THE
AUSSIE WOMAN

This Section, written by Women, is devoted to things about Women that should be known by Men, and things about Men that should be known by Women.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN POETS

By EVE'S DAUGHTER.

Poetry, as a word, has become as overworked as the word camouflage, and few people when they speak of poetry ever stop to reason whether or not of which they are speaking is poetry or verse. Perhaps it is not really necessary to reason, for even bad verse may become good poetry. To thousands, Ella Wheeler Wilcox is probably the greatest poet who ever lived. The soul output. Yet a too great facility is often as fatal as labouring achievement; smooth ease transforms strength and beauty into refined prettiness.

Every woman is a poet—instinctively and naturally. But women fail of high achievement because they lack the power of adequate and high expression. Then—what is poetry? No definition covers the real thing, because always the spirit is missed in the explanation. For those who know, poetry can be distinguished from verse as easily as chalk from cheese. There is a fair, a something, which says "This is poetry" and "This is not poetry." Except for purposes of world standards, a hard and fast rule is very difficult to apply, because individual taste and preference always enter into judgment. Keble says, "On the one hand, are the poets who, spontaneously moved by impulse, resort to composition for relief and solace of a burdened or overworked mind; on the other, those who for one reason or another, imitate the ideas, the expression and measure of the forms." That is good but hardly goes far enough. "Poetry," says Shelley, "may be defined as the expression of the imagination." But that definition also courts argument on the breadth and meaning of the word "imagination." Coleridge's idea of poetry still stands perhaps one of the best. Good prose he defined as proper words in their proper places; poetry, the most proper words in the most proper places. If it is this instinctive use of the right word that can change the feeling and value of a whole stanza.

I said that women are poets instinctively, and I add that the emotional thrill can be obtained in many other ways than by rhyming words. To me, the humblest scullerymaid, who pauses for a moment in the midst of washing blackened pots and pans to watch the setting sun, and is capable of expressing her feelings only by the words, "Isn't the sunset lovely?" is as much a poet instinctively as the man or woman whose genius reflects itself in a poem. There are people so obsessed by the mystery of beauty that they must remain forever inarticulate for very lack of some medium by which they can give expression to their emotions. Poetry of soul, even an instinctive, inarticulate kind, thrills no less because it thrills mutely. Most of us are keenly susceptible to beauty and a sense of romance gives some form to the few of us are able to give vent to our longings in anything but suepuddings and children's clothes. Yet that is not to say that the feelings are not there, and alive.

Women, mostly, are versaile, not poets. They write charmingly, forseibly—sometimes tenderly; but generally they lack that ability for sustained flight and adequate expression which would enable them to reach the highest levels of achievement. The whimsical "Bellerive" wrote years ago:

The she-poet plays with the thinnest things, those precious for fairies and grass-hoppers' wings. The shooes of the beetle, the tram foars of greats, And all to get shhillings to trim up her haps.

That is not strictly true, but there is an element of truth in it. Poetry to those who never soar into the realms of poetry.

Yet all the women I am going to deal with have more than a little claim to recognition, because they have soared higher than the many charming verse-writers. Perhaps not one of them can be called great—in a world view—but for ourselves they deserve merit and credit for what they have achieved. More so, because they are our own. Mary Gilmore must rank high in any history of Australian literature. Her verses have an intimacy which has sometimes marred her expression, but her sincerity, force and passion are noteworthy in a welter of smooth, charming rhymes. "Had I felt less intensely," she says, "I would have had an easy command of words. Marrīd was written in snatched moments, consequently only such thought as could be seized and shaped in a few moments could be taken for expression. Marrīd was written at the wash-tub, while baking bread, house cleaning and all the rest. If I could not get my hands out of the dough or the ends quickly enough, the thought was lost."

Everybody knows the homeliness of Marrīd:

"It's splinin' an' ou'.
Air feelin' full of grace;
Here's there, up an' down,
An' round about th' place."

"It's rollin' up your sleeves.
An' whitenin' up the heath.
An' scrubbin' out th' floors.
An' sweepin' down th' path;"

DUNLOP TENNIS BALLS FOR QUALITY & PRICE

 случая вы хотите получить.
Aussie

It's bakin' tarts an' pies,
An' shinnin' up th' knives;
An' feelin' 'e if some days
Was worth a thousand lives.

It's watchin' cat' th' door,
An' watchin' by th' gate;
An' wonderin' why he's late...
An' wishin' all at once,
An' smilin' just so sweet;
An' feelin' real proud.

The place is fresh an' neat.

An' feelin' awful glad
Like them that watched Sil'um;
An' everything because
A man is come! Home!

