

THE PATHFINDER

MARCH 13, 1920.

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Some Specimen Production of Our Minor Poets

CENSUS statistics ought to include an enumeration of the poets. However, it might cost too much to count them, as they are so numerous. Perhaps it would be simpler to list merely the people who are not poets. Certain it is that nearly everyone will drop into verse at one time or another, especially under strong provocation. Anything like spring, love, the moon, war, sunsets, etc., is liable to touch a poet off; he is perpetually loaded to the muzzle and all he needs is a tiny spark to detonate him.

The Pathfinder has been accused of discouraging the poets, but it has to discourage them. As Herbert Spencer tells us, self-preservation is the first law of life, and the Pathfinder has to fend the poets off or they would destroy it. You can't use kind words on poets; they are proof against all persuasion; you have to "treat 'em rough", and even then they are harder to overcome than the Huns on the Marne.

They form in solid masses, line upon line, with apparently inexhaustible reserves, and they make terrific drives on the poor unprotected editors. They are now beginning their big spring drive and from the preliminary bombardment it looks as if it would eclipse anything ever known before to offensive warfare.

The Pathfinder does everything possible to persuade poets not to send in their poems for publication, but this has little effect. If we published a tithe of the poems we are urged to publish we would have room for nothing else in the paper. If we print one poet's poem, then we are besieged by hundreds of others, who demand to know why their poems were not also printed, when they were "just as good or better."

We are thinking of starting an exclusive poetry paper, which will be a national clearing-house for poetry and near-poetry. There is unquestionably a great field for such a publication. If properly encouraged, our poets would do wonders. We might get congress to vote a subsidy on poetry, or pensions or bonuses to all poets; or it might even be possible for the government to take the whole industry over and administer it on a sort of tripartite basis, like the Plumb plan for the railroads.

A good stiff duty should be placed on foreign poetry, so as to protect our native poets from the cheap products of other lands. The government might incidentally fix prices for poetry, and lay down standards of purity, weight, etc.

As a preliminary to all this good work, we will now present a few sample verses taken from poems that have been sent in to the Pathfinder. These samples run the whole gamut of rime, rhythm and meter. In some cases the rimes are stretched a little, it will be noticed, but what is a rime good for if it will not stand a little strain like that? We trust that these actual specimens of contemporary verse, right hot from the griddle, will be found edifying, etc. Other aspiring poets can

study them and thus see what to emulate, and perhaps what to avoid. For example here is a gem, excerpted from a poem dedicated to the "Yank soldier":

His face is set; his sword devours
The enemy as though with charm.
He cleaves his path through rebel hordes,
His eyes shoot fire, and yet are calm.

You see "charm" rimed here with "calm"—but we will let that pass. From another war poet we get the following, in which the riming is equally bold and original:

On came the foe, rushing foe,
As down they fell by hundreds.
'Twas bravery held our men;
They knew they were outnumbered.

"Hundred" and "outnumbered"; Tennyson could hardly have done better than that. But even Tennyson would not have tried to rime "steam" and "submarine", as the author of the following succeeded in doing:

Brave boys, put on steam;
Be ready at the guns, boys;
'Tis a German submarine.

The war was prolific of poems. Here is a specimen verse from what might be called the greatest work of near-poetry produced during the entire war period; it was struck off while the outcome was still in the balance and it breathes the true spirit:

Divided we fall would be detrimental to all.
Oh people heed the call and we will win
before next fall.

Yes, and we did win, though not "before next fall." The next one is not quite so optimistic, and yet it also has a happy turn to its mournful note:

And, like the dieing bugle notes,
Fades the light on these dim hopes;
Drifting on forevermore,
Unto a bright and glorious shore.

It takes a genius indeed to make "hopes" rime with "notes". You don't find anything equal to that in Kipling, Browning, Whitman or Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Now comes one of the most lilting and sweetly beautiful of the samples we have to offer.

I'm alright in the summer,
When the world is all in tune,
While the birds are sweetly singing
And flowers are all in bloom.

