

THE POEMS OF HERBERT TRENCH

By Benjamin De Casseres

Rarely comest thou,
Spirit of Delight....

wrote Shelley in the long ago. Did he mean that no great new poems were being fabricated? Probably not. But it is true today—rarely comest thou, Spirit of Delight; the Spirit of Delight being to me a book of fine poems.

Of versifiers there is never an end. The humorist and the sobbing sentimentalist are always with us. Every "poet", no matter how commonplace, believes that he is unique, just as every pair of lovers believe they are unique and that no one has ever loved in just that manner before. But great poets are rare—those that spring throstle-throated and frenzy-smitten straight from the forehead of Dionysus. Swinburne and Hugo and Whitman and Poe have had no successors. Thomas Hardy is sublimely metaphysical at his best—never a singer. Only Gabriele D'Annunzio today carries out the legend of the traditional poet. He is a demigod, a superman. the Red Vision, a spiritual Bolshevik, a passionate chanter of movement and revolution. Just now he is mixed up

with the international traffic cops, but that is a poet's birthright—to keep in trouble.

But speaking of the Spirit of Delight. It came to me when I picked up for review "Poems" by Herbert Trench. As in the case of Murray Marks, I had never heard of Herbert Trench, so my delight was doubled—something of that feeling that an astronomer has when he catches certain jolts and jostlings along the chalk-line of old Neptune that tell him there is another planet in the sidereal system lying beyond and out-there somewhere.

The poetry of Herbert Trench is done impeccably. It is not world-shaking verse or visions that will jolt Blake or Swinburne or Leconte de Lisle out of their heavens. They are intellectual products (we have too little intellectual poetry in the world today), marmoreal, of a poised and studied sensuousness, done by a man who is absolute master of his vision and his voice.

They are dedicated to the "memory of the two well-beloved masters, Ivan Turgenev and George Meredith", and, indeed, the influence of both these great writers is seen in Mr. Trench's work. There is the impersonal attitude and intellectual pessimism of the great Russian, but tempered by the inescapable faith that all's well that ends in the slumber of God. Meredith would have liked many of these poems, so would Robert Browning—and Francis Thompson. The latter is recalled in Mr. Trench's magnificent "Requiem of the Archangels for the World", also done in Latin by E. Iliff Robson. To me, it is the finest poem, by far, in the book, although "Deidre Wedded", a long narrative poem, should, like the "Requiem", be bound in gold and jasper and printed separately.

The theme of the "Requiem" is sublime. The star that has borne us all is dead. The streams are dumb. The human heart had faded into dust. The battle flags of our wars against Nature and Evil and our poor enemies are furled. The spouting craters of ideas—the skull—are silent. The oceans are mud. Gods and flowers and little children have passed like a morphinated dream.

Make ready thou, tremendous Night,
Stoop to the Earth and shroud her scars,
And bid with chanting to the rite
The torches of thy train of stars.

It is not the vision of a pessimist or a Schopenhauerian Nay-sayer. Our legend has been a glorious one. We lie bleeding on the altar of Moloch, but we are not tired or fatigued. It was a sublime adventure of a spark of God in matter.

Fount of the time-embranching fire
O waneless One, that art the core
Of every heart's unknown desire,
Take back the hearts that beat no more.

"Apollo and the Seaman" is a beautiful series of studied images—a poet's poem. "The Rock of Cloud" is Shelleyan—ethereal and winged. "The Battle of the Marne" and "Stanzas to Tolstoi in His Old Age" are majestic and have the beat of the heart in every line. "An Ode to Beauty" is unforgettable in its matchless house of words. Mr. Trench's Hound of Heaven is the immortal Helena, mother of the sons of song.

Nothing in these poems reveals to us what manner of man Herbert Trench is. There are no excursions into the waking world. He is not of this day or hour, or any particular day or hour. I imagine him to be seated in a tower in some lost English town where, care-free, he carves his visions into words.

Poems. By Herbert Trench. Two volumes.
E. P. Dutton and Co.