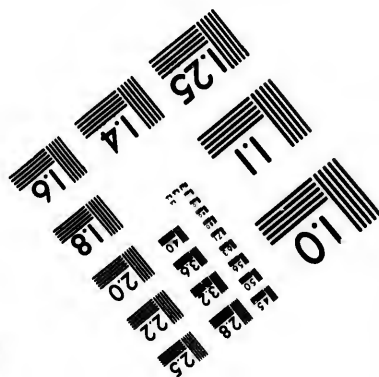
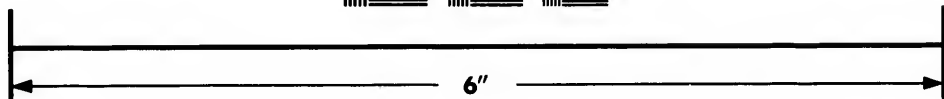
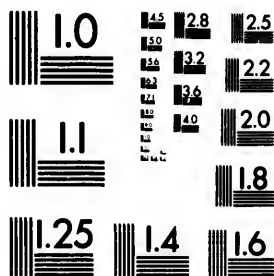


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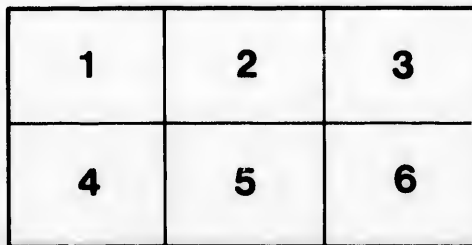
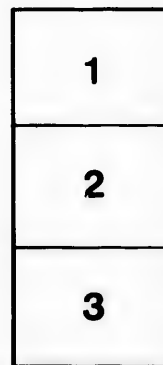
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Louise Frosger Guiney.

CONTEMPORARIES—IV

LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY

“NORTH from the beautiful islands,
North from the headlands and highlands,
The long sea-wall,
The white ships flee with the swallow ;
The day-beams follow and follow,
Glitter and fall.

The brown ruddy children that fear not,
Lean over the quay, and they hear not
Warnings of lips ;
For their hearts go a-sailing, a-sailing,
Out from the wharves and the wailing
After the ships.”

Such are the first lines of the first page of a little volume of poems, called “Songs at the Start,” published in Boston ten years ago. It is not a particularly original or characteristic poem, this “Gloucester Harbor,” yet it is smooth and sweet with a charm reminiscent of Longfellow in his sea verse. It repeats his cadences and the color of his peaceful reverie just touched with pathos.

“Woe, woe, for the old fascination !
The women make deep lamentation
In starts and in slips ;
Here always is hope unavailing,
Here always the dreamers are sailing
After the ships !”

This might easily have been written of the gentle poet of the Charles, who has indeed laid so many young writers under

his spell. The volume as a whole, however, hardly keeps up our delight of these opening lines and contains little else, I fancy, that its author will care to preserve, with the exception of one brief lyric.

SPRING.

“ Again the bloom, the northward flight,
The fount freed at its silver height,
And down the deep woods to the lowest,
The fragrant shadows scarred with light.

“ O inescapable joy of spring !
For thee the world shall leap and sing ;
But by her darkened door thou goest
Forever as a spectral thing.”

There is in these verses alone any hint of the racy and wonderful style Miss Guiney was soon to develop. But her second venture in the sea of letters, “The White Sail,” published some three years later, show a marked advance upon the first and contains a number of distinctly original and notable poems. It is full of that delightful freshness of health which lends her words their inspiring quality. The joy of her lyric mood is as clear and inevitable as the “inescapable joy of spring.” Absolute sincerity and health possess her lines and bear them with a rush beyond the commonplace monotony of minor chords. She is never dolorous and never dull. Even natural sorrow is so infused with the perennial gladness of this beautiful world as to become scarcely more poignant than an ancient tale of pathos.

“The young Sun rides the mist anew ; his cohorts follow
from the sea.
Let Aztec children shout and sue, the Persian bend a thank-
ful knee :

Those glad Auroral eyes shall beam not anywhere hence-
forth on me.

“Up with the banners on the height, set every matin bell
astir!

The tree-top choirs carouse in light; the dew's on phlox and
lavender;

Ah, mockery! for, worlds away, the heart of morning beats
with her.”

