

Fiction Contest Results

The Gazette-sponsored fiction contest open to all Dalhousie students, has been duly completed and awards given. The judges were C. L. Bennet, head of Dept. of English, W. G. Allen, Prof. of English and A. R. Bevan, Prof. of English. First place honours went to Sis Nichols for story "Peccavi", the close second spot to Barbara McGeoch for story "The Grass Snake".

On this page the creative genius is displayed.

Peccavi

Father Stephen thoughtfully rose slowly from his knees, genuflected wearily, and turned to go into the confessional. It was nearly time to listen to a recital of human error, and the consequences that followed thereby. He was so tired of this parish, things drifted along in a murky stream—the tavern brawls, the squalid weddings, the christenings amidst rats and heaps of old bottles, in a rotten slum hole, owned by Mr. Mulcahie, the largest donor in the parish. How could he fight the wrongs . . . he was old, even his eyes reflected no stream of light, his greying hair straggled untidily over the collar of his worn cassock. He sat down stiffly and inclined his head toward the grill as the first steps shuffled in . . . "Father, I did not go to Mass last week, I slapped my wife because I was tired, she was so surly . . . I am truly sorry . . . I resolve . . . " "Yes, my son, te absolvo, in nomine . . . Your penance will be . . . " "The rigamarole of words ground out day after day like a worn out record player that people had forgotten how to turn off; again and again, " . . . te absolvo, in nomine . . . "were they really forgiven, were they really sorry, or were they only doing what other people expected them to do, was that all that he himself was doing, had life lost its meaning for all, had they forgotten the Son—"come unto Me, all ye that travail . . . I will refresh you." Had he not come unto God at his ordination, had not his whole life been dedicated to the glory of God, and yet he was not refreshed. Life became more and more like a desert, every day he stumbled over more bleak skeletons, at a great distance he was lightly touched with the sparkling oasis of a child's devout confession . . . and yet what was wrong?

Mr. Mulcahie came in with his petty recital of having forgotten to donate to a certain charity, having been a few moments late for Mass—his attitude toward God as a jolly friend of his who would naturally overlook any slight

error for a price. As Father Stephen began to mutter the Absolution a child rushed to the door of the confessional: "Father, come quickly, Mary is dying, the stairs fell . . . hurry, Father, before it is too late." Father Stephen moved swiftly from the confessional. Mr. Mulcahie was forgotten, a pious sinner on his knees in an empty box, frustrated from fulfillment of his week's duty, and the steps went out of the cathedral, the quick patter of the child's and the heavy tread of the priest. Mulcahie thought of the child, he knew the 'home', condemned years ago, but his lawyer had managed to keep the commitments away for a price. Now his greed swept over him, the enormity of his crime. DEATH by his own invitation had visited someone. He hurriedly rose from his knees, grasped his cane and hat and ran through the empty pews really praying for the first time in his life. "Father, peccavi, forgive me—peccavi, peccavi"—he staggered blindly to the rotten court where Mary's home was, past the doorways of lurking shadows of women of neither race nor age. A crowd had gathered around the door, sullenly they fell back as he broke through. Scalding tears streaked his cheeks—he went through the burly policeman at the door—and stopped, struck with fear as he saw that the ceiling would fall in a minute obliterating forever the three figures under the stairs. Mary, pinned by a beam was bravely smiling at her young husband, who stroked her white face, kissing her hungrily . . . Don't worry, darling, they will be here in a moment and get it off." Father Stephen held her hand praying softly, his eyes closed—no one heard the ominous crack in the ceiling. Mulcahie hurried to the group, pushed Father Stephen backward, threw Pat against the wall, and bent over Mary, shielding her view from the ceiling . . . "Forgive me, my child—" A heavenly smile suffused her glance, and she started to speak. At that moment the ceiling fell with a resounding crash, and dust arose in suffocat-

How To Invest Your Summer

Do you want to make your summer pay dividends? Here's how to go about it. The Student's Christian Movement of Canada is sponsoring three student works camps this summer. At each camp about twenty-five young men and women representing every major Canadian University come together to practice a system of co-operative living.

