

TODAY
LONDON, ENGLAND
JUNE 1923
(pages 139-143)

THE VINE PRESS.



"Lilly-White" from Lillygay.
By courtesy of the Vine Press.

Steyning, in Sussex, is the home of the Vine Press. It was established there some three and a half years ago by Mr. Victor B. Neuburg. The books of the press have the pleasant crudity of the chapbook, largely the result of the quaint woodcuts in the illustrated volumes, of which there are two, and of the naïve typography in those which are unpictured. It is not clear whether this crudity is deliberate or accidental. Probably both taste for primitive printing and circumstances have played their parts in the production of a series of books which are as certainly unlike any other books now being published as they are far removed from that revival of good printing which has once more raised typography to the dignity of an art.



"Bowpots" from *Larkspur*

If the Vine Press books were produced in America they would be advertised in the Greenwich Village reviews as "Books that are Different," or "Tomes with the Neighbourhood Note." Their relationship to the best modern printing is as the relationship of "cottage" pottery to Crown Derby. They would go exceedingly well with Messrs. Heal and Sons' furniture. They are a sort of "barbaric yawp"—with a public-school accent; and they have just a hint (in the decorated initials), a faded memory of the Arts and Crafts Movement of a quarter of a century ago. In short, they look as though they had been produced under joyful but difficult conditions by someone who ignored or was ignorant of the best principles of typography.



"Bonfire Song" from *Lillygay*

If the result is agreeable and refreshing, as it certainly is, it is due very largely to the very delightful woodcuts which give two of the volumes, *Lillygay* and *Larkspur*, an irresistible charm. These cuts, by Eric and Percy West, successfully recapture an ancient simplicity without being merely archaic. Some of them have decorative beauty and others a sly humour which is altogether delicious. Not since Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osborne engraved their sense of fun on blocks of wood at DavosPlatz some forty years ago have we had such pleasantly inconsequential cuts. By courtesy of Mr. Neuburg a selection of these woodcuts have been used to illustrate this note.

The following books have been issued: *Lillygay: an Anthology of Poems*, 1920; *Swift Wings: Songs in Sussex*, 1921; *Songs of the Groves*, 1921; *Songs of a Sussex Tramp*, by Rubert Croft-Cooke, 1922; *Larkspur: a Lyric Garland*, 1922. Five hundred copies on antique laid, and forty on hand-made paper, of each of the volumes have been issued, with the exception of the *Songs of a Sussex Tramp*, of which the quantities are six hundred, and twenty, respectively. The copies in each class are numbered.



"The Milk-Maids" from *Larkspur*

For authorship—Mr. Neuburg is responsible for all the volumes save one. He is editor of the admirable collection of old songs brought together under the beautiful title of *Lillygay*, and for such songs, no more appropriate typography could be imagined than that of the Vine Press. *Larkspur* is another anthology of jolly old songs, including rollicking "numbers" from Robert

Green, Tom D'Urfey, Aphra Behn, Edmund Waller and John Keats, interspersed with certain quaint imitations of the antique, under various names, such as Chrystopher Crayne, Paul Pentreath, Harold Stevens, Arthur French and Nicholas Pyne, who are but disguises for Mr. Neuburg himself. *Swift Wings* and *Songs of the Groves* are volumes of poems by Mr. Neuburg. The former might be described as a modern echo of the earlier and more "native woodnotes wild." Some of the pieces are just pleasant, yet clever, jingles; others are boisterous expressions of a live Paganism, but the best are quietly impassioned word pictures of life in Sussex. One of the best of these is the little poem called "Sheep":



Colophon from *Larkspur*

The old frocked, bearded shepherd drives his cloud
Of fleecy white across the sunny meadows
Up the hiss-side, The idle, crying crowd
Dallies to browse, pasturing midst the shadows
Of gorse and bracken. Slowly the flock passes
Over the turf, amongst the rushy grasses.

The old, wise dog chases the lingering sheep
With modulated barking; the bell-whether
Tinkles to his lazy followers: the steep
Hillock's alive. The white cloud runs together
Baaing, the dour grey shepherd following;
In noon-tide's blare the tinny sheep-bells ring.

Songs of the Groves shows Mr. Neuburg in a more modern vein, and less bucolic, but always in love with life and living things, not always of the hillside and the field, but the equally living things of art and legend.