

POETRY

(Continued from page 21)

keenest pronouncements. Of fire he says, "We are not lightly to extinguish that." Of the effects of time, "To be white bones in honey after hot fire."

Despite the skill with language the reader comes across an occasional ambiguity due less to verbal ellipsis than to an unwarrantable chamois-leap of thought. Here and there an end stanza that should clearly taper off is allowed vaguely to trail off, a fault of which the book itself may be accused, for it ends with a group of insignificant lullabies. A perfunctoriness mars the Emily Dickinson poem.

For the most part these poems give the impression—as all good art should—of having been completely expelled through the instrument. A finality adorns them. A counted width of words. In its strict limits each poem holds and imparts its distinctive grace.

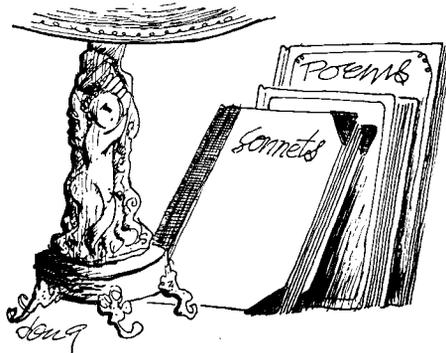
Lost Faith

POEMS 1922-1947. By Allen Tate.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
1948. 208 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GERARD PREVIN MEYER

INCREASINGLY over the past quarter of a century, the name of Allen Tate has come to stand for a singular integrity of outlook. At all times he has given the impression of a poet who knows his own mind and intends to use it in his poetry. In consequence, he has been accused of a certain coldness; but hardly a line of Tate's is not informed by passionate sincerity, though it may be controlled by a fine irony or educed by emotions which many readers outside the South of his fathers find inexplicable.

In making the South, that "nation within a nation," a symbol, he provides for himself and "my few readers" "a local habitation and a name" upon which to focus the sense of loss—loss of tradition in society, loss of faith in religion, loss of a convention in literature. But Tate is enough of a determinist or fatalist (though an enemy of naturalism) to feel that not much can be done about the situation, even in the field of politics. "One must have deep inside one's secret being," he wrote in that fine novel, "The Fathers," "a vast metaphor controlling all the rest: a belief in the innate evil of human nature, and the need to face that evil." It is Tate's view, stated in both poetry and prose writing (through the frequent violence of his rhetoric), that, having lost



our faith, we can only find it again by a violent effort: which, however, may destroy both us and those around us.

The vision of this impasse forces upon Tate the irony which crisps his style, which, among the later poems shows to excellent advantage in such

openly satirical verse as this, from "Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air":

In this bad time no part
The poet took, nor chance:
He studied Swift and Donne,
Ignored the Hun,
While with faint heart
Proust caused the fall of France.

Still as impressive in "Poems 1922-1947" as when they first appeared are those nearly perfect poems "Idiot," "Death of Little Boys," "The Last Days of Alice," "Shadow and Shade," "Mother and Son," "The Traveler," "Ditty," "The Wolves," "The Subway," "The Twelve," "The Cross," "Mr. Pope," "Ignis Fatuus," and "Emblems" (particularly I and II). Of the newer poems, "Seasons of the Soul" though uneven, has already made the greatest impact; this is its first appearance

Married Love

By Theodore Maynard

1.

THE JOYS we had are like two mirrors that throw
An image back and forth and back again:
For in receiving joy we joy bestow,
And joy confessed—oh, never such joy as then!
The body's pleasure is the very least
Of pleasure's complex parts; who make it all
Still have a good, but only as the beast
Mates as it munches fodder in its stall.

Ah, but in marriage, even as we exact
The uttermost farthing, as reward we press
Rubies in thanks for tower and temple sacked
In such sweet, stern remorseless tenderness:
At the same instant trampled in the dust,
And charioted as conquerors august.

2.

Passionate bodies men, and passionate hearts
Have women (so they say), but poets both.
Nay, passion experienced, the soul's dual parts
Of male and female swear their marriage troth.
Only the brute the biological
Function performs in pure simplicity;
On us there floods an intellectual
Light in the spasm—each to his degree.

Now is the wife known, now the husband known,
The essence reaching through the accident,
Thus making what was separate its own,
Fused and transmuted in the sacrament
That in the annihilating instant sees
And tastes of God in His eternities.

3.

Only could Love and Wisdom Infinite
And limitless Power have human love designed
To climax in an agony exquisite,
The broken body, the triumphant mind,
The shame that Eden's innocence restores,
The last abasement, ultimate of pride,
When in astounding joy the groom adores,
Abashed, the astounded joy he gives his bride.