"Tune" and "bloom"—put that rime into your riming dictionary; it is something that should not be lost. Here also is something of the same order, though not quite so bizarre:

My thoughts go soaring above the clouds,
While my feet on the earth must remain,
But when the death angel shall beckon me on
I will life very gladly resign.

It will be noted that the sentiment is always true and exalted; and that is something, even if the rime, meter, etc., have to be sacrificed to force a point. Witness the following:

Let come what may, God's on his throne;
He's reading the soldiers' hearts,
Having the recording angel to write
He's a slacker, or he's of our part.

Here is another fine thing. It shows the very best of intentions, and it would be a captious critic indeed who would complain about the vague meaning of "blunt":

To crush autocracy is now the great and
vital stunt,
And with patriotic zeal bear and stand the
cost and blunt.

You have heard the term "poetic license". In many of these poems the authors take full advantage of this privilege. They are not hampered by any particular rules, but like the writers

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Drifting with the silent tide
 Good and bad men float astride
 The shinning bar of victory.
 Bleak and watchful, dead to thee.

Now we come to one which has a very bold rime indeed. We don't know the number of this poet's license or we would publish it so that credit might go where credit is due.

My country, land of freedom, for which my
 fathers died;
 'Tis for you my life I offer, for you this
 sacrifice.

The next is equally fine in sentiment. It illustrates the way all the near-poets have of changing the order of the words by putting the adjective after the word it modifies.

Then soldiers, brave, of Uncle Sam, be true
 to dear Old Glory,
 When fighting on the fields of France, with
 blood of heroes gory.

"Blood of heroes gory". That might appear to some to be a repetition, but the repetition only emphasizes the thought, and it helps out the meter and rime. In the following we have the very embodiment of patriotism, and it gives us a new use of the word "grave", besides riming it with "graves".

When we are dead and buried, this will be
 our humble grave,
 That the stainless stars and stripes may
 float above our graves.

In the next stanza we find a similarly free use of rime, in matching "downs" with "crown". This stanza is to be commended for the solid 18-K truth it contains.

In the history of a nation
 There are many ups and downs.
 The man who reigns and rules a country
 Must pay dearly for his crown.

We now present a couplet from a poem on Pershing. If he should be nominated for president, this might be used as a campaign battle-cry:

General Pershing led them all,
 With his face against the wall.

Here we have Gen. Pershing pictured leading them all with his face against the wall. Few generals have led their troops in that way. The poet has drawn a little on his imagination this time, but it is picturesque. Modern generals do not lead their forces but stay many miles behind the lines. Still, that is figurative. Perhaps the poet means that when Pershing had his face against the wall he was studying a war-map. You can always find a hidden meaning in all great poems if you look for it. The following expresses very laudable feelings, and the only novelty about it is the unusual twist, "the nations among":

Our flag stands for all that is just and true,
 For a courage too great to do wrong;
 She stands for a nation, watching o'er you,
 When you fight for her folds, the nations
 among.

Following is a fine thing on America. Here again the ideas are splendid, and the only fault, if any, is in the wording:

America, this glorious land of freedom,
 power and fame,
 Has made a home for everyone who to this
 country has came.

"Fame" and "came"; here we have a perfect rime. Grammar and such things should not be allowed to stand in the way of a real poetic thought. When people write prose they are supposed to write with some approach to correctness, but with poetry you can do

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anything. Witness this also:

The price of freedom is the blood
Of men like you and I.

They had hearts of love for mother,
But for us they had to die.

Some writers would have said "of men like you and me", but it was necessary to make it "I" in order to rime with "die". Speaking of rimes, notice the riming of "war" with "law" in the following:

A truce for all nations at war,
And good will to mankind in every clime,
Upheld by love, and maintained by law.

One poetess, writing on the coal strike, says: "Many trains stopped their run and the cattle and sheep were piled at the railroads with nothing to eat." "Sheep" doesn't quite rime with "eat", but it is near enough. The same poetess, in further describing the terrors of the coal strike, says: "It was then in the autumn; the cold winter came; many suffered for fuel to make a warm flame." Few would have cared for fuel to make a cold flame, it must be confessed; that would have been but an aggravation.

