

# WHEN EDITORS WRITE VERSE

By David Morton

**T**WO editors of other people's poetry here lay aside the paste and shears and speak out in their own voices, as poets — Harriet Monroe, the redoubtable editor of "Poetry", in Chicago, and John Farrar, editor of *THE BOOKMAN* and of "The Bookman Anthology of Verse". Yet another, Franklyn Pierre Davis, clings to the less precarious rôle of editor and presents the fifth in his series of anthologies of newspaper verse.

Miss Monroe, in a prefatory note, offers her book more or less in the nature of a contemporary historical exhibit, and thus encourages the reviewer in opening the subject of poetic possibilities in the immediate and contemporary. Such discussion is the more strongly suggested because of Miss Monroe's famous attachment to the idea that life here and now is the proper business of poetry. While the inclusion in the book of the ecstatic "Columbian Ode" of thirty years ago serves to measure the temperamental distance from our own skeptical and disillusioned days, the element of contrast is more pointedly revealed in the effective title poem in two parts — "1823" and

"1923". The first section, reconstructing the well ordered, provincial, and convention ridden world of a century ago, contrasts strangely with "1923", in which the busy, emancipated world bursts in its cosmopolitan entirety on the consciousness. One gets the feeling that here is an interregnum, with no gods ruling. The poem in its two parts is a brilliant piece of writing. One's thought toys with the query whether a poem which takes for its subject a passing phase of contemporary civilization is dealing with the permanent stuffs out of which lasting poetry is made. Perhaps the answer is affirmative in just the degree that the poem reveals and communicates significant phenomena in the human spirit as affected by the conditions and events recited. And in this poem there is the mood of wistful reminiscence, there is the sense of vastness, there are the emotions of wonder and terror — for us, today. Will the reader of 2023 feel them in the same way? Implied somewhere in the answer to that query lies the difference between lasting poetry and journalism.

"The Difference" is, by all odds, the most interesting poem in the book. In the section entitled "At the Prado", Miss Monroe displays an ability in portraiture — as in "Velasquez", for example — but the free verse which constitutes "Carolina Wood-cuts" and "Notes of Travel" fails of effectiveness through omission of the cardinal artistic necessities of selection and unity. "A Lady of the Snows", though, represents Miss Monroe's ability to indulge occasionally in a clear, appealing lyricism. On the whole, one closes the book grateful for the vivid and interesting title poem, two or three graphic portraits in bold, brief strokes, and a singing lyric.

If Miss Monroe never abandons

Arnold's "high seriousness", Mr. Farrar parts company with his oversolemn and concerned generation, and offers, among other things, a delightful collection of light and whimsical verses to Amaryllis. Here — in the midst of the begoggled and ugly young men talking Freudian psychology to the ladies in the laboratory — steps the cavalier with graceful and extravagant compliment and pretty conceit. This sort of thing one doesn't expect to find in this scowling year of our Lord, but coming upon it, one lingers with joy and passes on with regret that we no longer know how to rest our terrible honesty with these charming and fanciful insincerities. Mr. Farrar's touch here is delicate and sure, and the result is that rare and difficult thing, captivating light verse.

A more serious speaking is heard — I am not certain it is a more valuable one — in the first section of the book, which aims, with a little too much rhetoric, at rather broad and more emphatic effects, and in the last section, which sets forward some portraits-in-incident of "war women", done with good feeling but with less sharpness and distinction than is necessary to make them memorable, in the degree that the gestures of Amaryllis are memorable.

Mr. Davis's "Anthology of Newspaper Verse for 1923" fails, on the whole, to give any feeling of quality. Apparently the collection is made with little or no regard for standards of excellence, the only requisite for inclusion being publication by a newspaper.

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The Difference, and Other Poems. By Harriet Monroe. Covici-McGee.  
The Middle Twenties. By John Farrar. George H. Doran Company.  
Anthology of Newspaper Verse for 1923. Edited by Franklyn Pierre Davis. Published by Mr. Davis at Enid, Oklahoma.