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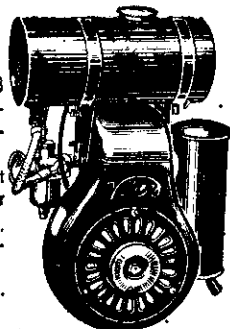
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WALTER DE LA MARE

(continued from previous page)

his excursions into what may be termed human poetry he gives the Good-night of a grandchild in war-time:

"Heaven bless you, child!" the accus-
tomed grown-ups said—
Two eyes gazed mutely back that none
could meet,
Then turned to face Night's terrors over-
head.

Though he is the kin of Chrystabel, the Ancient Mariner, and La Belle Dame Sans Merci; the emanations from his land of faery are as English as his landscape in "Nod."

IT may sound an awesome qualifica-
tion to be a friend of death, but he
is so much so that one wonders if there
is a Celt in his ancestry, for, in Celtdom
and the Celtic fringe, death is as natural
as life.

"Look thy last on all things lovely,"
would be understood as well by a Gael
or a Breton. It somehow makes him a
full man, this ease among tombstones,
for he has made a familiar of the old
enemy of the flesh—*rex tremendae*
majestatis—without divesting him of
dread or majesty. This ease is not
founded on mere nonchalance. To the
riddle of existence he has made his
choice of answers.

Though I should sit
By some tarn in thy hills,
Using its ink
As the spirit wills
To write of earth's wonders,
Its live, willed things,
Flit would the ages
On soundless wings
Ere unto Z
My pen drew nigh,
Leviathan told,
And the honey-fly:
And still would remain
Mv wit to try—
My worn reeds broken,
The dark tarn dry,
All words forgotten—
Thou, Lord, and I.

Very few poems are selfless. In that
he comes near to the wisdom and the
anonymity of the birds to which song
is praise.

INTO this world he has entered so
deeply that he claims "it is possible
to see both burning sun and black night
together." That is his acceptance of the
power of imagination in the ancient
battle between body and spirit. There
is a sonnet by another poet, Gerard
Manley Hopkins, which might be a de-
scription of de la Mare's own individual
mind which is intrigued, captivated,
obsessed, by the conflict between the
natural and the supernatural, the per-
sonal and the impersonal, the national
and the universal. It is "All things
counter, original, spare, strange."

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows
how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle,
dim.

Walter de la Mare was born at Charl-
ton in Kent in 1873. His first book,
Songs of Childhood, was published in
1902 under the name of Walter Ramal.
His works include metaphysical poetry
and metaphysical prose. The terrible
burning odyssey of "The Traveller," a
long, philosophical poem which crowns
one of his last volumes, *The Burning*
Glass, and which sets the seal on his
position among the major poets of our
age, leads to this conclusion:

Ay, this poor Traveller too—
Soon to be dust, though once in life
elate,
Yet from whose gaze a flame divine
burned through:
A son of God—no sport of Time or Fate.

It is a delight to remember that New
Zealand has, in Katherine Mansfield, a
link with Walter de la Mare. They
were what Ruth Pitter would call "blood
relations of the mind." The New Zea-
land writer names him among the guests
she culled so carefully for the dream
home which she planned meticulously,
even to the black earth in its garden,
and which was her comfort in days when
she was racked by pain and loneliness
on the Mediterranean Coast.

His poem on her has something of
the symbols of a brotherhood, a society,
closed to the general, but open to the
particular, of which the rites are known
only to the unworldly, and to children.
Indeed, many of his poems have been
written with children running round
him. It has, too, something of that
heightening, that patina of unreality over
reality which she sought in her own
prose.

It has been his desire for years to
visit New Zealand, a wish doubtless
whetted by Katherine Mansfield and
Ian Donnelly. So real was it that he
wrote once half-humorously, half rue-
fully, that he would be willing to come
"as a stowaway or even as a castaway";
but latterly the hope has faded, for the
seventies, he says, are a narrow cage.

Book Reviews

War Poet

FIRE AMONG THE RUINS. By Stuart
Piggott. Geoffrey Cumberlege: The Oxford
University Press.

IN the 1914-1918 war a whole genera-
tion of poets—Grenfell, Wilfred
Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert
Graves—found a new and terrible
reality in war. The poets of the recent
war came to it with an inherited cyni-
cism and disillusion which, at least in
part, cushioned them against the harsh
blows of fate. Thus, although the moral
and physical predicaments were both
more desperate than in 1914-18, no
artist found it in his heart to treat the
recent war as a melodrama. Modern
war poetry has the tougher fibre even
if less passion. And it is less querulous.

Stuart Piggott, though a compara-
tively minor poet, shares the stoicism of
his generation, or the indifference. He
is an accomplished, an able, rather than
a supreme poet. But poet he is, and it
is the war which fills his quiet medita-
tive verse with sadness if not with
anger. A literary poet, the allusion,
to classical mythology or to "Arnold
on the Hinksey ridge," comes to him
naturally, without any hint of a man-
darin exclusiveness. Several of his
poems are, in a sense, occasional: he
broods on Monte Cassino and wonders
whether the age of its 8th Century
founder was any more dark than our
own when

—the guns roar and spit across the ray-
lashed vineyards

The opening poem, *The Fire*, is in
very similar mood to those five poems,
The Ruins, which, blitz-inspired, closed
the poetic career of Laurence Binyon
with an unlooked-for greatness. Many
of Stuart Piggott's poems are closely
linked to place: "The Western Hima-
layas," "North Indian Landscape," and
"Cairo" are three such glimpses of a

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