Review of "Manhattan Men: Poems and Epitaphs"

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BOOK REVIEWS

and sincere. Unlike many autobiographies the note of modesty persists throughout the whole story. As one reads the story of this cultured yet simple Christian, one is strangely reminded of the life of Saint Paul. The story presents a picture and a challenge. We have here the picture of a man who searches beneath the limitations of organized Christianity for a deep, abiding, and mystic friendship with Jesus, and finds the path of vicarious suffering to be the road to life abundant. We are confronted with a challenge that, shaking us from our modern religious complacency, bids us take New Testament religion seriously as this modern apostle is doing in India.

Some have predicted that this book will cause a "revival of primitive Christianity." Still others see it as an adventure in biography which is not surpassed by any other of its type. At least it can be ranked among the best religious books of the past decade and it gives promise of being one of the most read books of its kind for the year. It is particularly to the student of the psychology of religious experience that this book will appeal.

W. F. R.

Manhattan Men, by Alfred Kreymborg...Coward McCann, Inc., New York, 1929.

This dizzying age of gin, jazz, mechanistic materialism, and sophisticated veneer has truly entered the field of art and we find our presses thundering day in and day out to saturate the already flooded book stalls with volume after volume of superficial trash. It is the product of the new age, we are told, bizarre, impressionistic, experimental.

It is reasonable to suppose that there are some things relative to art that must be held necessarily to a high standard at all times. One of these things is poetry. Matthew Arnold tells us that we should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. Certainly, not all poetic attempt approaches the standard of Arnold, but the tested poetry of an age does hold to a high requirement that gives it distinction and quality. Wordsworth has rather given us the high requirement suggested by Arnold when he says poetry is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." And this, combined with a discriminating observation of the mechanics of verse, gives us poetry capable of fulfilling high destinies.

But from the anthology, Manhattan Men, by Alfred Kreymborg, it is not wholly impossible to imagine that Mr. Kreymborg neither conceives of poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," or attempts to give poetry even a place among the arts. For to believe his collec-
tion is even a poor attempt at art—is to obliterate entirely the distinction between the excellent and the hopelessly inferior.

The author has divided his anthology into three main divisions. The first, entitled, New York Old and New, contains some old ballads reminiscent of Frankie and Johnnie, as well as some supposedly clever and acute observations on Manhattan. The second section, Manhattan Epitaphs, reminds one of the little jottings on the pad beside the telephone, and the third section, Park Avenue Lyrics, is not even worth consideration.

In the realm of poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honor, that charlatanism shall find no entrance. And if ever poetry was charlatanism this is. Mr. Kreymborg’s observations are timely, to be sure, but far from startling. He never approaches grandeur in any form, neither can he plead naiveness. From the following we can hardly say he possesses liquid diction or fluid movement:

**Empire**

As soon as we need oil in Mexico  
There’ll be plenty of lads glad to go  
And wrest all the oil from the Mexican  
And lay down their lives again.

And is this the art of poetry?

**Love**

Life  
may be out  
of season now  
but not  

Love.

Mr. Kreymborg, we regret, is catering here to the modern school. His anthology is deceiving. It is a representation of an artless period, inartistically expressed.

J. S. S.