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The Wits' Weekly

Conducted by EDWARD DAVISON

Competition No. 28. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best short poem in Analyzed Rhyme. For the benefit of those who missed the discussion of Analyzed Rhyme in our last issue a brief explanation is printed below.* (Entries should reach *The Saturday Review* office, 25 West 45th Street, not later than the morning of April 30.)

Competition No. 29. Mr. Mencken's April *Americana* reports that Mr. Billy Sunday has announced an intention to have himself skinned after death, the skin to furnish a drum for use in street Revival Parades throughout the United States. A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the poem most nearly resembling what Mr. Vachel Lindsay might write on hearing such a drum beaten in Springfield, Illinois. (Entries, which may be fragmentary, but must not exceed forty lines of verse, should reach *The Saturday Review* office not later than the morning of May 7.)

Competitors are advised to read carefully the rules printed below.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH COMPETITION

A prize of fifteen dollars was offered for the best description, in the manner of Mr. Thornton Wilder, of Mr. Sinclair Lewis's thoughts and feelings on coming back to settle in Gopher Prairie after having won fame in the world.

THE PRIZE DESCRIPTION

HE had been in Gopher Prairie for a week. It was Rotary Day at the new hotel, and dazedly he reflected that he was there as the guest of Dr. Kennicott. It did not surprise him, nor even shock him. The great shock of his decision to return overshadowed all lesser concussions. But he did not intend to respond to the loud platitudes and meaningless compliments that he knew would be heaped upon him. He hated that.

The two columns on the front page of the *Weekly Dauntless*, under the heading, "The Return of the Native," had been almost intolerably painful to him. It outraged him that he should be the subject of so much rhetoric. He had hoped that the paper would damn him roundly, and that he might then find a handful of appreciative souls that might turn out to be friends. But he knew it was too much to hope for. The *Dauntless* had hailed him as the man who, with Percy Bresnahan, "had put Gopher Prairie on the map." Lewis floated into a cold, calm fury that did not leave him for days.

Changes in the physical city were to have been expected, but no one could have anticipated the changes that had come to pass in Gopher Prairie since Lewis last saw it. For three consecutive years it had won the "Better Cities" contest, and the very pavements rang with the slogan. Lewis had no quarrel with civic improvement. But the clanging monotony of the cry bored him horribly. When he accepted Dr. Kennicott's invitation he was in that state, and having arrived at the luncheon he knew that he was about to be bored still worse. Rapidly he studied the faces at the long table, but saw everywhere smug prosperity and the Spirit of Boast. Desperately he recalled his reasons for his return, and clung to them as to an anchor. If he must be a spiritual hermit, he could not endure it. Then he found himself listening to an excellent speaker. "Beyond physical convenience and civic improvement there were intellectual continents undiscovered." The applause was tremendous. Lewis was thinking, "I wonder if my grandchildren's grandchildren will glimpse one of the shores?"

DAVID HEATHESTONE.

If David Heathestone had not already proved his mettle by taking the prize from nearly two hundred rival competitors a few weeks ago I might have found it more difficult to explain that he wins this time for the sole reason that his fragment was the least unsuccessful of a not very successful batch. Mr. Thornton Wilder would not, I think, have permitted a shock to overshadow a concussion, and to me there seems something wrong with the simile of the anchor. Moreover, the fragment has no subtlety and its prose is only negatively reminiscent of Mr. Wilder's. But even more serious objections are to be urged

against the entries by Parker Tyler and Gertrude Jennings which, more than any others, approached Mr. Heathestone's standard. Formerly, in such circumstances, I withheld the award. The post office regulations, however, seem to forbid this, and therefore the prize will always in future be awarded. One can only regret a law that reduces a contest of skill to the level of a lottery.

Mary Heath Ballantyne and Arjeh were the best of several who chose the wrong approach by making Mr. Wilder describe Mr. Lewis's thoughts in the first person, thus:

Now I shall become acquainted with the central passions of the Main Street that I have reviled. Fame is mine, but I am terrified at the illusions of the brain-fever that my leisure engenders. Henceforth I am constrained to paint my characters in tableau, unmoving. In repose each is curious and exasperating. "I think," Babbitt said to me lately, "I could confess a little about myself if you would let me be quiet long enough."

This, by Mrs. Ballantyne, is pitched in a completely false key to harmonize with Mr. Wilder. But the last sentence, taken on its own merits, is of pregnant excellence. Theodore Schilling might have challenged the prizewinner if he had written at greater length, but Arjeh, who can usually be depended on for a good parody, slipped into mere burlesque this time. Parker Tyler alone seems to have envisaged a possible satiric parallel in Shakespeare's return to Stratford. He made very little of it, however.

RULES

(Competitors failing to comply with rules will be disqualified.)
1. Envelopes should be addressed to "The Competitions Editor, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City." The number of the competition (e.g., "Competition 1") must be written on the top left-hand corner. 2. ALL MSS. must be legible—typewritten if possible—and should bear the name or pseudonym of the author. Competitors may offer more than one entry. MSS. cannot be returned. 3. *The Saturday Review* reserves the right to print the whole or part of any entry.

*The following specimen of Analyzed Rhyme by Frank Kendon, its inventor, is reprinted from last week:

*Oh that content, content might softly so
Steal over me and cheat this longing for
Jams,
That I might love the trees about my
home,
Or well enough sing to throw the songs
away.*

The principle of Analyzed Rhyme can be briefly re-stated as follows: "Mr. Kendon takes two such words as "soon" and "hide," but separates the vowel from the consonantal sounds before looking for his rhymes. The "oo" of soon is united with the "d" of hide; and the "i" of hide with the "n" of soon. This simple analysis produces the rhyming sounds oon, ide, ine, ood as a basis for new sets of words. Thus an absolute sound relationship can be established between words that have hitherto seemed alien to each other, e. g., soon hide, divine, brood." (See the issue of *The Saturday Review* dated April 14.)