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Sara Teasdale's Prize

poetry. Probably he never thought of it—nobody was thinking of poetry during the period when his will was drawn. Of course the omission of poetry from any prize-list which included at least two literary products, the novel and the play, was preposterous; and we may hope that the present donor, or other donors, may permanently atone for the slight with an annual prize as large as the other prizes.

The poem of each year—or book of poems—must be, we submit, at least as prize-worthy as the editorial of the year. It may be, of course, of a value immeasurably greater, for, by the favor of the gods, it may be a masterpiece, an enduring work of genius—a distinction which could scarcely be claimed for any editorial.

H. M.

REVIEWS

A MODERN EVANGELIST

Look! We Have Come Through! by D. H. Lawrence.

D. H. Lawrence has recently published a third volume of poetry to stand beside his *Love Poems* and *Amores*. This event has, so far as I am aware, passed almost without notice in the English press. The reviewers of the English press know perfectly well that Mr. Lawrence is supposed to be a dangerous man, writing too frankly on certain subjects which are politely considered taboo in good society, and therefore they do their best to prevent Mr. Lawrence from writing at all, by tacitly ignoring him. If they are driven to the admission, these selfsame reviewers are obliged grudgingly

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ingly to acknowledge that Mr. Lawrence is one of the most interesting of modern writers. Such are the conditions which a modern writer with something new to say is obliged to accept in England to-day. The press can make a great to-do about the innocuous, blameless and essentially minor poetry of Edward Thomas (to take but one example); they politely refuse to discuss the questionable, but essentially major effort of a D. H. Lawrence. Is it any wonder that such an attitude drives a man to sheer fanaticism?

For a fine, intolerant fanatic D. H. Lawrence undoubtedly is. That is his value for our present day, so rich in half-measures and compromises. Lawrence does not compromise. In this last collection of poetry he gives us works which are not good poetry, which are scarcely readable prose. He includes them because they are necessary to the complete understanding of his thought and gospel. We, if we are wise, will read them for the same reason. For Lawrence is an original thinker, and his message to our present day is a valuable message.

Briefly, the message is this: that everything which we call spiritual is born and comes to flower out of certain physical needs and reactions, of which the most patent is the reaction of sex, through which life is maintained on this planet. Lawrence therefore stands in sharp contrast to the Christian dogma of the middle ages, and to those writers of the present day who still maintain an attitude of respect to the Christian view, which is that we are each endowed with an immortal soul, at strife with our physical needs,

which can only be purged by death. Lawrence, like a recent French writer, "does not desire to spit out the forbidden fruit, and recreate the Eden of the refusal of life." He is frankly pagan. To him, the flesh is the soil in which the spirit blossoms, and the only immortality possible is the setting free of the blossoming spirit from the satiated flesh. When this is accomplished, then the spirit becomes free, perfect, unique, a habitant of paradise on earth. This is the doctrine of which he is the zealot, the intolerant apostle.

The specific value of this idea need not concern us very greatly. The question is, rather, of its poetical value; and there is no doubt that it is a system of philosophy which is essentially poetical. Poetry is at once highly objective and highly subjective. It is objective in so far as it deals with words, which are in a strong sense objects, and with the external world in its objective aspects. It is subjective, because it also states the poet's subjective reactions to words and to all external phenomena. Lawrence is one of the few poets in England to-day who keeps this dual rôle of poetry well in mind; and that is why his poetry, though it may often be badly written, is never without energy and a sense of power.

The reason for his failings as a poet must be sought elsewhere than in his attitude to life. We can only understand why he fails if we understand the conditions under which he is forced to write. With a reasonable degree of independence, a public neither openly hostile nor totally indifferent, an intellectual *milieu* capable of finer life and better understand-

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ing, Lawrence would become nothing but an artist. He has none of these things; and so he is forced, by destiny itself, to become the thing he probably began by loathing, a propagandist, a preacher, an evangelist.

This brings him into close connection with Walt Whitman, who similarly spent his life in preaching with puritanical fervor a most unpuritan gospel. Indeed, if one examines closely Lawrence's latest technique as shown here in such poems as *Manifesto* and *New Heaven and Earth*, one is surprised to see how close this comes in many respects to that of the earlier Whitman, the Whitman of *The Song of Myself*. For example, note the selfsame use of long, rolling, orchestral rhythm in the two following passages:

When I gathered flowers, I knew it was myself plucking my own
flowering,
When I went in a train, I knew it was myself travelling by my own
invention,
When I heard the cannon of the war, I listened with my own ears
to my own destruction.
When I saw the torn dead, I knew it was my own torn dead body.
It was all me, I had done it all in my own flesh.

Every kind for itself and its own, for me, mine, male and female,
For me those that have been boys and that love women,
For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be slighted,
For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and the
mothers of mothers,
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
For me children and the begetters of children.

The difference is (and this too is curiously brought out in the technique) that Lawrence is more delicate, more sensitive, more personal. He deliberately narrows his range, to

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embrace only life and his own life in particular. Unlike Whitman, he has a horror of the infinite, and I am sure that he could never bring himself to "utter the word Democracy, the word en-masse." He is an aristocrat, an individualist, and indeed, he has only a horror of the collective mass of mankind, which he sees (and in this case, he sees more clearly than Whitman) to have been always conservative, conventional, timid, and persecutors of genius. In fact, the only similarity is, that both he and Whitman are preachers of new gospels, and therefore are obliged to adopt a similar tone of oratory in their work.

For this reason, Lawrence in his best poetry is unquotable, as is the case with all poets who depend rather on the extension of emotion, than on its minute concentration. But now and again he produces something that seems to transform all the poetry now written in English into mere prettiness and feebleness, so strong is the power with which his imagination pierces its subject. Such a poem, for example, is the one called *The Sea*. I have space for only its last magnificent stanza:

You who take the moon as in a sieve, and sift
Her flake by flake and spread her meaning out;
You who roll the stars like jewels in your palm,
So that they seem to utter themselves aloud;
You who steep from out the days their color,
Reveal the universal tint that dyes
Their web; who shadow the sun's great gestures and expressions
So that he seems a stranger in his passing;
Who voice the dumb night fittingly;
Sea, you shadow of all things, now mock us to death with your
shadowing.

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The man who wrote this, and many other passages in this volume, has at last arrived at his maturity—the maturity of the creative artist who is able to grasp a subject through its external aspect and internal meaning simultaneously, and to express both aspects in conjunction, before the subject is laid aside.

John Gould Fletcher

AN ENGLISH SOLDIER POET

Ardors and Endurances, by Robert Nichols. Frederick A. Stokes Co.

The contents of this volume are divided into three Books, the first presenting war poems. The design on the outer cover is appropriate to the hour—the frenzied face of war, a reproduction from the drawing of a Fury by Michelangelo. The heroic title may come from the lines—

My heart demands in grief
Ardor, endurance and relief:

or the lines may be the offspring of the title.

It is always with a tender awe that I touch a book by a soldier. And this young soldier is so winningly frank and boyish—he takes us so into his confidence! He tells us what he has read—in some passages that he has quenched his thirst from the goblet of Keats, in others that Milton has led him by the hand; and this influence of the past does not necessarily injure the poems it stamps. However, Mr. Nichols forms a veritable “case” for the modern surgeon of poetry, for we find him using throughout his work such expressions as “in sooth,” “I wis,” “Hist—draws he