

Poet Out in the Open

PARADOX has always played a puzzling part in human existence. At present both domestic and international affairs bristle with paradox. The humbled turn tyrants. The statesmen of democracy muddle the best interests of civilization. Those are only two cheery little paradoxes of our own time. The world is full of loud-speaker voices either reporting hodiernal paradox or recommending paradoxical courses. There seems to be little humane logic left to mankind.

Being what is called "a poet" also appears as a paradox in the world of today. At least, many people are engaged, more or less violently, in pointing that out. And yet, any imagined civilization without poetry is but another paradox—even though Plato did ban poets from his Republic. The Republic of Plato was always too cut and dried. One so-called poet of the day, however, is perplexed by a particular paradoxical development of his own. Suppose we present his case.

There was a time—actually!—in which it was not necessary closely to follow swift-moving world events in the daily papers. Events were not moving swiftly. The world was comparatively at peace. There was no such thing as war-in-the-air. There was a fair amount of prosperity and only an average amount of unemployment. In that golden age this poet grew up and decided to cultivate words and phrases in his little garden. He wrote at leisure, often in a library, with some chance of contemplating eternity—the world not too much with him. He aspired to the sagacity possessed by the ancient masters of his craft. Still in his twenties, with his first book published, he encountered one who exclaimed at that time, "Why, I thought you had a long, white beard!" So ancient, apparently, were the accents of his youth.

A great deal of bosh has been talked and written about the Ivory Tower. For one thing, it is a tower of enchantment, and enchantment must always be part and parcel of poetry. For another thing,

the toiling masses demand their dram of enchantment, which is better for them even than beer. Both are narcotics, but there is more wisdom in poetry than in wine. This poet says so, who has tried both. Nevertheless, try and stay in your ivory tower today. You try and do it!

This poet feels that he has grown up, as it were, backward. Maybe he has been growing down, down into the moil and toil of the world about him, beset by the multifold pressures of actuality. Where, by the way, the greatest of the first poets in English adventured long before him, when Geoffrey Chaucer walked a living world. That is hardly to draw a parallel! But this particular poet has, of late years, found himself going about the land talking out loud to people about poetry—an idea that would have filled him with stammering confusion in the past. For then he was a sage. Now—he is an itinerant lecturer.

This latter is a state of occasional exhilaration and frequent misgivings. After an attempted, necessarily sketchy, résumé of America's contribution to poetry in past and present—when there comes the aftermath of questions from the floor, two in particular are almost certain to be uttered (representing, as it might be, two opposite poles of inquiry): "What do you think of the poetry of Edgar Guest? . . . What do you think of Gertrude Stein?"

Before college audiences, the chilling conviction has come to this poet that almost any member of the English faculty who happened to be listening could render a far more illuminating discourse on poetry than he. For the poet's business in the past has been chiefly trying to write verse; and that is a very different thing from talking about it or, intelligently, about poets. But the world has got him out of any ivory tower he may possibly have inhabited—and is determined to ask him questions!

Before women's clubs the conviction has been borne in upon him that they merely wish him to read or recite poetry to them in order to lull or excite their

senses. This he has been delighted to do, *maugre* that fateful moment when he hears a voice in his ear going on and on, thinks, "Why doesn't someone turn off that damn phonograph?"—and realizes that the reverberant vocality is his own.

How much of this is good for him? How much of this is good for them? This poet has never minded travel. He has now seen much of his country and many cities. He feels friendly toward people, any people. He has seen and talked to them in variety and quantity. He has tried to say honestly what he thought. But he has desired less and less to write any more poetry. Crossing snow-patched Montana in March, he was busy reading "Betrayal in Central Europe."

Fortunately, this poet's excursions are only seasonal. But at home, in his roaring city, the state of the world drives him into merely polemic verse. Whereas he would like to sit down and attempt—we said attempt—to write another "Kubla Khan." Why not? Not only nepenthe is there, but beauty for the ages.

"The world is too much with us—?" Ah, Wordsworth, old sockalexis, what a copper-riveted cinch you had! The poet of today is in a streamliner deafened by radio as it shoots like a projectile across the plains. He is one with the shouting lockstep of the streets. Or he is on a platform looking out upon a sea of innocent faces whose mouths murmur, "But he doesn't look at all like a poet!"

