

THE GREEN GARLAND

STRANGE RENDEZVOUS, by A. R. D. Fairburn: the Caxton Press, 17 6s.

(Reviewed by P.J.W.)

IN his early poems A. R. D. Fairburn comes back again and again to the subject of romantic love, and in this collection, which includes *Poems, 1929-41*, alongside later work to comprise the bulk of his writing apart from *Three Poems*, it is the passionate, youthful love lyrics which stand out.

But there is an interesting obverse to his rather conventional, romantic passion. Time is the most persistent image in this volume. "I sing Wild Love, the bitterest of Time's fruits"; "Time sharpens his knife"; "I am a weary man . . . whose lust is chastened"; "the candles gutter and burn out." In the long "Disquisition on Death" he broods on "rotten flesh" and "the beggar's scabs." He is afraid of "that old greybeard, that ragged seer who stalks in the gutters of my brain," and there is a sense of doom in poems like "The Encounter" or "To Daphnis and Chloe in the Park," where the young lover has become "a man defeated in his loins."

This almost obsessional note, the preoccupation with time and the in-

evitable end of physical joy, which contrasts so often with his simple delight in life's pleasures, helps to explain the more familiar side his work typified in the outraged rebel of the social satires, or, as he himself writes, "the flesh-starved anarchist who walks in lone pride in the wilderness with bleeding feet." There is something of the Swiftian temperament in this book. In "To a Millionaire" he plays sardonic lip-service to the Popular Front with his dolphins "murmuring to the revolution Will you be long," and there is much similar bitterness in the witty satires and epigrams such as "On an Intellectual" or "For the Gravestone of a Politician":

We asked for bread, he gave us stones:
may this one press upon his bones!

He is perhaps our best verse satirist, but on the whole, the satirical passages in this volume are less moving than his broodings upon the great themes of love and death. His youthful lyrics have at times a remarkable tenderness and compassion in them, and like his personified Wild Love he "wears his green garland in the withering sun, lights the world's blinding dark, and then is done." The green garland and the blinding dark are his true emblems:



A. R. D. FAIRBURN

"Bleeding feet in the wilderness"

they form the balance between which his imagination swings. And although in the later poems the blinding dark covers his vision of life's beauty more and more, it does not destroy it. The essence of his statement is contained in the prophetic words:

maid and man
take what you can
before the heart grows cold
the mind desperate and the body old.

ARABS AND CHRISTIANS

A HISTORY OF THE CRUSADES, Vol. II, the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East, 1100-1187, by Steven Runciman: Cambridge University Press. English price, 42s.

MR. RUNCIMAN'S brilliant first volume (reviewed here in 1951) took the reader to the capture of Jerusalem by the Latin Christians. The second volume, not quite so dramatic, but just as high in quality, brings the story to the reconquest of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187. The 11th Century dealt with the great migrations from Western Europe to the Middle East. The 12th Century is concerned with the defence of the Latin states which resulted.

It is a story of cupidity, disunity, treachery, meanness, bungling, hope, courage and calamity. Consider the forces involved. There was a small aristocracy living luxuriously but precariously in the Latin states of Outremer—the Frankish East; they needed continuous strengthening from the West or complete adaptation to the East, and they had neither. The Italians who brought the pilgrims, soldiers and colonists were concerned with the profits of their shipping and not with the Crusades. Frankish Christian revenue came largely from tolls on the trade conducted by the Moslem merchants; the Crusading Order of Templars were active bankers financing their infidel clients; neither the Templars nor the Hospitalliers owed loyalty to the King.

TO NEVER GROW OLD . . .



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