

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

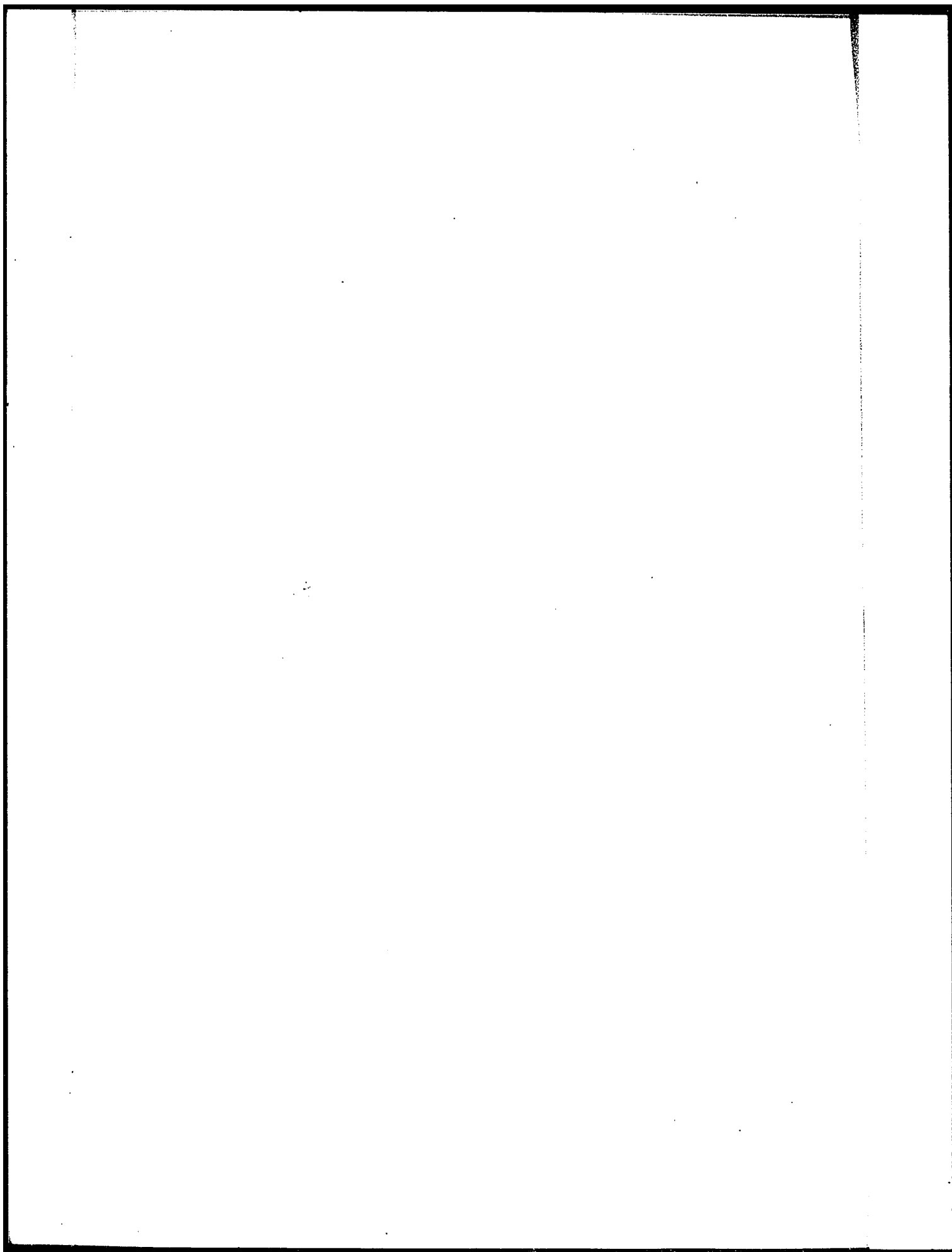
**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

UMI<sup>®</sup>



THE EVERLASTING MERCY

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

(M.A., U.O., 1931)



Stanley A. Puchniak, O.M.I.  
St. Paul's College,  
Winnipeg, Man.

no 106

UMI Number: EC52150

#### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform EC52150  
Copyright 2007 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

I

LAUREATESHIP.

"The Laureate is dead; long live the laureate."

Poetry, as one of the fine arts, received its just measure of glorification even in ancient times. In as much as it was the idealisation of genuine human experiences of heart and soul and sense, it grew in its universal appeal among both the cultured and the uncultured.

The first recordings of poetic thought can be traced as far back as the Old Testament where the word of God is written at times with exquisite coloring, where the prayers of individuals and of peoples are couched in the simplest yet most touching poetic form.

But it was the Greek nation which, endowed with marvelous creative gifts and appreciative powers, have laid down the solid foundations of poetry as we know it to-day. Providence, shaping the destinies of nations, even in the minutest details, seems to have singled out the Greeks as the recipients of a language, a bell-metal melodious and indestructible, out of which the Greeks shaped the arm of their harp, strung it with golden chords and out of its bosom poured forth harmonies, plaintive and sad, joyful and triumphant. At times this harp, the language of the Greeks, groaned like a furious tempest, at other times in sweet and simple tones it charmed the wearied toiler and the exhausted warrior, singing of home and hearth, of peace and joy, always enchanting and charming, casting spells wherever gentle zephyrs carried its penetrating vibrations.

The Masters of this harp were honored as kings and heeded as oracles. It was a natural consequence that only such a people should, on account of their appreciation of the best and most beautiful, establish a tradition which lives in all its glory and picturesqueness even to this day - the laureateship. At a contest open to all poets the successful competitor was crowned with laurel. The Romans, although less favored with creative gifts, yet gifted with the art of selecting and adapting what was best among the Greeks, adopted this crowning.

After a considerable lapse of time during which the laureateship fell into disuse, it was revived in Germany and it was the Emperor himself who invented the title of Poet Laureate. Henry V crowned his historian, and Frederick I crowned the Monk Gunther who celebrated his deeds in an epic poem. But no great interest was attached to the title until the

ceronation of Petrarch in the Capitol of Rome in 1341. In Germany again, the custom, after having apparently fallen into another period of disuse, was restored by the Emperor Frederick III who <sup>crowned</sup> ~~crowned~~ Piccolomini and Celtes.

The imperial privilege was also granted to the universities and the degree of Poeta Laureatus was conferred by continental as well as by English universities. The French had royal poets, but no laureates. The title existed in Spain, but there seems to be little information extant about those honored by it. The early history of the laureateship in England is traditional.

We read that Edward III, in 1367, emulating the crowning of Petrarch at Rome, granted the office of laureateship to Chaucer, but under rather prosaic conditions, for instead of laurel there was a yearly pension of one hundred marks and a tierce of Malvoisie wine. This last item must have been granted with hopes of stimulating fertility in the poet's sterile spasms. However, this legend probably arose out of an annuity of seventy marks granted by that monarch to his "Valet Geoffrey Chaucer," with the controllership of the wool and petty wine revenues for the port of London, the duties of which he was required to perform in person. Henry Seogan is mentioned by Ben Jonson as the Laureate of Henry IV. John Kay was court poet under Edward IV and Andrew Bernard held the same office under Henry VII and Henry VIII. John Skelton received from Oxford and subsequently from Cambridge, the title of Poet Laureate. Spenser is spoken of as the Laureate of Queen Elizabeth, on the ground of having received a pension of ten pounds a year when he presented her with the first books of the Fairie Queene.

Up to this time the laureateship had not been established as we now understand it, nor can any certain trace of wine or wages be found. But the introduction into England from Italy of masques during the reign of Elizabeth rendered necessary the employment of poets and in 1619 James I secured the services of Ben Jonson by granting him by patent an annuity for life of one hundred marks. Although not mentioned in the document as the laureate, he was doubtless deemed such. In 1630 the laureateship was made a patent office in the gift of the Lord Chamberlain, the salary was increased from one hundred marks to one hundred pounds and a tierce of Canary wine was added, which was commuted, in the time of Southey, for twenty-seven pounds a year. From that time there has been a regular succession of laureates. Among the more famous are John Dryden, Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Bridges.

While the office of Poet Laureate shaped itself into a conventionality, its duties took on more definite features. The laureateship, besides being a recompense for past achievements in poetic pursuits, was granted to one who gave promise of future activities and whose duty was to sing the nation's noble deeds. The laureate was also expected to write a poem commemorative of the king's birthday and of all those greater events of the royal family which had a national importance.

It can easily be inferred from history that political considerations often controlled the appointment, and at length a strong feeling was raised in favor of its abolition. After the final derangement of George III in 1810, the performance of annual odes was suspended and subsequently discontinued. On the death of Pye the office was offered to Walter Scott, who declined it, and Southey was appointed with the

virtual concession, which has since become the rule, that he should only write when and what he chose. The laureateship to-day is reduced to merely a sinecure and political motives are strong in the appointment to office.

After Tennyson's death, Robert Bridges was appointed to the high honor and after the passing of the latter a newcomer, John Masefield, is welcomed in the kingdom of letters as the servant of the King and of English literature. This is an act of homage at once to the old and to the new. Dr. Robert Bridges brought his life's work to a touching fulfilment with the "Testament of Beauty." Although the great mass of work written before he accepted the laureateship was sufficient justification, although the office had been accepted on the understanding that it should be so, Robert Bridges performed a self-imposed task which raised the laureateship to the height of its dignity. In his passing there was a kind of deep poetic beauty, a beauty raised to the highest degree and bequeathed in a Testament.

Poetry is England's greatest art form. Possibly no modern language has a greater tradition of poetry, and to have allowed the picturesque office of laureateship to lapse, as it has been suggested, would have been a concession to the materialism which threatens contemporary life. Nor would there have been any justification. A number of names was submitted for selection to grace the vacant office. Messrs. Kipling, Yeats or Watson, Binyon or de la Mare; any one of these might have been appointed for his past achievement quite apart from any promise of future success. None however, would as perfectly have fitted the place of honor as he who was chosen. The appointment of Mr. John Masefield has been received with a chorus of praise for its wisdom and justness.

There are many reasons which prompted us to select John Masefield as the subject of the present study. He has succeeded in being both the poet of the literary elite as well as the poet of the man in the street. There is in his work no attempt to write cheap jingle, to catch the unsephisticated ear, and there must be something deep and penetrating since the volume of his collected poems published a few years ago had, in a strikingly short time, sold eighty-thousand copies!

There is one sense particularly in which Mr. Masefield is the most important figure amongst contemporary poets. He has charmed the popular ear, he has cast a spell more penetrating and more vigorous than any of his compeers, and it has been his extraordinary privilege to lure the multitudinous reader of magazines, - that wary host which is usually stampeded by the sight of a page of verse.

"The Everlasting Mercy" was selected as the subject of our special study because it was the poet's first extensive product and because it was this poem that placed Masefield in his kingdom. Further reasons will be detailed in the development of this sketch.

In an old number of the Poetry Review we find a thoughtful remark on Masefield's poem which begins thus: "The unreasoned but not unreasonable clamour which heralded the issue of The Everlasting Mercy caused people to devour poetry." The story of the publication has already become part of the literary history of our century and The English Review may feel justly proud of the part it played and the editorial courage of the late Austin Harrison in giving so many pages of one issue to the publication of a poem in a new vein by a man who was then little known. The venture was staggering, but the effect must have surprised alike the poet and the editor, for edition after edition of that number was constantly demanded and John Masefield's poem gave a new vogue to poetry.

The fact that there are as diverse opinions on Masfield as there are on Hamlet or Bacon's essays, arises, of course, from the sheer fact that he is not merely the personification of an idea driven to logical consequences, but a poet, - a creature of whims, moods and fancies, and withal, a wrestling philosopher, an observer of men, an idealist and a realist at the same time. Whether it is the frolic of the ocean and wind in the topsail, a sordid crime, or a poignant tragedy or an idyll of romance, his voice rings forth, proclaiming fearlessly the outstanding realities of life, the minuteness and mutability of this mortal existence, the vastness and complexity, the wonder, terror and hope of human destiny. For this reason the present study shall prove of intense interest.

The new Poet Laureate will afford much pleasure to those who love the sea and to those who appreciate the old English ballad and poetry that is warm and forceful, human and alive. A poetic mind, we say of him as he himself has said of one of his characters:-

He loved the downland like the sea--  
And every other thing he loved  
In which a clean, free spirit moved.

