

PUBLICATIONS

Collected Poems of Alice Meynell. Burns and Oates, London. Price, 5s nett; pp. 117.

We have all, when endeavoring to wade through pages of uninspired verse, felt inclined to echo Thomas Carlyle's scathing stricture on the poetaster: 'To the poet we say first of all—See. If you cannot do that, it is of no use to keep stringing rhymes together, jingling sensibilities against each other.' What we want to get at is the thought of the man, if he had any: why should he twist it into jingle if he could speak it out plainly? Indeed a large quantity of the verse published by obliging firms reminds one of nothing so much as of the painful, regular, reiterated, and utterly futile noises made by a motor-cycle the owner of which is vainly trying to start the machinery working. Like the motor-cycle, the versifier succeeds in making noises at regular intervals, but the divine afflatus is conspicuous by its absence—Pegasus refuses to soar. It is indeed matter for congratulation when a book of poems, containing seventy-five poems is met with; and from the beginning to the end of the volume there is not one that is not replete with true poetic life, not one, to quote Carlyle again, when the poet is not 'rapt' into true passion of melody, and the very tones of him become musical by the greatness, depth, and music of his thoughts. The 'him,' in this case, is a woman, Alice Meynell, who was during the last few weeks spoken of as a possible Poet-Laureate. We in New Zealand have heard little of her; but this new edition of her poems ought to do much to spread her fame. The short, dainty poems in which she delights are distinguished mainly by their originality of thought, their singular felicity of phrase, the melody and spontaneity of their rhythm, and the simplicity and directness of their poetic appeal. Individual tastes will have of course their individual preferences, but the poems which might be singled out as especially charming include what Ruskin spoke of as 'that perfectly heavenly "Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age,"' 'After a Parting,' 'Song of the Night at Daybreak,' with its truly Elizabethan ring, and 'The Shepherdess,' which must be one of the most beautiful examples of the value of the choice of words in the English language. One of the many gifts of Alice Meynell's muse is her unerring choice of the right measures and rhymes for her poems. She never makes a mistake. There is, for instance, the regular, changeless, almost monotonous measure of the 'Letter.' As the poem proceeds, one recognises its echo of the restrained, but intense pathos of her subject, the dulling of ideals and faculties in the aged woman, and her contrast with the young and high-spirited girl who bids her own old age—

'Listen, the mountain winds with rain were fretting,
And sudden gleams the mountain-tops besetting,
I cannot let thee fade to death forgetting.'

In this tragic masterpiece the poetess finds an echo in the heart of every reader; for her subject is the fate that must overtake us all—the inevitable end of mortal humanity, the loss of our bright youth.

'Only one youth, and the bright life was shrouded,
Only one morning, and the day was clouded,
And one old age with all regrets is crowded.'

Yet, despite her keen realisation of the tragedy of man's life, there is in this book a poem on 'Death' which is perhaps more genuine in its beauty than any utterance of the many poets who have sought to reconcile us to passing through the stern gateway by which all flesh must leave this visible world. Walt Whitman, with his praises of 'delicate death,' sounds extravagant and forced beside this calm and tender acceptance of the natural aspect of death.

'Thou shalt ultimately lie
In the roots of flowers that thrust
Upwards from thee to the sky,
With no more distrust
When they blossom from thy dust.'

'Nought will fear thee, humbled creature,
There will lie thy mortal burden
Pressed into the heart of Nature,
Songless in a garden,
With a long embrace of pardon.'

This is of course merely the natural aspect of death. But when the poetess touches on the supernatural—and not a few of her poems are intimately Catholic in their standpoint;—her utterances are striking and delightful in their deep insight into spiritual things, and her daring, vivid portrayal of them. Two instances may be cited—'In Portugal, 1912,' and 'The Unknown God.'

A word of praise must be given to the publishers, who have most fittingly housed the beautiful soul of poetry committed to their charge. The paper, the type, and the artistic binding are all a delight to the reader.

Life, Science, and Art: Being Leaves from Ernest Hello. Translated from the French by E. M. Walker. R. and T. Washbourne, Ltd., Paternoster Row, London. Price, 1/6 nett; pp. 176.

This little book, with its record of the intimate thoughts and aspirations of a gifted and devout Frenchman, will to many readers be reminiscent of that other famous Frenchman whose centenary we celebrate this year—Frederic Ozanam. In both there is the same keen intellect, the same rare spiritual insight, and the same intense fervor, conviction, and energy. The pages of both are full of trumpet blasts, calling the Catholics of this prosaic age to a place in the mighty army of Christendom beside their devoted ancestors of the bygone centuries. 'It is the crime of the age,' says Ernest Hello, 'not to hate evil, but to discuss terms of peace with it and make it proposals. There is only one proposal to make to it—that it should disappear.' 'If you are alive at all, rouse up the life in you. Take up your soul, and rush into the thick of the fight. Take your wishes, your thoughts, your prayers, your love. Catch up any weapon you can possibly wield, and throw yourself body and soul into the struggle where everything is at stake.' We plead guilty to intense pleasure in his defence of the much-abused individual who cannot keep his temper in an argument. 'A man who is liable to grow angry is almost always a man of deep affections. The man who gets heated in an argument, who pursues his adversary with accusations, who wishes at all costs to carry the citadel by storm, to convert, to persuade, is a man full of affection.' Among the different essays, perhaps the most successful is that on 'Art.' In this subject Ernest Hello is at his best in beauty of thought and diction. His essays possess depth and originality; they are most happily expressed; and the work of the translator has been unusually well performed, inasmuch as there are none of those exasperating Gallicanisms of construction which often mar a translation from the French. The little volume is most attractively got up, and should make a most suitable gift book.

The Trumpet Call: A True History of My Conversion to the Faith. By Clement A. Mendham. R. and T. Washbourne, Ltd., Paternoster Row, London. Price, 3d nett; pp. 72.

A useful little résumé of the arguments and the sentiments which brought one soul into the true fold. The history of a conversion is always interesting, and this account is written with transparent sincerity and earnestness.

The Way of the Cross, and Other Verses. By Dismas. R. and T. Washbourne, Ltd., Paternoster Row, London. Price, 1/9 nett; pp. 72.

A devotional blank-verse rendering of the story of the Passion. We confess, however, to a preference for the two poems the book contains, which are not taken from Scriptural sources—'Reflections' and 'A Legend of the Penitent Thief.' It is probably impossible for anyone but a genius of the highest order so to clothe the events narrated in Scripture as to make us forget the old, sublime cadences of the Latin and English Gospels.

We have also received, from Louis Gille and Co., Sydney, a very full and complete account of the life and

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