

# **THE CAMBRIDGE MAGAZINE**

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### **CAMBRIDGE POETS 1900-1913.**

**By**  
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There is a great deal of difference between thirteen years and three. That is the thought from which Oxford must seek comfort when critics dwell, as some of them surely will, on the general superiority of the Cambridge volume of verse. It does strike one as more sure-footed, more full-blooded, more mature. The extra ten years between, say, twenty-five and thirty-five, are apt to be very important in the formation of a poet's mind and style, to draw upon in such names as Rupert Brooke, J. E. Flecker, Aleister Crowley, H. O. Meredith and Harold Monroe. It also gains from its inclusion of women. Our scrupulous principles at Oxford did not allow us to include persons who were not members of the University.

Mr. Brooke is always good both in thought and workmanship, though, except for Granchester, it does not seem to me that he is here represented by his finest work. Mr. Flecker come out here represented by his finest work. Mr. Flecker comes out wonderfully well. The Address to a Poet a Thousand Years Hence, and Yasmin, and, of course, the gleaming and resonant Samarcand poem would be admired in almost any collection. We hear the darkest rumours of Mr. Fleck's past; he has been described as an apostate, or even a Bulgarophone Greek, but work like this will atone for many crimes.

On the whole, there is, as one would expect, much similarity between the two University volumes. One can see that the same influences are at work in both centres. But some of the differences in detail are rather curious. The "blood and mud" school, which strikes a strong and very successful note in the Oxford volume, is almost entirely absent from the Cambridge. There is also far less deliberate incorrectness of metre; indeed the metrical treatment is, as a rule, most refreshingly firm and clear. There is less extreme religiosity: less of the grotesque or fantastic, though one must not forget Mr. Iolo William's fine little "Love Demoniatic." There is also less

of what I may call the pure pursuit of insipid beauty. Perhaps the phrase does not explain itself; I mean the kind of poetry that goes on and on, always rather beautiful, with nothing very particular to say or to be excited about. It is found in perfection in parts of *Endymion*. I speak of it with respect, if not with affection, because I believe many real poets love it; and it has its due place in the Oxford book. In the Cambridge book there is very little indeed of it. There is hardly a poem in this volume which has not its "bony structure" of genuine thought, and the thought is often really interesting. It is noteworthy too that quite half a dozen of the Cambridge poems refer to dons and lecture-rooms. Mostly, as in duty bound, the poet says: "Damn their teaching," or puts forth the orthodox poetic view that learning should only be pursued in bad weather; but one writer is not afraid to speak with sympathy of "great Verrall bending at his desk," and another to lament the evanescent charm, not of a rose, but of a lecture. There must be sincerity about this.

I have said that the book gains by the inclusion of women. I incline to think that the gain lies not merely in the acquisition of several fine poems, especially from Frances Cornford and "John Presland." It is rather that the whole book seems to come from a normal human atmosphere in which women are treated as fellow-workers and not as freaks of nature. I speak without adequate knowledge, but it looks as if the Cambridge poets and poetesses belonged to a society in which men and women met and talked and knew one another. The Oxford poets have, I think, preserved more intact the virginal atmosphere of the absolutely uncontaminated College.

Lastly, one cannot but feel in both volumes that tendency which Q. describes in his introduction: a tendency of poetry to become particularist, lyrical, subjective, and "intent on its own emotions rather than on its auditors." "The old business of a poet did not end with this. . . . On the top of all this he had to realise his self by losing it, to purge the universal back in a new embodiment which all men could recognize." This is true and wise criticism, and much needed at the present day. But it need not—and, of course, is not meant to—discourage those who hope for great things in English poetry. Poetry has absorbed much new material of thought in late years, and is trying hard to express it somehow. When it knows rather more clearly what it wants to say, it will proceed, we may hope, to build up the great objective forms which embody something more permanent than a personal view or mood or emotion.

The power of architecture will no doubt come; meantime, the Cambridge Poets of 1900-13 show that they are real poets, masters of varied and sincere thought, of delicate feeling and of extremely fine form in matters of detail.