

POEMS FOR WORKERS. Edited by Manuel Gomez. Number 5 of The Little Red Library. The Daily Worker Publishing Co., \$.10.

A title like "Poems for Workers" implies, first, that poetry in general can be appreciated by workers, and second, that there are specific poems or a specific type of poetry that make a special appeal to workers. The first of these ideas is certainly unconventional. College professors and graduates of the five-foot shelf will say: try to talk poetry to workers! But they forget that poetry, like all the art forms, had its origins in the mass activities of early peoples. And it was the coming of the capitalist system and particularly its most vicious flowering, the United States, that was to a large extent responsible for the abortive divorce of art from the life of the masses.

Manuel Gomez believes that you can talk poetry to workers, that workers can talk poetry to themselves. He points out in his introduction that his anthology is the first of its kind in the English language. All other collections, like Upton Sinclair's "The Cry for Justice," have gathered together primarily poems about workers. It is true that not all the writers assembled here are themselves workers. Some like Siegfried Sassoon, for example, have really no direct relation with the working class. But practically all of these poems are written in a language and from a point of view that are close to the understanding and the life of the workers of America. Some of the poems are good and some are bad. Gomez makes it plain that the collection is personal and arbitrary. It might have been expanded into a portly volume dressed in an elegant binding and a postimpressionistic jacket. It might have sold for \$5 instead of 10 cents and been reviewed in all the best magazines. It might even have become a topic for esthetic table-tappings in "atmospheric" wine-cellars where poetry is once more made a virgin. But it wouldn't have reached the people for whom it was intended, the men who dig our coal and build our bridges and do most of the hard-boiled, dreary, unpoetical work of the world.

Since the anthology is frankly arbitrary, it is perhaps useless to criticize the selections Gomez has made. Carl Sandburg is hardly represented at his best, nor are Michael Gold and Jim Waters, who has written better stuff than this for The DAILY WORKER. But any reader can be thankful for the inclusion of two poems not usually met with in anthologies: Edward O'Connor's impudent and gaily pathetic hobo song, "Nobody Knows," and Arturo Giovannitti's "When the Cock Crows." This wild dark tale of a midnight lynching is, in my opinion, one of the great poems of the English language. It is a leaping prophecy and a scourge. There is nothing like it in English unless it be the same poet's "The Walker," which falls short of its fierce, gigantic eloquence. Milton's "Avenge, O Lord, Thy Slaughtered Saints" is rhetorical in comparison and William Ellery Leonard's "The Lynching Bee" seems stilted and literary. We must go back to the Old Testament prophets to find its equal. The poem is desperately real and its denunciation and scorn and lyrical madness burn nakedly into the mind. And it is a poem which comes close to the deepest emotions of most workers. A. B. MAGIL.