The Making of Poetry by A. H. R. Fairchild

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doctrine, warmly espoused and finely expounded by Mr Jack, that poetry is a 'liberation,' without inferring that it necessarily 'says goodbye to limitations' or 'overrides them.' It is a commonplace that a member of a highly organised state may be 'freer' than the inhabitant of a desert island. And if there is any truth in poetic realism, poetry may liberate our souls as effectually by permeating and vivifying the tissues of actuality, as by disturbing and rending them.

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The Making of Poetry. By A. H. R. FAIRCHILD. New York: Putnams. 1912. 8vo. 263 pp.

The study of æsthetics has always had—and must always have—a peculiar fascination of its own. The gifts of science to mankind are plain and incontrovertible, but the gifts of art are harder to apprise. What is beauty? Of what use is the study of beauty? Why, with nature before our eyes, do we need what must at best be but a faulty copy in picture or poem? These are questions to which the critics of all ages have offered answers, but of which there can never be any completely satisfactory solution. The very poets themselves cannot tell us what poetry is, at best they can but suggest certain of its aspects, or give us some such vague and illuminating definition as Shelley's, 'Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds,' or Wordsworth's familiar epigram of 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' But if the quest be foredoomed to failure it is none the less worth undertaking; Childe Roland may fail to achieve the adventure of the Dark Tower, but we should be the poorer if he never attempted it—the poorer, not only by the actual gain of endeavour, but by loss of certain knowledge. Because the *genus homo* is greater than any individual, there is no need to abandon the study of human nature altogether, and the study of æsthetics is neither more nor less than the study of human nature. Professor Fairchild sets out boldly by asking 'Can poetry be defined?' and having decided 'that no finally satisfactory definition of poetry ever can be made,' goes on to examine 'the only part about which definite and precise statements can safely be made...the material and the processes which go to make poetry what it is.' Cordial agreement with Mr Fairchild's conclusion does not, however, necessarily imply entire acquiescence in his chain of reasoning. We are told that poetry cannot be defined because it 'begins and ends in feeling,' and feeling cannot be described in terms of something else and therefore cannot really be described at all. But, as Mr Bertrand Russell shows in his *Problems of Philosophy*, this difficulty confronts us just as much in practical and material matters as in sensation. We cannot accurately define a feeling, nor can we accurately describe a table. In both cases we 'simplify and systematise our account of our experiences' by using a currency of speech which experience has shown to contain a common denominator of truth. It is not because the final appeal of poetry is to feeling, and

feeling transcends words, that poetry cannot be defined, but because art is universal in the fullest sense of the word, and no hands but those of the gods can gather together all the scattered fragments which make the perfect image of Truth, no language but that of Olympus can fully express her message. But if Mr Fairchild dismisses poetry itself somewhat cursorily, he deals in greater detail with his subdivisions: (1) What is the material out of which poetry is made? (2) What are the chief processes or kinds of activity involved in the making of it? (3) What, from this point of view, is the real nature of poetry? (4) What is the need, and what is the value of poetry? All criticism of any merit provokes contradiction, but while we wince at the suggestion that in the lines,

I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me,

Tennyson 'might better have said "feelings,"' and grow impatient of the matter-of-fact interpretation of 'brief candle'—'What really justifies the term "brief" is the parallelism between Macbeth's life, as he now sees it, and a candle. Neither lasts for long; each implies a limit of time; both are about to go "out"'—much of Mr Fairchild's careful and thoughtful treatment of individual epithets is stimulating and suggestive. Now and then it is difficult to see the full force of his reasoning. He lays great stress, for instance, on the unpoetic nature of utility, and declares that to him a vine is less beautiful than a spray of honeysuckle (the idea of honey being presumably too remote to be intrusive). This is a matter of personal idiosyncrasy, and while it may surprise the reader, calls for no comment, but when he goes on (p. 58) to enumerate nearly fifty images employed by Wordsworth in the *Reverie of Poor Susan*, and adds 'only two, meadow and pail, can even suggest use or service,' we are left in perplexity. 'Trees, however beautiful, are for lumber and fuel...waterfalls, however magnificent, for power and light' (p. 50), and yet these same trees suggest neither use nor service—to say nothing of cottage, river, hill, stream, eyes, all of which are included in his unutilitarian list. As a matter of fact the contention that images are poetic in proportion as they are removed from all idea of the service of man will not hold water for an instant. What of that 'brief candle,' the poetic nature of which Mr Fairchild has been at considerable pains to explain? Finally a protest must be entered against the constant use of the detestable verb to 'personalise' which even its inventor confesses 'is not attractive.' In the coining of words, more perhaps than in anything else, success, and nothing but success, proves justification. 'Personalise' cannot be called a success.

But, with all its faults, the book is one likely to be of real use to students of literature. It is not profound, but it draws attention to many points which are likely to escape the attention of the inexperienced reader, and its whole attitude towards poetry is eminently sane and healthy. Chapter VII, which deals with the Need and Value of Poetry, is particularly good. Nothing is easier than to drift into sentimental generalities on such a subject, but the author does good service in

insisting on the disciplinary and logical character of poetry. 'It has a logic as severe as that of science, a logic more difficult and more subtle because it is based on more elusive conditions...Poetry, in very truth, is a supplement to everyday life of the most intensely practical character ...it knits together (life's) scattered and disparate bits of experience in a revealing way; it organises life afresh, and on a higher plane than that upon which we commonly live.' There is nothing new in all this, but it is put with vigour and conviction, and, after all, the value of criticism lies less in saying something new than in bringing home to us truths with which we ought to be, but are not, familiar. The section on Primitive Poetry contains some interesting suggestions, though perhaps it scarcely discriminates sufficiently between different degrees of poetic sensitiveness in different races. But, of necessity, these remarks are very condensed, and the point which Mr Fairchild makes, if not the only one possible, has a value of its own. His study of poetry as a whole is calculated to stimulate thought and set the reader investigating for himself, and the work which achieves this, fulfils the chief purpose of criticism by compelling us to set up and defend our own standard of right judgment.

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CIRENCESTER.

The Middle English Penitential Lyric. By F. A. PATTERSON. New York: Columbia University Press. 1911. 8vo. ix + 203 pp.

A more appropriate title for this book would have been 'The Middle English Devotional Lyric,' for Dr Patterson has extended its limits to include many pieces not definitely penitential, such as the translation of 'Veni Creator Spiritus' (No. 44), the prayer 'To þe gude angell' (No. 46), 'A Morning Thanksgiving and Prayer to God' (No. 48), and, indeed, with few exceptions the whole latter half of the material which he has assembled. In the case of some of these pieces—as, for example, the 'Pater Noster in Anglico (!)'—even the lyrical quality is difficult to perceive. Nor do all of them show that unity of emotion which Mr Patterson accepts as the true test of the lyric (p. 2). For example, 'A Confessioun to Ihesu Crist' (No. 4) is separable into three distinct poems: (1) a prayer to Christ, (2) a prayer to Our Lady, (3) a prayer to angels, saints, etc.

In his Introduction Mr Patterson severely criticises a classification of religious lyrics 'by means of external—almost accidental—names, such as *Prayers to God, to Christ and to the Virgin Mary*' for the reason that 'the unity of the lyric is not expressed by a title chosen from some convenient external feature of the poem' (p. 2). To group various prayers to the Virgin, as German scholars have done, under the heading *Mariengebete*, is to his mind particularly objectionable, 'as a prayer to Mary may express any one of many religious emotions,—it may be a prayer of confession, a supplication for mercy, an avowal of reformation, or an expression of mystic love-longing. In fact, a title