So be it. The sensitive plant in a garden grew—and they will presently be digging it up for bomb shelters. Not yet, however, shall we desert or betray our native land of the spirit. But also, we will make songs of these new things in our own fashion: of the phenomena of a world gestating horror, but the good as well as the evil dream; tell of the tyranny, the cruelty, the squalor, but also of the bravery, the struggle for justice and beauty; turn and face the multitude, be no longer fearful of a world that has so often betrayed us—and when the god speaks through us, make them hear.

W. R. B.

Senile Dementia

BY EVELYN ENGLE

AS records on an ancient gramophone
Whose coils while new may take another song,
But when the spiral grooves have been there long
Are more impregnable than flinty stone;
The cylinder once hardened now is prone
To take no new impressions, whether strong
Or weak is negligible, these belong
To the fresh imprint and to it alone.

So is it with the facile human brain
Which time congeals. The old and senile man,
To years and generations wholly blind,
Is still a youth and at his prime again;
And at his oldest never older than
The last thin etching on his brittle mind.

Letters to the Editor: *In Appreciation of the Poet of Democracy*

Commemorating Whitman

SIR:—In 1925 an effort was made to commemorate Walt Whitman with a statue in the Manhattan he had loved and celebrated. But there was difficulty in obtaining a suitable location, and the net result was the plaque which the Authors Club unveiled on the site where was printed the first edition of "Leaves of Grass" in 1855. This faces the plaza at the Brooklyn end of the Brooklyn Bridge, which it has been proposed to name Walt Whitman Park. It is a happy suggestion, for it is in the very heart of the Brooklyn Whitman knew, in the days when he edited the *Eagle* and the *Freeman*. It is also proposed to issue a Whitman stamp this year, and rumor suggests a new Whitman society of national scope. Another indication of increasing appreciation of the poet of democracy is the recent action of the Board of Higher Education in approving the naming of the English building at Queens College, Walt Whitman Hall. Plans are already being executed to decorate this building appropriately, and artists are about to begin the work. Collectors have donated books and works of art, and others have permitted paintings of the poet to be copied, notably Miss Bertha Johnston, of Brooklyn, and the Huntington Historical Society. Mrs. Frank J. Sprague has presented busts of Emerson and Carlyle which belonged to Whitman, and Mr. Oscar Lion has given a Sidney Morse bust for which the poet sat.

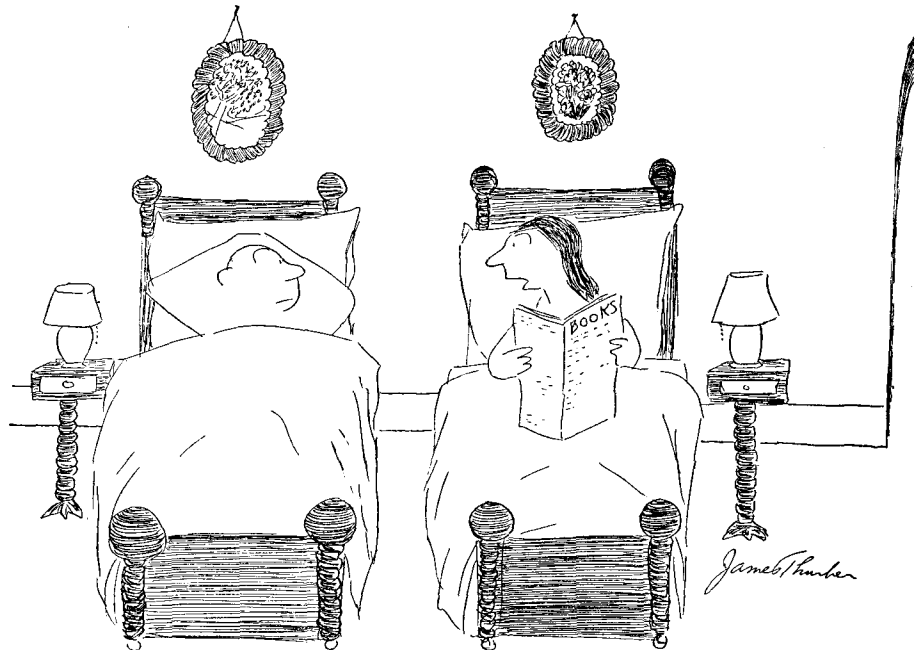
The purpose of this letter is to invite Whitman collectors and admirers to assist us in creating a great Whitman collection in the youngest of the City colleges. Photographs, autographs, letters, manuscripts, works of art—all would be appreciated. When the owner does not feel able to share his treasures with the public, it is suggested that photographs be made and presented or that we be allowed to have an artist make a copy. Camden has a museum dedicated to Walt Whitman; why should not Brooklyn have its Park and Queens College its Walt Whitman Hall to impress the young with the ideals of democracy of which he is our most influential poetic voice?

