

**A BOOK OF
PRINCETON
VERSE 1916**

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A Book of Princeton verse 1916 by Alfred Noyes

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PREFACE

BY ALFRED NOYES

THIS book of Princeton verse is selected from poems written during the last six years on the Princeton campus, with the exception of one poem by a Princeton man in France. With the exception of one contributor, moreover, it is chiefly the work of undergraduates, who are still in residence. One or two contributors are students at the Graduate College.

The book must be compared, therefore, not with the ordinary anthology of contemporary poetry, but with some of those college anthologies which have recently attracted attention in England. The volume of Oxford undergraduate verse, edited by Professor Gilbert Murray, was drawn from a wider field; but the Princeton book of verse may more fairly be compared with a selection of that kind, though I feel confident that it needs no apology on any ground, and that it contains a considerable quantity of work which would hold its own in any contemporary anthology.

It differs greatly from those collections of verse for which the old college magazines used to be ransacked. The greater part of this book has never been in print before, and a considerable quantity was actually written for the book itself.

The quality of the work seems to me unusually fine; and it has been selected from a large mass of material that falls only slightly below the average level of the book. This, of course, is an indication of a remarkable quickening of interest in what is—after all—the chief Americanizing influence now at work, the language and literature which are the common heritage of half the world.

After the days of Lowell and Emerson one of the penalties for those Unguarded Gates, of which Aldrich wrote so forcibly, was the temporary submerging of the literary sense, a looseness of form and a consequent looseness of thought, which at one time seemed likely to corrupt not only journalism but even literature itself. In recent years there has been a growing reaction against this, and, rhetorical as

the phrase may seem, I feel more strongly than ever that—in these times of black disaster—the splendid task of carrying on the torch of literature may yet be reserved for America. Disaster certainly threatens that torch in Europe; for the whole of European civilization is menaced. It is encouraging, then, to find the younger men at an American university developing just those qualities of lucidity, order, and proportion which are the first essentials of literature, at the very moment when the older generations, both in Europe and America, seem ripe for chaos in both thought and form. These younger men seem to realize that, just as a crew cannot exert its full strength until it has learned to work in harmony and obey the rhythmical laws of its art, so there is no grace or strength in literature, unless the form and the thought be in perfect harmony, and the writer be the captain of his own soul and of his own words also.

I believe that there is a national significance in this quickening of the literary sense among the younger men; and I know no finer example