It is an education in itself merely to mingle with students from the length and breadth of Canada, as well as from the United States, but the potentialities of a summer spent in such an atmosphere become even more forcefully revealed as the students settle down to the business of tackling the basic problems which beset our present society with a view to finding the answers in terms of straightforward Christian living. By securing a job in the industrial or agricultural sphere the camper is able to identify himself in a practical way with the working class; thus as a result of first hand experience coupled with an honest approach, the student camper is able to gain a clearer insight into, and a deeper understanding of, the many complex problems that face the various classes of society. Finally, by pooling ideas and experiences, by discussing fundamental problems with all sincerity, honesty, and conscientiousness; and by comparing our society with the way of life as taught to us by Christ, the camper is able to find the answers to many questions—answers which can never be reached within the walls of the university.

The text as to how far the camper has progressed in his search for unity and Christian fellowship comes at the end of the summer when each camper, if he so desires, contributes his summer earnings into a common pool. From this pool, funds are distributed according to the basic needs of the individual. In this way, many students are able to return to college, whereas they would have found it otherwise impossible.

A summer in a work camp can achieve more than any college course in the way of broadening one's views and helping one to assume a global aspect on the facts of life.

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Anyone interested may obtain application forms from Rev. Blair Colbourne, at the S.C.M. office in the Men's Residence, or by contacting him at his home, 314 South St.

ing clouds. When they finally were dug out, Pat had only a broken leg, but his spirit was crushed forever; Father Stephen paralyzed for life, but finally filled with peace at the action of Mulcahie—and Mary—the peaceful look preserved by Mulcahie's body, which was crushed beyond recognition, but whose last words had been seeking true forgiveness . . . in nomine Domine . . . perhaps Absolution had been granted.

The Grass Snake

The great orange ball of the August sun flamed in the bottom of the bay, throwing the treetops which folded over one another on the upslope into black silhouette, that spilled over the dark water in a deeper ebony shadow. On the open lake the light was still clear and the oblique rays reflected red on the ripples which shimmered their ruddy image until they leaped across the water in streaking fingers. The canoe, caught in its path, burned, and the boy turned his eyes, stung by the brilliance, to where the sky edged into chill blue.

He was, perhaps, ten. His face, smooth-cheeked, had a clean bare look, swept of all emotion except the animal joy of the very young which showed in his eager eyes and the sharp plains of his face. The sun, a burning torch, sifted through his pale hair dying it red.

The smooth bole of the cedar paddle trailing in the water, swung in a slight eddy, turning in his hands and with sudden importance he gripped it tightly sending the canoe slipping across the surface. Dark whirlpools edged with gleaming froth circled out behind the boat and the bow, rising with each deep stroke, settled back with a short muffled clap throwing water out in tiny drops that dimpled the surface. The boy's breath came faster, a flush suffusing his cheeks as the canoe approached the far shore where the trees, a stiff border of black reaching out to the canoe, stealthily receded as it drew closer.

Out of breath he leaned forward, the paddle drawing an aimless pattern on the water as he watched with childish curiosity the tiny ripples spread out from the bow. In a widening V they opened out rocking a small stick floating on the surface. It rolled gently with them, rising on each narrow crest to fall back again each time. As the boy watched, now idly, it convulsed, sending out small ruffles that met and fell back, engulfed, before the larger ripples from the canoe. It moved again and the boy saw the small oval head of a grass snake lift above the surface like some minute periscope, watching with bright eyes as the shadow of the canoe drifted over it. It was almost invisible on the black water.

The light swiftly sinking into dusk shone on the burnished soot color of its back gleaming with water, merging on the sides into a deep forest green. Thin willow green stripes marked the symmetry of its body, and in one place a lightning zag of pale yellow was streaked. Its small head glistened like rubbed ebony, the keen edges delicately carved and the soft curving throat shaded paler showing creamy in the light. Now the grass snake lay motionless, only its tongue, a narrow thread of forked crimson flickered in and out nervously.