The exquisite touch is here, the lightness of hand, the perfection of temper. Not to be overborne by the turbulence of our days, nor too much moved by any sadness, is the first lesson of art,—art, that helper and continual solace of the world's life. So that the great artist must be first of all joyous, then assured, then fervent, then unrestrained and out of all bounds save those of his own conscience and contriving. His only patent is originality. And while he says something new about all the facts of experience, he brings them all to the touchstone of his unjaded spirit. He must not merely see Homer's world with an eye trained to minuter vision and wider sweep, he must bring to its appreciation a zest as wholly unspoiled as that of a savage. If the revelations of knowledge mean for him the dissolution of old faiths and historic creeds, he must not despond; he must have merely so much faith the more, believing that what has come safely so far may be trusted to journey to the end without any anxiety of his. He must know that while dogma, which is only fossilized creed, can never be anything more than a curiosity, the need of worship is a craving of the human heart, a living desire neither to be ridiculed nor overthrown. If the discoveries of science seem for the time to overshadow the achievements of art, he must only rejoice, remembering that art has been the mother of science, and that all science has returned the benefits of its parent a thousand fold. When he hears

on every side the detractors of art belauding science and decrying the work of the artist as a thing long past use to the world, he will recall similar periods of history and smile to think how art has always been entirely equal to the task of absorbing whatever innovations science might unfold. He will keep in mind forever and ever the necessary place of art in the general economy of the state, and no temporary dethronement of his mistress will cause his loyalty to swerve. While the artist, then, ponders the word of God in the wind through the tree, he will be glad and brave before all other men.

But the artist will be the gladdest and bravest of men only if he is great. For the same sensitiveness of inward vision which makes the great artist the happiest of his kind will make a lesser spirit the most miserable. Revelation will come to him as a burden too heavy to be borne, not as a rapture too keen to be expressed. So you will find all the minor poets of a nation piping in a minor key, while their greater and robuster brothers are bearing up the eternal chorus of the world, refrain after refrain, to the final triumph of right and love and beauty and goodness, to the final assurance of gladness and the contentedness of peace.

The true artist, therefore, in these qualities of courage and hope must be distinctly the most manly of his fellows, and there is no more manly note in American letters to-day than that which rings through the lyrics of the little lady of *Auburndale*. She can put more valor in a single line than one can squeeze from our periodical poets in a twelve month. For it is a sorry but certain fact that our magazines are fast becoming the *nincompoopiana* of literature. And this not because they are ill-conducted, but because their practical success depends upon it. We must always make allowance in any art for the influence of popular demand. When we consider the circulation necessary to make a book or a mag-

azine a practical success, the wonder is, not that contemporary letters are so poor, but that they are so good.

A ballad like "Tarpeia" or a single lyric like "The Wild Ride," has virility enough to furnish the ordinary minor poet with lyric passion ten times over. I am permitted to quote a version of the latter lyric, longer by two stanzas than that contained in "The White Sail."

"I hear in my heart, I hear in its ominous pulses
All day, the commotion of sinewy mane-tossing horses ;
All night, from their cells, the importunate tramping and
neighing.

"Let cowards and laggards fall back; but alert to the saddle,
Straight, grim and abreast, vault our weather-worn galloping
legion,
With a stirrup-cup each to the one gracious woman that
loves him.

"The road is thro' dolor and dread, over crags and morasses ;
There are shapes by the way, there are things that appal or
entice us :
What odds? We are knights, and our souls are but bent
on the riding !

"Thought's self is a vanishing wing, and joy is a cobweb,
And friendship a flower in the dust, and glory a sunbeam :
Nor here is our prize, nor, alas ! after these our pursuing.

"A dipping of plumes, a tear, a shake of the bridle,
A passing salute to this world, and her pitiful beauty !
We hurry with never a word in the track of our fathers.

"I hear in my heart, I hear in its ominous pulses,
All day the commotion of sinewy mane-tossing horses,
All night, from their cells, the importunate tramping and
neighing.

"We spur to a land of no name, out-racing the storm-wind;
We leap to the infinite dark, like the sparks from the anvil.
Thou leadest, O God! All's well with thy troopers that
follow."

To find just such another dauntless note, the very elation of courage, we must go to Miss Guiney's own new volume, "A Roadside Harp," a particularly pleasing piece of book-making, by the way. There in "The Kings," and in the following extract from "The Knight Errant," we are touched in the same strain.

"Spirits of old that bore me,
And set me, meek of mind,
Between great dreams before me,
And deeds as great behind,
Knowing humanity my star
As first abroad I ride,
Shall help me wear, with every scar,
Honor at eventide.

* * * * *

"O give my youth, my faith, my sword,
Choice of the heart's desire:
A short life in the saddle, Lord!
Not long life by the fire.

"Forethought and recollection
Rivet mine armor gay!
The passion for perfection
Redeem my failing way!"

"The passion for perfection," that is so characteristic of our time! Indeed all our artistic activity may be said to be distributed among two classes, those who have a passion for perfection, and those who have a madness for reform.

