

Books and Plays

The Meeting

By JAMES CHICHESTER

I saw them meet upon the hill,
Circe and the fair Persephone;
The day was hushed and strangely still—
The maid came led by Mercury.

The meeting on that teeming mound
Set signals for all things to rise;
Green growths came springing from the ground
And rain fell softly from the skies.

First Glance

"MAY DAYS: An Anthology of Verse from *Masses-Liberator*," edited by Genevieve Taggard (Boni and Liveright: \$3), possesses a merit which is so rare in anthologies of contemporary verse that it deserves to be cried out. "May Days" is interesting. Numberless other collections of modern poems are more or less valuable for reference, and some of them are indispensable. But they are not continuously readable, and the reason is, I fancy, that the contents are catholically chosen for their excellence alone. Now it happens that we differ in nothing today so much as in our notions as to what constitutes excellence and importance in poetry; so that a "representative" volume of the "best" poems will of necessity be a hodge-podge both of ideas and of styles, and one may be sure that the future, having its own conviction as to what was important in our time, will find most of the going in these anthologies very hard. I have always believed that an anthology should be one-sided, that it should reflect only the prejudices of the editor or the tendencies of his school. It will then be interesting to certain readers at any rate; and if in the long run it prove all wrong, surely that will be the next best thing to having proved all right. I neither know nor care what the future will think of "May Days," but I am positive that it will be in no doubt as to the character of the book. For it has a character. All of the poems in it are the product of a point of view.

Just what that point of view was Miss Taggard has had some difficulty in saying in her introduction. And no wonder, since it shifted with events and with the coming and going of personalities. It is with the shifts that Miss Taggard has had the most trouble—and again no wonder, considering that the period of which she writes the intellectual history in fifteen pages included not only "a war and a revolution and five or six famines" but a most engaging holiday—a May Day—of free speech just on the eve of the war and the revolution referred to. Yet in the main Miss Taggard has brilliantly succeeded in suggesting the spirit which moved the poets and cartoonists of the *Masses* and the *Liberator* in those most exciting days of American journalism. "What survived," writes Floyd Dell, "was a collection of pictures, articles, stories, poems, and plays so gay and bold, so new and vivid and forceful, that the magazine [the *Masses*] became a sort of rallying-place for young genius from all over the country." Here are the best of the poems.

"Although much fine poetry was published in the

Masses-Liberator," says Miss Taggard, "I have not tried to restrict this anthology to verse of conspicuous poetic merit. Much of the best is light verse. I have tried to preserve everything that gave the flavor of those days." Wherein, of course, she was exactly right. There are many pieces of conspicuous merit—by John Reed, Max Eastman, E. E. Cummings, C. E. S. Wood, James Rorty, Carl Sandburg, Louis Untermeyer, Hazel Hall, Louise Bogan, Genevieve Taggard, Vachel Lindsay, and Amy Lowell. But light verse and propaganda verse predominate, and they are what give body to the book. And the final distinction is given it by several longer poems toward the end which, although they were called forth by particular events, still breathe with passion and anger and pity. These are *Third Degree* and *The Strange Funeral* in Brad-dock, by Michael Gold, and *Tom Mooney* and *The Heretics*, by William Ellery Leonard.

MARK VAN DOREN

The Latest Negro

The New Negro. Edited by Alain Locke. Albert and Charles Boni. \$5.

THIS book marks an epoch in the hectic career of the American Negro. It illuminates an intellectual revolution which owes its origin and expression to a multiplying series of social changes during the past decade. In undermining and annihilating the Negro myth it functions as a clarifying and signal contribution to contemporary thought.

What is the new Negro? The old Negro, according to the common conception, was an indolent, docile creature without the spirit of resistance or the desire for independence. Like most common conceptions, this one is wildly erroneous. Before the American Revolution alone, for instance, over twenty-five rebellions of black slaves occurred. After the revolution the rebellions multiplied. The struggle in Haiti under the courageous leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the aid rendered Bolivar in his vivid victories in South and Central America, the reaction of the Negro in the past war all parade in formidable contradiction to the conception. These insurrections, however, were evidences of primitive recalcitrancy and aggressiveness rather than of a provocative and intelligent rebelliousness. They were the frantic, futile struggles of a suppressed race. The new Negro represents a different reaction. He is rebellious likewise, but his passions have become subtilized, his primitivism refined. He has discovered a new weapon—the pen. A new culture is in the process of evolution. And the present volume is an expression of that culture. The great diversity among the topics it treats is a sound indication of the versatility of the Negro genius. Here is represented the effervescence of a new spirit in an ancient people.

The cultural growth of the Negro since the Civil War went through two evolutions before it reached its present culmination in the philosophy of the new Negro. The first stage was characterized by a passionate imitation of the culture of the white race. White mores, white conceptions, white ideals became for the Negro the source of both inspiration and aspiration. Negro leaders fell in line with this servile, goose-step procession. The second stage revealed a revolution in attitude. This period was marked by the literature of protest. Imitation was transformed into antagonism. Things white were denounced and things black were eulogized. In Negro fiction, for example, the heroes were black and the villains white. It was a period of melodramatic sentimentality. This stage reached its apex of extravagance and fanaticism in the Garvey movement with its "back to Africa" slogan, its Black Star Line