

THE NEW AGE
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REVIEWS.

Cambridge Poets 1900-1913. (Heffer. 3s. 6d.)

It would be accepting too much to accept this volume as typical of Cambridge. To begin with, the compiler is a lady and one who might be accused with every appearance of reason of having rather too great personal interest in a book which contains no fewer than eleven of her hitherto unpublished poems, as against less than eleven for all the other thirty-seven authors. We begin, then, with expectation of partiality, and it is, at any rate, to be hoped that this collection need be taken as no more than the expression of "Aefrida Tillyard's" likes. Secondly, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch is not typical of Cambridge but leagues from being so; and this is a refreshing reflection, for his Introduction is discreditable. The present writer, reading carelessly, supposed through five pages that the lady-compiler was writing. It should not have been a shock, but it was one, to discover the truth. We put it to any reader whether the feminine pen following has not all the character of a precieuse.

"I shall take it to be conceded at this time of day, not only that good poetry is worth writing, but that our language has a capacity and our nation a rather special aptitude for it; and these admissions—if the reader will be good enough to make them before starting upon the poems here collected—will excuse together the authors, the anthologist, and the contributor of this short 'Introduction.' "

Why "at this time of day?" Shakespeare has been dead a long while and Chaucer longer still. When, and by whom, was "good" poetry ever considered not worth writing? "Q." is certainly thinking of his "Daily Mail." And this "rather special" aptitude—what a coy little way of getting the nation to think well of itself, if the reader will only be good enough to admit first that fine poetry may be worth writing, and to excuse our troubling him with our anthology! Windy silliness is all there is to that, and it is no excuse for a writer "at this time of day" when all is "conceded" of whatever there may have been unconceded" by the ignorant public—it is no avail to a Professor of English Liter-

ature that one or two wounded poets have titled at the bourgeoisie of their times. But Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch will make you five pages of colloquialism and archaism over this conceded point and drag in the naked evidences of his studies, a dozen or so of famous names. "It takes (I say," he says, "a great and brave man to perceive this [the permanence of poetry]." Our Professor is, then, a great and brave man, for he perceives. We get a little feminine description of his exact surroundings at the instant of writing, which description serves to introduce an image of waves that owe their impetus to the whole sea behind them, this image illustrating the truism (Arnold formulated it for the Early Victorians) that a poet owes his impetus to the currents behind him. Once again we are told that the writer is rustivating, and then how young men kindly tell him that his enthusiasm keeps remarkably green, and finally, with a firm vote for the continued existence of dramatic and epic poetry which have recently been considered dead by a young poet of Sir Arthur's acquaintance—we are quit of this disgraceful performance.

It may, indeed, have been difficult to say anything original about these "Cambridge Poets." Most of them have been uproariously patronized by Fleet Street, which seems not to have had any terror or doubts regarding *this* sort of poetry. And most have been rebuked or laughed at in THE NEW AGE. . . . Messrs. Crowley, Brooke, Buxton, Neuburg, Flecker, Freyer, a few Girton and Newnham stars are these "poets," with some others among whom are one or two we mention with respect. It is a change for the good to turn from Mr. Crowley's dusty, rusty—we should like to say razzily-dazzly—mystagogery to the manly "Anima Vagula," by Archibald T. Campbell, or to the admirable descriptive piece by Mr. Michaelides, "The Forests of Massachusetts," and the poem "To my Father," by the same author. Two of Mr. J. C. Squire's best pieces are included. The Rev. R. Keable writes two sincere if somewhat fanciful effusions. Mr. Munroe has a few good lines in his play. But, for the rest, what is there but perspiration and vocabulary? A 'cute of pretty phrase drives them repeating it forever and a day; and the influence of Girton and Newnham is apparently deplorable. "Kiss me dearest" might easily be taken by the average reader as a synonym for Cambridge. It is as well to know that there is a permanent Cambridge which is not the city of these versifiers. No wonder, though, that the Perse boy sneered of poets "they droop about in such a tedious row." One of them implores his fellow students:—

For God's sake, let us laugh a little—but himself appears to be most concerned with a certain "Thoralis"—"my sword-like Thoralis," he calls her.

But none of them laugh, except in a cynical, tired fashion like Mr. Rupert Brooke, who curses like a cavalier to be back in Grantchester, Cambridgeshire—

The shire for men who understand.

Men like Mr. Brooke, you understand! But imagine a man of understanding ranting in such a fashion of his 'shire. These much approved lines on Grantchester are offensive with infantilism.

And is there money still for tea?

A man might say it with a covering laugh—but write it, publish it?

There is not a specimen of wit in the whole volume—but remember it is compiled from one of the parasitical colleges. Except the poems we have distinguished, here is nothing but feebleness, sentimentality, and morbidity—decadence.