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CORRESPONDENCE

AN ENGLISH POET ON "POETRY"

Dear Editor: I resent any attacks made in England on your exquisite and ably edited magazine—*POETRY* of Chicago. It is full of daring and lovely experiment and achievement.

For example, I find the work of H. D. and Max Michelson very beautiful, and sincerely think that numbers of American artists are ahead—in the mass—of ours.

There are, as you are of course aware, a number of similar experiments in metre and feeling, going on in Italy and France among the younger men. I could give you many names—interesting as those of R. Aldington, Ezra Pound or R. Frost. And as an old contributor to the *Saturday Review* perhaps I may say that poetical criticism in England just now, from a number of social causes, is at a very low level. It has never, as compared with France, been generally high in England.

The English, after fifty or sixty years, have, for instance, still not the faintest idea of how great a poet they possessed—how Greek an artist—in Matthew Arnold. He is still thought to be far inferior to Tennyson; whereas Tennyson, compared to Arnold, was a talented child, who grew up into a venal muddler of the Millais standard. He was a considerable man; as an artist he had no trace of greatness about him. So bad is English natural taste, so confused, that it took nearly three hundred years or so—till about

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1771, the date of the publication of Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (and of course Mackenzie was a Scotchman)—before English published criticism noticed that there was anything in the least remarkable or subtle about Shakespeare's handling of the character of Hamlet. This was unobserved by the best English critics—Dryden, Pope, Addison and Johnson.

We are in the art of literature a people vital, but coarse, stupid, and exceedingly confused. We live in a draughty channel between the continental and the insular. Our mind is always in what is called a "tide-up"; rough waters like those at the meeting of the streams of the North Sea and the Atlantic off Dover.

Off Dover, you must know, there is never the normal eight minutes of "slack water" at the turning of flow into ebb. There is always a mad churning between two seas. And England is always in a witch's reel between Hebraism and Hellenism; materialism (commercial cynicism) against social reform; political wealth against popular poverty. At present England is exhausted by her massive political effort to transform herself into a self-directed and perfectly free nation. She is extremely noble, a great nation; but she has at present apparently no intelligence or fine leisure of feeling left over, after the shock of parties and of armies, in which to practice or adequately to criticise, the finest of the fine arts. She has, for example (and this we owe to an admixture of savage inertia into Philistine Puritanism), no National Theatre. And her living poets must endow her

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with beauty in her own despite. They should expect no reward, for they will certainly receive none—why should they fare better than Shakespeare, Arnold, Shelley or Blake? And perhaps that is best. One may remember Athenian treatment of Socrates and Pheidias, and be patient with our people. They do not know that "the beautiful is hard."

Herbert Trench

Scattignano, Italy, Dec. 2nd, 1918

A CORRECTION

Alice Corbin regrets that the final version of her poem, *Song of Sunlight*, arrived from Santa Fe too late for revision of the text last month. We record it here, in order that subscribers may enter the change in their copies. The final stanza should read:

Sunlight, I am mad with your light.
Rocks, earth,
I have never known you before.
Suns, you are powdered like rocks
In my body.
Earth, your red canyons
Are sluiced through me,
The crests of your hills
Break over me—
I ride upward to meet them.