Mary Gilmore was born on August 16, 1860—racyly Celtic, with French and a little Spaniard blood in earlier generations. As an infant of three she was very sensitive to music—if Celtic. She would beg her mother to sing The Irish Bagpiper and The Bonnie Hills of Scotland, and certain musical phrases in these caused almost an anguish of emotional feeling. She would cry out of the room to weep unseen, and get blamed for asking for what she would not listen to.

Mary Gilmore (Mary Cameron; she married in 1877 William Alexander Gilmore in Colonia, an offshoot of New Australia in Paraguay, South America) began to write at 6 or 7 years—a fancy of composition chiefly in the form of letters. "Ifthere," she says, "I had written set copies and dictations, but had not known that I could use words to express my own thoughts.

Could scarcely eat, and never played at school in the dinner, filling slate after slate with compositions, imaginative and descriptive of natural phenomena such as sunshine, red roads, wind, rain, sky, the colours of a cow, or how wonderful was the shine and color of a chestnut horse, etc." Later she went as a pupil teacher to Wagga for four years, and later still to Sydney, where she became interested in the Labour Movement through William Lane. She worked with him for the New Australia movement, and went to Paraguay a theorist of socialist and returned after five years experience a confirmed Socialist.

"The war and its conditions have justified our experiment," she says. "We failed because we were but one while drop in a world-ocean not white. To-day we would not fail, because the world trend is toward and not from us. Paraguay would take a whole book to itself—as our stories, our tragedies, our comedies, our serious childlessness, our ridiculous Britishness, our influence on half a continent. The Australians work like three men and are sober; the English are drunken. . . . said South America."

After the party left Paraguay Mary Cameron went to Buenos Ayres for a while, then through the way to Patagonia, and after much hardship returned to Australia via London and Bombay.

Mary Gilmore has edited the Women's Page of the Worker since the beginning of 1929. Her books are Mermaid and Other Verses, The Worker Cook Book, The Tale of Teddy Wicks, The Passionate Heart. Three books are to come—one in prose and two in verse.

Her last book, The Passionate Heart, is the book of a true woman, and contains some of her best work. Her memorial verses for our dead, are among the noblest testimonies yet written in Australia, and The Corp is probably one of the most starkly tragic pieces of verse which has been penned by a woman anywhere:

O wind of hell that smote the corn
And whipped it down to swathed forlorn!
O wind of hell that split the blood
That poured upon the corn in flood!
The corn that all men set for food
And human corn created good.
O horror of The Thousand Days, That drew across the world a trail Where the only sound was a broken wall Where the fanatic corn was trodden down And the mud rose over it stale and brown!

O human corn of the serried ranks
What was the wind that left you blanked The hungry world that asked for you Knows only a shuddering through and through

Known only the cry of the broken heart And the empty stand in the harvest mart The yellow corn, the ripened corn The evening came and we knew it not; We only heard the whining shot; We only knew the wind of death Had swept upon it with dreadful death.

These Fellow Workers is a regretful dirge for the young blood spent, of noble souls struggling, yet there is a measure of hope running throughout it all.

Let us make lamentation for our young. Make lamentation for our dead. Weeping with all the mothers of the world. Whose blood in these is shed.

But shall the blood beget new seed, And the grain be fruit of flavor When the world makes pause to look at the dead And the long hate dies in an hour.

Mary Gilmore is the poet of striving humanity, and no other verse permeates a great many of her verses. Here is the delightful Gipsy Babe:

Thy mother was a lover
Flaming and wild.
Thou shalt have for cover
Wool from the sheep.

Thou shalt have for pillow
Down from the swallow.
Thou shalt have for love
Sorrows the sea.
Thou shalt have for life
Tracks of the sheep.
Thou shalt have for angel
Watching over thee.

Deep in the heather,
One golden bee.

Then there is the beauty of crocuses sparkling in the sunlight, rainbows, sea-shells and gossamer:

The moon came dancing down the sky All in her silver gown.
The dewdrops held her a looking glass, And the fairies piped her a tune.

And, oh, the star-dust under her feet, Plashed out sparkling and flew, As she danced as light as a fairy might On the tips of her dainty shoe.

Women's cry throughout the ages is epitomized in Eve-Born—one of the finer things in The Passionate Heart:

I span and Eve span A thread to bind the heart of man; But the more we span, the more we found It wasn't his heart but ours we bound! For children gathered about our knees The thread was a chain that stole our ease.

There was a tear of tears for eyes That more than man was love and prise. But deep in the heart of one of us lay A root of loss and hidden dismay.

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