That, with his magnificent past and the promise of his future, makes the choice of John Masfield as the poet Laureate of England, a happy augury for the art which is England's greatest national achievement.

\* \* \* \* \*

11.

LIFE AND WORKS.

One of the most discouraging difficulties we experienced in the preparation of this sketch was our utter impossibility of obtaining the necessary details appertaining to the life of Masfield. This difficulty becomes quite enormous when we learn that Masfield created a new standard in contemporary poetry and that without apparently any sufficient education he was able to reach surprising heights of knowledge. It is, therefore, with deep regret that we are compelled to study Masfield's personality as if through a thick veil of mist which hides his inmost self from our gaze, which conceals the minute incidents and accidents of youth whose influence is so great in shaping and moulding a poetic mind. His personal convictions

would have thrown much light upon his attitude in studying the religious element of his works. Yet, we must make the best of the scanty information we have and hope that someday, interesting and instructive biographical data will allow us to know the man better and to esteem him the more.

There is, if we might call it so, a beauty in Masefield's youth, a beauty which touches the chords of sympathy in us and immediately explains his attitude towards life and towards man. He is remarkably rugged, in fact, the most rugged of recent poets and unconsciously one links his life with that of Elgar whose music is much like Masefield's poetry. As Elgar, Masefield was schooled in experience, and all his learning, as that of Elgar bears this characteristic that it was not forced upon and crammed into the mind, but greedily devoured whenever possible, stimulated by the promptings of personal ambition and initiative. The natural result of such study is the absence of pedantry, the freedom from artificiality; the class-room type and text-book model are fortunately missing. But instead, we have a real, genuine, unexaggerated picture of life and men which is in every way human and alive.

Masefield would have been more at home, as someone remarked, in the Viking Ship of Eric the Red than in a tame conventional age, singing the seamy side of civilization. Left fatherless while still a boy, Masefield experienced something of the sea fever he was to describe and sing in later years. That he might be trained for a nautical career he was sent by his uncle to H.M.S. Conway, lying in

the Mersey. It was the custom then for apprentices to make a long trip in a sailing vessel. Young Masefield went, therefore, around Cape Horn to Iquique in Chile. On the way, he was taken ill, and after reaching port, was sent home by steamer. That, it seems was the only voyage he ever made under sail, and, contrary to popular belief, he never served before the mast. After his restoration to health he qualified as an officer in the Merchant Service, and, if certain hints in "Biography" are anything to guide us, followed the sea for a while. On going to New York, however, to join the "Adriatic" as sixth officer, he decided to end his sea-wanderings and sought a livelihood ashore. That was the beginning of many adventures during which he tramped from place to place, at one time serving as bar-tender in a New York Saloon, until at length he returned to his native country and to fame.

Masefield was about twenty-two years of age when he was bar-tender and one night, after the business of the day was over, he found a book of Chaucer and casually fell to reading one of his poems. This night, as he himself admits, was the night of his conversion, leading him into a new glad world of thought, in fellowship with Shakespeare and Milton. This youth could have had no better master, for, of all great poets, Chaucer is perhaps the most sensible, the most human, the most modern, and Masefield was his disciple. If we glance at the simple opening of the Nun's Priest's story in the Canterbury Tales and compare with it the beginning of Masefield's Widow in the Bye Street we immediately notice the master honored in his pupil.

John Masefield's greatest quality is that he knows men. He knows men better than most any man. He was schooled in practical psychology from his earliest youth. His knowledge surpasses that of poets who always dwell among fancies and myths, forms and colors which sway the heart of a poet. And he knows man's nature with its retinue of virtues and vices because he lived with men. At fourteen he was indentured to a captain in the mercantile marine and he saw human nature unadorned: sometimes too great to need adornment, sometimes reaching down to unutterable depths of shame and bondage. This makes more valuable the clear testimony of his confidence, that the soul of man may escape from the uttermost dungeon of captivity, into the glad freedom and light of the love of God. Trained in hardship and misery, rubbing elbows with every rank and file, watching, examining and studying, Masefield equipped himself with a treasure of abundant material for his future enterprise.

From the perusal of Poets' lives, the careful reader will form two categories: the human and rugged, and the sickly sentimental. Those who are brought up in good healthy surroundings, but soon fall victims to luxury and are pets of fortune usually belong to the latter category. Those who struggle and toil, and fight to live, form the rugged poets, the human category. These circumstances of life and of course temperament, but chiefly life, - react on the mind astonishingly. The sentimental type produces poetry that is artificially mechanical; he portrays life as peace, joy and tranquility; in a word he creates in his own distorted fancy, pictures that are not natural, he does not take them from life; they live and die and are happy but only in the poet's imagination. The other does give us poetry saturated with

real mortal life, permeated with intense struggle of humanity, outline  
ing the conflicts of flesh and blood, of body and soul. <sup>This is the real, rugged, human + natural poet.</sup> The reason <sup>As such is Masfield.</sup>  
thereof lies in his own life. He has but to sketch a few lines and  
one seems immediately to feel that life blood flows in its veins,  
that it plays an important part in adjudicating the literary and  
poetical value of one's works. More about it later.

The first period of his literary activities commences with  
1902, when he published a little volume called Salt-water Ballads.  
It attracted little attention because his verse was chiefly imitative,  
though here and there one came upon a lyric of some charm and freshness.  
The author seems to strike the melodic line and right singing note  
though the charm and structure may be of a too facile kind. By this  
volume and the Mainsail Haul in 1905, Masfield established himself as  
a lyric poet. In them, youth's exuberance of emotion and affection  
creates at times a feeling of rapture and carries the song in sensuous  
and lavish loveliness with gallant and vivid images of knights and  
pirates and those concrete things youth always loves. These poems  
have at times a rich coloring, a springtime freshness that comes but  
once in a poet's lifetime. Although these poems did not create great  
fame for Masfield, they showed, nevertheless, that he was human and  
in his frame there was a beating heart, pulsating with intense vitality,  
as all hearts of youth with sanguine hopes and delightful dreams.  
Maturity, as we shall see, brings other triumphs.

In these early works Masfield developed a marked contrast  
between the beautiful and the ugly. This contrast is one of his  
characteristic features and is constantly reflected throughout his  
writings. Again and again he pictures to the reader the sharp  
antagonisms, the harsh realities of life, the idealist's vision of

what life should be while the drunken voices of humanity disrupt peace and quiet and disturb the atmosphere of beauty.

This early period can also be called Masefield's apprenticeship because he did not venture so much on paths which his own nature would suggest but adhered to the beautifully beaten tracks of the old masters of the seventeenth century. These were his guides, and good guides they were. As a result of his intense study of these poets, Masefield edited the lyrics of Herrick, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, with much sympathy and sound judgment.

In 1908 Masefield published *Campden Wonder*. There were two literary men whose friendship with Masefield influenced the latter in his literary career and particularly in drama. The poetic drama was believed dead and it was of little use to attempt its resurrection. Masefield knew this and consequently wrote in prose. He experimented upon many short plays of which there seems to be no record. In "*The Campden Wonder*" he finds his proper voice. The grim intensity of this play surpasses the more ambitious "*Tragedy of Nan*." It is a masterpiece of dramatic art. From the beginning where the note of warmth and security is struck to the unexpected and tragic close the deep interest is never relaxed.

*The Tragedy of Nan* was published in 1909. It is written on a large scale and is the author's best known work. There are many weaknesses in which the style loses its individuality. Yet, strange to say, it added greatly to Masefield's literary fame. *The Tragedy of Nan* bears marks of that exultation which comes from a delighted brooding on extremely

excessive and terrible things. This exultation is carried on through the play in a sweeping manner leaving with the reader or listener a lasting impression. This is possibly, why it caused men in the field of literature to take greater notice of Masfield.

In 1910 *The Tragedy of Pompey the Great* saw the light of day.

It is interesting to note in the course of this period how Masfield's view was shaping itself and maturing for the greater works of his second period. He never ceases to experiment. There are men in all walks of life who never dare experiment. Usually these remain ever in the background and mar their activities by a detestable hesitation which at times causes the sufferer an agony of despondency and disgust. If he who has no patience to experiment, is endowed with great gifts and powers, his works will be remarkable for their freshness, flow and spontaneity. Those however, who experiment, pass through a period of development such as Masfield's first period in which there is good, bad and indifferent, rarely anything striking. However, a little glance at this period will help us to know better and appreciate more fully the author of *The Everlasting Mercy*, the subject of the present study.

*Pompey the Great* has received many severe blows from critics. They have judged him according to standards which the author never intended to adopt. This accusation was also held against later works and we shall deal with it more fully in its proper place. The dominant idea in the author's view was not so much plot and character as the exultation that comes from spiritual triumph or from brooding on the wayward paths of this mortal existence. There is, nevertheless, in all the works of this experimental period, a sense of nobility and poetry.

The second period of Masfield's literary career starts in October 1911 when *The Everlasting Mercy* was published. This was his first big undertaking and the large proportions of the design are clearly apparent in the poem. He distinguished himself by an increasing gravity of mood, a beauty more disciplined, inward and austere. This period was brought to its triumphant maturity in *Dauber, the Wanderer*, August 1914 and the sonnets.

As it is our purpose to examine *The Everlasting Mercy* in every detail we shall limit ourselves here to a few brief considerations. One of the most extraordinary events of Masfield's life must have been the appearance of *The Everlasting Mercy*. It came like a thunderbolt upon the literary world and its sacred traditions. It was a new venture, bold and fearless in spirit and in style. Its amazing vitality, its startling frankness took the public by storm. It is the picture of life, life surging in the street and market place, in city and village, - everywhere, but life lived by toiling men, a life of necessity always active and real. Masfield handles his material very skillfully and never for a moment allows himself to become its victim. The poem affected all its readers as true to life precisely because the material provided by experience had undergone the necessary process of selection and transformation. The novel was shapeless and lumbering, the narrative poem easy and proportioned.

In 1912 Masfield published *The Widow in the Bye-Street* and a year later *The Daffodil Fields*. The scene of the first poem is set in a Shropshire town. The story comes nearest to unrelieved horror and tragedy. Even in the hour of reconciliation with his mother in the death cell, there is a pervading sadness mingled with bitterness. Jim's romance and the mother's devotion make the story quite alive.

As it is impossible for us to sketch each of his works we shall limit ourselves to the more important ones of this period. — Romantic love is the motive in Daffodil Fields published in 1914. This is rather unusual, as romance is not Masefield's forte. Dauber, published in the same year, has the vividness of personal experience, with the impersonality of the greatest narrative art. It must be recognized as a remarkable piece of work. The Wanderer, a poem of ships and sea, is pervaded with a deep mystery and symbolism. This ship holds us with a peculiar fascination from the moment of her first defeat to her last moment of triumph. Philip the King (1914) is a dramatic poem in which the news of the Armada's defeat is brought to the King by a beaten remnant just as he is giving thanks for victory. The Faithful and Good Friday, both published in 1915, have an austere beauty of thought. The one is in prose, the other in poetry. They exemplify "simplicity of art untouched by softness."

The more important of his works are the sonnets which are concise and austere, moulded as severely as those of Shakespeare. In these he questions the dark sources of life and death and beauty. There is no continuous sequence of thought. They contain a just appreciation of man and his destiny, of life and gladness, of man's faculties and powers, and the mysterious life that gives life to these. It is a faultless poetry, the high-water mark of Masefield's art.

We have made an attempt to divide Masefield's works into three periods. It is impossible to guarantee accuracy as we have had very scanty means of research at our disposal. The following is the list:-

First Period: Saltwater Ballads 1902. A Mainsail Haul 1905.

Camden Wonder 1908. The Tragedy of Nan 1909. Ballads and Poems 1910.  
The Tragedy of Pompei the Great 1910. Shakespeare 1911.

Second Period: The Everlasting Mercy October 1911. The  
Widow in the Bye-Street 1912. The Daffodil Fields 1913. Dauber 1913.  
Philip The King 1914. The Wanderer 1914. The Faithful 1915. Good  
Friday 1916. Gallipoli 1916. Loellingdon Downs 1917.

Third Period: Reynard the Fox 1919. A poem and Two Plays 1919.  
Right Royal 1920. Melloney Holtspur 1922. King Cole 1923. A King's  
Daughter 1923.

