

# BURYING POETS

By John Donelson

**T**HE fate that poets most encounter in life is not fully made up for by the glories that attend their memories. Fortunately, in spite of academic strictures, their verses cannot be completely mummified; but their lives, alas! are often rendered so dull as to defy revivification by the weighty pens of the dons. Take Byron and Shelley, the spirits whose manners and morals, according to all ordinary standards, were execrable, yet whose lives were full of freshness and color. Biographers explain this fact and that, excuse and whitewash, cavil and quarrel,

until both of them have become more legendary, and terrifying in that legendry, than they are real. From this mass of material must, of course, stand out the remarkable "Ariel" of André Maurois. It will be ranked as one of the novels of the year, no doubt; in spite of the fact that it is biography. It is deft and sympathetic. Maurois paints his hero with subtly ironic strokes and yet somehow makes his baffling whimsicalities, often so tragic in their consequences, lovable. The one flaw in the book, to me, is its almost total ignoring of the actual moods of creation. Must no part of the life of a poet—particularly one such as Shelley—be given to the swift passion of inspired creation? However, perhaps M. Maurois, in striving to be eminently human, avoided the eerie qualities of the poet by overstressing the passions of the man. "Ariel" should be a best seller for years to come. It is already appearing on the lists of volumes in demand at the bookstores.

The only other books of all those concerning these two bards—most of them of Byron, apropos of the centenary of his death—that have the saving touch of humanity mixed with good writing are "Byron: The Last Journey" by Harold Nicolson and "The Political Career of Lord Byron" by Dora Neill Raymond. Mr. Nicolson paints a fascinating portrait of Byron's last days in Italy and Greece. The figure, somewhat pathetic, emerges boldly from these pages. The book is well planned and well written. Miss Raymond is only slightly less successful in a larger field. I resent her attempt to ease over the Byronic lapses of character; but hers is a volume well worth owning.

"Byron and Greece" by Harold Spender is dull, but contains excellent material. "Shelley and the Unro-

mantics" by Olwen Ward Campbell justifies its title. Mr. Campbell both in style and in approach is overromantic. Samuel C. Chew's "Byron in England" is a dignified, scholarly, and worthwhile book; but a book for the scholarly mind. "Poems of Lord Byron", selected and arranged in chronological order with a preface by H. J. C. Grierson, is a splendidly printed and convenient work.

There is one moral which readers may draw from the biographies of poets through the ages. Poets do not treat women well according to accepted social standards; in fact they are, in the main, antisocial in more than this one particular. Yet we must have poets, and they occasionally do fine, daring things that stand out and go down in history as well as in the history of literature. Byron, Milton, Rupert Brooke—who shall say that poets do not make politicians, heroes, and soldiers? Any woman who marries a poet must in this enlightened age do so with wide open eyes, and with a knowledge of her probable fate. Nevertheless, I think we might fittingly close this review with, "God pity poets' wives", and add with apologies, "and their mistresses."

Ariel: The Life of Shelley. By André Maurois. Translated by Ella D'Arcy. D. Appleton and Co.

Byron: The Last Journey, April 1823-April 1824. By Harold Nicolson. Houghton Mifflin Co.

The Political Career of Lord Byron. By Dora Neill Raymond, Ph.D. Henry Holt and Co.

Byron and Greece. By Harold Spender. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Shelley and the Unromantics. By Olwen Ward Campbell. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Byron in England: His Fame and After-Fame. By Samuel C. Chew. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Poems of Lord Byron. Selected and arranged in chronological order with a preface by H. J. C. Grierson, Litt.D. D. Appleton and Co.