

# WILLIAMSON'S 'DONNE TRADITION' PRAISED

THE DONNE TRADITION. By George Williamson. Boston: The Harvard Press.

PERHAPS the most important book to come out of Villard hall has arrived on the campus. It is George Williamson's "The Donne Tradition." Not since Clarence Thorpe's "The Mind of Keats," which was written in that bat haunted building, has there come a book of such genuine value and significance from the English department. The book carries the name of the University, and is already spreading that name in remote corners of England, France and Italy, where men like Read, Legouis (the younger) and Praz are engaged in reevaluating Donne in the light of a changing age and of a growing interest in metaphysical poetry. While the book was not calculated to sweep the nation, even in our own country it should have an immediate success in those rare places where poetry and scholarship are human and real. Its influence on Donne scholarship, like the influence of the work of Grierson, should become more apparent as time brings students to consider the meaning of the history of poetry. Its immediate influence, if the book reaches an audience which needs it, should be to give historical perspective to a contemporary group of metaphysical poets, such as Turbyfill, Henderson, Crane, Jeffers, and those represented in Miss Taggard's recently published anthology of metaphysical poetry, "Circumference."

The difficulty of interpreting Donne is well known. He has that type of obscurity attributed to Browning—an obscurity which arises from paying too much attention to his thought, and saying too much in too little space. This difficulty is complicated by the fact that Donne had a great and curious mind. Williamson has thought out these difficulties with such strength and simplicity that the inarticulateness and obscurity of Donne's packed style becomes lucid, clear. He begins with an apt description of Donne and of that morbid aura of death which Williamson calls "Donne's Shroud." He proceeds to a definition of the nature of the tradition, then gives its historical background in Chapham; he then follows with a full description of the development of the tradition, its decline, and extinction in the reaction which followed Dryden. The trinity of Donne's genius (his mysticism, his logic, and his passionate intensity) is traced through the century in such a manner that the age itself, with its combined currents of rationalism and mysticism, receives an original and valuable interpretation. He makes more apparent the real profundity of Donne's influence; and as for the genius of Donne, he presents it completely—from the rose to the worm in—the rose with its sharp temper and morbid flavor.

Williamson's work is individual and carries the stamp of his own mind. To him does not belong the art of borrowing opinions to thread upon a thin scaffolding of meagre thought, but his is the "radiant and light bearing intellect" that can walk through Corinna's garden in the dark without a lantern. He follows "plangent waves of emotion and subtle nebulae of thought"; he dissects the "tissues of success and failure," and pulls apart the hardest conceit "articulated by a tough reasonableness." He rebukes conclusions of men like Courthope with more accuracy than offense. He contradicts the false statement of the "great" Professor Legouis (the elder). He corrects a long-standing error of Dr. Johnson. And he does all this in the interest of good taste, and with such trenchant simplicity that there is hardly a page of the book that does not bear the hard, clear mark of scholarly precision, blended and softened only by a genuine style.

The Donne tradition contains a body of devotional poetry unsurpassed in the history of our language, and Williamson has added to its value by revealing in a sympathetic manner "the strange witchcraft of its metaphysical suggestion" from "the slight music of Aurelian Townshend" to the "supreme lines and images" of Vaughan. In addition he has given us an important summary of a

phase of the poetic intelligence—that phase which is the metaphysical ability to give power and perspective to emotions caught and patterned by the intellect. Such an ability was the core of Donne's genius, and the heart of the Donne tradition.

The book, which was published by the Harvard Press, is in simple and beautiful format, and should delight people who love good printing.—Pat Morrisette.

(Courtesy of Old Oregon)

## A Dream of Beauty

A NOTE IN MUSIC. By Rosamond Lehmann. New York: Henry Holt.

IT HAS long been thought that Miss Lehmann was a one novel author. "Dusty Answer," her ode on sentimentality, was acclaimed for a time and then there was silence. But now she has written a beautiful and moving piece of creative writing; a note in music very nearly becomes a note in literature. She is a craftsman in interpreting that which is most true of people, their blind, erring gropings, their small hopes and compromises. While her first book was perhaps a little sensational, this new work shows a more subtle understanding. Beneath the petty maladjustments that are allowed too often to grow into dragons, she stirs up glowing bits of beauty.

## A Defense of Freedom

LIBERTY. By Everett Dean Martin. New York: W. W. Norton Co.

"LIBERTY," by Everett Dean Martin, is easily one of the important books of our time. How can the civilized individual save himself in the midst of the machine age? Has democracy become a boomerang? To every college student these questions are going to arise sooner or later. In a book "where every sentence is exciting," Mr. Martin embraces the problem and answers it. His definition of the meaning of freedom is provocative.

"Democratic societies can save themselves," he says in part, "from the tyranny of mediocrity only by limiting the number of things which may be organized,—that is, by leaving as much of life as possible to individual initiative. The trend of modern civilization is in the opposite direction."

## Nudity vs. The Swede

JEROME. By Maurice Bedel. New York: Vilis Press.

