

The Oxford Book of Ballads by Arthur Quiller-Couch

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epic poem; they could only be obtained through commerce with the world.' It is to be regretted that Mr Verity did not expand this still further, and illustrate more fully Milton's knowledge of human nature, and the niceties of his treatment of character; except for an occasional hint—such as the note on the Council of the Fallen Angels (II, 309)—he does little to prove his assertion; and yet in the face of those critics who still maintain that Milton 'knew human nature only in the gross,' it is well worth enforcing. It is also somewhat surprising to find a modern critic quoting with apparent approval Dryden's complaint 'that Milton saw nature through the spectacles of books,' and calling no attention to such exquisite passages as the description of evening after a stormy day, in Bk. II, ll. 488—95. It is true that in a note on Bk. IX, ll. 445—54, Mr Verity somewhat coldly allows that Milton was 'a true lover of Nature,' but he goes on to say that the poet who dwells with delight on

The smell of grain or tedded grass or kine,

on 'drooping plant and dropping tree,' is not 'minutely accurate.' The introductory essay on the sources of *Paradise Lost* is admirably clear and sane. Due allowance is made for every possible influence which can have affected Milton, without the assumption that every chance resemblance implies deliberate plagiarism. The notes are full, and contain abundant references to the work of former critics, and also to passages from other poets both ancient and modern, whose works may serve to illustrate a point or make an interesting comparison. The beginner will find this edition a storehouse of information, and those who know Milton well will find much to interest them.

G. E. HADOW.

CIRENCESTER.

The Oxford Book of Ballads. Chosen and edited by ARTHUR QUILLER-
COUCH. Oxford: University Press. 1910. 8vo. xxiv + 871 pp.

The ballad-editor's dilemma is between scientific collectivism and literary eclecticism; for the fact is that the ballads are not—or at least were never meant to be—literature. Let him who shies at so plain a statement pause to investigate the true meaning of the word 'literature,' and to contrast it with the true meaning of the word 'lore'; and he will perceive that the ballads are properly communicable only by word of mouth, not to be stereotyped in hard letters and cold lead. The written or printed ballad is an 'animula vagula,' as it were, 'in corpore vili.' It is not easy nowadays for us to assume the right position towards the ballads—which, it may be, has gone past recovery; yet while the editor of a play extant in four folios and six quartos is expected to record all his variants, the editor of ballads may go browse and choose what pleases him most. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has the advantage of a precedent set by Sir Walter Scott and William Allingham; he has also the *variorum* edition of Francis James Child;

and the result is thoroughly satisfactory to everybody who likes the ballads and does not care about their history.

All the best of Child's three hundred and five are here, some of them in more than one form: there are three versions of *Young Bekie*, and *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight* and *May Colvin*, and *Earl Brand* and *The Douglas Tragedy*, are two pairs of variants. We are glad to see the bold inclusion of *King Arthur and King Cornwall* and the *Marriage of Sir Gawain*, from their sadly-mutilated originals in the Percy Folio. Here and there we may cavil at errors of commission or omission in the editing: the hand of the censor has fallen on *Glasgerion*, *Young Hunting*, and *Brown Robyn's Confession* (the only ballad of the Virgin's miracles we possess); Percy's garbled version of the *Boy and the Mantle* is given in place of the delightful original in the Folio MS., and the broadside version of the *Lord of Lorn* instead of the Folio one; *Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard* opens—I think illegitimately—with the refrain of the *Bonny Birdy*; there is a better version of the *Great Silkie of Sule Skerry*, and the one given need not have been altered in the sixth verse; and *Judas* stops very suddenly and quite inexplicably before it has got under weigh. The *Lyke-Wake Dirge* has every right to be included, and it is encouraging to see 'Fire and fleet' adopted in place of 'Fire and sleet.' Towards the end of the book several poems that are not ballads, and some that are frankly folk-songs, are included. *The Spanish Lady's Love* is very like the best of Deloney's work, which to my mind is very like the worst of Deloney's work.

Book IV—'early carols and ballads of Holy Writ'—is most interesting, though some of the poems are certainly not ballads. *The Falcon* and *Jolly Wat* seem to have come out of *Early English Lyrics*; if they did not, Sir Arthur is to be congratulated on correcting the order of the stanzas in the latter; and if they did, he may be asked why he did not also include the modern traditional variant of the *Falcon*, which would seem to have a better claim to a place among ballads than the fifteenth-century lyric. *The Angel Gabriel*, *The Three Kings*, and *The Innocents* are not true ballads; but all the other (too few) English traditional carols are here except *The Bitter Withy*. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch might have added this, and improved the texts of other carols, if he had searched recent numbers of the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*. Would he not like to know of another genuine verse belonging to the carol of *The Seven Virgins*? In return, he should be pressed for a plain statement about his version of *I Saw Three Ships*: the verse about St Michael and St John is only known to me in Ritson's careless quotation from what he calls 'a musical medley' (i.e. Forbes' *Cantus*), and there the form of the stanza is different.

The volume, uniform with the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, needs no bibliographical comment, except that the end-papers, maps of the Border, are a happy idea carried out more picturesquely than usefully.

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LONDON.