

## Points of View

## Explanation

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
Sir:

My critics in your issues of June 21st and July 23rd deserve a word of acknowledgment and of explanation. In the first place, this was by no means a self-imposed task. I had submitted to my publishers a complete anthology of Eastern poetry, including translations from nearly all of the Eastern peoples that have produced any—I even found in my researches some ancient Egyptian poetry not of much literary value, but very curious—under the title of "The Book of the East," which I had personally much faith in. It was returned to me in these terms: "This is not just what we would like. What we want is a book of Chinese and Japanese poetry—about 325 selections—say 400 pages."

Those were the terms under which I went to work, and my researches were necessarily confined by a lack of financial resources (I made the book out of advances of \$20, \$25 and up to \$50, out of the \$500 I received for the entire book—the final payment of \$150 was made in six monthly instalments! The edition, 1,000 copies at \$7.50, sold out in somewhat less than a year to New York City. I went to Columbia and found there a fairly representative collection—for America at least. The New York Public Library, my only other resource, yielded but a very few volumes. I had not been at work a month before I had quite made up my mind that from the standpoint of my own critical judgment the task I had been set was practically impossible. But I had been bid to put my taste in my vest-pocket—so to speak—by the decree of my publishers—an anthology not for the critical, but good enough for the general reader. Allowing for many pages that to my own personal taste were simply banal, in both the Chinese and Japanese sections, I succeeded in finally getting together 210 pages of text—as the book stands. The whole performance simply begs the question of criticism of any concise character. It was to be a book of a size to attract the general reader, something that for the first time might lay claim to a certain comprehensiveness. And that was all. This statement will cover the different spellings of the same poet's name—the different renderings from the Shi-King, etc. Mr. Waugh makes the point that "poems from the Shi-King are credited partly to this collection and partly to 'Unknown.'" To this I simply answer that I included these latter poems, and they are very few indeed—hardly worth of remark—on their apparent merits as being more or less worthy of space. Again, he remarks that "one poem from the Shi-King is included on pages 48, 95, and 118, under three separate titles, each appearing in a separate place in the index. At least three poems are given in two different renderings on different pages and under different titles and separately." I can only answer that conceive the slight difference in the spelling my meddling with his title—of course—and that I was glad enough to find the "three poems in two separate renderings," even though they were under different titles. A difference in renderings is always surely a joy to the maker of any poetical anthology from a foreign tongue. Again, as to nomenclature I felt sure that anybody with the intelligence and the price would readily conceive the slight difference in the spelling of the same poet's name.

There are a few misprints in the book—a rather unusual piece of proof-reading—but the one "grand and glorious" error seems to have quite escaped all of my reviewers with the exception of the inimitable Arthur Waley, who pounced upon it at once. In my anxiety to fill my pages—and fulfil my publishers' dictum—I included the work of one "Pai-Ta-Shun" among the original translators of the Chinese. Now this is simply the *nom de chinois* of Dr. Frederick Peterson, a well-known specialist of West 50th Street, New York City, who has made more than one journey to the Flowery Kingdom. I found his little book—printed in China—in the New York Public Library and somehow from that circumstance jumped to the conclusion that he was "the real thing"—a bona fide translator.

May heaven and all the Powers protect me from the consequences of such a primal error as this! Even the existence of Dr. Peterson was quite unknown to me, until after the book was published, when I called on him with due apology. "Pai-Ta-Shun" is simply a play on his own honest patronymic of Peterson.

By the way, Arthur Waley, to whom the Herald-Tribune sent the book in London,

appears to be the only one of my critics who frankly conceived it from my own standpoint—a popular work—and treated it as such, albeit with full praise for its virtues, such as they are, for which, as he is the one ultimate authority, he has my everlasting gratitude.

I will only add that the book was compiled without the slightest help from any living soul. I had looked forward to submitting my work to Dr. Thomas H. Carter, the head of the Chinese Department of Columbia, the only available genuine authority—but he returned from a year's leave on sick absence only to die within two weeks in New York City (September, 1926).

JOSEPH LEWIS FRENCH.

New York City.

## "The Mouse"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
Sir:

A few years ago I enjoyed reading in *Harper's Magazine* a short story entitled "A Singapore Day." It fascinated me so much that I re-read it several times since, and now cannot help writing to tell you how much it pleased me. So vivid were the descriptions of scenes in Singapore, that to read them was like viewing a charming collection of water-colors painted on the spot. Now that's the sort of thing that makes a story worth-while—the fact that it takes the reader into some pleasant phase of life that would otherwise lie outside his experience. Furthermore, the story interest was so ably sustained by (1) suspense, (2) plot and (3) an unexpected twist at the end, that in my estimation "A Singapore

Day" deserves to rank as a short-story masterpiece.

Since then I read another short story that pleased me just as well. Entitled "The Mouse," it had been reprinted from some obscure periodical of whose very existence I had been unaware. In its particular way "The Mouse" was as meritorious as "A Singapore Day." Its pictures of a phase of human nature was as vivid as Mr. Tomlinson's human pictures of the exotic scenes of Asia. I felt the emotions of the principal character just as strongly in one story as I caught the physical features of the tropical town in the other.

All credit to the editors of *Harper's* for having printed "A Singapore Day." But they certainly missed a lot of credit when they failed to print "The Mouse."

