own critical position is quite consistent with his fictional writing. His work sacrifices characterisation and mundane realism to the exigencies of plot, the fascination of ideas at the border of understanding, and relatively swift narrative flow. The fact that he sacrifices less than most other sf writers, and retains as much as other writers of those fictional elements held to be most valuable by the majority of sf fans; together with his confident and attractive way with words; makes him one of today’s sf authors most worth reading.

NOTE:
* cf. Senior Podair in Negro Digest, March 1976: “Language goes beyond being merely a communicative device not only expresses ideas and concepts but may actually shape them.”

**REFRESHING AND RELIGIOUS**


Many of Pickford’s poems seem very personal ones, and are perhaps more striking for their sincerity and enthusiasm than for their poetic qualities. As an example I take a passage about the flame tree of the title:

*A high round-crowned Flame tree where our children’s tree house was
observatory overlooking Eden, storehouse of our imagination, doorway to a boundless future, refuge for the innocent, hermitage and hospice close to heaven
set round now, with flaming sword...*

The drift of the poems is refreshingly, because genuinely and unembarrassedly, religious, but the assertions about the image here (rather than that the image is poetically allowed to carry its own weight) are not necessarily to be shared by the reader. Similarly, from an artistic point of view, the road to heaven seems too easy and too arbitrary in:

*The parting of friends is birth.
Feelings unfence as hearts reach out for union
hints of heaven – we can touch the infinite.*

One does not like to be in any way ungenerous in the case of an author whose feelings are so positive. There is an important distinction, however, between moral values and art.

The last-quoted example nevertheless is not representative of what is best in this uneven collection. Pickford succeeds far better when he distances his material from himself — notably by means of a historical setting. The best poem, to my mind, is the last in the book, ‘The Western Rebellion’. Here we might perhaps think to have found too much of the other extreme, but upon a moment’s thought the historical verisimilitude can be seen to be the effect of careful use of the imagination rather than more respect for facts of the past. the poem does however lack some of the emotional force of more subjective poems. A balance between the two modes might make for more indubitably successful work, but possibly we should be grateful for the variety which we do find in the meantime instead of looking forward to something more finished but conceivably more lifeless. Only Pickford himself can provide the answer to this question, and it will be interesting to see which way he develops.