

# A PAGE FOR POETS

CONDUCTED BY HENRY GODDARD LEACH



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## TUNING UP

AMERICA is writing verse again. The other Sunday I opened an old tin box in the family closet and found that it contained bundles of letters, tied in gay ribbons, dating from the early decades a century ago. These notes were all acceptances or regrets to dinners and parties, and the reason that they had escaped the scrap basket was that they were all written in rhyme. Apparently it was a special courtesy to your hostess in that very polite age to reply to her gracious invitation in verse. Those were the days when we were tuning up for Longfellow and Lowell, for Whitman and Poe. And it seems that at this present time we are tuning up for something important in poetry again. Apparently every American village, every school has its poetry group of shy but joyous rhymesters. Verse seems to be one of our releases from the headachy adding machines of the New Deal. If you have delicate ears you can detect in your neighborhood a buzzing undertone of amateur metrists as insistent as the whir of cicadas in your orchard on a hot August day.

"When is a poem a poem?" I once asked Vachel Lindsay, and he answered, "When it is enjoyed and accepted by the community; when the local blacksmith and the carpenter, the doctor and the schoolteacher all agree that they like it and want to keep it." And he deplored the judgment which rejects verses that do not succeed in becoming nationalized through publication in our million-circulation magazines. Happily organs for the more local publication of verse are now springing up all over the country. On my desk I have some sixty tabloid magazines devoted almost exclusively to verse.

*Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* announces that more than a thousand organizations, representing over five million people, will co-operate in the ninth annual celebration of Poetry Week, the fourth week in May. The founder of Poetry Week, Mrs. Anita Browne, has recently established the headquarters of a National Poetry

Center in the Radio City Building of Rockefeller Center. Another announcement electrifying to poets is the organization by Mrs. Hugh Bullock, with the aid of an advisory board of poets, of an American Academy of Poets. The Academy hopes to provide annual fellowships of as much as \$5,000 for American writers.

At Smith College the girls have revived a sixteenth-century custom. They print their verse in Rhyme Sheets and have them hawked on the campus by criers with hand bells. But these girls also employ twentieth-century methods. Selections from their verses they broadcast from Springfield, to put them over not only on the campus but to the country at large.

So poetry in America also marches on.

## ANNIVERSARY ODE

OH POETRY *Society of America*,  
*Protector of Apollo's esoterica,*  
*But yesterday I knew you in the nursery,*  
*And now it is your Silver Anniversary!*  
*Your vigor and vitality embolden one*  
*To wager that you'll celebrate your*  
*golden one.*  
*Long may you help the Muses and the*  
*Graces*

*To teach the colts of Pegasus their paces!*  
Such was the happy salutation of Arthur Guiterman, former President of the Poetry Society of America, to its twenty-fifth annual dinner in New York City on January 31.

The perennial officer of the Poetry Society is the Corresponding Secretary, tireless friend of all poets, Miss Margery Mansfield, 516 East 78th Street, New York. Edwin Markham is the perpetual Honorary President. This year Margaret Widdemer is the Honorary Secretary and the Vice-Presidents are Joseph Auslander, Leonora Speyer, and Padraic Colum.

## INTERSCHOLASTIC POETRY CONTEST

THE RESULTS of THE FORUM's 1935 Interscholastic Poetry Contest will be announced in the May issue. Seven hundred ninety-three entries were received. They came from 197 schools in 37 states, Alaska, and the District of

Columbia. Of course, most of them are pleasant and commendable exercises in verse and not necessarily pure poetry.

## DOGS, ETC.

SOME MONTHS back this editor returned some verse submitted by a Philadelphia poet, Mary Borland, with the truculent advice that she try an airplane trip to Yucatan or, failing that, practice standing on her head in her own backyard. Nothing daunted, this versatile poet submitted a new sheaf of verse illustrating moods of "stand-on-the-headitiveness." The delighted editor promptly accepted a poem which will shortly appear, "On the Kennelly-Heaviside Layer." But the editor did not wish to be labeled bizarre in his choice of subjects. In fact he has recently been successful in publishing poems on cows and other barnyard animals. So he wrote Mary Borland suggesting a poem about a dog. She replies, "Could you give me a hint — do you want a metaphysical dog, a comic dog, a tragic dog, a Laura-Benetesque dog, a pastoral or sheep dog, a sentimental Victorian dog?" What is more she submitted several specimen studies for poems on dogs, of which I beg her leave to quote two:

### *One Swift Kick* *(To a Pet Griffon)*

*Had I not walked on so blindly,*  
*Had I thought to look behind me,*  
*Had I chatted less politely,*  
*Had I known you meant to bite me.*

*You had never had a chance*  
*To nip me in the Sunday pants.*  
*One swift kick, and then we'll sever*  
*I sincerely hope forever.*

### *On the Death of Clorinda's Pug*

*Bring dog-tooth violets, dog-roses red.*  
*Poor Pug is dead.*  
*He ate*  
*A well-filled plate*  
*Three times a day,*  
*And in my arms he snored his life away.*  
*Alas! all flesh is grass,*  
*And even well-beloved pugs must turn*  
*at last to clay.*

*How many know—*

## WHO SAID IT?



**\$1,000.00 for good memories**

**H**ERE are the awards in the February-issue *Who Said It?* Contest:

First prize, \$50, to Arthur R. Blessing, of the Naval War College at Newport, R. I.

Second prizes, \$10 each, to Miss Helen L. Thomas, Harvard College Observatory, Cambridge, Mass., and Miss Margaret Beauchamp, 1804 Hanover Ave., Richmond, Va.

The Editor's felicitations to the talented winners! They and all other entries have been entered for the Sweepstakes award of \$500. And the many contestants who first entered the fray in February are urged to remember that they have the same chance for this prize as the rest, provided they mail in a complete set of answers by June 14. Readers who wish to compete in the Sweepstakes and need back issues to do so may obtain these by remitting 35 cents for each copy desired to the Circulation Manager of *THE FORUM*, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

Prize winners in the March-issue contest will be announced next month. Entries for the April issue must be received by the *Who Said It?* Editor, at the address above, by 6 P.M. on Monday, April 15. Remember, entries for this and all other contests *must* be made on the blanks printed monthly in *THE FORUM*.

A contestant has asked whether the fictional character as well as the author should be named in the case of a quotation taken from a novel or play. The strictest interpretation

of the contest rules would seem to indicate that *either* would suffice. But contestants are urged to give *both* character and author, for, on the whole, the most complete reply would seem to be the "most nearly correct" (see Rule 3).

By and large, the results of the two contests judged to date show that readers of *THE FORUM* are very well read people indeed. But no *perfect* set of replies has yet been received. At this stage of the contest, nine correct names is a high score.

Quotation Number 5 in the February contest troubled many entrants. Completely baffled, one reader gave it up, but wrote sadly opposite it — "doubtless an economic expert on household topics"! And we feel that Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt would be highly flattered were she aware that she has been awarded authorship of a line from one of the greatest Latin poets of antiquity.

We may say, too, that, had we not been already aware of the extent to which the Roosevelt Administration's words and deeds are being seized upon and discussed throughout the country, the reading of these contest blanks would have informed us of it. The commonest resource of contestants who find themselves at a loss for an answer is to give the President the benefit of the doubt and the credit for an extremely varied array of utterances.