Our present sheaf is wholly of American poems, and may be appropriately begun with Mr. Sterling's odes on the two wonders, God-made and man-made, which California showed to the world in 1915,— the Yosemite Valley and the Panama-Pacific Exposition. In both cases Mr. Sterling is disposed to find the chief significance of his theme in the hope of human brotherhood, and this, very naturally, is rather easier to relate to the Exposition than to the Yosemite. In the latter instance he leaps rather wilfully, as Shelley often did, from sensuous to social ideals.

> The mountain walls send up
> Their eagles on the morning, ere the gleam
> Of the great day-star fall on wood and stream;
> From south to north
> What golden wings, what argent feet go forth
> On heaven and radiant snows!
> What archangelic flights
> Of seraphim from everlasting heights,—

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* YOSEMITE. By George Sterling. San Francisco: A. M. Robertson.

ODE ON THE OPENING OF THE PANAMA-PACIFIC EXPOSITION. By George Sterling. San Francisco: A. M. Robertson.

THE PILGRIM KINGS. By Thomas Walsh. New York: The Macmillan Co.

POEMS. By Dana Burnet. New York: Harper & Brothers.

DREAMS AND DUST. By Don Marquis. New York: Harper & Brothers.

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS, and Other Poems. By William Alexander Percy. New Haven: Yale University Press.

THE MIDDLE MILES, and Other Poems. By Lee Wilson Dodd. New Haven: Yale University Press.

THE HOUSE THAT WAS, and Other Poems. By Benjamin R. C. Low. New York: John Lane Co.

THE JEW TO JESUS, and Other Poems. By Florence Kiper Frank. New York: Mitchell Kennerley.

THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY. By Edwin Arlington Robinson. New York: The Macmillan Co.

THE WHITE MESSENGER, and Other War Poems. By Edith M. Thomas. Boston: Richard G. Badger.

ITALY IN ARMS, and Other Poems. By Clinton Scollard. New York: Gomme & Marshall.

A CHANT OF LOVE FOR ENGLAND, and Other Poems. By Helen Gray Cone. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

SONGS AND SATIRES. By Edgar Lee Masters. New York: The Macmillan Co.

"—— AND OTHER POETS." By Louis Untermeyer. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

From citadels colossal, where the song
Of giant winds is strong,
And, washed in timeless fire, the granite glows
With silver and unutterable rose!

O vaster Dawn, ascendant and sublime,
That past the peaks of Time
And midnight stars' array,
Dost bear the magnitude of skies to be,
What hopes go forth to thee!
O glad, unrisen Day!
The soul, an eagle from its eyrie yearning,
Goes up against the splendor and the burning—
Goes up, and sees afar the world made free!

These lines, near the close of the Yosemite ode, perhaps do justice to Mr. Sterling's capacity to accomplish occasional fine effects, both of rhythm and phrasing, as well as to the nobility of his double theme. There is nothing so good, I think, in the Exposition Ode; yet on the other hand the fitness of the latter for its purpose is the more certain. The somewhat oratorical effects of the irregular ode form are well adapted to an audience and an occasion, whereas one does not care to contemplate the notion of Mr. Sterling declaiming his lines in the Yosemite Valley.

Mr. Thomas Walsh's volume, called "The Pilgrim Kings" from a brief but finely conceived interpretation of the story of the magi, takes us far from contemporary men and things. It is especially concerned with old Spain,— its princes, artists, and architecture, — and sometimes is notably successful in the reproduction of the desired atmosphere. The more conspicuous poems are in dramatic form, studies of painters like Goya, Velasquez, and El Greco, at imagined moments when the character of themselves or their pictures can be interpreted in fugitive dialogue somewhat reminiscent of the monologues of Browning. Quite worth while as these scenes doubtless are, they do not seem to me to form the really satisfying portion of the volume, partly, perhaps, because they inevitably challenge comparison with the richer historic interpretations of Browning, and partly because Mr. Walsh's blank verse is undeniably tame. His rhymed lines are often well wrought and individual. For example, take this "River Song" from a group of Alhambra lyrics:

There came as tribute out of far Bagdad
Unto Alhambra once a minstrel lad
Who all day long touched softly on the strings
The river song the Tigris boatman sings.
A sun-bronzed slave who toiled among the flowers
O'erheard a sob from the Sultana's bowers,
And whispered,— "Minstrel, wake that note no more;
She too in childhood knew our Asian shore;
Fair is Alhambra,— but by pool or dome,
Sing here no more that song of youth and home."

