CLAUSEN, EMMA, *Im Vorübergehn: Gedichte.* Los Angeles: The Commonwealth Press, 1956, 158 pages. $2.75.

Emma Clausen, the 89-year-old authoress of *Im Vorübergehn*, has had an unusual career. Trained in her native Germany as that most pleasant kind of schoolteacher, a "Kindergärtnerin," she emigrated at 18 to Canada. After a brief marriage she came to the United States, where she supported her two children and herself—first as a teacher, then as a nurse, and finally, after medical studies, as a physician. In 1922 Dr. Clausen abandoned her practice and moved to Los Angeles, a city destined to become the assembly point of the German literary diaspora during the Nazi years. In Los Angeles Emma Clausen, like a feminine Theodor Fontane, blossomed as a poetess at an age when the ordinary human being has no greater ambition than a bench in the sun. A good deal of Dr. Clausen's work has been published in German-American newspapers; the present volume is intended to present a selection of her poetry in a less transitory medium. Remarkably enough, not a few of the poems in the collection have been written during the last decade; precisely these poems, the products of extreme age, are the best works in the little book.

Im Vorübergehn is divided into five sections. The opening poems of the first part, *Am Weg entlang*, treat the larger aspects of life in a language now Eichendorffian ("Kannst von all der Gottespracht / Nicht ein Fünkchen missen!"), now distinctly Schillerian ("Da kreisen die Welten um die Idee, / Um den ewigen Gottesgedanken!"). Then the poetess turns her attention to the problems of what is called, in some circles, "Auslandsdeutschtum": a moving little poem, "Heimatfremd," describes the plight of the emigrant, a stranger in his adopted country and yet equally a stranger when he returns to his homeland. Still other poems—one presumes that they were written for delivery at German-American conventions—celebrate "die deutsche Sitte" and call upon the German-American to preserve the purity of the German tongue. The section closes with a series of laments on the condition of Germany after 1945; the poetess hopes that the German people will not be the target of "Völkerhass und Rachsucht."

The verses of *Im Wechsel der Tage*, dealing with such various subjects as Wagner, Johann Strauss, and the modes of address in South German, are perhaps less successful than the poems which comprise *Erinnerungen an die Eltern*. Dr. Clausen conjures up her dead parents by describing the objects which were their daily companions in life: her father's pipe, his inkwell, his pocket watch, her mother's chiffonier, her jewelry box, the keys of the old piano around which the poetess and her sisters once danced as children:

> Die Tänze, die luden zum Tanz uns ein—
> Wir liessen nicht Vater erlahmen—
> Er musste der fährende 'Herr' ja sein
> Im Tanze mit seinen drei 'Damen!'

Anyone who has sensed the pathetic air of old furniture or bric-à-brac will be touched by these portraits of German "Dinge" that have found their way into another world and another age.

An der engen Pforte is composed of poems written in memory of Dr. Clausen's parents and, more especially, of friends who have evidently been members of the German-American colony in Southern California. (Here a few explanatory notes would have been useful to the uninitiated. Particularly confusing is the poem dedicated to Georg Hermann. The reader thinks, of course, of the brilliant portrayer of Berlin Jewish society who met such a hideous end at Auschwitz, but the verses themselves would seem to indicate another Hermann altogether.)

In *Die schöne Welt* Dr. Clausen moves easily from Santa Monica (perhaps the first description in German verse of the refuge of the Manns and Werfel) to the great National Parks, to Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Grand Canyon. Dr. Clausen is a careful guide through these awesome vistas, a traveler of keen poetic perception and equally keen eyesight. Her nature poems betray her splendid vision very much as Droste's nature poems betrayed the famous shortsightedness of the Westphalian poetess, and one is saddened to learn that in recent years Dr. Clausen has gone blind. The lyrics of *Heimfahrt* describe the approach of her affliction, and one of them in particular, "Schwindendes Licht," deserves a place of honor among poetic descriptions of old age:

> Noch seh' ich in der Ferne
> Den Mond am Himmel steh'n,
> Die Sterne, ach, die Sterne,
> Die kann ich nicht mehr seh'n.

Equally simple, and equally moving, are the poems where Dr. Clausen contemplates the imminence of death:

> Es wird ein Morgen tagen,
> Und ich erwache nicht;
> Die Uhren werden schlagen,
> Mich aber stört es nicht.

Lines like these cannot be dismissed as the work of the literary dilettante, the poetaster whose true home is the newspaper column. Dr. Clausen is a cultured and sensitive woman who, had she not spent her life in a foreign country (a situation which inevitably causes a certain estrangement from the mother tongue as a living instrument), would probably have made her mark as a poetess in her native land. If one compares her work with that of a Paula von Preradović or an Agnes Miegel, one will find disparities in skill, to be sure, but not in talent.

Yet, on the other hand, Dr. Clausen did come to America; her life has been devoted to "German-Americanism," and German-Americans should be thankful for it. The great German-American cities of the United States are disappearing, as it were: the character of Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and Saint Louis has undergone a distinct change in recent years, and one fears that the German-American spirit, to which American culture owes such an infinite debt, will soon be dead and forgotten. Perhaps Dr. Clausen's example, personal and literary, will serve as a reminder that German-Americanism deserves to be preserved—and that German idealism and liberalism survived longest not in the "lands of German tongue" but in America.

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