

INDIVIDUAL VERSE

By David Morton

A HANDFUL of slender volumes which includes an allegorical narrative, delicate and radiant lyrics, passionate and exalted sonnets, and richly caparisoned poems of romantic mysticism, offers a fare sufficiently various for the most extreme epicurean palate. What is more welcome yet, is the presence, in two or three instances at least, of distinct and individual personality behind the body of work. This is encouraging—in the face of the more or less well grounded criticism of the contemporary renaissance, that so many poems, even by the more distinguished figures, might have been written by any of their colleagues, so far as the imprint of a distinctive personality is concerned.

Donald Davidson, a new poet, whose book is aptly named "An Outland Piper", seems to me to elude this blight. Here is poetry which offers escape from the prisons of actuality through channels of a sensuous and romantic mysticism. It is at once valiant and pathetic in its following of strange Tigers and Tiger-Women into outland jungles. Adventures for the spirit, so old that they are new again in this age, are to be had in such poems as "The Tiger Woman", "Following the Tiger", "Twilight Excursion", and "Avalon". Through them

poetry escapes into a more exotic and passionate and lovely world than is known to this busy and dreary one in which we live and write. Mr. Davidson returns to his own generation in the note of ironical disillusionment with which some of the poems conclude. His is a refreshing book to read, illumined with strange lights and glammers, alien to our little streets. Technically, the poetry is that of a competent workman — though one might complain of the prevalence of unusual words, taken from the language of the self-conscious intellect, not from the free and simple speech of poetic feeling.

One finds less to engage the imagination in Elsa Gidlow's "On a Grey Thread". Now and again there is a bit of passionate and glowing revelation; and, sometimes, there is the crisp, direct thrust that goes home, quivering and with a sting. But for the most part there is an obvious striving toward the passionate utterance of what is presented as startling spiritual experiences. In most cases, the spectacle fails of being convincing.

Grace Fallow Norton sustains her reputation for delicacy of treatment and subtle poignancy of effect in a slight allegorical narrative under the title, "The Miller's Youngest Daughter". The volume of twenty-four pages is devoted entirely to this single poem, done in varying metre in its more or less loosely joined several parts. The theme is the conflict between spiritual hunger and ecstasy on the one hand, and material greed and passion on the other. The whole is conceived in a fine unifying mood of exaltation, reduced to responsible and restrained expression. Technically, one is tempted to believe, the poem is an experiment in irregular metrics and assonance. It succeeds, one is

tempted to conclude, despite these eccentricities, not by virtue of them.

"Mosaics", by Beatrice E. Harmon, is another volume of the Yale Series. Miss Harmon has practised to good purpose the various verse forms, and handles syllables and lines dexterously. The feeling in the poems is strained and the writing is poetic convention. What is wanted here is something more like individual expression.

Poetry is nothing if it is not life at a vivid and trembling intensity or in deep saturation. Mrs. Conant's group of poems — slight, crisp, almost epigrammatic — have this vividness and this intensity. The beauty that is in them is the sudden and swift and concentrated radiance that reveals and passes. Thus the epigrammatic quality is not in phrase alone, but in thought and feeling. "Many Wings" is delightful reading. The author attempts no themes of ambitious proportions; most of the subjects are of intimate experience, but they are treated with a penetrative vision that reveals significance, and with a sureness of touch that guarantees effectiveness.

In leaving these slender lyrics we enter upon the country of a less flashing and more thoughtful illumination in Gustav Davidson's book of half a hundred sonnets. Mr. Davidson is at ease in the sonnet, in both the English and Italian forms, and expression moves freely and without distortion. Most of the poems are love sonnets, and while many of them possess no sharp distinction of idea or feeling, they make, in some instances, pleasant reading. One turns from most of these, however, to such sonnets as "Beauty", with its passionate and sincere adoration; "Dead Profounds", an accomplishment in fortunate phrasing, and "Like Some

Northcoast Adventurers of Old", which achieves a fine exaltation of mood and the language suited to it. Mr. Davidson's gift of phrase and epithet and vigorous line brings an interest and distinction of style to a form too often dull even in the hands of poets otherwise spirited enough.

An Outland Piper. By Donald Davidson.
Houghton Mifflin Co.

On a Grey Thread. By Elsa Gidlow. Will
Ransom.

The Miller's Youngest Daughter. By Grace
Fallow Norton. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Mosaics. By Beatrice E. Harmon. Yale
University Press.

Many Wings. By Isabel Fiske Conant.
B. J. Brimmer Co.

A Half Century of Sonnets. By Gustav
Davidson. Nicholas L. Brown.