With Mr. Burnet's poems we return again to to-day; they are of the war in Belgium, of the streets of New York, the Woolworth Building and the Subway. Some of them are up-to-date in ways of which I — in common, I am sure, with others — have already begun to weary a little,— the effort, for instance, to make poetry play the part of editorial on problems of poverty and labor, sweat-shops and prostitution. (Why should the last-named institution be forcibly raised to lyrical quality by dubbing its representatives "Sisters of the Cross of Shame"?) But with this passing protest noted, I find Mr. Burnet's social feeling, and his poetic feeling too, to be on the whole sound and stimulating. The finest elaborate poem in his collection is "Gayheart, a Story of Defeat," which attracted some attention on its appearance in a periodical,— the story of a young journalist who lost his idealism in a New York boarding-house. In doing so he found worldly success.

His boyishness had died. His hard, clean youth
Was gone for ever 'neath a whelm of clay.
Yet as I looked I saw him lift his head,
And all his grossness seemed to fall away.

His hungry look went straight to Heaven's throne,
High up into the folded book of stars,
And on his face I saw the Quest again —
He was the seeker, fainting with his scars!

This last line exemplifies an annoying weakness of Mr. Burnet's — his willingness to let the rhyme make his phrasing. Men do not faint with *scars*. A number of such terminations mar the workmanship of the poem; but I am quite willing to admit that to stress them strongly, in the face of the poet's veracious and fine-spirited portrayal of the struggle of youth with the bigness and the sordidness of the city, would be the mark of a petty mind. I wish that the volume were smaller, and had taken a little longer in the making. That its writer can sometimes attain beauty of finish let this little lyric attest:

Love, when the day is done,
When all the light grows dim,
When to the setting sun
Rises the Vesper Hymn,

Let us stand heart to heart,
We who have toiled so far,
Bidding the day depart—
Seeking the risen star!

Mr. Marquis's "Dreams and Dust" is a book that appeals strongly either to one's amiability or one's ill-temper, according as one is disposed to be sympathetic with youth. (Having said which, I feel bound to praise it beyond its deserts!) I have no notion what the actual age of the author may be; but his work seems to me to be singularly typical of what a sensitive and intelligent young person might be supposed to think and to say on

almost anything. There is a wide variety of themes, and on almost all of them one can predict instantly, on their being introduced, what will be said. Yet despite this, the writer is a sufficiently good workman to avoid mere triteness, and one feels that the sense of obviousness is not due to borrowing, but to natural community of experience. Here is a bit out of a "madrigal" which shows Mr. Marquis's lyrical verse at its pleasantest:

Arise, arise, O briar rose,
And sleepy violet!
Awake, awake, anemone,
Your wintry dreams forget—
For shame, you tardy marigold,
Are you not budded yet?

Up, blooms! and storm the wooded slopes,
The lowlands and the plain—
Blow, jonquil, blow your golden horn
Across the ranks of rain!
To arms! to arms! and put to flight
The Winter's broken train!

More vigorous, on the other hand, and indeed of outstanding individuality in the whole collection, is a poem called "The Struggle," which describes a conflict between the speaker and a mysterious being—"man, god, or devil"—whom he has come upon in a deep gorge, and whom he at length overcomes and throttles. It ends thus:

Between the rifted rocks the great sun struck
A finger down the cliff, and that red beam
Lay sharp across the face of him that I had slain;
And in that light I read the answer of the silent gods
Unto my cursed-out prayer,
For he that lay upon the ground was—I!

There are, to be sure, three more lines, but there ought not to be, so I stop here for the poem's sake.

