

# Feature Page

## POETRY

### WHY WE WRITE

"May I congratulate you on 'The Fiddlehead' for April and express a hope that many more issues will follow of equal merit? A collection of admirable verse, in my opinion; and I doubt if any periodical publication in Canada can equal it, as such. Some pieces are more to my taste than others, but there is nothing here which does not add to my high (and but recently aroused) hopes for the Old College's, and the Old Province's literary future.

Good luck!

Yours—

Theodore Goodridge Roberts

That was the text of a letter received shortly after the appearance of the second issue of 'The Fiddlehead' in April, 1946. We had made a good start. Other issues brought other letters of encouragement. Recently, a note from E. C. Kye, Librarian at Queen's University referred to 'The Fiddlehead' as "your original and well-produced periodical." And a letter from J. B. Erenor, a professor of History at Columbia University, and the author of several historical works, concluded, "I applaud your enterprise in keeping alive an old and proud tradition of U. N. E. and Fredericton."

It is unfortunate that the poetry group on the campus must wash linen in public. True, no direct attack has been made on the workings of the group, but there have been rumours of attacks, and hence the attacks are all the more dangerous. But we really do not mind having to justify our place here. Our linen isn't very dirty.

The preface to the first 'Fiddlehead' contained these thoughts:

"Fredericton and the University of New Brunswick have a tradition of poetry which includes, among others, Jonathan Odell, James Hogg, Barry St-anton, Sir Charles Roberts, Francis Sherman, Bliss Carman, and Theodore Goodridge Roberts. The Bliss Carman Society was founded in December, 1940, in the belief that this tradition is worth preserving and continuing. By continuing a tradition is not meant a slavish imitation of past themes and methods, nor does it mean a complete break with the past. To continue a tradition is to develop it to the point of contemporaneity. As this point is forever in motion the tradition must be forever unfolding by means of constant experimentation.

"T. S. Eliot has written that the poet should not wait for inspiration but must be experimenting, and trying his technique so that it will be ready, like a well-oiled fire-engine, when the moment comes to strain it to its utmost. The poet who wishes to continue to write poetry must keep in training; and must do this not by forcing his inspiration, but by good workmanship on a level possible for some hours' work every week of his life." Believing this the members of the Society have been practicing writers of verse. . . . The poems contained herein are not published, but are brought together in this form as a record largely for private circulation among members of the Society and their friends.

Our friends wanted 'Fiddleheads'. The first two issues sold out within a week of publication.

But after such an encouraging start there was a slump in appreciation. Why? Perhaps part of the blame can be fixed to individuals who seem to resent the work. At times this sounds very much like sour grapes, with the damner so

intoxicated with the decayed juice that he becomes falsely grand in his words of condemnation.

And there are those who cannot see the reason for it all. I trust they are not questioning the reason for all poetry. If it is a question of why we write, the answer has already been given. And I hope critics will remember that our first attempts cannot show the polish of thought and statement that requires years of training and discipline. Carman and Roberts had their beginnings too, remember.

One of Roberts early poems, published in the University Monthly in May, 1883, ended with these lines:

"Oh, poets bewailing your hap-

less lot,

That ye may not in Nature your

whole hearts steep,

Know that the wealth of the

poets' thought

Is sweet to win, but bitter to

keep."

We see that young poets aren't

born with Shakespearian lines in

their mouths. Neither was Blake-

speare, for that matter.

Set beside the lines the following

poem by Betty Brewster, which

could be an answer to Roberts.

"Only the subtle thing,

The slender, still things stand;

The heavy mountains crumble

down

To fluid wastes of sand;

The medalled heroes die,

The shouting millions pass,

And on their sunken graves

there grows

The mute, tenacious grass."

Roberts received no discouraging

criticism of his early attempts. And

as soon as he made a bot of a stir in

the world of poetry he was showered

with such praise as this: "Prof-

essor Roberts, while a student at

the University (of New Brunswick),

distinguished himself as a writer of

both prose and poetry."

Carman wrote no poetry in his

undergraduate days. But his early

poems, written after 1881, were also

published in the University Month-

ly.

One morning in the maiden

day,

"A silver-throated bobolink one

month of June,

(Like maidenhood 'tis come and

gone so soon),

His broken, rippling, joyful

roundelay

Sang to the bubbling brook that slips away  
Beneath the alders to the warm lagoon.  
Youth-like I waited for the ripening noon,  
And loitered where the dew-dripped shadows lay."

Margaret Cunningham also writes of nature:

"The fields are loud  
With crying winds  
That riot through the sky,  
And all the night  
They tear the hills  
And pile the snowdrifts high.  
When morning comes  
With frost-bored breath  
The white fields voiceless lie,  
And silent stand  
Black ragged pines  
Embossed upon the sky."

We receive constant criticism about the gloom, the brooding, in our verse. It is what we find—and we seem to be in keeping with the spirit of all contemporary thought expressed in poetry. Surely we may be forgiven this "fault". We sometimes think. We cannot stay drunk all the time.

And I have heard rumours from several sources that we delight in shocking. This, I say, is a fault in the reader, not the writer. So many people love the thrill of treading on thin ice, and they, imagining we tread thin ice, are perhaps disappointed that they were not the first to do the cracking. Also, since it is our business to give as vivid and forceful a picture as possible, must we be dubbed with the criterion of damnation of Victorian saintliness, "We shock." I think no one blinked an eye when Ben Jonson wrote

"But some young woman must

be straight sought out,

Lusty, and full of juice, to sleep

by him."

And what of these lines of

Blake's?

