

INWARD COMPANION. By Walter de la Mare. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)

THE REGION OF THE SUMMER STARS. By Charles Williams. (Oxford: Geoffrey Cumberlege; 6s.)

Nothing in poetic style could be further removed from the lapidary perfection of Mr de la Mare's small, minutely introspective lyrics than the plunging, hypnotic verse in which Charles Williams recorded his adventure into the maze of that strange web where the Celtic belief in the Suspended Parousia is entangled with the Provençal eroticism of the Troubadours. But the Oxford University Press has brought out a new edition of *The Region of the Summer Stars*, Charles Williams' difficult sequel to the equally difficult, but no less splendid *Taliessin through Logres* in the same week that sees the publication of *Inward Companion*, a collection of new poems by Mr de la Mare. The appearance of these books marked the most important poetical events of the autumn publishing season. This apparently fortuitous conjunction has disclosed at least one point where these so various poets have shared an experience. Charles Williams, looking outward into the legends and the symbols they typify, pauses suddenly to make an inward-looking definition:—

. . . . but O, pledged  
beyond himself to an edged anguish dividing  
word from word and uniting thing to word—  
each guiding and each fighting the other. . . .  
he sang in his grief; 'hapless the woman who loves me  
hapless I—flung alive where only  
the cold-lipped mermen thrive. . . .'  
Obscurely his future. . . .  
shook in his blood; his look was held by the flood  
angrily rose-darkened down the inlets of the wood.

With the rose-darkened flood the poet is carried back again to his objective analysis of Taliessin. That sudden admission of the creative writer's edged anguish when the thing and the word fight one another is made also by Mr de la Mare, veiled in the exquisite perfection of the first poem of his new volume.

*Here I sit. . . .*

*Woing from a soundless brain  
The formless into words again.*

The content of this collection will not add anything to our knowledge of the poet's changeling sense of his adventure, half mis-adventure, in a treacherous, magical world, but almost every page is new in the delight to ear and mind of some well-found phrase:—a bee's *hooked piratical feet*, Izaak Walton's *lucent, dewy, rain-sweet prose*; or, a *face that dream has scrawled upon* and the acid perfection of an epitaph:

*Slim cunning hands at rest and cozening eyes—  
Under this stone one loved too wildly lies;  
How false she was, no granite could declare  
Nor all earth's flowers, how fair.*

*The Region of the Summer Stars* is a more difficult poem to read than any one of Mr de la Mare's: it requires some learning on the reader's part and it appears to watch a more formidable horizon, but to the serious lover of poetry *Inward Companion* will offer a primer of design and construction and its range is minute and infinite.

*Go far; come near;  
You still must be  
The centre of your own small mystery. . . .*

NAOMI ROYDE SMITH.

LETTERS OF MARCEL PROUST. Translated and edited with notes by Mina Curtiss. (Chatto & Windus; 21s.)

Guessing upon whom an author has modelled his characters is a game fraught with dangers: but it is a game which is a necessary (though by no means a full) part of literary biography. Unfortunately, of late, it has been played to excess. The friends and acquaintances of different authors have come to be regarded as their characters, so that the imaginative processes by which characters in fiction are created have been belittled. The result is that critical studies have come to be accepted as substitutes for the works of art which they examine and literary biographies to be taken as means by which by reading one book an author's whole life and works may be known. This is not surprising: it is what one might expect of a period in which human life is considered largely a matter to be judged according to a card-index system of age-groups. It is all so simple. The process can be worked backwards: 'A la Recherche du Temps Perdu is the novel of a homosexual who suffered from an Oedipus complex.' Such has been the fate of Proust at the hands of the pundits. The publication of his letters may help to redress the balance.

'I have been working on a long book', wrote Proust to Louis de Robert, 'which I call a novel because it isn't as fortuitous as memoirs': and therein resides the secret of his art, for his great novel is only fortuitous 'to the degree that life itself is.' Experience for the great novelist is always something which is touched-off life, so that resemblances between his characters and friends are never more than coincidental. If it were otherwise, his fiction would be no more than the adding of a narrative commentary to a family album.

Indeed, the present selections from Proust's correspondence do not provide footnotes to his original work so much as emphasise the power