Another volume breathing forth the spirit of youth, but with far more artistic individuality, is Mr. William A. Percy's "Sappho in Levkas." I have not seen for some time a re-study of a well-worn classical theme, like this of the passion of Sappho for Phaon, showing so much fresh poetic charm. If the author (I say again in ignorance) indeed be young, he is fortunate not only in having captured something of that beauty of ancient poesy which was once—but is not now—the common heritage of educated youth, but also in having the traditionally "classical" combination of beauty and restraint. I cannot think the metrical form of the poem to be as good as it deserves; the moderately irregular, ode-like rhythms of which it is composed seem—so experience teaches—to call for rhyme. A passage like this, therefore,—

Beyond the violet-circled isles, yea, to
The confines of the habitable world
My singing reached; nor can I think
The times come ever when the hearts of men
So stripped of brightness be
But they will shake with rapture of my songs—

perplexes the senses of the reader as approximating to the familiar blank-verse cadence yet departing from it without the accustomed compensation. The same circumstance impairs, for me, another of the longer poems in the volume which is of delightful imaginative quality; it represents St. Francis's reputed sermon to the birds. From this I quote what space will allow, knowing that those who read will wish for more:

O swallows, should you see, when evening comes,
One leaning from his darkened window, dark,
His eyes unlighted, bitter with the day's defeat,
Toss where your vagrant flight may catch his gaze;
For, as you scatter up the golden sky,
Haply he may remember Jacob's dream,
The ladder and the wings and, holpen, send his heart
In God's light careless way to climb with you.
And you, sweet singers of the dark,
That tune your serenades but by the stars,
Love gardens most;
For gardens do unlock themselves
With magic silentness unto your spell,
And music unto sleepless eyes doth bring
The lonely solace of unloosened tears.
But most, you morning choristers, that haunt the eaves, . . .
Fail not to keep your matins clear for us;
And should you know, by some bird craft of yours,
The room wherein an almost mother lies,
Choir your sweetest there, as tho' the babe to come
Were son of God—for so he is!

Turn we now from youth to middle age. This is the meaning of Mr. Dodd's title, "The Middle Miles," and he is explicit to define the period as near the age of thirty-five. It is a depressing time, he tells us, without the consolations of either youth or age; we are disposed to look forward with some impatience to the poet's turning forty, that he may be a bit less self-consciously melancholy. To speak more seriously, the volume represents the reflections of an eminently cultivated mind, phrased often with notably good taste. Many of the poems have the distinctive charm of a familiar essay. The writer cannot complain if the reader feels what he himself so clearly does, a certain lamented incapacity to sing songs "set to vital tunes"; instead, he tells us, the poets of to-day (which seems, in a way, to be the world's middle age)

sing remembered memorable days,
Unforgettable loves tenderly nursed by time,
Mad exquisite deeds worthy a thousand voices,
Sombre and delicate visions, permanent in perpetual evanescence,

but try in vain to "strike out crashing seven-hued chords." After all this, it is only fair to note that the collection includes a "Song Triumphant," ending with this heartening, if unnecessarily formless, strophe:

Truth, truth, ye cry!
But I
Seek not to fix the colored spray,
Seek not to stay
Wave, wind, or gradual star:
To-day
Is mutable as these things are.
Yet the vast sway,
The under-rhythm — God's pulse-beat —
shall not fail.
God's song above God's silence shall
prevail.

"The House that Was" is a skull, and Mr. Low undertakes to recreate from it, with fine imaginative insight, the riches of the life that had been lived within it.

There is a sound in thee, cold skull,
Too cobweb-thin for ears, too frail to die.
Such sound as follows singing, when a bird
Has fluted once and flown, and sings no more:
Such sound as breathes out petal sighs that fall
When stars touch roses, or a late moon strays
Through sleeping gardens of the long ago.
Yes, there is music in thee; as a stone —
Shed from some ancient capital, and found,
After slow centuries of creeping mould,
All grown with moss and crumbled with decay—
With every broken leaf, in each blurred line,
Sings of its haughty lineage for aye.

Here, one sees at once, is the authentic touch of poetry; and it is almost everywhere in Mr. Low's book, not only in imagery but in method of thinking. Delightful is the little scene of boy and girl love, called "Once Upon a Time":

Dear God! — to see you where the wind had gone,
All in soft shadow, still as Paradise,
Knee-deep, and lifting from the water's brim
Your looped-up garments . . . Star-eyed seraphim
Came down and kissed you, kneeling, with their eyes.

