

# THE LIBRARY TABLE

## A Book of Verse by Robert Watson

Obviously Mr. Robert Watson, the Western Canadian novelist, is an admirer of "R. L. S." but the dedication of his book of verse just published ("The Mad Minstrel" from The Ryerson Press) may remind anyone who notes the forms of book titles and dedications of J. M. Barrie's not-to-be forgotten tribute to his Mother "Margaret Ogilvie". For Mr. Watson, in dedicating this book to the memory of his Mother has, like Barrie, used the maiden name.

It is always easy to raise questions, and it is open for readers to differ in opinion as to the choice of a title. The book is in two parts, part one containing "Weird Tales of the West", and part two "Songs of Everywhere". Those who have had some insight into the testing monotony of Prairie life under Homesteading conditions, will find in "The Frozen Cage" something to commend to the consideration of folk who are tempted to put wealth in land or grain or money before health of body and mind. "Moon-Mad" also has a lesson in it.

"For it wasn't the moon with its sallow light  
That laid God's creation low;  
Nor was it the doing of witch or sprite:  
'Twas the thinking that made it so."

"De Rochelle", one of the longer stories, justifies the word "weird", and may be rather too much so for some people. "The Pluck of Barney Binge" has also a little in it that tries the imagination, but the story illustrates well the truth in the injunction in the first verse:

"Don't reckon a man a coward, Dan,  
Till the grass grows o'er his grave,  
For the worst you've met may alter yet  
And die like an Indian brave."

A change mid the tales of the West will be found in the story of "The Madness of Glaucus". (There's 'Madness' in several pieces in the book, but there's some "method in all the madness"). "Glaucus" was "a noted general when Rome was in its fame". Like "Moon-Mad", this number emphasises the influence of what one believes on the condition of the mind. Of the remaining pieces in this section "Perpetual Pat" and "Tailless Pete" may make differing appeal to readers, but "A Yukon Bantam's Lay" should entertain all alike.

The second part of the book opens with "Come to the West, Dearie!" a short poem, which we believe appeared (as did a few others in the book) in the BRITISH COLUMBIA MONTHLY. Following the first, are the suggestive verses "To Life—And Death". These indicate that Mr. Watson is capable of producing bigger things.

"Ah, Life! is't true the partnership between us two  
Is half-way through?  
Half-way! And yet, it seems, I romped but yesterday  
Among the hay,  
A merry, red-cheeked, barefoot boy, without a care;  
—Free as the air—  
While stretched before me lay a world of joy and strife;  
And you—my Life."

This also from "Dawn":—

"The voice of the morning whispered  
Its lesson of love it taught;  
That life and peace are eternal;  
That evil on earth is nought  
But a sinful dream, and transient:  
The offspring of wrongful thought:

That every thought is a power  
Our freedom to speed or stay  
When not a murmur or discord  
Shall challenge the harmony;  
When man shall attain perfection.  
Like earth at the break of day."

Among other pieces that call for comment are "The Quick—and The Dead"; "My Creed"; the lines under "R. L. S." which close with these: "When'er I feel inflated by some trivial success, I just stand before that picture with the letters,—R. L. S."

Mr. Watson has evidently been unable to resist a disposition to descend—or rise?—to the use of his native Scots tongue, and "To an Old Chum" and one or two other pieces will have their own appeal to his compatriots who are now Canadians. "Agree, Bairn—Agree", though in English, will be included in this group because of the association of the words.

The verses "To Sleep" close with this happy thought:

"Loving so well the boons of your bestowing,  
Why should we dread your Elder Brother's strength?  
'Tis but to slumber while the soul is growing;  
To wake at length."

The value that may be put on the book from the point of view of literary or poetic power, will no doubt vary according to the standard of analysis of the critic. But in giving this impression of a first reading of Robert Watson's first book of verse, and in commending more what we can to consideration rather than to question, we do so trusting that, as Mr. Watson's "Scroll of Life is yet but part unrolled," he may, in what remains to him, surpass himself in both prose and verse.

D. A. C.

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