IN "JEROME," by Maurice Bedel, we have life, not as it is, but as it should be to be enjoyed. "Jerome" is also called "The Latitude of Love," and is one of the fifty prize novels—Goncourt, perhaps. Paul Morand, in "The Nordic Night," laughed at the same situation—the French idea of the nude as opposed to, or rather, trying not to be opposed to, the Scandinavian idea of the nude.

Jerome, a charming young French writer, visits Norway and under the guidance of a beautiful stalwart blonde learns more and more about the old Norse nonchalance. His sophistication melts into wistfulness, he suffers conventional chill-blains, and learns that youth will flame, even on the bitterest snow-bank. Jerome is not the only person you will enjoy meeting—there are some other fine portraits: of the intellectual women, of the Russian who seeks happiness in deepest despair, of the blonde herself, who looked so simple. Bedel has an unusually pictorial style that makes for rapid, hilarious reading.

## A Musician's Humour

EVENINGS IN THE ORCHESTRA. By Hector Berlioz. New York: Alfred Knopf.

MUSICAL journalism, according to anyone interested, has always been a thing thwarted, and what is even more acute: underpaid. Hector Berlioz, in Paris during the nineteenth century, was not only threatened with trampling, and meagre financial state; throughout his tempestuous career he became entangled in every sort of misfortune that ever beset the path of a music critic. That everyone read Berlioz made matters only so much the worse: More people were the brunt of more insults, more incompetent friends begged the advantages of his prestige, more people were ready to laugh at his mistakes. He had a curious and sweetly honest attitude toward his work: "The unhappy feuilleton-writer, compelled to write on everything within the realm of his feuilleton (a sorry domain, a morass full of toads and grasshoppers) desires only to accomplish his task. He has often no opinion whatever about the things on which he is forced to write; those things excite neither his anger nor his admiration—they do not exist. And yet he must seem to believe in their existence, seem to have a reason for bestowing attention upon them, seem to take part either for or against them." What is even sadder: Berlioz himself was a composer—"what agony must it have been to the composer who felt himself big with a masterpiece like 'Les Troyens,' and yet had to practice abortion upon his own soul almost every day to help bring into the world the misbegotten brats of every musical harlot in Paris from Meyerbeer downwards!"

But suffering, fighting off fools, failed to take from this master of all musical journalists, a fine wit and a natural art of story-telling. In "Evenings in the Orchestra," a closely woven series of musical and personal incidents, is a discussion of that very interesting theory that musicians have a humor all their own and shared by no other profession.

The stories are a collection of tales told by members of the orchestra. Beautiful, and almost brutally morbid—could such things be told in a studio or a cafe, even in the most abandoned company? Perhaps to say that music is in them is a trifle obscure, but their peculiar quality is explained when we learn that they have been told in the orchestra pit, during the performance of an opera:

Kleiner sits in a saloon, his elbows on the table, gloomy, distracted. His friend says: "Have you again lost eleven games at billiards, as you did last week? Have you broken a pair of drumsticks or a pipe you had colored?"

"No—I have lost—my mother."

The friend is chagrined at his clumsiness, and apologizes.

The waiter comes and Kleiner orders a chocolate with milk.

Kleiner's mother died last night, after fourteen hours of agony.

The waiter returns: "No more chocolate and milk."

Kleiner pounds the table with his fist and exclaims: "Confound it! Another worry!"

"The musicians break into such a fit of laughter that the conductor, who has been listening to them, is compelled to take notice of them. With one eye he gives them an irritated look. The other eye smiles."

## The Flame of Rebellion

REVOLT OF THE FISHERMEN. By Anna Seghers. New York: Alfred Knopf.

THIS chef-d'oeuvre, "The Revolt of the Fishermen," by Anna Seghers, a German writer, won the Kleist prize for the year 1929; the award being one of the highest attainable in the literary field in Germany.

The story is Grief. Telling a tale of the Fisherfolk of Santa Barbara, who strike, starve, fail and return again to toil for a wage that is still to leave their wives and children hungry, it is superb in its simple power.

Poor Creatures, to be cursed with animated brains is, for them (though they do not know it) high sorrow. Days of fierce toil and combat with the elements, of life and of nature, bring but nights wasted in wrong thinking, for there is nothing else to do after the sun goes down but to mull over the past; an invariably unsatisfactory procedure. This grey apathy quickly flames into the crimson fire of rebellion!

Rife with tales of youthful daring, bitter resentment and mobmadness, the work is, in miniature, an epic of rebellion.

Its characters are catholic. There is a universality that will continue through time, surmounting even the barriers of new ages.

Over all looms darkly the carnal attraction of Mary, the street-woman. Here, in Mary, in Hull, the agitator, and in Andreas, the boy zealot, are eternal types; painted with the true hand of understanding.

All of this and more is bound into the confines of a book of a scant two hundred pages. Rebellion, dully scarlet, broods, flames, and dies; all against a dark background of oppressiveness, colored like rich smoke, deeply purple-brown.

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