Delightful, too, is the dialogue between the Little Boy and the Locomotive. "All night," says the boy,

"in dreams when you pass by
You breathe out stars that fill the sky,
And now, when all my dreams are true,
I hardly dare come close to you."

"But you," says the locomotive,

"you drop of morning dew,
God and his heaven are globed in you."

This little volume contains no outstanding or astonishing poem, but its remarkably high level of intensive poetic quality, from page to page, distinguishes it at once from the common case where it is plain that the half would have been better than the whole.

Of this latter sort is Mrs. Frank's collection, which is professedly a reminiscent kind of portfolio, in part covering — she tells us — her "sixteen-year-old period," and as such of more interest to her immediate friends than to the public. I do not know why, even so, she should have cared to preserve some of the contents, such as

Half the stars are dim with weeping,
Antoinette.
See the moon how palely sleeping,
Antoinette.

But the reader whose eye lights first on a piece of banality like this is presently astonished to find close by it one or another poem of distinctive insight and force. Rarely is the form as good as the thought, but sometimes it takes care of itself adequately, even if not cared for. For example, note these lines, full of vivid experience, representing a "Night-Mood":

The wind of the world
Is on our cheeks. Surely the infinite
Blew upon us and we shuddered. The fires of God
Are underneath us, and this planet's sod
Is as a shell. Where shall we flee from God?
He presses too close upon us. O, in all space
What then shall shield me but your bending face!
Closer! closer! What are we? A shifting breeze
That the winds of the world will gather.

Still better is a poem of which I can quote only a fragment, called "The Mother":

They have sought wild places,
And touched the wind-bound Pole,
But I shall go a-venturing
After a soul.
. . . . . .
Stark is the journey, unknown;
Yet I shall traverse pain,
For a soul is a shy, wild thing,
And strange to attain.

I shall pluck it out of eternity.
O, I shall laugh with glee!
And high in my hand shall I hold it
For God to see.

A new volume of poems by Mr. Edwin Arlington Robinson is fairly certain to do two things for us. It will furnish us real creations in character, like those of dramatist or novelist; and it will represent further interesting studies in the problem of making diction at once colloquial and poetical. The collection called "The Man against the Sky" does not disappoint us in either particular. It opens with a fine little character sketch of "the man Flammonde"; it includes also portraits of personages as different as old King Cole, Shakespeare and Jonson, and two very real quarrelsome modern lovers called John Gorham and Jane Wayland. I find — perhaps because of its fitting into the recent tercentenary — the monologue of Jonson, giving his view of Shakespeare, the most pleasing of these studies.

I'll meet him out alone of a bright Sunday,
Trim, rather spruce, and quite the gentleman.
"What, ho, my lord!" say I. He doesn't hear me;
Wherefore I have to pause and look at him.
He's not enormous, but one looks at him.
A little on the round, if you insist,
For now, God save the mark, he's growing old;
He's five and forty, and to hear him talk
These days you'd call him eighty; then you'd add

More years to that. He's old enough to be
The father of a world, and so he is.
"Ben, you're a scholar, what's the time of day?"
Says he; and there shines out of him again
An aged light that has no age or station —
The mystery that's his — a mischievous
Half-mad serenity that laughs at fame.

The title poem stands, oddly enough, at the end of the volume, and is a kind of final mystical character-study of a nameless man who becomes — from being seen on a clearly outlined hill-top, descending to some unknown place — a type of Man himself.

Where was he going, this man against the sky?
You know not, nor do I.
But this we know, if we know anything:
That we may laugh and fight and sing,
And of our transience here make offering
To an orient Word that will not be erased,
Or, save in incommunicable gleams
Too permanent for dreams,
Be found or known. . .

No planetary trap where souls are wrought
For nothing but the sake of being caught
And sent again to nothing, will attune
Itself to any key of any reason
Why man should hunger through another season
To find out why 'twere better late than soon
To go away and let the sun and moon
And all the silly stars illuminate
A place for creeping things,
And those that root and trumpet and have wings,
And herd and ruminate,
Or dive and flash and poise in rivers and seas,
Or by their loyal tails in lofty trees
Hang, screeching lewd victorious derision
Of man's immortal vision.