ROGER SPRAGUE



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## The Wits' Weekly

Conducted by EDWARD DAVISON

*Competition No. 42.* A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best Lines on Receiving an X-Ray Photograph of Him- (or Her-) self. (Entries should reach the *Saturday Review* office, 25 West 45th St., New York, not later than the morning of September 24.)

*Competition No. 43.* A prize of fifteen dollars is offered for the best short poem called "A Dog's Death." (Entries should reach the *Saturday Review* office not later than the morning of October 8.)

Attention is called to the rules printed below.

### THE FORTIETH COMPETITION

The prize of fifteen dollars offered for the Coolest Song for a Very Hot Day has been divided between Tom Henry and Elizabeth Wray.

#### THE PRIZE SONGS

#### I

*O*LIE low Tom Collins, the heat  
lowers o'er thee  
And stifling the air that poor mortals must breathe;  
The sun on the tin roofs in rage  
searches for thee  
To suck thy sweet vapours and make  
thy heart seethe.  
Where heat cannot reach thee nor  
torrid waves bleach thee  
Ah, dainty refreshment, have thee no  
care;  
With thick walls behind thee, at six  
I shall find thee  
So cool in the cubes of my new  
Frigidaire.

TOM HENRY

#### II

The sun shone down in frozen rays  
That shattered on the street,  
While other people struggled through  
What they considered heat.  
I wondered how the grass could  
spring  
So green from frozen sod,  
After you passed me by with just  
That distant little nod.

ELIZABETH WRAY.

I dislike dividing the prizes in these competitions. This time, however, I had to do so for nobody wrote a song that deserved the whole award. Most of the competitors seemed to think that the easiest way to write a cool song was to make as many references as possible to ice, the Arctic, frigidaire, and iced tea. Marshall Brice was the best of these and Alice M. Dowd and Claudius Jones also deserve mention. The last wrote one of the few really singable "songs" of the week.

*Come where snaps the ice-sheathed  
twig,  
Snowshoe-crushed, the snow-crust  
crunches.*

*Fence-pole wears a powdered wig  
Fence-rail, icicles in bunches.  
On the drift-caressing ski  
Climb and slide and leap with me.*

*Knife-like cuts the northern flaw  
Roaring down from wind swept  
summit.  
Musk-rat cap and mackinaw  
Scarcely takes the keenness from it.  
On the drift—etc.*

*Then we'll seek a cabin out,  
Where from Winter's blast it cowers,  
Light a log and round about  
Sing a song of summer flowers.  
On the drift—etc.*

Excepting the refrain, I liked this. But it might just as pertinently have been called Song for a Very Cold Day.

Other singable entries were strangely few. Who could possibly lift his voice to such a typical verse as the following?

*Oh mighty crystal avalanche  
That burieth the giant tree  
Willst embalm in thy snowy hous-  
ing?  
In cold storage would I be.  
Like a clam or slippery oyster, let  
me bed myself in thee.*

—though to be sure there is a hint of a famous hymn tune in the last line. Whatever merits this has are

not those of song; and the same could be said of many a better entry this week. Homer Parsons spoiled his rather slight effort with a banal chorus. I quote only the verses of his "Warble of the Movie Fan."

*The mountains and the beach are  
hot;*

*Upon the street you're fried.  
Oh, how much cooler is the lot  
Of those who sit "inside!"  
When I am dead, and all the days  
Are hot as this below,  
Oh what a refuge from the blaze  
Gehenna's Picture Show.*

This and one set of the prize-winning verses offered a welcome relief from the overwhelming number of ice-box songs (or would-be songs) of which Miriam Teichner's was one of the briefest and best.

*I wish I were a quart of milk.  
I ask for nothing greater  
Than standing quiet all day long  
In the refrigerator.  
I wish I were a quart of cream.  
There's nothing I could dream of  
Would give me more intense delight  
Than being made ice-cream of.*

But this kind of thing, even when it is very well done, can scarcely be called ambitious. Too many competitors took the same line of least resistance and thus a good theme was more or less wasted. Tom Henry alone made me feel thirsty; but he should know that the most cooling of all drinks in very hot weather is hot tea. Elizabeth Wray shares the prize with him more because of her originality than her success in saying what she had to say. We print some verses held over from a recent competition.

#### AFTER A. E. HOUSMAN

#### I

*The young man often wonders,  
What is it to be old?  
The old men try to tell him  
But still it stays untold.  
He never finds it written,  
He never hears it sung,  
Till to the same tune goes it—  
What was it to be young?*

JOHN F. DOUGHTY

#### II

*The sunrise gilds the selfsame peak,  
The moss still paves the glen;  
What is it now I vainly seek  
That came unbidden then?  
The mirror of the lazy stream  
Still catches cloud and sky  
But either I have lived a dream  
Or mirrors learn to lie.  
The dust is deep upon the way  
My bare, brown feet once trod  
But gold's not in the dust today  
Along the path I plod.  
The lark still whistles from the  
Wheat,  
The pines grow tall and true,  
Above the brook the alders meet—  
But where's the land I knew?*

DALNAR DEVENING

#### RULES

Competitors failing to comply with the following rules will be disqualified. Envelopes should be addressed to Edward Davison, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 25 West 48th Street, New York City. 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. The Editor's decision is final and *The Saturday Review* reserves the right to print the whole or part of any entry.