AMERICAN & BRITISH VERSE FROM THE YALE REVIEW

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American & British Verse

from The Yale Review,

With a Foreword by John Gould Fletcher



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FOREWORD



SOMETIME during the past spring I was walking in London, and I happened to go into a bookshop devoted to the sale of poetry. The proprietor was overhauling his shelves, and as I chanced to know him personally, we fell into conversation. It appeared that he had on hand a number of books of poetry by American authors, which he had hitherto kept separate from the English product. He was now proposing to amalgamate them, by rearranging the entire collection alphabetically, under English poetry; a decision in which I entirely and whole-heartedly concurred.

It has been too much the fashion recently to insist that American literature should be considered as something entirely separate from the literature of the British Isles. As John Macy once said, American literature is a branch of English literature. That is not a limitation; it is a high title to glory. The American poets of to-day are just as truly the heirs of Chaucer and of Shakespeare as the English; the American novelists acknowledge their indebtedness to Defoe and Fielding. The roots of English literature are now planted on both sides of the Atlantic; doubtless the fruit will be diverse, but there is no reason why either country should find it bitter. Whether present-day American poetry or English poetry is the greater, is a

matter open to the friendly give-and-take of discussion; but surely an American poet can feel proud of adding something to that superb and noble language which has already been the chosen voice of so many of the world's ablest singers. And, whatever we add, it is only because we were given this instrument to reshape and revivify.

In these few pages, there are English and American poems standing side by side. Here is Masefield singing of the change that alters all things, a theme as old as poetry itself. Here is a great New England poet's beautiful tribute to the memory of the friend whom he, and English literature, lost because of the war. Here is the frail, delicate intensity of Sara Teasdale to be contrasted with the rich, swooning loveliness of Sassoon. Here is the breezy buoyance of Nichols and the ironic bravado of Bodenheim. And here, too, is my own effort to add something to the well-merited crown of glory which a great English poet-novelist has attained on his eightieth birthday. This little collection is not an ordinary group of poems; it is a link between two nations, an emblem of growth, a proof that poetry is still being written in the English tongue.

John Gould Fletcher.

June, 1920.

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