I must repeat here, what I said in a former paper in connection with some of the poetry of Mr. Percy MacKaye, that this sort of workmanship is highly significant to those interested in the poetic art, as showing how all the effects of directness, veracity, and individuality can be obtained, not only without losing the sense of beauty but — what is especially pertinent to our generation — without losing the sense of form.

Poems concerning the war are abundant, here as in England, and for the most part are equally negligible here as there. The obviousness of that which one must feel concerning the great conflict seems to pall upon the poetic spirit, like trite condolences on the day of a funeral. The verse of Miss Thomas is always to be listened to with respect, but her little volume of war poems, "The White Messenger," has not escaped the unfavorable influences of which I have spoken. The sentiments are such as almost all can share, but didactic generalization hangs upon a great part of them. This little poem, called "Spilt Wine," escapes it because it frankly keeps to the particular moving fact:

A flower of youth — a Linus boy,
He bore a glass of purple wine;
His step was Pride, his glance was Joy —
A flower of youth divine!

One shattering blow! The crystal broke—
Fast flowed away the precious wine.
— It was the brutish Earth that spoke,
"I drink but what is mine!

"For mother of all fruits am I,
Who send them up, to tree and vine;
To give them back should none deny,
When I with thirst shall pine."

I looked again.— So quickly shed,
The flower of youth, his blood for wine!
And brutish Earth, deep-murmuring, said,
"I drink but what was mine."

Mr. Scollard's new volume, on the other hand, called "Italy in Arms," touches only the edge of the war, as Italy herself has done, and it is the title poem alone which assures us that the poet wishes her well in the conflict, apparently not for any social or political reason, but because of the groves of Vallombrosa and similar things. The book is, in effect, a kind of poet's journal of travels in the land best loved of poets, and none who know Mr. Scollard's verse will need to be told that it is compact of pleasant images and pleasant melodies, wholly free from the weight of arduous thinking. This sketch of "A Roman Twilight" is perhaps among the best of the traveller's memories:

The purple tints of twilight over Rome;
Against the sunset great Saint Peter's dome,
And through the gateways peasants wending home.

Shadows that gather round the Aventine;
And just above the dim horizon line
The star of Hesper, like a light divine.

A perfume faint as of forgotten sweets,
As though there came, far-borne through lonely streets,
The breath of violets from the grave of Keats!

Of the poems called forth by the war, which have been read in American periodicals, none attracted more interest than Miss Cone's "Chant of Love for England," written in reply to the German Song of Hate. This forms the title poem of a widely varied collection, marked throughout by fine feeling and the influences of the intellectual life, with somewhat uneven workmanship. From the standpoint of the interpretive imagination, one of the best pieces in the volume is that called "The Gaoler," in which the soul speaks of the body.

To be free, to be alone,
Is a joy I have not known.
To a keeper who never sleeps
I was given at the hour of birth
By the governors of earth;
And so well his watch he keeps,
Though I leave no sleight untried,
That he will not quit my side. . .

I have cried to the winds, the sea,
"Oh, help me, for ye are free!"
I have thought to escape away,
But his hand on my shoulder lay.
From the hills and the lifting stars
He has borne me back to bars;
With the spell of my murmured name
He has captived and kept me tame.

I have also found unexpected pleasure in Miss Cone's ode on Lincoln, written for the centennial in 1909,—for surely one does not hope for much from more odes on Lincoln. They must be frankly expository; but the exposition rises to some real imaginative effectiveness in a passage like this, where the "voices of the outland folk" take up the sound of praise, in answer to those of English blood:

You shall not limit his large glory thus,
You shall not mete his greatness with a span!
This man belongs to us,
Gentile and Jew, Teuton and Celt and Russ
And whatso else we be!
This man belongs to Man!
And never, till a flood of love efface
The hard distrusts that sever race from race,
Comes his true jubilee!

