch with modern poetry are aware that José-Maria de Heredia is one of the modern masters of the sonnet form; that his work, slight in extent, has a perfection and richness of workmanship which have brought him the coveted French Academy admission. A good English translation of his *Sonnets* is therefore a welcome thing, though any translation must at the best be an aggravation to those who know the original. Mr. Edward R. Taylor's attempt is interesting and at times pleasing, if not thoroughly successful. He has a certain gift for orotund speech and some ear for the metrical music of this most exacting of verse forms; as a result, he occasionally gives a really impressive rendering of the French. This is true of the opening "Oblivion," for example. Often, however, Mr. Taylor's hand is unsure; the meter jars and the diction lacks fitness, and at times is forced and obscure. This is, of course, particularly unhappy in view of Heredia's technical perfection. As a whole, the translation is tentative and only acceptable as a pioneer effort. It should be added that the book Englishes Heredia's "Les Trophées": over a hundred sonorous and vivid sonnets seizing for subject on representative scenes in the historical development of man from the classical time to the present day, or using scenes of nature that lend themselves to chromatic imaginative treatment.

With Lloyd Mifflin's remarkable first volume of sonnets in mind, the reader will feel something of disappointment in

the author's *Slopes of Helicon and Other Poems*. It almost seems as if sonnet writing were a gift by itself, not a certificate for general felicity and power in English poetry. The odes and lyrics making up this second collection are artistic and graceful; often they have an earnest ideality that is welcome. But rarely if ever do they strike one as original or inspired. Such verse is mainly the result of book-culture. Indeed, in the longer pieces one walks in a Hall of Echoes, at times. The sonnets—of which there is a group—are admirable, notably the opening, "From the Battlements," which has the thrill and lift that denote real poetry. Some of the love songs, too—"Take Back Your Words," and the lighter "In Pall Mall," and "The Luncheon al Fresco"—are very happy. Mr. Mifflin seems to us more derivative when he sings in the minor key (as in the division called "Beneath the Raven's Wing"); here his debt to Swinburne, Poe, Landor, and other masters becomes obvious. Such a blot on good taste as the use of the word *galore* in the sombre poem, "The Land of Nevermore," luckily is unique. Of the more ambitious things, perhaps the "Ode to the Memory of Keats" takes precedence for art and heart. The poems as a whole can be enjoyed, while they by no means hail the writer as an independent voice, or a new force in verse.

A first volume of verse, of more than average merit, is M. A. De Wolf Howe's *Shadows*. The writer's art is quiet but adequate; technically, there is little to criticise in his well-turned verses. Mr. Howe is serious-minded, too, his aim is earnest, and he does not ask us to feast on syllabub or syllables. We like his touch in dealing with Nature: some of the best lyrics of the collection come under this head. Witness "The Field Day" or "Golden Rod." "The Orchestra," again, is a charming poem—as good as

anything in the book. In another vein, "By the Shore" appeals to us, though, in general, Mr. Howe does not quite hit it off in his attempts at contemplative verse. His crisp neatness of manner enables him to write very clever quatrains, of which there are a number.

We should like space also to quote so good a poem as "The Horizon at Sea," which has a larger suggestion than is customary with the writer. On the whole, Mr. Howe has produced a promising first book and one made up of decidedly agreeable verse. He has technique and worthy purpose: the higher imaginative flight may yet come.

Richard Burton.