While the latter are running with socialism, realism, "veritism," the New Ethic, the New Education, the New Granny's Nightcap, and all sorts of feather-toppers whatever, the former are frittering away their efforts in symbolism and the deceptive sound. In matters of faith, too, the latter are devoured by a thousand untried notions and nostrums for the betterment of this precious race of pigmies, while the former have turned back to a paganism older than Athens, a paganism on which the shadow of the time has passed as a cloud on the sea. "To a Dog's Memory," "Open Time," "Athassel Abbey," "A Friend's Song for Limdisius," there is no more gracious and winning and impassioned note in English letters to-day than rings through these beautiful and pagan, perfectly pagan, lyrics. Listen to the opening of the last :

"The breath of dew, and twilight's grace,
Be on the lonely battle place ;
And to so young, so kind a face,
The long protecting grasses cling !
(Alas, alas,
The one inexorable thing !)

"In rocky hollows cool and deep,
The bees our boyhood hunted sleep ;
The early moon from Ida's steep
Comes to the empty wrestling-ring.
(Alas, alas,
The one inexorable thing !)

"Upon the widowed wind recede
No echoes of the shepherd's reed,
And children without laughter lead
The war-horse to the watering.
(Alas, alas,
The one inexorable thing !)"

And again listen to the close of "Athassel Abbey."

"But I am wind that passes
In ignorant wild tears,
Uplifted from the grasses,
Blown to the void of years,

"Blown to the void, yet sighing
In thee to merge and cease,
Last breath of beauty's dying,
Of sanctity, of peace!

"Tho' use nor place forever
Unto my soul befall,
By no beloved river
Set in a saintly wall,

"Do thou by builders given
Speech of the dumb to be,
Beneath thine open heaven,
Athassel, pray for me!"

It is given to few poets to write so. And if such lines are not unmistakable proof of genius of the very finest lyric quality, one must be sadly deluded as to what is good and bad in English poetry. While this writer is thus so worthy a follower of the masters of song, she is in her serene unvexed temper at one with that eternal paganism which lies like the deep sea calms far below all passing storms of faction and fashion and the virulence of creed.

There are, it seems to me, two characteristics in Miss Guiney's work, either one of which would render her most worthy of distinction as a poet. The first is this pagan quality of joy, which she must inherit from our New England saint, Emerson; the second is a rich and anything but modern quality of style entirely her own, yet one whose seeds

must have been sown by those robust and individual poets of the Elizabethan times. I find none of the verse-makers of to-day whose product is so markedly original and at the same time so free from affectation. It is easy to adopt this or that sort of originality at will,—to acquire a mannerism. But real style is an attitude of the heart, a frame of mind, quite impossible to imitate. When suffused by an abundant wholesome imagination, as in the author of "A Roadside Harp," such an attitude of spirit, such a power of style, becomes capable of the rarest self-revelation and expression in art. Take for instance that lovely "Ballad of Kenelm." So absolutely fresh and unhackneyed in every line, yet so free from any taint of affectation, it could only have been born of the most genuine poetic impulse working through the sincerest and most unconscious style.

"They travelled down the lane,
An hour's dust they made."

"But once I hear the blackbird in Leighlin hedges call,
The foolishness is on me, and the wild tears fall"

"He has done with roofs and men,
Open, Time, and let him pass."

"The gusty morns are here,
When all the reeds ride low with level spear."

These are the things, so simple in their loveliness, which look so easy to do, and which none but a master ever achieves. Like Browning, Miss Guiney has often a too curious and irresponsible fancy which leads her through perplexities of speech; she wreaks expression upon some thought too trivial or vague or remote to be worth the while; and yet like the great Victorian of "Pippa Passes" or "Home Thoughts from Abroad," she has at command a golden unmarred deliciousness of cadence and a smooth sufficiency of utterance, that make all rival effort toil in vain.

Nothing, for example, could be more winning in unstudied simplicity, more [graciously touched with haunting quiet, than these lines:

“When on the marge of evening the last blue light is broken,
And winds of dreamy odor are loosened from afar,
Or when my lattice opens, before the lark has spoken,
On dim laburnum-blossoms and morning's dying star,

“I think of thee, (O mine the more if other eyes be sleeping!)
Whose great and noonday splendor the many share and see,
While sacred and forever, some perfect law is keeping
The late and early twilight alone and sweet for me.”

And so we lay aside [this thin little volume of exquisite poetry, reassured that [it is only the blind who can believe that the poets are all dead to-day, while there walks among us a very child of the old Greek spirit,

“Whose random hand
[Struck from the dark whole scenes like these,
Archaic beauty, never planned
Nor reared by wan degrees,

“Which leaves an artist poor, and art
An earldom richer all her years;”

We lay it aside with one quotation more, summing up in a single couplet, itself worthy of the Greek Anthology, the light-hearted philosophy of that elder paganism, a hundred times overthrown by the casuistries of the schools, yet always returning with its unobtrusive solace, dauntless and unperturbed, to our human need at last. How large and sweet a benediction of farewell within the small compass of a score of words!

“Praise thou the Mighty Mother for what is wrought,
not me,
A nameless nothing-caring head asleep against her knee.”

BLISS CARMAN.

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