The two figures were still, gauging each other, but as the small human remained quiet the snake twisted forward suddenly, its body moving in a sinuous double S. As suddenly it stopped the thin bright line flickering once in defiance. Cautiously, the boy had lifted the paddle, raising it high over his head and now he smashed it down a foot to the left of the frozen snake. The clap echoed over the lake filling the air with abrupt sound and bouncing off the woods bounding on each side. The boy smacked the paddle down again, sending small tidal waves over the tiny creature and then in a sudden fit of impatient anger as it did not move, thrust the weapon under its body. The snake twisted forward a few inches but instinct was strong, holding it motionless once more. Sudden pity and shame moved in the boy as quickly as he had been seized by irrational anger and slowly he backpaddled the canoe away.

The sun was lower now and drifting behind the snake as it moved, its body tracing a delicate pattern on the water, the boy wondered what had driven it out into the lake where it lay helpless. He looked back at the op-

posite shore remembering the brush that clung with wiry fingers to the rocks along the shoreline that he and his father had burned that afternoon. The flames even as they destroyed the brush had perhaps forced the grass snake out into the water.

The snake with the boy trailing were now quite near the shore and he looked with sudden apprehension at the trees which retreated in vast black depths before his eyes. He swung the canoe around and in a few strokes was out once more on the open water, where the sun showed an orange disc on the horizon paling overhead to a washed blue. He hesitated, fear swelling up within him, but drawn strangely back to the snake no longer visible behind him on the dark water. He shivered and then suddenly, half angrily, swept the boat around once more and paddled back in short quick strokes to the shore. His eyes swung over the water looking for the grass snake, in quick panic lest it might have disappeared or reached the shore already. Then in a moment it lay on the water in front of him moving steadily forward. It was within the deeper shadow of the tress now, barely distinct on the brittle black mirror. Giant trunks half submerged, reached out in dark masses under the water and nervously the boy willed the tiny creature to the shore, glancing at the trees through which the poplars, a ghost army, gleamed white.

A sudden sound drew his eyes back to the place where the grass snake lay. The surface stretched empty before him, marked only by small swirling hollows in the water, spreading in ever widening circles. His throat grew tight and quick tears blurred his eyes as he leaned over the bulwark of the canoe trying to peer beneath the surface where the speckled wall-eyed bass lay lurking under the rocks. There was nothing. The ripples washed against the canoe and disappeared and once more the water stretched smooth and black.

Terror and guilt rose in him. He had killed the snake, but there was nothing he could do, nothing he could have done. He swung the canoe, sweeping wide around the place where the grass snake had disappeared and as the boat moved away from the shore the dark shadow of the trees hid the water.



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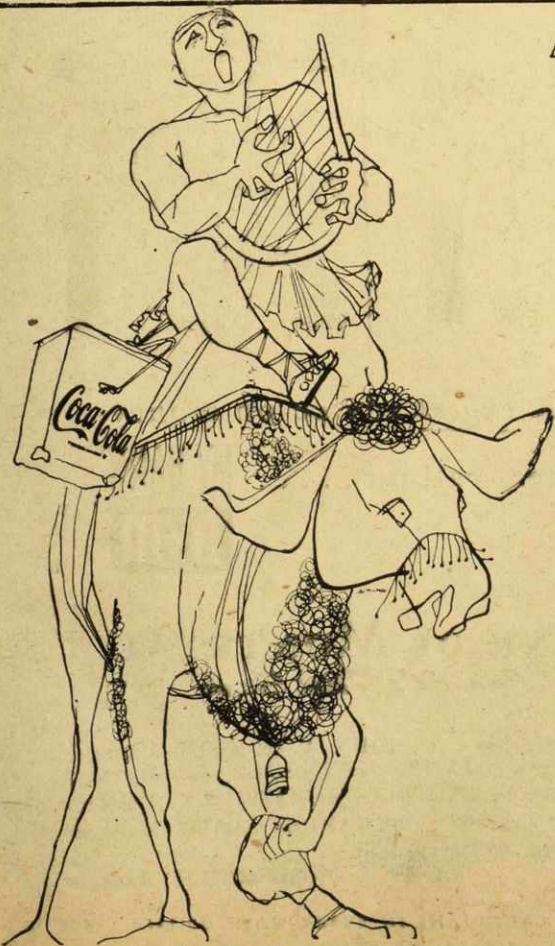
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