

BOOK REVIEWS AND LITERARY NOTES

SONGS TO SAVE A SOUL. SWORDS FOR LIFE.

Irene R. McLeod, New York, Huebsch.

Never has poetry been so free as it is to-day. There is no dominant orthodoxy. Almost the only thing expected of it is the unexpected. The prevailing tendency is the same as in philosophy and education. Traditional standards are regarded with a fresh candour, not interested in maintaining reputations or hypotheses. They lose authority, and keep what interest they may, as revelations of the minds which applied them. This frank attitude enlarges the area of artistic invention and fosters the spirit of adventure. There is much in current poetry that is truly renascent, in the exploration of humanity, in the search for intrinsic values, in the exaltation of the sincere record of experience, in the readiness to sacrifice form before matter, in the refreshment of the sense of wonder. Contemporary lyric poetry is remarkable in its variety—in all its width of range from the "cool and nowise turbid cup from wells our fathers digged," through "short swallow-flights of song, that dip their wings in tears and skim away," to the newest, startling cry of old emotion caught in the rapidly shifting meshes of modern life.

Of this renaissance Miss McLeod is one of the truest voices. She has hardly a trace of the traditional or perfunctory. She has no manner to keep up. She has the fresh outlook, keen feeling and sincere expression—the "innocent" eye and voice—of the true lyricist, the poet unspoiled; whose perceptions are unblurred, spirit unjaded, and words undictated. Her modernity is not enervated by weariness, though she expresses well the weary moods when they come. Her pain and joy are vivid and absorbing, and there is no "dull narcotic exercise" in her verse-making, even when she sings of hopeless and premature sorrow overtaking radiant love. She has the zest of town and field, can love crowds and solitude, can rejoice in the beauty of the human body. She can abandon herself utterly to love's wildest passion, or carol its peace in perfect simplicity, each in its turn with all her heart.

Again and again the eternal child-spirit of the poet breaks into passionate revolt and cries out its Everlasting Yea and Nay:

Though living give my faith the lie,
Though loving clip the wings of love,
Though men humanity disprove,
Though all my suns and moons go out,
Though tongues of all the ages shout
That only death may not deceive,
I'll not believe! I'll not believe!