Much has been expected from a new volume by Mr. Masters, who attained a somewhat ambiguous fame through the "Spoon River Anthology"; but the book of "Songs and Satires" is a miscellany, and not a few will be disappointed in finding in it only a few monologues of the Spoon River type. This type, original and fascinating though somewhat inversely to its characteristically poetic appeal, may be briefly described as a composite of the dominant moods of Swift, Walt Whitman, and Mr. Bernard Shaw. Some readers are most attracted by the Swiftian power of merciless but not unsympathetic observation of the foul and ugly, some by the Whitmanesque affection for the common but unconventional, some by the Shavian habit of laughing in the wrong place. The resulting effects are often almost important, but usually not quite important, because Mr. Masters, unlike the three writers just named, has no style. By style I mean a consistent medium of expression used with a sense of form, either prosaic or poetic,—a thing the very want of which has proved to be appealing, for a large portion of our reading public greatly prefers the habit which dashes recklessly and amusingly from this manner to that. With this in mind, I am tempted to find in a certain elegant simile of Mr. Masters's a description of many of his own effects: "You are a Packard engine in a Ford." For there is no denying him some of the admirable qualities which I attribute (wholly by hearsay) to a Packard engine. On the other hand, I should not think of applying to him the neighboring metaphor from the same poem: "A barrel of slop that shines on Lethe's wharf." This, it will be observed, represents one of his taking manners. Another is that of pure prose, not even cut into rhythmic lengths; for instance,—"This city had a Civic Federation, and a certain social order which intrigues through churches, courts, with an endless ramification of money and morals, to save itself." But these are not all. There are not only the moments of penetrating insight into personality—insight of novelist or comedian, one would say, characteristically,—but also, on occasion, the haunting revelations of feeling which poetry exists to communicate. I wish indeed that many of these compositions were worthy to be placed beside this one, called "The Door":

This is the room that thou wast ushered in.
Wouldst thou, perchance, a larger freedom win?
Wouldst thou escape for deeper or no breath?
There is no door but death.

Do shadows crouch within the mocking light?
Stand thou! but if thy terrored heart take flight
Facing maimed Hope and wide-eyed Nevermore,
There is no less one door.

Dost thou bewail love's end and friendship's doom,
The dying fire, drained cup, and gathering gloom?
Explore the walls, if thy soul ventureth—
There is no door but death.

There is no window. Heaven hangs aloof,
Above the rents within the stairless roof.
Hence, soul, be brave across the ruined floor—
Who knocks? Unbolt the door!

Some, I conceive, will say that I have selected this poem for praise, with vicious traditionalism of spirit, because of its "thous" and "wasts" and other formal signs of poetic manner; on the contrary, however, it is the worse for them, and the last stanza alone, which is wholly direct as well as profoundly imaginative, is perfect.

I conclude with Mr. Untermeyer's mysteriously titled volume, one of parodies of the verse of his contemporaries. He imagines a "banquet of the bards," wherein the celebrants display their various poetic modes in so characteristic fashion that the layman might well, at times, have difficulty in distinguishing burlesque from reality. With certain of the personages represented I confess to having no acquaintance, and wonder that they should deserve the fame which parody implies; but contemporary fame is a swift and mysterious thing. Most enjoyable, perhaps, are Mr. Untermeyer's representations of such current phenomena as imagism, free verse, and "polyphonic prose." Thus—

The iron menace of the pillar-box is threatening
the virginity of night,

and

Zip! the thought of you tears in my heart. I
fumble and start;

the first of these lines being attributed to Mr. Ezra Pound and the second to Miss Amy Lowell. Mr. Pound is also made to say, how characteristically it would perhaps be unbecoming to observe:

Come, my songs, let us sing about something —
It is time we were getting ourselves talked about.

And Mr. James Oppenheim's rasher moments of inspiration are represented in some lines beginning:

Oh Nietzsche, Whitman, Havelock Ellis, Lincoln,
Freud, and Jung,
Help me to cast off these wrappers of custom and
prohibition,
Tear down the barriers of reticence!

The fact is that free verse, and the other more superficial elements of exaggerated romanticism, lend themselves rather too easily to the art of the parodist to make the results very highly worth while. But if one could find a poet who represented them in a really important way, and could then exhibit in burlesque the essential spirit as well as the manner in question, as Calverley did (for example) in his famous parody of "The Ring and the Book," he might do a service of both literary and social significance. If Mr. Untermeyer has not accomplished this, it is perhaps only for want of better material.

RAYMOND M. ALDEN.