Practically all of Masefield's narrative poems deal with  
common men and women, as his lyrics deal with the ordinary things of  
land and sea. Chaucer, his great model, included all types of humanity;  
Masefield narrowed his range to working folk; he has no romantic heroes,  
but only such half failures as you meet any day at the dock or on the  
street. The sailor, the steaker of steamers, the man with the clout,  
the chanteyman bent at the Hallyards putting a tune to his shout,  
the drowsy man at the wheel, and the tired man at the lookout. Among  
the narrative poems is Dauber. The author's favorites are "The Ever-  
lasting Mercy" and The Widow in the Bye-Street. By these he is to be  
judged as a poet.

Masefield is undoubtedly the poet of the poor. He has a  
wonderful understanding of the common folk. Having been born into it,  
and lived it with each moment of his life, he saw more clearly the  
springs of beauty and gentleness in them not obvious to many. Mean,  
degraded and pitiable, none of his characters are less than human.  
Saul Kane can ~~be~~ and love intensely, - he is quick in perceiving

all that is beautiful and noble in life. He is an inarticulate poet and mystic. The more one studies the character of Saul the more are the sordid and repugnant details of the story forgotten save for the end for which they are employed, namely, to emphasize the miraculous fact of conversion. The beauty of his character which slumbers under the cloak of revelry and debauch, breaks forth and by its breaking forth in the true light of grace shines brilliantly in a new poetic atmosphere full of grandeur and ecstasy.

Only a man like Masfield could write such poetry and create such admirable scenes of contrast; virtue and vice, heaven and hell, grief and joy. He knew the life of the very poor - he shared it as sailor and bar-tender, as a struggling writer in sordid Bloomsbury lodgings, in the lonely years before success comforted and encouraged him. He shows us that life, suppressing nothing, over-emphasizing nothing. He shows it as it is in the hour both of joy and sorrow. Neither does he leave us depressed and disappointed, defeated by its aimlessness and hopelessness that we marvel at its wonder, its beauty and its heroism. After all turbulent passion is spent and great calm reigns, there is a feeling of solemn and joyful exultation.

111.

THE EVERLASTING MERCY.

The place is biggyd above the sterrys cleer,  
Neon erfhely paleys wrouhte in so statly wyse,  
Com on my friend, my brothir moost enteer,  
For the I offryd my blood in sacrificise.

John Lydgate.

Thus does John Masefield preface his poem, thereby creating an atmosphere for the story as well as declaring the underlying principle of its solution. At the end of the poem Masefield adds the following explanatory note: "The persons and events described in this poem are entirely imaginary, and no reference is made or intended to any living person."

This poem so very obvious in itself hardly needs any comment. It is the high adventure of the soul. Saul Kane, the hero, when his soul is wafted by the gentle breeze of Grace, puts off bestiality and rises to a joyful perception of the meaning of life and to an unselfish reconciliation with God and man.

Sharing with the other great poets, though in a lesser degree, the psychological faculty, Masfield possesses the power of presenting the mainsprings of human actions, and the problems of conduct with an unusual force and directness of thought and language. The Everlasting Mercy reveals this power excellently. His keen penetrating insight is coupled with an indulgent compassion for the frailties of man and thereby the poem is relieved from the sordid flavor of newspaper horrors told in verse. He looks beyond the actions of men, viewing them as drops in the vessel of eternity, and as working a destiny or Nemesis in the fulfillment of which the doers will acquire experience and knowledge.

In this poem there are several main sections quite easily discernible. They could be divided under the following topics:

- a. Darkness of Sin.
- b. Remote Glory of Grace.
- c. Action of Grace.
- d. The Flowman Divine.

#### A. DARKNESS OF SIN.

The story is unravelled to the reader by Saul Kane himself who makes a confession of his entire life. The reader's interest is immediately aroused by a sweeping avowal of Kane's youth:

I bit my father's hand right through  
And broke my mother's heart in two.

From '51 to '61 he learned boldness and courage and the fickleness of women; he was initiated in riotous drinking parties, full of merry mirth and wild frolic.

My blood did leap, my flesh did revel,  
Saul Kane was tokened to the devil.

In these few lines the reader is introduced to the hero of the poem in a direct straightforward manner. At once the atmosphere is created and intense interest aroused. But Saul Kane does not end here. From '67 to '71,

I lived in disbelief of Heaven,  
I drunk, I fought, I poached, I whored  
I did despite unto the Lord.  
I cursed, 'would make a man look pale,  
And nineteen times I went to goal.

Here is the plain truth about Kane. This information would suffice to create a subject for conversion. But Masfield wishes to paint this state in such striking colors and with so much emphasis that all hope of conversion will be banished from the reader's mind, to show thereafter the mighty power of Divine Grace.

Then Saul Kane continues to describe the meeting of his mate Bill, as black a sprig of hell as himself. There follows a discussion about the right to poach in this territory. They are going to settle their claims by a fight. They agree to meet at Wood Top.

The conversion of Saul Kane began when he was in the ring, about to commence a fight. From the outset he experiences a feeling of remorse: "I'm fighting to defend a lie." Again and again the impulse came to him to step forward and confess that he was in the wrong, but he dispels the thought lest the spectators should deem him a coward and some even lose their stakes. While waiting in his corner he is compelled to examine his conscience about past misdeeds when he sees the places of his sinning. He thinks of Nell.

Saul Kane is not a ruffian. Masfield held that a ruffian without intelligence was no fit subject for so divine an art as poetry, -

sure evidence that he did not regard Saul Kane as such. With all his vices, Saul Kane has the heart of the poet which responds emotionally to beauty and virtue and purity in nature and humanity. All through the poem, from the fight at the beginning when he realizes that he is standing up in defense of a lie, he is aspiring and struggling, sinking and rising again. He loathes the mean faces of the men who have come to watch the fight.

The description of the fight is intensely vivid and dramatic and casts such a spell over the reader that he does not even notice the technical weakness of poetic structure. The fight ends in a victory for Saul Kane. But Saul despises his undeserved victory.

After the fight he and his associates repair to the village inn, where the night is spent in bestial drinking and revelry,

And shut out Christ in husks and swine.

Hot Hollands punch on top of stout  
Puts madness in and wisdom out.  
From drunken man to drunken man  
The drunken madness raged and ran.

After three long hours of gin and smokes, the crowd of revelers was stunned to sleep by the heat and the oppressive smell. This section is described rather realistically and with minute detail to show that the state Saul Kane was not that of a novice reveller but of a mature libertine and consequently his conversion would be something strikingly extraordinary. And there, while his companions lie about him in drunken stupor, we have the first indication that the mind of Saul Kane is being moved upon by Divine Grace.

I opened window wide and leaned  
Out of that pigstye of the field,  
And felt a cool wind go like grace  
About the sleeping market place.  
The clock struck three, and sweetly, slowly,  
The bells chimed, Holy, Holy, Holy;  
And in a second's pause there fell  
The cold note of the chapel bell.  
And then a cock crew flapping wings,  
And summat made me think of things.

He thought of the men and women throughout the years who had heard the striking of those clocks and the chiming of those bells:

I wish I knew if they'd a got  
A king of summat we've a not,  
If them as built the church so fair  
Were half the chaps folks say they were.

But whatever they were, they have departed and in this pensive mood Saul Kane wanders on:

I wondered, then, why life should be  
And what would be the end of me  
When youth and health and strength were gone  
And cold old age came creeping on.

It was all a mad, disgusting game in which he was inextricably implicated and there is no hope of conversion now,

For parson chaps are mad supposin'  
A chap can change the road he's chosen.

And at that moment of morbid helplessness the devil's voice counselled him suicide. But Saul Kane would not die. A madness seizes upon him. He thinks he could fly and shout; he wants to tell all the people that they are less excellent than lice, steeped in vice and sin,

But you, you minds of bread and cheese  
Are less divine than that dog's fleas.

#### B. GLORY OF DIVINE GRACE.

In the recoil from the man he had been, Saul Kane acts like one beside himself. He tears his clothes and hurls them out of the window in shreds; he hurls his boots and all he has, he knocks the glass out of the windows and in his madness throws everything he touches. And then he seizes the lamp,

And down the stairs, and tore back bolts  
As mad as twenty blooded colts;  
And out into the street I pass  
As mad as two-year-olds at grass,  
A naked madman waving grand  
A blazing lamp in either hand.

He raves aloud of hell and destruction and turns the quiet English country into a pandemonium. He rings the fire bell; the whole village peeps out of windows in mortal fear to see this maniac in rage. The firemen, thinking there is a fire, make ready to fight it. Saul Kane snatches the nozzles and says:

I am the fire. Back, stand back,  
Or else I'll fetch your skulls a crack;  
- - - - -  
I'm fire from hell come up this minute  
To burn this town, and all that's in it.  
To burn you dead and burn you clean,  
You cogwheels in a stopped machine,  
You hearts of snakes and brains of pigeons  
You dead devout of dead religions.

They all run after him, try to seize him, but in vain. \* Here Masefield beautifully describes the race by telling what impressions one has of running naked against a chilling breeze. Then Saul Kane knocks at each door and shouts "Fire".

Saul Kane wanders back to the Lion where he slept. The raging madness boiled itself out and left him suddenly sick and cold and worn out. He is carried to bed by two girls who laugh at him. After awakening Saul hears how someone rang the fire bell. A reward is promised for the identification and arrest of the culprit. All kinds of suspicions and gossip are current but no one knows who did it. Saul ate and drank and gathered strength and at four he renewed his mad frenzy shouting aloud: "Take warning. I'm death and hell and judgment morning." He hurls the bench, bangs the table, and begins throwing and hurling everything he sees, calling this episode his second inning.

Out into the street I ran uproarious  
The devil dancing in me glorious.

In his mad run he meets the parson and bars his path. Now Saul gives vent to all the bile that is within him, expectorating his venom on everything that the parson holds sacred and holy. Masfield's talent is remarkably expressive in this entire passage.

In the meantime people had gathered who listened to him while he "blathered". The parson makes a heroic effort to answer and tries to influence the young man, saying:

Meanwhile my friend, 'twould be no sin  
To mix more water in your gin.

— — — — —  
We're mortal men with mortal kidneys.

Rather clever. - This section of the poem is very well composed, full of sound reflection on the part of Saul Kane. Saul Kane sums up:

But parson'd proved to people's eyes  
That I was drunk and he was wise;  
And people grinned and women tittered  
And little children mocked and twittered.  
So, blazing mad I stalked to bar  
To show how noble drunkards are,  
And guzzled spirits like a beast,  
To show contempt for church and priest.

Recalling his appointment with Jane, Saul wanders about seeking her, but she cannot be found. As he sits down to watch the setting sun amid angry clouds gathering in the horizon, he decides to return and brace himself with gin. On his way he steals some pears and turns into the marketplace. The quiet of the village makes him dizzy. The sky has all God's warning written in bloody marks all over it. He notices the tears of a child, lost while its mother makes some purchases. Saul comforts the child, telling it lovely fairy tales while the passers-by feel an insult for the child's mother because this drunkard associates with it.

And just then Mrs. Jaggard came  
To view and end her Jimmy's shame.  
She made one rush and gi'm a bat  
And shock him like a dog a rat.

The mother complains bitterly, fearing lest perhaps her own child might later tread in the foul footsteps of Saul Kane.

You Devil's limb,  
How dare you talk to Jaggard's Jim;  
You drunken, poaching, boozing brute, you,  
If Jaggard was a man he'd shoot you.

The shoppers thought I'd killed the child.

Saul tries to vindicate his action and offers an explanation. The mother will listen to none of his talk and rebukes him insultingly. She pours out all the bitter anguish of her soul, her sufferings and her worry with her children. She tearfully complains about the wretchedness brought on by her own husband's horrible drunkenness.

This little episode reacted well upon Saul, well in our sense, perhaps too well, for, lest its fruit might become lasting, Saul hurriedly returns to the bar to get more drink. Yet in spite of all, the thought remained, it was not drowned. He was anticipating something terrible. He read it above in the sky, he noticed it in the peaceful village, he saw it in the child and now it returns to him with redoubled force. It was a word, a word from the woman in a public house which caused Kane's conversion.

