



Collected poems: With an introd. by John Drinkwater (1922)

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TWO years ago Mr. Edwin Arlington Robinson reached his fiftieth birthday. On that occasion he was publicly

greeted by nearly every poet of any distinction in America as the master of them all. Enlightened criticism in that country has for long recognised him as having more clearly the qualities of permanence, perhaps, than any other American

now writing. Even a poet so unlike Mr. Robinson himself in aim and method as Miss Amy Lowell devoted a long chapter in her book on Tendencies in American Poetry to the work of one whose distinction she finely acknowledges. A new book by Mr. Robinson has in America, among the austere critics at least, as much importance, shall we say, as a new book by Mr. Yeats has to those in this country. And yet, with all this, there is, I suppose, no poet of anything like his excellence in America who is there so little known as more than a name, while in this country at present he can hardly be said even to be a name. I do not think that any of his books are to be found in an English publisher's list, and in reviewing a recently issued anthology of contemporary American verse, at the length of two columns, the Times Literary Supplement passed him by without reference, while the Nation and Athenceum, with even less excuse,

since in that case it could not be merely an oversight, spoke of him only to dismiss him in two or three lines as being duller than Wordsworth at his dullest. A third writer, in the Saturday Review, can only say that his " compositions are to a strange degree " like those of Miss Amy Lowell and Mr. Sandburg. It would be as intelligent to say that the poems of Edgar Allan Poe are like those of Walt Whitman. Ignorance is all very well, and even rather charming in its place, but when it begins to commit absurdities of this kind something ought to be done

about it. A critic who discusses contemporary American poetry .and thinks that Mr. Robinson is either not worth mentioning at all or only to be mentioned with contempt, or that his poetry is like Mr. Sandburg's, simply does not know his business and ought to change it for another.

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