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BOOKS

TRADITIONAL POETS

POEMS 1943-1947. C. Day Lewis. Jonathan Cape, London, 1948. 6s.

PILLARS TO REMEMBRANCE. John Redward Anderson. Oxford University Press, 1948. 10s.

INTIMATION and other poems, 1941-7. By H. M. Margoliouth. Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1948. English price, 6s.

A MASQUE OF REASON. Robert Frost. Jonathan Cape, London, 1948. 7s.

WAR is generally considered a somewhat acrid solvent of traditions, but one of the surprising effects of the Second World War has been a tendency to make traditionalists out of the avant garde. In poetry this is particularly noticeable. Where the 'thirties were a period of lively and often confusing experiment, the 'forties have been years of poetic conservation. Even in France, still the leader of fashions in art and philosophy, poets like Eluard and Aragon suddenly began to write clearly and simply, as though in a time of trouble they had taken to heart the maxim of Po Chu-I, that a poem was not finished until it could be understood at first reading by an old woman of the roads.

Almost the first of the "New Poets" in pre-war England was C. Day Lewis, whose *From Feathers to Iron* became a sort of manifesto for the group that included Auden, Spender, and MacNeice. Of that group of poets, Day Lewis was picked as the most likely stayer by a curious assortment of judges that included T. S. Eliot, T. E. Lawrence, and Winston Churchill. Certainly his output has been impressively steady, and he has become a more solid and rounded "man of letters" than most of his contemporaries. But Day Lewis's poetic progress has reversed his own earlier formula: like Spender's, it has become from iron to feathers. This last collection of poems—strongly marked by English influences, notably Hardy and Meredith—is lyrical or reflective in tone, and its best poems are inward rather than outward looking. There is a striking return to natural imagery; and many older readers, tired of the bursting shells and railways and underground conspiracies that cluttered up so much of his earlier work, will appreciate lines like these:

But it's useless to argue the why and wherefore.

When a crop is so thin,

There's nothing to do but to set the teeth

And plough it in.

Poems 1943-1947 is uneven in workmanship, but has some very moving and beautiful pieces, and includes the brilliant English version of Valéry's *Cimetière Marin*.

Mr. Anderson is a good deal more traditional, and a good deal less of a poet. This is academic verse in the line of William Watson and Stephen Phillips, the reworking of ancient myths and dynasties into decorative patterns "on the arras of faded years." Of its kind it is often very good indeed—erudite, polished, and full of the sense of history—but it is hard to get excited, at this stage, about the sort of thing that wins the Newdigate.

Another Oxford poet—bearer of a name deeply venerated among scholars everywhere—is Mr. H. M. Margoliouth, whose little volume of lyrical and reflective pieces, quite charmingly produced by the O.U.P. in a format reminiscent of the pre-war German Insel-Verlag (and interesting to compare with

our contemporary Caxton Poets here) is much more modest in intention and in effect. These donnish verses breathe their English ancestry, from the Anglican poets of the 17th century through Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold to the Shropshire Lad. Mr. Margoliouth, by his own admission, stands "at Pisgah's foot"; but his intimation, his glimpse of a symbolic harmony "from whence all meaning starts," is authentic; and his verses run gracefully in familiar moulds.

Mr. Robert Frost has a much saltier flavour. Contemporary with the English Georgians, this New England poet has ploughed his own stony furrow with complete artistic integrity for a good many years, and has come to honour (and the inevitable rude assaults from his juniors) in his own country. In a rather cantankerous preface he makes a well-timed plea for a literary bridge across the Atlantic; and this volume is sure enough of its welcome abroad. The two masques it contains are originally conceived and expressed with incisiveness and dry humour; the shorter pieces have the pithy oracular wisdom of the country-sage, and no more bad temper than might be expected from an ornery Yankee.

—J.B.

A MORALIST'S SCRAPBOOK

A CRAFTSMAN'S ANTHOLOGY. By A. Romney Green. Allen and Unwin. English price, 12/6.

AN anthology made by a craftsman, not an anthology of special interest to craftsmen, this selection of verse and prose is closer to Robert Bridges' *Spirit of Man* than to any other garnering of the sweet, the wise, and the sententious that I know. It is designed to express a philosophy of life rather than to illustrate any phase of literature: it is Romney Green looking out at the world, not peering in through some library window and scanning the serried ranks on shelves.

The compiler is a man who has travelled and worked with his hands and, from the photograph supplied, one suspects that he was brought up at a time when people were more readily taken in by the exclamatory rhapsodies of those intolerably windy old gentlemen, Carlyle and Nietzsche. These authors, it is true, are quoted too copiously. We are better pleased to find a good deal of Emerson (a writer who tends to be underestimated outside America), of Bertrand Russell and of Plato. The taste in verse is dubious. There is over-much Tennyson and A. Romney Green (their diction has points in common), but the extracts from Browning, Whitman and Wordsworth are happier.

In spite of its faults, due to the bad time he chose to be born (who doesn't) or to a certain exceeding idealism which makes him too inclined to take words at face value and thus fall a prey to the rhetorician, Romney Green has made an anthology which is individual and alive. A strong moral bias is evident throughout. This book is sane rather than brilliant, contains few discoveries, and reaffirms a faith in the essential nobility of man.

—David Hall

OTHER TIMES, OTHER FUN

THE ENGLISH COMIC ALBUM. Compiled by Leonard Russell and Nicholas Bentley. (Michael Joseph. 15/-)

LEONARD RUSSELL, editor amongst other things of the annual Saturday Book, has ideas, style, gentle wit, and a

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MARCH 11