

"Songs and Sonnets"

By Maurice F. Egan. 31. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.

SO MANY OF OUR modern collections of minor verse are marred by the presence among serious work of trivial rhymes and examples of verse-making which rely upon verbal gymnastics for their success that it is a relief as well as a genuine pleasure to come across a book wholly free from these meretricious performances, and to find a poet who has a sincere regard for his work and shows no tendency to trifle with his song-gift. Such a book is Mr. Maurice Francis Egan's recent collection of songs and sonnets. There is something very attractive about Mr. Egan's verse: though it may never exactly soar to the lofty heights of song, it at least rises above the commonplace, and maintains an even and graceful flight in the clear atmosphere of poesy; and its note is pure, sweet and uplifting. Among the verses in the first section of this book, "Songs and Hymns," there is nothing better than "A Duet in Winter," "Among the Reeds" and "The Old Violin." The last of these is this pleasing fancy:—

Though tuneless, stringless, it lies there in dust,

Like some great thought on a forgotten page;

The soul of music cannot fade or rust—

The voice within it stronger grows with age;

Its strings and bow are only trifling things—

A master-touch!—its sweet soul wakes and sings.

The half dozen narrative poems, while spirited in movement and possessing a certain vigor of expression at times, do not impress one as being altogether successful. There are few poets who are story-tellers as well, and they only can hope to create poetry of this kind. The third division of Mr. Egan's volume contains his best work. It is as a sonneteer that he is most fortunate. The high average of excellence throughout the entire body of sonnets presented makes it difficult for one to name particular favorites; yet "Theocritus," "The Joy-Bringer" and the group of four entitled "Legends of the Flowers" may be named as sure to delight any lover of the sonnet. The first of the flower legends, called "Of Flowers," and beginning

There were no roses till the first child died,

is an exquisite poem. The final division of poems is made

up of a number of religious pieces, all of them readable, and evidently evoked by the poet's life and experiences. They lack the fine quality of the sonnets, and something of the artistic finish of Mr. Egan's other verse.

From those who have read many of these songs and sonnets as they appeared in the various literary magazines, this pretty volume will receive the warm welcome it deserves.

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