"The priest rot in his surplice

by the lawless lover

. . . and their worms embrace

together."

I do believe that for many to meet

a poet would be to discredit his

poetry. Why is it we cannot realize

that poetry is written by human

beings? Raleigh and Milton were

men, you know. Yet if we could

meet them today I think the divine-

ness of their poetry would become

lost to us. And hence it seems im-

possible that students at the Uni-

versity of New Brunswick can write

poems. Gods and goddesses can-

not walk among us!

We are indeed human beings, and

I know we flourish; for in our verse

making we do not take the soft soap-

stone to mould. Rather we take the

hard diamond—that one that Shake-

speare took. We are not the cutter

he was. But there are many of

these diamonds. Surely there is

no harm in our practising on them.

Now, we would not have our

critics adopt a hands-off policy. We

need criticism—but of the right

kind. Rather, we wish a hands-on

policy. But wash your hands. Con-

sidering the number of bubbles

blown at this University there must

be soap and water around.

Love conquers everything except

poverty and a tooth-ache.

## Poetry

### NEW YEAR'S DAY, ENGLAND 1944.

Beneath the cool, soft, Sussex mist,  
The Downs lie, old and still—  
North, to Surrey and the Weald, it  
creeps from hill to hill.  
Thus the New Year, stealing in, o'er  
English flock and farm,  
While tall white cliffs yet kindly  
warn the little ships from harm.

Who are bred within these isles may  
love this vague change best—  
But where, untrammelled from the  
Pole, the fast tree bellowing wind,  
Sets the snow—spume eddying  
along each drifted crest.

The hard, bright, blinding, steel-  
cold days will fill the thankful  
wind  
With psalms of praise for Him who  
makes these joyous things and  
kind.

Almighty, if it be Thy will, show me  
yet again  
The dark dim-steaming, grateful  
woods.

After summer rain—  
The scent of resin bubbling,  
Mid pines, at stifling noon—  
The seared brown meadows weiling  
the cicadas' screaming tune;  
The blue-green jewel of the lake  
Flashing back the sun;  
The twang of hunting night-hawk  
When the baking day is done.

Here am I utterly pressed upon by  
foolish man-made things.  
Not the greatness of man's soul  
which even through black squalor  
sings,  
But the nagging devils conceived  
for profit or for ease.

There are no lone, loon—haunted  
woods  
Where whose seeks Him sees  
The limitless, low, rocky hills  
Out-dancing the eye;  
(Whether melting snow-voices  
Talk anew of birth,  
Or in frost-flecked, crimson glory  
The year prepares to die.)

And e'en cherishes these matters,  
May think, if he but dare,  
On His purposes for striving,  
Dumbly well-intentioned, man,  
With the finger of his fire-smoke  
reaching  
To God's face above him there.

—David Munn.

### THE PEOPLE OF THIS EARTH

The people of this earth don't know  
The wailing of the broken wind;  
Don't know the reason for its wail-  
ing;  
Can't know for whom it mourns.

The people of this earth don't know  
The laughter of the bloated brook  
When all-divining Gods their tears  
of pity shed;  
Don't hear its mocking  
Can't know for whom the Gods have  
wept.

The people of this earth don't know  
The passing of the timeless orbit  
Into the soulless atom era;  
Don't feel its icy blast;  
Can't know the chilling power of  
the future reign.

The people of this earth  
Shall never see, can never know,  
Because they will not.

The people of this earth don't know  
The people of this earth.

—R. L. '48.

## Notes . . .

The results of the recent Brunswick Literary contest have been gratifying both to the members of the Brunswick staff who initiated it and to the members of the Faculty who were kind enough to act as the judges. Through the generous co-operation of Dr. Pacey, Dr. Bailey, Professor Smethurst and Mr. Gammon on one hand and the entire eligible student body on the other the contest was a success.

What constituted its success does not lie alone in that the winning entries were of good quality but also in that the entries were great in number. This emphasis on quantity may seem opposed to the exclusive attention usually paid to quality in creative writing, but by the quantity of short stories, essays and poems submitted it was possible to obtain some conception of the quality of expression of the student group whose interest is at least partly occupied by ideas which range to the originality prerequisite to good writing.

We believe that an optimistic view is indeed warranted after considering the "quality in terms of quantity" and believe in the continuation of some medium of interest in the field of creative writing.

Webster:

We looked up that word "modicum" to be certain of using it in the correct sense and were beset by a difficulty we wish to air.

Opening Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and turning to M, we found ourselves somewhere in the Mos and the word monogenic focussed our attention upon itself. We learned it meant something relating to monogenesis which has meanings: 1. a and b; and 2. a and b and is opposed to polygenesis. This discovery we found most interesting and the interest was quickened when glancing across the page told us that a canticule was the subordinate cone of a volcano.

Sudden realization of the fact that monicula could never be substituted for the now forgotten word for which we had originally begun our consultation, generated a wave of disgust for our gullibility and Webster's chicanery.

At this moment a friend entered our room and enquired as to what cause our annoyance was due. We declared intense industry rather than annoyance and as an afterthought requested that the visitor please look up the word modicum.

Controversy:

Under this title the first of a series of five articles will appear on this page, beginning in the next regular issue. It is expected that the readers will disagree with many of the views of the five authors. It is felt however that only by reviewing current concepts of our campus, can we be enabled to recognize the faults and applaud the truths as they are revealed to us in the more finished political, ethical and social creeds and cults that beset us at this time.

"What kind a dress did Betty wear to the party last night?"

"I don't remember, I think it was checked."

"That must have been a real party!"

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