There used to be a custom then,  
Miss Bourne, the Friend, went round at ten  
To all the pubs in all the place,  
To bring the drunkards' souls to grace;  
Some sulked, of course, and some were stirred,  
But none give her a dirty word.

That night, maddened with the agony of his divided soul, and inflamed by drink, Saul Kane insulted her as none had done before:

She up to me with black eyes wide,  
She looked as though her spirit cried;  
She took my tumbler from the bar  
Beside where all the matches are  
And poured it out upon the floor dust,  
Among the fag-ends, spit and saw-dust.

"Saul Kane," she said, "when you next drink,  
Do me the gentleness to think  
That every drop of drink accursed  
Makes Christ within you die of thirst,  
That every dirty word you say  
Is one more flint upon His way,  
Another thorn about His head,  
Another mock by where He tread,  
Another nail, another cross.  
All that you are is that Christ's loss."

Rain poured outside and pelted on the window-pane. The drinkers retired one by one. Saul saw what it meant. She was white when she spoke. This terrified him. There was more than the words she spoke. There was the truth of it all, the undeniable fact that he was a wretch, a scoundrel and a hardened sinner. - The clock slowly ticked away the seconds. The bar-room was closing up. The thought of someone knocking at the door of his soul so obsessed him that he could not dispell it.

"The water's going out to sea  
And there's a great moon calling me:  
But there's a great sun calls the moon,  
And all God's bells will carol soon  
For joy and glory and delight  
Of someone coming home to-night.

He went out into the night. There was a storm within his soul, a storm so great <sup>he</sup> ~~he~~ knew not what was blowing,- his throbbing pulse or the planets in revolt or the entire universe.

And inn signs swung like people hanging,  
And in my heart the drink unpriced,  
The burning cataracts of Christ.

C. ACTION OF GRACE.

Peace and quiet were within his soul. The bolted door had yielded. He knew ~~that~~ that he was done with sin. And on his way the water in the brook, the market place and all those scenes which before spoke to him of sin and evil, now spoke of God and His Everlasting Mercy. It was a new world into which Saul Kane entered that glorious day; the tomb had become a garden, the prison a cathedral. The cup in his hand is now a sacramental chalice. All natural things become symbols of a spiritual presence. Christ is calling to him in all he sees: in bud, flower, brook, plough-man and all.

This section of the poem is most beautiful, - after the storm the quiet and calm; after sinful solicitude, - a peaceful haven of rest.

O Christ who holds the open gate,  
O Christ who drives the furrow straight,  
O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter  
Of holy white birds flying after,

- - - - -  
The corn that makes the holy bread  
By which the soul of man is fed,  
The holy bread, the food unpriced,  
Thy everlasting mercy, Christ.

D. THE DIVINE PLOUGHMAN.

There is, declares the poet in conclusion, One who waits upon every soul watching it as the ploughman watches his field, nourishing it, sowing the seed and nursing it patiently until it is time for harvest, -

And in men's hearts in many lands  
A spiritual ploughman stands  
Forever waiting, waiting now,  
The heart's "Put in, man, zook the plough".

This ploughman's scope extends to all creatures with an immortal soul and into all times of eternity. The desire which makes each breast tremble for something better than we have known is, "Christ in us" not the fulfilment, but "The hope of glory". And He who created the hope will brighten it to maturity. - Travellers tell us of hillsides now clothed with luxuriant vegetation which once were lurid with volcanic fires, of fragrant flowers blooming forth in districts once desolate and barren. So does the Husbandman work in character. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing. They shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God". It is His glory and none other for which the poet cries in his closing lines:

O lovely lily clean,  
O lily springing green,  
O lily bursting white,  
Dear lily of delight,  
Spring in my heart agen  
That I may flower to men.

Such is the story of Saul Kane, a man with poetic instinct and a noble heart degraded to the lowermost degree of bestiality who defies parent, Scripture and Heaven, and ultimately denies God, passes through various stages of degradation until his state is so revoltingly hopeless that there exists no ray of sunshine for him. Yet he seeks happiness, - but finding none in the pleasures of the senses, in deep despondency he is tempted to commit suicide. Masfield leads up to this climax very beautifully and skillfully. Saul wants to live, - he wants to be good but no sooner does he banish the thought of suicide than he steep himself in the same old vice and retraces his sinful steps. Just when there was all the hope for Saul's conversion, it is dispelled by human weakness. He falls deeper and deeper until there is no more hope, and at the moment when the reader is inclined to feel an utter disgust for Saul Kane, he changes, and yields to the healing balsam of grace and thus is his conversion operated.

IV.

PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSION.

The fact of conversion, declares St. Paul, is as truly the act of God, as is the birth of life. It cannot be achieved without the grace of Him "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness". The spiritual change involved is so great that without the aid of the Holy Ghost it cannot be accomplished. It is He who quickens the sin-steeped soul, enlivens the bruised conscience, informs the mind and moves the will, creating an ever-deepening sense of need, which ultimately results in the reconciliation with God. From the first forlorn and wistful look of the soul standing afar, until its completed return, He is the helper, present in every moment, as the sun is present in the growth of the flower from a tightly closed bud to the beauty and fragrance of the full-blown rose.

Much attention has been given in recent years to the Psychology of Conversion. Conversion literally means a change and in the accepted definition a moral change, a turning or returning to God, in which sense it has passed into our modern languages. There are three classical examples of conversion in the sacred literature of our era. The most extraordinary of the three is the conversion of St. Paul. The other two are those of Constantine the Great and St. Augustine. Masfield selected the name of Saul in his poem, possibly to make the fact of conversion more striking by connecting it with the classical name of Saul who was afterwards St. Paul. This little fact is quite ingenious and points to the poet's solicitude even about the detail of a name.

There may be two kinds of conversions; one which is a turning to God, the other a returning to God. No doubt, Masfield did not have in mind a pagan Saul Kane who had no knowledge of the true God, but a Saul Kane who in early childhood imbibed the fundamentals of christianity, and while tender was well practiced into its observances. Later on, as he himself describes in the poem, he commenced by disobeying his parents and once the sacred bonds of filial piety and submission were shattered, the reckless Saul went from bad to worse until finally he was the devil's own.

It should be remembered that the psychologist deals with methods rather than with causes, although true psychology deals with causes as well. The popular notion of a psychologist is one who studies means and methods, leaving the causes to others. Wrong as this is, we shall tolerate the limitation of scope and draw a further distinction which will be more <sup>a la portée</sup> of all. The theologian approaches the fact of conversion from the divine side; the scientist from the human side. The cause is important to the former; the method alone occupies the latter.

Is it possible to lay down definite laws by which conversion is conditioned? Yes and no. It might not be very safe to dogmatize on the movement of a free and independent soul while "the spirit bloweth where it listeth", for, in the vast and mysterious spirit world exceptions continually occur which point to some larger generalizations that we have yet attained.

There is an extraordinary penetration and persistence in the life of a seed-thought sown in childhood days. Many a time the most phenomenal conversions are brought about by the emergence of some early memory or association of home or school. In studying the history of degenerate souls it has often been remarked that principles inculcated in childhood are the most lasting and the most reactionary and frequently control and influence a career in later life.

Temperament also plays an important part in the shaping of conversion. Thus the phlegmatic temperament is not likely to experience a transformation of the explosive, soul-shattering type, which may occur in the development of a more sanguine and impulsive nature. The understanding of this law would be a comfort to many noble hearts. People of one type crave the experiences of another and are surprised not to feel them and, as a sad consequence, recoil in their efforts and return to discouragement and despondency. Conversion from the human standpoint is operated by the intellect which knows the truth and by the will which gives its consent to this knowledge. This alone is sufficient; all else is secondary and unimportant although frequently helpful. Conversion therefore to be genuine, must not necessarily conform to a type. The sun's rays are not more different when reflected from diverse surfaces, than are the varieties of experience accomplished in regenerate souls by the action of the same spirit.

It is interesting to benefit by the learned conclusions of those who studied the fact of conversion from this human side, but we must not overlook the other aspect of which religion takes especial account. The Bible deals with causes not with laws. We shall be disappointed in our search to find a method of creation; but we easily find the cause, the Creator. We shall not be favored with dissertations on light; but we read "And God said, let there be light, and there was light". In passing from the work of a modern psychologist to the New Testament, we become conscious of an *entirely different standpoint. We now view the fact of conversion* from the divine side. We find no methods or theories. The insistent note is that it is an act of God, as astonishing as is the gift of a new day.

Conversion in the life of an individual is such a great event that men in history have not feared to exaggerate its importance. All else was minor. St. Paul and all great converts looked upon the day of their turning or returning to God as the greatest of their lives. As St. Paul's conversion is a classical one, and as it is knit with Saul Kane we shall linger a moment in our study to trace certain features in it.

St. Paul carried with him influences of Judaism, some of which reached below the realm of his own consciousness. He had studied the Scriptures. He must have been impressed by the bearing of those disciples whom he persecuted and particularly by the martyrdom of St. Stephen which he witnessed. All these things, no doubt, were factors in the great change. But not of these did he make mention when he wrote of his conversion: "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me. -- I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, howbeit I obtained mercy, ~~and~~ and, last of all, he was seen of me also as of one born out of due time." He had been met by Christ. That was sufficient.

When we study the experiences of those who have known this change of life, the same point becomes clear. In sundry ways they set out to experiment with life travelling along the road of unbelief, lingering in forbidden fields, breaking down barriers erected by the wisdom of God, lovers of pleasure more than searchers of God, and then something happened which each one can only explain by saying : it was God who inspired me; God's finger was there. - At times men have thought that they were running away from God, when actually, they were rushing into the open arms of His Everlasting Mercy.

The Everlasting Mercy is a poet's study of the fact of conversion. He presents to us the problem in the history of Saul Kane, a village wastrel and drunkard, a poacher and libertine. He was a hopeless member of the community to which he was a perpetual scandal, an ~~unt~~ outrage, and a blot upon the reputation of his little village. What can be done with such a man? Masefield answers that there is power in the Grace of God to change that life in a moment. This is the supreme message of the poem.

There is a flower in the tropics, which is long concealed within a coarse thick covering so hard and unattractive that no one could imagine the loveliness within. As the sun ~~woos~~ the hidden flower, life stirs within the thick encasement which threatens now to become its tomb, and at last, gathering strength, bursts open the walls with a loud report. Most flowers turn quietly to the sun and are lured by its gentle rays into gentle beauty. Happy are those lives, which like the flowers, open to God without any conscious effort or striving. Our poet however pictures the light falling upon something obdurate and unyielding. At the inmost centre the soul abides, but; "<sup>wall</sup> wall upon wall the gross felsh hems it in". The light shines upon the soul of Saul Kane, and the walls are shattered for the imprisoned glory to appear. We see him unregenerate, his life a ceaseless blasphemy;

when suddenly a word, a thought enters the madness and the shame, and in one amazing flash he is changed. The man stands in the light, a newborn soul, rejoicing in the Everlasting Mercy.

There is no hopeless or irrevocable human life desperate though its condition may appear. The deepest and truest thing about the worst man is that he has been made in the image of God and that, though it may be scarred <sup>and</sup> or defaced, the divine impression can never be destroyed. In his lowest degeneration, he is different from the brute to whose level he seems to descend. His life there is an unnatural life. His supreme kinships are elsewhere. The conversion of such a man is actually a return to himself. Then in the true sense of the word does he become human.

Take all in a word, the truth in God's breast  
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed;  
Though He is so bright, and we so dim,  
We are made in His image to witness Him.

The conversion of Saul Kane began when he was about to commence his fight with a fellow poacher. Saul experiences a deep feeling of remorse because he is fight to defend a lie. This impulse repeatedly assails him to step forward and admit that he is wrong, but he dispels the thought for fear of being branded a coward. Saul Kane won the fight but he felt an utter disgust at the whole affair. He drowns these sentiments at the bar-room. And then, while his associates are stunned with drunken sleep, he:

Opened window wide and leaned  
Out of that pigstye of the fiend,  
And felt a cool wind go like grace  
About the sleeping market place.  
Etc. etc.

His mental depression is so low that there is not a single ray of sunshine in his whole being. The spectre of his past misdeeds haunts him. He sought happiness in fleeting pleasures which like smoke vanished into the air leaving darkness and bitterness in his soul. He understands now how vain and futile were his efforts after happiness where it was not to be found.

