

forced statements can I reconcile their appearance in one article, for there is nothing particularly kindred to them all except, perhaps, the fact that they all write poetry—even here some jaundiced reader is likely to boggle a bit. There is excellent material for a debate on this very point; as, for instance: Can any reader equally enjoy the poems of Fannie Stearns Davis and Louis Grudin? In other words, the four books characteristic of these four poets represent the four points of the poetical compass.

Mr. Masfield, I have said, is the past. "The Dream, And Other Poems", containing but nine poems in all, brings nothing new to our conception of this writer. Beauty is invoked by the thin wistful evocation of past things; the martial note is struck in a paraphrase of one of the greater passages in "La Chanson de Roland", several sonnets which might almost have leaped out of "Lollington Downs" are in evidence, and the sea is mentioned in a final poem. There is color, a fine melodic treatment, and that underlying sadness that permeates most of Mr. Masfield's later work. One or two curiosities are in evidence, one of them being a poem which Mr. Masfield declares came to him in a dream, appearing "engraven in high relief on an oblong metal plate, from which I wrote it down". As usual with dream poetry the reader experiences a brief regret that the poet did not wake up sooner. This book, however, should please Masfield worshipers, although it is to be suspected that even they will be a bit disconcerted by its brevity. It is life that is short, not art, and five rather mediocre wood engravings by Judith Masfield are not sufficient to carry a book of nine short pieces when it is issued at the usual trade prices.

THE POETICAL COMPASS

By Herbert S. Gorman

A LOOSE sort of symbolism may be effected by attributing to the four poets considered here a certain time significance. Thus, Mr. Masfield is the past; Fannie Stearns Davis is the present; Conrad Aiken is the future; and Louis Grudin is—well, the fourth dimension. Only by such

Fannie Stearns Davis's volume, "The Ancient Beautiful Things", represents the present in so far as it is a rather unaffected hymning of daily life, of love for one's children, of nature moods and house moods and the idea of the home. There is a gentleness of conception and a naïve faith in the intrinsic appeal of her subject matter that partially disarms the critic. She rhymes agreeably; her lyrics fall daintily upon the ear, and there is evidenced a sufficient degree of sincere ardor to convince the reader that this is poetry. Nothing unusual occurs, no sudden flashes of beauty or irresistible snatches of melodies. One must accept this book as it is proffered—a gentle and wholesome series of marginal comments upon the poet's own life. *Delicacy* is probably the right word to use in describing her work. Its great failing is an ever present thinness of mental conception and a distinct limitation of personality which even its undoubted ardor fails to disguise.

Turning to the future we find Conrad Aiken's "The Pilgrimage of Festus" and begin to wonder when this poet, who has proved himself so excellent a craftsman in certain lyrics and in "Punch, the Immortal Liar", will desist from rewriting this poem. He has done it several times before. His Senlin, his Forslin, were cut from the same cloth that Festus is. Here again is the wanderer through the land of images who passes through mysterious forests seeking the secret of life and the high approximation of living. Turn back to "The Jig of Forslin" and note how it starts:

In the clear evening, as the lamps were
lighted,
Forslin, sitting alone in his strange world,
Meditated; yet through his musings heard
The dying footfalls of the tired day

Monotonously ebb and ebb away
Into the smouldering west;
And heard the dark world slowly come to
rest.

In his new poem we find Mr. Aiken introducing his character, his pilgrim who is really but the shadow of his intellectual self, as follows:

And at last, having sacked in imagination
many cities
And seen the smoke of them spread fantas-
tically along the sky,
Having set foot upon so many walls, fallen
and blackened,
And heard the harsh lamentations of women,
And watched without pity the old men, be-
traying their vileness,
Tear at their beards, and curse, and die,
Festus, coming alone to an eastern place
Of brown savannahs and wind-gnawed trees,
Climbed a rock that faced alone to the north-
ward
And sat, and clasped his knees.

Festus, we see, is our old friend Forslin with a dash of Mr. Eliot's "The Waste Land" thrown in.

If we allow for a certain repetitiousness in Mr. Aiken there is a deal to be said for his poetry. It moves to a dreamlike and beautiful melody and, although it is never surprisingly beautiful, it holds to a certain high evenness of distinguished phrases. It is essentially atmospheric poetry, always creating a world of its own for the reader, a world of dim forests, and twilight and moonlight. One of its failings is that it grows tiresome after a time; the reader wearies with the eternal melancholy fall of the syllables. In "The Pilgrimage of Festus" we find Festus attempting to conquer the world of himself, wandering in the Forest of Departed Gods where Confucius, Buddha, and Christ talk with him, struggling in the net of himself, and coming to the eventual conclusion that all knowledge is inconclusive. This is not a very astonishing goal to reach, after all.

Young Mr. Grudin has been likened

to a representative of the fourth dimension, but this was only to take him out of the time symbolism. In "Charlatan: A Book of Poems" (he need not have subtitled it so carefully; we should have guessed) he offers a rather aggravating series of efforts. He will hardly escape the accusation of being unduly influenced by the work of Maxwell Bodenheim, but even so the fair reader will discover that Mr. Grudin possesses a mentality and a certain decorative fashioning of words that are altogether his own. He, like Mr. Bodenheim, appears to be essentially an ironist but, unlike Mr. Bodenheim, he does not push his irony so far. Young men have a habit of starting out un-

der the masks of tremendous bitterness; and the bitterness, mainly implied, in Mr. Grudin's work smacks altogether too much of youth to be taken seriously. If he can find himself (and I do not think that he is particularly near to his real self as yet) he should do excellent work. As it is, "Charlatan" is even a more tentative volume than the earlier privately published booklet which he was unwise enough to suppress.

The Dream, And Other Poems. By John Masefield. The Macmillan Co.
The Ancient Beautiful Things. By Fannie Stearns Davis. The Macmillan Co.
The Pilgrimage of Festus. By Conrad Aiken. Alfred A. Knopf.
Charlatan: A Book of Poems. By Louis Grudin. Lieber and Lewis.