

THE EDITOR RECOMMENDS—

E. A. Robinson's Dime Novel

Hate and fear of the devil! With these two emotions as a psychological background, "Avon's Harvest" (Macmillan) in the hands of another poet might have been a terrifying bluster of words. As it is:

Merely a dagger on a dictionary.

Daggers are out of date, but there you are.

Take it; and if you like it, shave with it.

There in his library, with the dagger before him, Avon analyzes his own soul. His tone is conversational. His calm in the face of a blast of inner emotions is as pitiful as the face of a woman tearless under great sorrow. The nervous hatred of a single individual has been the motif of Avon's existence. It shadows his life and his confession. The ghost of his hatred haunts him, when the object of it dies, so that fear and hate commingled torture him. With a masterful restraint Robinson builds to his climax. Scarcely ever does a word or a figure stand out to clog the movement. It is as simple as death and as poignant. Slow at first, then a slight lift to terror, then broader strokes,—

Though fear had made an anvil of my heart
Where demons, for the joy of doing it,
Were sledging death down on it....

Nowhere else can I recall so brilliant a drawing of the intense calm of a suffering neurotic. Toward the last of the poem, I had the feeling constantly that something was about to break through, there must be an outrush of quick words; but it never came.

The shadowy glimpse of an uplifted arm,
And a moon-flash of metal. That was all....

"Avon's Harvest" is less difficult than much of Robinson, and it is more moving. He has called it his "dime novel in verse". Well, perhaps it is as near the penny dreadful as he will ever come. In American literature, surely, there is no more powerful dramatic poem.