He knows full well the heroic sacrifice he must make to break his habits and tread on the small and narrow path of virtue. This seems utterly impossible. And at this moment the spirit of evil whispers into his ear to end this wretched existence by committing suicide.

Obviously something strange has been occurring within his battered soul. He has gone to the very limits and has been met by One who will not let him rest. Still he waits at the window. This scene comes to us charged with universal ~~mean~~ meaning. Men look for God who would themselves deny the fact.

In the early spring there is no external evidence of nature's awakening, but tremendous things are developing beneath the surface in bulb and root and seed. Godlessness is not the deepest thing in any soul. The roots of our being stretch themselves out in quest after the infinite.

There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that returns to God. May we not apply these words to Saul, this watcher looking out into the night listening wistfully to the bells chiming, "Holy, Holy, Holy?" There are flowers that open up when darkness covers the earth. The sun's rays woo them during the day - but it is in darkness that they find their glory. There is something genuinely poetical in this circumstance of Saul Kane.

Masefield is a master when there is question of the dual conflict of body and soul, the material and the spiritual, man and God. The intensity of the story is heightened to new flights by the great struggle between Saul Kane and the grace of God. The first reaction after the above is pensive quiet and recollective meditation. Saul is seized by the mad fury of rage and insanity. He is beside himself; he rushes out into the darkness, rushes through the streets; he raves of hell and end of all things.

There are many roads by which one can enter a city, roads which converge from every point of the compass. There are also many paths that lead back to God. God may allow any experience, even the slightest incident to become a means of conversion and a path to reconciliation. Some souls have been stormed by a sudden sorrow, others by a flood of joy. Sometimes a casual word, or even a look such as that which broke the heart of St. Peter, have been sufficient for God to operate his end. Just when we feel most secure or for that ~~unhappy~~ matter insecure, something awakens us and we leap into the very arms of God in <sup>grateful</sup> ~~grateful~~ surrender. The fact of course is, that there has been much preparation out of sight before the final cause moved us. The vessel is ready to <sup>be</sup> launched and now but little power is needed to move it forward into freedom upon the great waters of peace and happiness and communion with God.

It was a word spoken by a woman, in the public house where Saul Kane was trying to drown the penetrating voice of conscience, which the Spirit used to lead this man to his reconciliation with God.

There used to be a custom then  
Miss Bourne, the Friend, went round at ten  
To all the pubs in all the place,  
To bring the drunkard 's souls to grace.

Some of the drunkards sulked, some were stirred but none ~~in-~~ sulted here. Yet this night, maddened with the agony of his divided soul, and inflamed by drink Saul Kane insulted her as none had done before.

Saul Kane, she said, when next you drink,  
Do me the gentleness to think  
That every drop of drink accursed  
Makes Christ within you die of thirst,  
That every dirty word you say  
Is one more flint upon his way.

- - - - -  
All that you are is that Christ's loss.

Then and there the barriers were broken, the flower burst its rough and repugnant pod and Saul's soul experienced a new birth in the saving waters of grace. Saul Kane was reconciled with God. "God who commandeth the light to ~~shine~~ <sup>shine</sup> out of darkness did shine out of this heart

to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

It is interesting to find such an illustration of swift emergence and development. Grace has progressed by such wonderful stages that we cannot trace its steps. In one extraordinary experience and in one glorious event Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle. St. Augustine thus announced his conversion; I opened the book and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell. I cared to read no further, nor was there need of it, since at once, with the ending of the sentence, the light of security had passed into my heart and all the gloom of hesitation was dispelled. Lacordaire says: "I was unbelieving in the evening, on the morrow a Christian, certain with an invincible certainty." Saul Kane is confronted by The Friend - the gentle breeze of grace has entered the heart emptied now of pride and self-sufficiency rushing in to fill the vacant place - the searching, cleansing, healing breath of God.

After his conversion Saul Kane is a new creature vivified by a new life of grace by which he becomes a participant in the very life of God. This fact is another feature of the soul after its reconciliation with God. It was a new world into which Saul entered on that glorious day, - the sordid tomb had become a fragrant garden. All things natural and created became symbols which emphasize the work of God and his everlasting presence in the universe. Christ calls to him in all he sees - in bud and flower and brook.

O Christ who holds the open gate,  
O Christ who drives the furrow straight.  
O Christ the plow, O Christ the laughter  
Of holy white birds flying after.

Masefield has proven in his poem that he is a deep psychologist and that his psychology is of a healthy kind based on a knowledge both of men and of religion. There cannot be found in the entire poem one statement in denial of this. From the beginning to the very end the poet perseveres in seeking his theme with unshaken unity of design and coordination of principle. This feature is strikingly impressive the more one studies the poem.

There is one important factor in conversion which John Masefield has noted and which has frequently been overlooked. The splendid vision of spiritual realities which came to Saul Kane, led him to take up some useful work in the world. The celestial glory is embodied in the calling of a ploughman. Saul's past life was summed up thus by Mrs. Jaggard:

Who never worked, not he, nor earned,  
Nor will do till the seas are burned,  
Who never did since he was whole  
A hand's turn for a human soul.

All this Saul Kane full well knows and makes no effort to deny it. This must come to an end after his conversion. Idleness is not merely a crime, it is a sin. In the early morning Saul Kane sees old Callow, the ploughman, "at the task of God", and he resolves to make that his calling:

I kneeled there in the muddy fallow,  
I knew that Christ was there with Callow,  
That Christ was standing there with me,  
That Christ had taught me what to be,  
That I should plow, and as I plowed  
My saviour Christ would sing aloud,  
And as I drove the clods apart  
Christ would be plowing in my heart  
Through rest - harrow and bitter roots,  
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits.

Work is one of the deep essential laws of Christianity and it has been glorified by the Son of God himself who worked for so many years as a carpenter. A person who has gone through a rebirth must of necessity take means to preserve the precious gift of grace and perpetuate its life by avoiding all waywardness. Now waywardness sows its roots in idleness. Work therefore, is the only antidote to vice. - Conversion also makes a man useful to society and to his community. We might even speak of its economic value without lowering the character of its high discourse. The acknowledgment of God in Christ solves one of the most difficult problems of our time by vesting with dignity every service rendered to the community. There will be nothing sordid or vile when our work is done in communion with God. The plough becomes as sacred as the altar of sacrifice. - Conversion is the liberation of the everlasting spirit through our mortal existence into all the duties and relationships of the daily round and common task.

IV

CRITIQUE.

In Arnold's "The Function of Criticism" we read that a gentleman reporting a conversation with Wordsworth on the merits of criticism, says: "Wordsworth holds the critical power very low, infinitely lower than the inventive; and he said to-day that if the quantity of time consumed in writ writing critiques on the works of others were given to original compositions of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed; it would make a man find out sooner his own level, and it would do infinitely less mischief. A false or malicious criticism may do much injury to the minds of others; a stupid invention, either in prose or verse, is quite harmless." - Criticism is a baneful and injurious employment and if we were to endorse Wordsworth's point of view we would abstain from continuing this thesis. But, while this question allows discussion and while greater men indulge in discussing its merits and demerits, we shall pursue our modest critique to our heart's content.

When we first entered upon the study of this poem, it was with an entirely different equipment of principles and standards of poetic adjudication. In the course of our study we fell a happy victim of far superior outlooks.

on poetics and this change of attitude has compelled us to modify our original plan almost beyond recognition. It is hoped that this liberty, instead of detracting from the genuineness of our efforts, shall rather enhance our conclusions and make this study more palatable from the poetic standpoint.

Before the World War wrought its changes upon the minds of men, fusing the will and spirit of millions into one glorious national impulse, life in England seemed very complex, and literature was easily reflecting its complexity rather than its unity, its surface eddies and cross-currents rather than its deep underflow. Following these fickle breezes, criticism yielded many of its classical principles, and the result of a new experimental criticism created stagnation both in the production of works and in their just appreciation. Much importance cannot, therefore, be attached to the majority of the critics of this period, yet among them we shall be delighted to find some sterling types of intellectual minds which, in spite of every opposition, would not sacrifice their lofty ideals.

Moreover, the standard of selection is not really the opinion of any critic, but rather a consensus of readers' opinions whenever such can be found. If it is doubted whether a selection based on fickle popularity can have any literary value, we reply that until time crystallizes its judgement upon books, popularity and personal taste are the only means we have of adjudicating them, or at least this popularity bespeaks of merits which are embodied in a particular work.

About taste and its vagaries it is hardly worth discussing, but of popularity enough can be said to distinguish the false from the true. There are many so-called popular poetical creations which are superficial

or clever or humorous or sentimental or sensational, each appealing to its own category of readers, and with such poems which come and go like ladies' styles, we have no concern. But then, there is another kind of popularity in literature that goes back to real men and real women, old and young, wise and ignorant. To be popular, therefore, in a true sense, a writer must display a genuine human quality that appeals to people generally, and that not only diverts them for a moment but makes them reflect and think and remember approvingly or disapprovingly.

Such popularity is indicative of a certain kind of power. It may be the power of truth or falsehood, of a genius or a dancing dervish; but the writer who casts a spell upon a variety of readers is not a common one. He should be examined twice and more. If he is ~~really popular~~ merely popular, his works will be forgotten on the appearance of another; but if he wins the next generation and the next, he is on the road of few travellers which leads to Parnassus.

The next matter to be emphasised is that no essay about recent literature can be authoritative and that at every point the reader no less than the writer is free to follow his own judgement. The essayist examining by the light of his personal taste a few works which are popular <sup>is</sup> the best sense, must try to be temperate with what he likes, and fair with what he heartily dislikes; but if he wholly succeeded in the latter aim he would be more or less than human. The reader, on the other hand, will remember that time is the only critic who can surely tell which authors have the quality of greatness. Meanwhile, the best means of anticipating time's verdict in the future is to become acquainted with what time has approved in the past. In other words, the more one knows of old works, the more readily shall one be able to estimate the new, on account of the standard equipment of the principles

of poetic adjudication.

This does not mean that new works are critically to be regarded as of little consequence, for many of them are excellent, well worthy of our study, and because they reflect our own life and thought and speech, they come to us with a familiar appeal that works of a different age can never quite equal. Each generation likes its own books best. Therein, perhaps, is the danger that the lively present literature may blind us to its serious defects; hence the need of a standard of value which only the old and tried books can give us.

Before the *Everlasting Mercy*, Masefield had given us written several volumes largely of sea stories. For the theatre he wrote *Nan* and *The Tragedy of Pompei the Great*. Both plays and the lovely early lyrics had been accepted well by the discerning few, but it was with the publication of *The Everlasting Mercy* that Masefield entered his kingdom. Nor must it be belittled as a *succes de scandale*, based upon the use of realistic bad language. Masefield himself has said:- "Tragedy at its best is the vision of the heart of life. It is only by such vision that a multitude can be brought to the passionate knowledge of ~~and~~ things exalting and external". It was that faith which created the great series of studies of realistic humanity of which this poem was the first. As his later work has shown, Masefield's preoccupation is with beauty, and it was his great achievement in these works that he could always cut straight through the realistic surface to reveal the beauty, terror and pity which give everlasting significance to life.

Looking back to 1911, when *The Everlasting Mercy* first appeared in the *English Review*, we are stunned to learn that it occupied over forty pages, - a demand on space which would stagger the most ambi-

tious editors. Literary productions of an inconvenient length for either book or magazine are usually dismissed as unreasonable, and the pamphlet, - the remaining alternative,- is in itself a handicap as it seems cheap and is the favorite resort of the crank. Once published, *The Everlasting Mercy* created its own reputation as well as that of the author. Here was a poem which demanded no learning from the reader, a tale of fighting and drinking, rich in the strength of the vernacular, with a startling directness of style. Here was the real England which knows nothing of the literary coteries and temporary fashions of style. *The Everlasting Mercy* was simple, sensuous and passionate, with couplets as easy as Scott's and language as naive as Crabbe's. Above all it was English.

It is difficult to recall now, and it will in later years be still more difficult to realise the shock with which *The Everlasting Mercy* came upon certain circles of the literary world. It was something quite new in matter, in spirit and in style. Its amazing vitality, its startling candour, something large in the design, something swift in the action, which made its frequent carelessness of detail seem not merely negligible but inevitable, took the public by storm. A powerful impulse seemed to carry the poem along with the speed of a furious river. Only in *Dauber* and *Reynard the Fox* does he display, on the same scale and in the same pitch, the quality of careless, masterful energy as of manhood rejoicing in its vigorous powers.