EMORY HOLLOWAY.

Queens College,
Flushing, N. Y.

"Paradise Planters"

SIR:—Mr. Odell Shepard, in reviewing my book on Brook Farm ["Paradise Planters": *SRL*, March 11] . . . seems to feel as a man would who hears a beloved relative discussed by someone outside the family circle. The fact that the outsider may see the relative as clearly he cannot believe. One can in such a case pardon a certain unkind and hasty tone. But I feel Mr. Shepard goes too far in his statements, especially when he suggests that I "misunderstood and misinterpreted facts." If you put down a fact flatly as it is in open account, and interpret it only as it is interpreted by the words and writings



"Am I the only woman in America who isn't writing novels?"

of those who lived that fact—how can you misinterpret it?

Before printing, the entire galleys of my book were read by three men who know the Brook Farm milieu. Mr. R. E. S. Straker, for his information about the Protestant group at the Farm and Father Holden of the Paulists for the Catholic group. And the proof was also read by Mr. Haraszti, Curator of Rare Books at the Boston Public Library, himself a student and authority on Brook Farm and author of an excellent brochure on the subject—"The Idyll of Brook Farm." Their only corrections were in minor details of time and place. . . .

KATHERINE BURTON.

Bronxville, N. Y.

Attention: P. E. G. Quercus

SIR:—Man, you Sassenachs should keep your tongues off the braid Scots! Ye aye do the most daft like things with it. Do you mind when Victor Hugo described the Scots Brigade at Waterloo "advancing with their *pibrochs* under their arms"? When he was told what a *pibroch* really was, he replied: "From now on it will be what I thought it was." . . . Aweel, man, I suppose from this meenute a *pibroch* will ha'e to be something a body does in honor o' a haggis. And it would seem there are different sizes o' them, for yon Mr. Greig "did" a small one! Oh weel!

Ye're nae worse than yon newspaper *Time* that spoke the other day o' wearing "a tartan." The Sassenach chiel was trying to describe a belted plaid and seemed totally unaware he might as well ha'e said the Scot "wore a red" or "a yellow" . . . !

Speaking of marmalade a body maun be unco carefu! For "Caledonia Cream" ye canna use just anything wi' "Marma-

lade" and a wheen thistles an' a sprig or sae o' heather printed on the label. It maun be the real thing—a clear orange jelly wi' a wheen shreds o' the ooter skin o' the orange held in suspension. Oh! I havena told ye what a *pibroch* really is? Weel, look it up for yoursel'. I've been laid up in bed for six weeks and I couldna get my hands on my authorities. Forbye, the doctor says I mauna argue, and that's a sair deprivation!

JAMES KEDDIE.

Boston, Mass.

(Webster's New International defines *pibroch*: "An elaborate set of variations for the Scottish Highland bagpipe.")

Dick Merriwell

SIR:—For lo these many weary years I've been wondering what had become of those two super-villains, Chester Arlington and Porfias del Norte, who found their wicked way into my Merriwell yarns. Now, at last, you have given me the answer with your clever cartoon which appears on page 9 of the March 25 *Saturday Review of Literature*. They have joined in partnership to continue their evil ways on the path which leads straight to hell. Alas!

Thanks for the info., sad though it is.

GILBERT PATTEN,

Creator of Frank and Dick Merriwell.
New York City.

Christopher Pearse Cranch

SIR:—I am writing a biography of Christopher Pearse Cranch, the poet-painter. I should like to hear from any of your readers who have or know of any material concerning Mr. Cranch.

R. M. WHITNEY.

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