But were that thunderbolt of bliss not given
Save as a flash, it could not be sustained,
Or earth-bound hearts would seek no further heaven,
Or deem that Eden glimpsed were thus regained,
Like those who in fallacious floods go down,
Drowning their sensual love before they drown.

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between book covers. I like best the second section of this poem, probably because it seems to bring me closest to the experience frozen in it. "The formal re-creation of art . . . freezes the experience," as Tate says of the "Ode to the Confederate Dead"—still, for all its half-disclosures, one of the remarkable poems of our century.

In Erin's Step-Tongue

THE COURSE OF IRISH VERSE IN ENGLISH. By Robert Farren. New York: Sheed & Ward. 1947. 171 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ANN F. WOLFE

THE TRUE Irish poet is not one of John Bull's other rhymers. Even though he write in English, he has a racial tradition to follow in spirit and theme, a Gaelic prosody through which to Irishize the music and gait of his metres. Irish-born Goldsmith and MacNeice, writing in the English tradition, are not Irish poets. Robert Farren is, and he knows every aspect of Irish poetry.

In "The Course of Irish Verse" Mr. Farren surveys the poetry of the English-writing Irishmen who took over after the Gaelic order disintegrated. He traces the growth of their Irishness from eighteenth-century beginnings in English translations from the Gaelic and the English verse of anonymous hedge-schoolmasters. As he carries his subject on up to Colum, Stephens, F. R. Higgins, Clarke, and the other Irish poets of today, he treats not only the poets and translators who contributed to the development of Ireland's literary separatism, but those who should have and failed to. He lays emphasis on the phenomenal originality and metrical virtuosity of Mangan and the "total Irishness" of Higgins and Clarke.

Thomas Moore was the first important Irishman whose English verse sang Irishly. Influenced by traditional music, he wrote a few lyrics that were racial in mood and metrical pattern. In the "general body of his graceful, dainty, but un-Irish poetry" there was maturity and dignity, a break from the sentimentality of mock-Irish rhymes about dear little shamrocks and the convivial charms of whisky.

By the early nineteenth century native themes were setting "the track of the Gael" on the poetry of Ireland's step-language. The countryman's Catholicism as it conflicted with his belief in fairy magic found literary voice in John Keegan's folk-speech verse. In Ferguson and Allingham "country spiritism" integrated its rather other-worldly overtones with

"the sweet, wild twist of Irish song."

Mangan, foremost of the English-writing poets before Yeats, had a racy instinct for lyrical eloquence and sensuous metre. His appreciation of Gaelic poetry was of inestimable value to the translation movement. Some of Mangan's—and Ireland's—best poems are his versions from the Irish.

With Yeats Irish literature crystalized into a movement. In analyzing the poetry of Yeats and his colleague, Mr. Farren does not lose sight of their vital public relations service in bringing Irish letters to the attention of the world.

"The Course of Irish Verse" is a key piece of literary criticism badly in need of an index. The author quotes generously and comments brilliantly, if not always temperately. In his Swiftian approach there is racial psychoanalysis. Some may find this Irishman unreasonable, but few unreadable.

Mr. Farren's poets stand or fall on literary nativeness. He is pretty hard on the "fine fellows" and "grandees" who left Ireland's pearly half-lights for "the false Italianate sunshine of English poetry." Neither *Zeitgeist* nor circumstance excuses "those vexatious



Robert Farren's dictum: "Dig Irish earth—or else."

Irishmen, cultural emigrés who went versioning the divers dialects of Europe and Asia while an older poetry than most wanted service at home." Famous heads roll at his dictum: dig Irish earth—or else.

Poetry and Physics

By Gorden Link

THE RE is minuscule pause
at the junction of four dimensions
when the poem suspends itself in time and space
with abstract edges touching no ganglion's end
or thing or shadow of thinking.

At this infinitesimal delay
in the torrents of time
and the cataracts of curving space
that mate to spawn infinity,
the poem is ignorant of self or form
or destiny or pulse or sound.

It might emerge heroic
from this fractional log jam of history
as sermon or music or design or dream,
and only God who owes His being
Himself to this intricate phenomenon
can know how many poems
stipple our past disguised as symphonies
or steeples or religious revivals
or the staring skulls of dream upon the sands
that bury half-remembered races.

And this is well: if a poem survived
from every impulse man has had
to fossilize himself in song,
our heritage from history would be
mounds of memorial star-high and eternity-wide;
the topheavy world would stagger through the dark
uninhabited and cold and doomed
to never ending unawareness of man's capacity
for constructing nonconformist deities,
for translating tribal rhythms into a way of life,
for splitting hairs and infinitives and atoms.