The extraordinary popularity of *The Everlasting Mercy* since its publication in 1911 until to-day has embittered and soured the life of many a calm and phlegmatic critic. Even now there are cultured persons to whom this uncritical and uncontrollable popularity is an offence and, of course, to them a writer bent upon purely scientific and mathematical criticism would possibly be compelled to yield certain points. But these

points would appertain chiefly to finicking questions, as an occasional lapse from fineness in thought or form, an incidental banality of word or phrase; or a lack of delicate and refined effect of rhyme and metre. And the whole fuss would amount in the end to perhaps little more than a petulant complaint or an impertinent grumble that Mr Masefield happens to be himself and not, for instance, Bridges or Tennyson; that his own individual mind carved and shaped its own channels and that, <sup>in effect</sup> the vocabulary and explosives of Saul Kane are not those of an innocent Convent girl.

It is useless to wage war upon this seemingly offending popularity of the Everlasting Mercy. We should find joyful cheer in the new class of poetry-lovers which it has created. If such is the case what is the cause of that Masefield fever in the ordinary man of the street? The dynamic of Masefield's genius seems to be an intense joy in actual living, a bubbling of vitality. Besides his keen delight in beauty, there is a swift and accurate response of sense to the outer world of earth and sky, of flower and field. There is, moreover, a fierce delight such as humans experience in toil and danger, in excited action and desperate struggle, in the supreme effort of physical power, in health and strength and skill, in freedom and fun.

These golden instants and bright days Masefield is careful to emphasise and the rapture which they inspire him, the ardour with which he carries our mind and imagination, form the essence and secret motive of his poetry. And more than this. The theme of the Everlasting Mercy carries the reader away in an intense growth of appeal because there is a struggle between the finite and infinite, the mortal and immortal, man and God. The more we study the poem the more does its appeal possess us and carry us away on the author's wings of fancy not for a single moment allowing us to lapse from its swiftness to examine its details.

In examining the theme of the Everlasting Mercy our chief concern shall be whether it falls short in the beauties which are essential to that kind of narrative poetry. The story or theme is perfect or imperfect as the action which it relates is more or less so. This action should in the first place be one, then entire and finally a great and worthy action.

Masefield creates in his poem an atmosphere of that deep-seated unity which all art demands. He establishes and carries this unity of action in a masterly fashion. In the very first line our interest is captured by Saul Kane, the reckless, the wanton, the heathen. He is shown stepping ever lower along the ladder of degradation into the very depths of sin. When we are assured that Saul could sink no lower in vice and sin, a ray of hope is shown to us of a possible conversion. But no sooner are we prepared to rejoice in his amendment, when the vivid action carries us away in a vortex of debauch to touch the deepest bottom of hopelessness. And as after a fierce storm, nature is enveloped in sudden quiet, so does Kane's soul reflect and turn its eyes upon God. There is, in view of the intense dramatic action, no weakness that catches the eye. The reader feels no boresome details, useless digressions nor futile descriptions. If some little digression is indulged in, it is solely to relieve the excitement of the action and then return to the main theme with redoubled life and energy. The one coherent action which constitutes the soul of the poem is Saul Kane's conversion. All else is so skilfully interwoven and even unimportant the more important principles of life and existence so masterly distilled that the entire poem bristles, not with prickly redundant platitudes, but rather with an ever growing emphasis of the one main thought, the thought of conversion. It cannot even be stated that there are

episodes in the Everlasting Mercy which may be looked upon as excrescences rather than as parts of the action. On the contrary, the poem which we are considering has no other episodes than such as naturally arise from the subject, and yet is filled with such a multitude of strikingly astonishing incidents, that it gives us at the same time a diversion of the greatest(~~variety~~ ~~simplicity~~) variety and of the greatest simplicity, uniform in its nature, though diversified in the execution.

In many places Masfield creates almost a dual action which seems to be developing simultaneously. This is an art which the great poets, such as Milton and Chaucer, mastered and handled so skillfully. Far from us to rank Masfield with the greatest literary minds, yet we wish only to point out how the master was honoured in the pupil. Beside the many other beauties of such clever handling of double action, the parallelness of the subsidiary with the principle action of the poem hinders it from breaking the unity as much as another episode would have done that had not so great an affinity with the principle subject. This creates the same kind of beauty as that we admire in those works where the two different plots look like counterparts and copies of one another.

There is one other remark concerning the use of little episodes in Masfield's work. Had the poet omitted many of the scenes which in themselves might be irrelevant to the main development and had he dismissed those actions which are revolting, and clothed his subject in an unapproachable garb of artificial beauty, the work would be lovely and perhaps more exalting, but would it be true to life? There is hardly any doubt that it would not. The poet's duty is to represent man as he really is, but in an ideal fashion. Here, Saul the degenerate becomes Saul the convert. Is there a greater poetic episode in the Gospels than the story of the Prodigal Son? In its simplicity it is more

appealing; in its directness it is more fascinating and it is a masterpiece because it is true to life.

The action, therefore, in spite of its complexity, must be one. It must also be entire. An action is entire when it is complete in all its parts, when it consists of a beginning, a middle and an end. Nothing should go before it, be intermixed with it, or follow after it that is not related to it. No step should be omitted from the action which is required by the regular progress and development which it must be supposed to take from its origin to its consummation. The story of Saul Kane is in every way entire. From the first line to the last the different parts of it are told in the most distinct manner and the parts grow out of one another as is apparent from our study of Saul Kane's conversion in a preceding section.

The third qualification of a good story is greatness. This needs explanation. As we shall see further, this greatness does not mean that the story must embody heroism or an extraordinarily noble action. This is an element of the epic poem. It means simply that the story must convey a great principle of our existence, a principle that is worthy, noble and therefore great. - The Everlasting Mercy is couched about the greatest principle of our life. Man, a product of the creative Hand of God, is destined by virtue of his participation in the spiritual life, to things greater and nobler than can satiate the flesh, to things eternal, to God Himself. This idea reacts in man even unconsciously by the insipidity which grows out of all cherished earthly possessions. Man is unhappiest the farther he is away from God. Hence the greatness of man's participation and the necessity of man's reconciliation with God. Therefore, man is great not when he falls, but having fallen, acknowledges his guilt and returns to God with a heart broken and contrite. Could a

more beautiful subject be selected for such a noble art as poetry? This is why the Everlasting Mercy is so popular. It bubbles with robust humanity in its plain unadorned self. The power of action and of thought is well poised with the element of mystic and human meeting half way, with the ideal and the real twining and intertwining constantly, with sensuous and spiritual perception almost matched. And this is one of the secrets which makes Masfield's poem so wide and direct in appeal.

If reflectiveness were predominant, if the subjective element overpowered the keen dramatic sense, if the ideal were capable of easy victory over the material, this would be poetry of a different type. Masfield's deep knowledge of psychology and of men as they really are is splendidly portrayed in his treatment of this particular feature. The ideal does not conquer at the end, but after what efforts, after what despair and hopelessness. It conquers only then when in our mind it would have never conquered. This feature is one of the most striking phenomena in conversions. And with reason, for, it is not the human intellect that operates conversion. The human intellect is endowed with the gift of seeing the true. The will is drawn towards that true because it sees a good in it. But the extraordinary, however, in conversions is that the Grace of God alone performs the miraculous change.

These are some of the reasons why the Everlasting Mercy commands such an army of poetry lovers who rebel against the stereotyped model, but long for the pictures which represent human nature as all humans know it and feel it and struggle and fall and rise to the norm of Christian morality.

There are in this poem contrasting elements just as in life itself and particularly in life that is sound, there is a perpetual conflict between opposing forces. This is possibly the greatest characteristic

of Masfield, it belongs to the essence of his poetry and has moulded its form. The battering forces of his mind, transferred to the creatures of the world, have made this narrative poem very dramatic. Here also there is an occasional clash between realism in its grimness and idyllic sweetness. This bold and naked realism has met with much disfavor with those who cannot associate its relation to the underlying principles of reality. And it often happens that the critic who professes the greatest dislike to Masfield, hastens to quote the gaudiest example, practically ignoring the many serene and gracious passages.

The story, therefore, contains unity, entirety and greatness of action. And in spite of the most adverse breath of criticism the Everlasting Mercy is a masterly creation commanding a wider number of readers than possibly any other one poem of our contemporary songsters. Masfield has finally received his recognition and commendation, although grudgingly, even from those who are poets in the sense of artisans rather than artists.

Without touching upon the entire cast of characters that Masfield employs in this poem, it ought to suffice to state that there is the greatest unity and congruity in them. The principle character, only one, is, of course, Saul Kane. The poet treats him most humanly. One could easily say that Masfield picked him out from the millions of unfortunate humanity whose paths, darkened by waywardness, lead their travellers to an eternal night. That the characters portrayed in the Everlasting Mercy are exaggerated no one will say, except he who does not know men. Those, also, find fault with the character sketches who exclude from man's life the spiritual element, who call the great actions of Grace sentimentality, and who have never known or having known have disowned God. Only such individuals will trace no beauty nor truth in the Everlasting

Mercy. Fortunately, the popularity of Masfield does not depend on them, nor can they by their smart critiques change the nature of the poem.

We shall subjoin, as a corollary to the foregoing, a feature which intensifies the appeal of Saul Kane's character with the readers. Aristotle observes very truly: if a man of perfect and consummate virtue falls into a misfortune, it excites our pity but not our terror, because we do not fear that it may be our own case, who do not resemble the suffering person. Then he adds: but if we see a man of virtue, mixed with infirmities, fall into any misfortunes, it does not only excite our pity but also our terror, because we are afraid that like misfortunes may happen to ourselves, who resemble the character of the suffering person. This remark, is, indeed, a very reasonable one. The Everlasting Mercy as well as several other of Masfield's poems strike in us, in an unconscious manner, those deep chords of sympathy whose appeal explains in a great measure the popularity of such poems.

After this survey of the story and characters, there remains for us to study the sentiments and the language of the poem. The sentiments are the thoughts and behaviour which the author ascribes to the persons whom he introduces. Sentiments have likewise a relation to things as well as to persons, and are then perfect when they are such as are adapted to the subject. If in either of these cases the poet endeavors to argue or explain, to magnify or diminish, to excite love or hatred, pity or terror or any other passion, we ought to consider whether the sentiments he makes use of are proper to those ends. Masfield must have been familiar with all the classical poetry, because a blind rambler could never achieve such a co-ordinated development in a story unless he

was well supplied with poetical principles. When we consider the fact of conversion in an individual like Saul Kane, who had become the devil's own, we marvel at the logical development of the poem's sentiments. Saul Kane's thoughts and feelings are not those of a studied, text-book type of a regenerate; they are so spontaneous that they excite our wonder.

Now, it does not suffice for a poem to be replete with natural sentiments which in their naturalness reach down to the vulgar and realistic. There must also be the necessary abundance of sublime sentiments. These sentiments vary in the Everlasting Mercy. When Saul Kane is himself, reduced to the level of a brute, he acts like one and speaks like one. But as soon as Grace, either remotely or proximately touches his soul, Saul changes under that touch, and his sentiments change likewise under the influence of the great power of Grace.

When we speak of sublimity in Masfield's poetry we do not intend to give it the same prominence as for instance Milton's sublimity. We must constantly bear in mind that Masfield cannot, and possibly will never be classed among the great. He is not a poet's poet. A little model automobile can have all the perfections that a standard size automobile has; they are both perfect, and yet there is a big difference between them. The one has technical perfection of a model for display; the other has the perfection of utility in as much as it is serviceable in conveyance. Although the difference between Masfield and any great poet is not as tangible, the reader will nevertheless understand that a degree of perfection can be possible in one order or category, while the very same degree of perfection would constitute an imperfection in a higher order. Now, Masfield is neither Milton nor Wordsworth and we must study and judge him in that order and category in which Providence has placed him.

As there are two kinds of sentiments, the natural and the sublime, which constitute the essential idiom of this poem, there are also two kinds of thoughts which are carefully to be avoided. The first are such as are affected and unnatural, the second such as are mean and vulgar. Masefield's poem is at least natural. His sentiments show that he had a perfect insight into human nature and that he knew what means were proper to effect it. Enough has been said about this and we hope that will suffice. As for the element of vulgarity, in which the Everlasting Mercy abounds, we shall devote more space lower.