One poet, writing poem No. 77,466,-019 on the kaiser, says: "I'm moved with the spirit of patriotism as never has moved a heart before; nor tore with pangs at the human mind until it was weary, weak and sore."

A New York state poet sends in a poem which he kindly says we may "publish without charge". It is all about "The Day's Beginning", and one verse runs: "The stars recede as they have come; darkness dies and the day's begun." Riming "come" and "begun" calls for a little poetic license. It reminds us of some of the work of the famous "Sweet Singer of Michigan."

Here is the way one of the war poets cried out: "The kaiser is pushing steadily his ways, to destroy our freedom and may make us slaves." Another inquires: "Must I hasten on my way to join the army grand, and take my stand before the fray to save our homes and land?" Still another, wishing to do his bit, wrote: "To all you men who have the money, be sure to take a Liberty loan; for it is the only honorable way to save our boys and bring them home." Here we have "home" and "loan" riming.

One patriotic poet sends in a copyrighted poem entitled "Stand by Our Boys Over There". One of the best rimes in the whole thing runs thus: "To help Uncle Sam the kaiser to can." Riming "Sam" and "can" shows unusual skill. Another, in an epic on war and peace, thus apostrophizes war:

Oh stop your reign of horror
And listen to my cry.

Oh think of all the sorrow
Brought on by those who die.

The idea of this poem is very appropriate and noble, but riming "sorrow" with "horror" merely adds to the horror of war. Another poet, with equal patriotism, writes an ode to the flag in which he says: "Think what 'twill mean in the future, in the time that is to come, when we are old and aged and our work on earth is done." By defining "future" as "the time that is to come", and by using the epithets "old and aged" he makes the meaning doubly strong. To say nothing of riming "come" with "done".

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Now comes one of the new-day poets, who enthuses thus over the soviet revolution: "Here's to the day when the international flag we will raise, the flag which all nations of the earth will proudly embrace." A war-time poet, in a eulogy of the allies, says: "Before the murderous Kulturists the allies' flags unfurl, and fight for just and lasting peace for the civilized world." Farther on he makes this striking comparison: "The U. S. forces are temperate, intelligent and quick, while the Kaiserists art beer-soaked, slow and thick." An ardent admirer of the president breaks into verse in this way:

Hurrah for Woodrow Wilson,
A man of great renown,
Has stood the test in time of need;
No better could be found.

Here's another interesting rime: "Forward, then, must be our slogan; onward with our lines unbroken." But to get down to the Halcyon subjects of peace, here is how a poet rhapsodizes on seeing Niagara falls:

A cataract so great, so grand,
Its fame is known all o'er the land.
To view it with eyes all their own
Thousands have a long journey gone.

How true, how true! "Eyes all their own"—and "own" rimed with "gone". Here we have indisputable fact coupled with just sufficient poetic license to make the verses captivating. Another poet of the same class, in a beautiful poem on "Our Yesterdays", breaks out thus: "The holiness of love divine that clingeth not alone to time—". Then here is still another who is all heart; he registers his tender sentiments in this fashion: "I love to hear the mock bird's trill, to see the blooming daffodill."

These are fair samples of the poetry that editors receive by the bushel. All of it has merit of some sort. It cannot be denied that the ideas which inspire these poets are usually very commendable. It might be said, however, that their work would stand criticism better if they took more pains to smooth it up. In many cases the rimes could be improved.

If the Pathfinder might be allowed to make a suggestion it would be that in order to compose a real poem the poet must first have a definite idea of what he wants to say. A poem that starts nowhere and ends nowhere and merely wanders around wherever the rhythm and rime may lead it is not the ideal poem. Poetry has its place and it should be properly encouraged; there is nothing more potent to stir the human soul than a poem which combines the elements of rhythm, rime and reason.

But a much higher degree of workmanship is required for writing poetry than prose—and yet the typical poetry writer will break into poetry when he can't even write prose. This is like an airman who would try to fly high before he could fly low; it can't be done. Let the poets fly low at first, until they get control of their wings; and then let them soar as far into the empyrean as they may, and God speed them.