The greatest injustice to Masefield is to state that in his narrative poetry he thought it necessary to put the vision of beauty resolutely behind him. A certain critic stated years ago that the Everlasting Mercy is, for the most part, a catalogue of crude and brutal assertions not distinguishable from its own parody. He continues thus: the story wrested from the catalogue and from the interminable garrulity of the octosyllabic couplets is not a good story; the three steps by which the conversion of Saul Lane is brought about, are not such as give any pleasure or satisfaction in reading, and the attempts to show the inevitable approach of the merciful destiny is unconvincing. -- This critic seems to betray a personal grievance in the Everlasting Mercy and evidently gives unquestionable proof of his ignorance of human nature and of practical psychology. He is one of the old school who are more artisans than artists and whose chief aim is to picture nature not in its true color, however repugnant in its form but for that the more wonderful in its rise, but to caricature virtue and perhaps glorify vice.

\*

The study of poetry is oftentimes not sane and not rational in its aim and purpose. Often enough poetry was compelled to yield up its spirit to mere analysis or a dissertation upon grammatical and structural topics and sundry other irrelevant subjects. This vicious method which has worked destruction to true literary culture,

has passed away. Dr. O'Hagan asks somewhere in an essay, how any person can hope to become a literary scholar in the highest sense without assimilating the informing life of literature. How one can possess himself of the literature of knowledge without such assimilation is easy to see, but how one can become possessed of the literature of power without responding to the inner life of an art product is quite incomprehensible. The fault is that the true meaning and import of literature are misunderstood and its lesser coefficient is mistaken for its chief and primary one. Yet the spiritual element is by far the most important because it vivifies the thought and becomes its soul. There are, however, instances when one is compelled to make a special study of certain details, not merely because they are details but because they shape and form the thought, they are the vehicle of <sup>the</sup> soul.

Critics have possibly made too much of the poem's form. When Wagner produced his operas the entire world both musical and unmusical denied him recognition because he departed from the beaten paths and ventured upon a solitary trail hitherto unknown. But it was only his courage and the conviction that he was improving the threadbare idiom of his time which impelled him to soar to such heights of beauty in music that he has not been equaled. It took this man's determination to create for himself a monument which gains in splendor, strength and solidity as the years of time roll by.

We have instances of the same kind in all arts, even in poetry.

If Masfield had done nothing more than to free poetry from its time-rusted shackles of monotonous formality he would have already deserved high recognition. But, because he made his idiom convey such inspiring truths as those contained in the Everlasting Mercy there is hardly any doubt why his popularity is steadily growing and why his name ranks with those Poets Laureate who have embellished of English poetry.

Form -- what is form? It is a mould which shapes the words. -- The Everlasting Mercy is written in "the interminable garrulity of the octosyllabic couplets". Much of this is true or would be true if one were to read this poem to a native of Patagonia who had never heard the English language. But to one whose mind is open to conviction and who sees meaning in words and swiftness in action, this garrulity and despicable monotony are so secondary as not even to attract attention.

No doubt that where the action ceases a little or undergoes a momentary relaxation while the mind is carried to another consideration, the weaknesses become glaring. If Masfield were a schoolboy and handed this poem as a class assignment most probably he would be compelled to do it over because the classroom is a mould to shape and form within pedantic boundaries. Many an orator who sways the minds of thousands and dexterously plays upon their emotions does not know the rudiments about the figures of speech, or is totally ignorant of classical climaxes or would ignore the orations of Demosthenes and Cicero and discard their formalities to find a more forceful and potent vehicle for the thoughts that are surging in his mind. And yet he is an orator. So also with poetry. --

Of course, we do not claim that form must be ignored and disregarded altogether. But it does seem ridiculous to yield to sickly sentimentality and fall a victim of that fever at the risk of losing the more important - to embellish the flesh and leave the soul unadorned. The soul is by far the more important and deserves prior consideration to the flesh.

Then again there is a hardy vigour which at times yields reluctantly and loses its fascination when curbed in dead forms. *There are critics whose test of beauty consists in the perfection of inanimate form.* They will rhapsodize thus: but let the thought of wonder, the power of beauty enter the poet's mind and he becomes all flame of passion and ecstatic dream, while his medium pulses with a new life, a rhythm that makes us ache and dream with the poet. - This is superlatively

stupid. It reminds one of those "musicians" who would spend long hours raving over Faure's Les Rameaux or the chromatic progressions of some spicy secondary sevenths which flatter only the lascivious ear. - Sickly sentimentality. Too much yielding to the senses and too little consideration for the intellect. We advise such folk to adopt a diet of vegetables and read Jeremy Taylor's sermons.

Critics of the same school say that de la Mare has but to mention a donkey or an ass and the miracle takes place. Well, if there are people who wish to spend their life admiring the shapely form of an ass or donkey and leave the greater and nobler thoughts of life to others, let them do so. But let them also bear in mind that when they call *The Everlasting Mercy* barren and filthy in theme and shapeless and sterile in form they are condemning themselves and betraying perhaps a personal insult from the poem itself.

We do not deny that Masefield's form is frequently careless, clumsy and wagging. This is true, but we claim that this is not all in poetry. Masefield could have embellished his form considerably and with very little effort. But the poem's extraordinary merit is that while the form is poor in many places, the action is so remarkably swift that these defects pass by altogether unnoticed. It is only in places where the action subsides momentarily that these defects begin to stand out and Masefield could have easily remedied them by a more careful manipulation of his lines.

It is essential of poetry that it should by the sound of its words so far as possible echo or suggest the emotion or mood of the poet. This is called melody. *The Everlasting Mercy* abounds in melody, beautiful and charming melody and in this Masefield displays a great command. This feature is particularly noticeable where Saul Kane hears the voice of his remorseful conscience, where Grace touches his soul and especially after his conversion.

In respect to language and versification Masefield's narrative poems suffer from certain defects which are noticeable when any sustained effort is required of

him. He does not wait for the inevitable word. He is a prey to his imagination and yields an easy victim of inspiration. As we have mentioned above, *The Everlasting Mercy*, by virtue of its irresistible vigour and speed carries us over these obstacles as easily as a torrent rushes over boulders. In spite of some blemishes it must be admitted that in this poem, there is no padding in order to meet the exigencies of rhyme or metre. In other of his poems there are lapses into pitiable mawkishness and sentimentality, the style is oftentimes intolerably slipshod.-- He is fond of using similes and metaphors with very graceful effect.

Masefield's appointment to the laureateship was provocative immediately of a discussion upon the nature of poetic beauty. What is beauty in the art of poetry? According to the old forms of poetry, much of Masefield's work would be relegated to the second place. Naturally Boileau would allow our poem no poetic beauty at all. Quintillian would be of the same opinion, but not so Aristotle who would have ventured a few reservations in favor of the poet. Euripides would surely congratulate the poet laureate. But the whole question of what is and what is not poetry has changed front and that chiefly through two literary revolutions. The first revolution was the Romantic School and the second of a later date which Masefield himself, consciously or unconsciously has partly led - one which might be termed the Unromantic School. Even the classicists were not as non-romantic, in the literary sense, as the modern realists who, strangely enough, may be said to have grown out of the Romantic Movement, though their inheritance is complicated by the fact that they are also, in some sort, in reaction from the Parnassians and Symbolists.

Still, be that as it may, the realism, the direct painting of the outwardly ugly if inwardly dramatic - and therefore surely material for a poem - is modern to the extent that it has turned the Muses from an aristocracy into a democracy. This, in that it has enlarged the audience for poetry, since it has given to the

et's net a wider sweep, has been wholly to the good, wholly evolutionary. A theme which to a classical poet would have seemed unworthy of attention seems to a modern poet worthy of his utmost endeavor. Nevertheless it cannot too often be affirmed that the widening of the horizon of poetry to include in Masfield's words "the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the earthy", depends for its aesthetic success not on its theory but solely on the individual powers of the poet who seeks to put that theory into practice, and we are once more face to face with the old and fundamental problem of technique.

To many, especially to the young self-confident critic fresh from the university bench, the perfection of a writer's technique lies in its scrupulous freedom from verbal fault; but to the more experienced critic good technique lies principally in its power to hold an audience. To the first type of critic the great writers of the world must seem rather astonishingly unsatisfactory, until he grows older and understands more of life. It is only a true knowledge of life that can be a true knowledge of art. That is why the dilettante is so often a brilliant critic, but rarely a true one. Brilliance needs no experience, while truth does.

The technique of Masfield has been called in question by one critic after another. It is of course easy to show that his verse as verse may not always be technically flawless. Nevertheless it is constantly vivid, and vividness in poetry is a secondary virtue. It is moreover constantly human, that is, neither academically sound nor preciously anaemic, and humanity in poetry is no secondary virtue either. Poetry is to exercise its proper function among the people of the world it must be human first and aesthetic after. And it is a blessed truth that in the case of the greatest and most authentic poets, the aesthetics and the humanity are found in proper proportion. If a poet's technique enables him to say what is clamouring in his mind to be said, and to say it in such a way that it evokes a real response in the reader, then his method is right for HIM, no matter how wrong it may be for some other poet or critic of poets who might have a different instinct towards expression.

And no critic has the right to pillory any poet's lack of some other poet's verbal acrobatics when he has, as Masfield, the red-ripe glory in him. It is the very perversion of cleverness!

Besides the range of Masfield's poetic instrument, there is the exquisite harmony of it with mood and idea. He has no fear to be colloquial when that is the proper garment of his thought, the outer symbol of the inner reality, nor is he the least afraid of fierce and angry words when they are apt.

To-day Masfield can, without much difficulty, be placed among our greatest poets of psychology through *The Everlasting Mercy*, for its message has immensely quickened the sense of beauty in the world of religion both in the cultured and the uncultured. The grand doctrines of truth and sincerity, and the nobleness and solemnity of our human life in the tiniest duties of every day activities must be stirring to all minds in a healthy and wholesome manner. Some of the finer thoughts of *The Everlasting Mercy* echo and re-echo in one's mind until they create a world of enchantment.

In spite of bitter attacks and scathing criticisms from sundry quarters, in spite of the almost consolidated violence of certain professors of poetry who stamp *The Everlasting Mercy* with the stigma of garrulous nonsense and meaningless absurdity, incoherent and awkward - there is nevertheless an encouraging number counting into millions whose voices are perhaps uncouth and subdued but who feel none the less intensely the truth of the poet's message and see in it beauties which are not likely to penetrate the crust of cynicism of many a modern critic. Some of these assaults are little short of blasphemous.

Masfield launched *The Everlasting Mercy*, upon a world dulled by conventionalities to proclaim that art was not a mere matter of superficial technicalities and jingling jargon, nor a pretty plaything of untangible aristocracy, but some thing large and noble, something with a profound rootage in the stalwart

soil of our common humanity. His art can be summed up in a few simple principles which supply a clue to all his work. A human being is possessed of deep-seated beauty and nobility which is oftentimes vested under a hard crust of vice and wickedness. This the artist should remove to give expression to the passionate joy and delight of virtue and nobility. He is to reject and suppress those instincts which villify, and select and re-create the beautiful in his own poet's imagination to show forth that beauty in all its dazzling splendor. This Masfield has done with Saul Kane. In a word, true art should recreate objects into new wholes of intense beauty pulsating and living with real human blood in its arteries.

There exists an important distinction between those qualities of a poet which belong to him as such and those which belong to him in common with all educated men, the general and exalted powers of which art is the evidence and expression, not the subject. Upon this distinction depends the sound judgement of the poet's worth and the just appreciation of his art.

Poetry with all its technicalities and difficulties is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing. He who has mastered the technique and subdued the difficulties has as yet only learned the language which expresses his thoughts and conveys his ideas. He has learned how to express himself grammatically and melodiously. This language has a great power of delighting the sense of rhythm and melody. But it is nothing more. This is necessary but it is not the test of a poet's greatness. It is not by the mode and manner of representing, but by what is represented that the respective greatness is finally determined and established.

It is frequently quite difficult to determine where the influence of language stops, and where that of the thought <sup>begins</sup> begins. Many thoughts are so dependent upon the language in which they are couched, that they would lose half of their beauty if otherwise expressed. But the highest thoughts are those which are least dependent on language. Their worth is then in exact proportion to its

independency of language or expression. A composition is indeed usually most perfect when to such intrinsic dignity is added all that expression can do to attract and adorn; but in every case of supreme excellence this all becomes as nothing. We are more gratified by the simplest lines or words which can suggest the idea in its own naked beauty, than by the robe and the gem which conceal while they decorate. We seem to be more pleased to feel by their absence how little they could bestow, than by their presence how much they can destroy.

In poetry, therefore, there is the ornamental and the expressive. That which embodies and conveys the thought is worthy of attention and respect, but that which is simply decorative has little to do with the intrinsic excellence of the poem, just as little as a frame of a picture or the varnish of a piano.

V.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS.**

The characteristic features of a writer who is in any way original, that is to say, who does not merely re-echo literary banalities by reproduction, but modifies the influence of tradition, culture and contemporary thought by a strong admixture of his own, may commonly be traced to influences of his earlier life. This is more strictly true of poets because imagination with them is a fixed quantity not to be increased by any amount of study or reflection. Skill, wisdom and wit are cumulative, but that diviner faculty, the spiritual eye, though it may be sharpened and developed, focused and channelled, cannot be increased by any manner or method. This has always belonged to those things innate in us which we must respect as the immediate product of God Himself.

In Goethe we have a striking example of this. In him the imaginative

quality was uniform from the beginning to the very end, so much so, that his early poems show maturity, and his mature ones a youthful freshness. This is why Goethe is called by some critics an old boy at both ends of his career.

In Masfields's earliest authorship we find rare but not obscure hints of those powers which amalgamated to produce the Everlasting Mercy. His earlier poems were frowned and squinted upon by critics who practically all formed council against the Everlasting Mercy. Of course, it must be borne in mind that British criticism has never quite freed itself from the bondage of sectarian cant, nor has it ever honestly planted itself on the genuinely aesthetic point of view. It cannot quite persuade itself that truth is of immortal essence totally "independent of all assistance from quarterly reviews or the British army and navy."

Aristotle claims that we naturally take pleasure in any imitation or representation. This is the basic principle of our love of poetry. The reasons why these cause such delight is because all knowledge is naturally agreeable to us, not to the philosopher only but to humanity at large. Every representation, therefore, which is consistently drawn up, may be supposed interesting in as much as it gratifies this appetite for knowledge of all kinds. Per contra what does not add knowledge is not and cannot be considered interesting. A representation, therefore, to be interesting must not be vaguely conceived nor loosely drawn; it must not be general, undetermined or indefinite, but particular, accurate and firm.

An accurate representation may be considered interesting, but if that representation is a poetical one, much more is required. The poet must not only increase our knowledge but also promote our happiness. He will be successful in his enterprise if he knows how to convey charm and influence

delight. In fact all art is dedicated to joy and art's greatest problem is to make men happy. The highest art, is therefore, that which creates and diffuses the highest enjoyment.

Now, in poetry the feeling of intense enjoyment can still subsist even in face of most tragic circumstances and most terrible calamities. The liveliest anguish and the blackest despondency are not sufficient to destroy it. In fact, the more tragic the situation, the deeper becomes the enjoyment and the situation is more tragic in proportion as it becomes more terrible. This is one of the secrets of Masfield's success in the longer narrative poems. No doubt, the layman cannot quite analyse his sentiments and account for his enjoyment; yet this does not destroy their existence. They exist, and exist deeply-rooted in the heart of the reader.

Those pictures in poetry, however, seem to add no enjoyment but distort beauty even in tragic situations which over-emphasize an unrelieved mental distress. Such situations convey something morbid and revolting. They become painful in life; they are painful also in poetry. We have already pointed out Masfield's merits in this regard.

Some there are perched on the critic's roost, who claim that poetry to be a matter of enjoyment must abandon the exhausted, dead and dusty past and draw deep in matters of present importance which convey deep interest and novelty. This is hardly true, and to attribute Masfield's success to the fact that he selected life out of an English town of to-day would be unjust both to the poet and to poetry. The greatest poems of all times and nations were not those which appealed to contemporaries by charming their sense of interest and novelty. No -- They were poems brimful of action, sweeping and surging action, but above all human action such as human experience. Poetical creations belong to the domain of our permanent passions. Let poetry

and its herald interest these and the voice of all subordinate claims upon them is at once silenced.

The date of the action is a matter of little importance. The action itself, its selection, construction and development are ~~all the~~ important factors. The Greeks, who were gifted with inventive, analytical and constructive powers, understood this principle perfectly. Their first consideration was action, their secondary consideration was the image which clothed the thought in the treatment of action. To illustrate: the layman attaches value to a beautifully finished piano, the keys immaculate in color and perfect in shape, the varnish exquisite, the contours inspiring etc. The artist overlooks all this and strikes a key to hear the tone. Tone is all the artist seeks. There are perhaps too many who fall victims of the varnish, the carved legs and fine polish, and the whole time ignore tone. The real poet seeks the tone, the idiom of his expression, the soul of poetry which is nothing more nor less than the action as exemplified by the Greeks. They drew their force and power from the pregnancy of the matter which they wished to convey.

The secondary parts are so secondary in the Greek mind that they considered their work accomplished when in their mind the action was developed in detail. It is with difficulty that some understand what Menander meant when he told a man who enquired about the progress of his comedy, that he had finished it, not having yet written a single line, because he had constructed the action in his mind. The same is said of the author of Athalie. Some modern critics would have objected to these avowals, attaching primary importance to the brilliant colourings, the light and shade which their pens would draw as they went along. As a result of this attitude, there are poems whose reputation depends primarily on a line or two, but whose real worth ought to have relegated them beyond the darkness of the Styx long ere they lived. Such critics focus their myopic eyes upon detached expressions and do not concern themselves at all about the important feature -- the whole; they rivet their glance to the

language about the action and not to the action itself. This category of critics allows the poet to do as he pleases, to follow all whims and caprices, to have little action or no action at all provided that they can prey upon at least one single line whose burst of fine writing suffocates their being with intense delight. The Epicurses of lines: Please their sense of grammar, please their sense of rhetoric and their curiosity, and they will not worry about the sould of poetry. This is one of the causes of shallowness and sterility in genuine poetic inspiration in contemporary poetry.

What was true about the art of criticism in Arnold's day is equally true to-day and we take great pleasure in quoting him to confirm our statements. "The confusion (in guiding principles) of the present times is great, the multitude of voices counselling different things bewildering, the number of existing works capable of attracting a young writer's attention and of becoming his models, immense: what he wants is a hand to guide him through the confusion, a voice to prescribe to him the aim which he should keep in view, and to explain to him that the value of the literary works which offer themselves to his attention is relative to their power of helping him forward on his road towards this aim. Such a guide the English writers at the present day will nowhere find. Failing this, all that can be looked for, all indeed that can be desired, is that his attention should be fixed on excellent models; that he may reproduce, at any rate, something of their excellence, by penetrating himself with their works and by catching their spirit, if he cannot be taught to produce what is excellent independantly."

It is a fact of literary history that Masefield found his calling by reading Caucer. Studying men as Masefield did, in themselves and in things they controlled and influenced he could find no better pastime than to spend long hours in intense recollection with the poet who above all things had

the poet's gift, the knowledge of men and their ways. It shall consequently be of great interest to review a few notions about Chaucer, and by comparative study to retrace them as well as we can in his disciple of today.

Chaucer fascinated his contemporaries in the same way as Masfield does. The former's power of fascination is, however, enduring; Masfield's has not undergone the test of time. Chaucer's poetical importance does not need the aid of the historic estimate. He is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is still flowing for us and will flow always. He will be read as time goes on with greater influence and interest. The only difficulty is his language. But is the language of Burns and easier one? This difficulty is accepted and easily overcome.

If we ask ourselves in what lies the superiority of Chaucer we shall find the answer in the fact that he transports us into another world, a world different even to that sung by his own contemporaries. His superiority<sup>lies</sup> also both in the substance of his poetry and in the style. His superiority in substance is given by that deep, sweeping knowledge of men and humanity, so unlike the knowledge of the ordinary poet of his or the present day. The other poets have an artificial knowledge and paint artificially, thereby underlining their own helplessness. Chaucer surveys humanity from a unique point of vantage as from a mountain peak, seeing all mankind, in their garb of flesh and blood, body and soul, good and bad fortune, now rejoicing, now suffering, but always human humanity.

His style and manner are so distinctly different from his contemporaries in Europe that it is impossible to place him in a category. It is far easier to form one category comprising all the poets of Europe, leaving Chaucer in a world of his own which his genius created. To speak of Chaucer

in a comparative manner is very difficult because one cannot be altogether temperate. His poetry was called by some "Gold dew-drops of speech", "a well of English undefiled" because by the lovely charm of his diction and the graceful charm of his movement he makes an epoch and creates a tradition.

Chaucer has, as Arnold says of him, a virtue which only those have who followed in his footsteps as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. At one time it is the virtue of his liquid diction, at another it is the virtue of his liquid movement. And that virtue is irresistible. It's charm is so evanescent that Wordsworth, in an attempt to modernise the Prioress's Tale, has lost the delicate and evanescent charm of verse.

Now, the power of liquidness and fluidity in Chaucer's verse depends on a free and licentious dealing with language such as now seems utterly impossible. It seems to us that Masfield has attained it to a certain degree in some of the lines in the Everlasting Mercy., but it must be admitted that it is not the same species of fluidity nor perhaps the same liberty as is so simple a thing with Chaucer. To have emulated a genius of that original secret Masfield already deserves high consideration; but to have been even in the least degree successful is a still greater achievement as there have been very few among the most privileged who could as much as sit in the faintest shadow of Chaucer or touch the most distant vibrations of his evanescent art.

But is not this over-estimating the achievements of Masfield? Is it not almost ridiculous to compare a dwarf with all his perfections of

virtue and power to a well developed muscular heavyweight? This could be true if in our day, in the field of poetic pursuits, there did exist gigantic specimens of poetic heavyweights. But, alas, there exist in our estimation, only dwarfs and Masfield among them is the finest specimen compared with the old standards of the beautiful and the gentle, the great and the noble in poetry.

There seems to be one other quality which characterises Masfield's poetry and through which he seems to have a greater appeal than any other poet. There is in him and in his work the quality of genuine Christianity, the love of the poor and downtrodden, the love of the suffering and the helpless. The usual defect in poets who strive after this characteristic is that they overdo it by casting too much shade where light is better, by over-colouring certain aspects which create morbidity and sordidness and leave, in general, an impression of disgust, revolt and depression. Not so with Masfield in the Everlasting Mercy. His use of light and shade mixes in such good proportion that out of the whole picture exhales an atmosphere of genuine Christianity, of that consolation and comfort which we imbibe by reading the life of Christ in the Gospels. The charm of this quality penetrates through everything and touches our deepest sympathies. Its appeal grows on us the more we become familiar with it. This is a real test of poetic creative power. An ordinary commonplace poem becomes threadbare upon first reading; in others we seem to have the pleasure of gathering gentle but rare perfume upon second reading. But to grow in appeal with each perusal, without marring but rather intensifying our first impressions is a gift as precious as it is rare. And this gift is the privilege of Masfield particularly in The Everlasting Mercy. The Everlasting Mercy will live long after Masfield's life has reached its

mature fulfillment, it will still breathe its fragrance and influence hearts and souls to cherish what is noble and ideal. It will exercise its charm on humanity as long as there will be humanity that suffers and sins, that delights and in solitary but sincere efforts seeks what is noble and worthy in this mortal existence. This merit is the greatest a poet can crave, and this merit seems to be the gift of Masefield.

One concluding statement.

By this and by all that precedes, we do not wish to convey the impression that, because the Everlasting Mercy treats a wonderful subject in a splendid, although at times frail attire, it is the greatest masterpiece to leave a creative mind. Our purpose was solely to impress the fact that although unworthy to rank with the productions of far superior thinkers and technicians, the Everlasting Mercy is, nevertheless, a worthy creation, conveying to us one of the noblest truths of our life in a most impressive manner. For this we praise John Masefield and attribute to him powers which many a poet of higher skill and standing was utterly unable to exercise over such a wide world of humanity.

F I N I S