

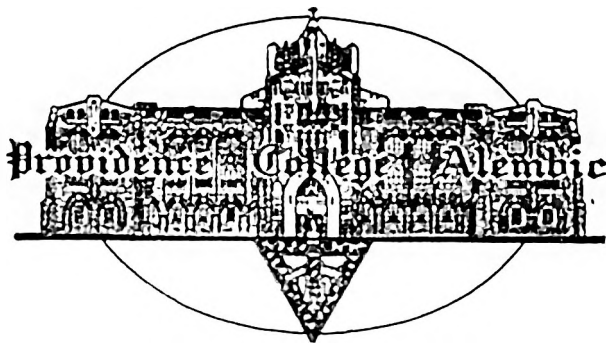
A L E M B I C

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THE ALEMBIC



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The Alembic

John Williams

THE ALEMBIC, oldest organization on the campus, was founded in 1920 to serve as the students' literary magazine. An alembic is an apparatus for use in distillation, and perhaps the founders had in mind Emerson's employment of the word—"Thus is Art, a nature passed through the alembic of man"—when they named the journal. This rambling column is called "The Alembic" because its function too is to serve as a still—for extracts and comments.

* * *

Located near Bulfinch's *Mythology* and Frazer's twelve-volumed *The Golden Bough*, two references on superstitions are found in some libraries: *Treasury of American Superstitions* by Claudia de Lys, and the *Encyclopaedia of Superstition* by Edwin and Mona A. Radford. Both are published by the Philosophical Library and have been out about ten years; both, we are to presume, are authoritative works.

Now regard the cover blurb of Claudia de Lys' *Treasury*: "You will find an abbreviated survey of current beliefs and practices which are traceable, for the most part, to primitive and other symbolic origins and expressions. The sole aim of the author is to clarify the approach to seemingly mystifying customs and clear the mind of any possible fear or prejudice . . . an adventure in the form of a short journey into folk lore."

There is something ambiguous and hazy about the

advertisement, and even a cursory examination of the *Treasury* will confirm this apprehension. In the first place, if the author had taken care to define "superstition," many of the entries would have necessarily been eliminated. A distinction between traditional practices and superstitions ought to have been made.

It may be picayune to find fault with her chapter headings, but her selection of "cute" section titles was a mistake: they just fall flat! How do you find a drowned body?—" . . . row a boat with a rooster on board around and around, and the rooster will crow over the spot where the body lies." This is included in a chapter entitled "Water, Water, Everywhere". "Our Feathered Friends" obviously deals with bird lore. "Denizens of the Deep" and "Give Us This Day" are two others.

In Chapter 10, "Everybody Loves a Baby," there are some paragraphs on "Birth Control Superstitions." Miss de Lys' explanation of the basis of the opposition to birth control should be a classic instance of an "example to be corrected" in logic textbooks. Here and elsewhere, her unctuousness and flimsiness destroy the force of her argument.

"Birth control, or planned parenthood, has been decreed a sin by some religious laws, and as a result many superstitious taboos sprang up against it. As sociologists point out, controlling the morals of society, and of women, in particular, has been the self-imposed task of well-meaning reformers for centuries. . . ."

"The Worship of Things" is a chapter which concerns itself not only with four leaf clovers and the "good-and-bad-things-come-in-threes" category, but also with two "superstitions," the sign of the cross and the St. Christopher medal. Both are badly distorted.

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"Devout persons will cross themselves in the face of danger, when it is lightning, etc. . . . The gesture is performed as a countermagic to protect one against a calamity of a similar nature."

If the sign of the cross is a "countermagic" do not wonder at finding it recorded in this *Treasury of American Superstition*, for it belongs there.

If absence of humor is evidenced throughout the volume, you may notice something more in the treatment of the St. Christopher medal: bitterness and insistence. You think of the lofty intention, the dedication "to clarify the approach to seemingly mystifying questions and clear the mind of any possible fear or prejudice," and you are amazed that the author does not know better.

"It is no exaggeration to say that millions of superstitious persons would not drive a car, take a sea trip, ride in a plane, or undertake a trip of any kind without carrying the traditional good luck safety token of St. Christopher. . . .

In peace and in war, those who have the St. Christopher medal on their persons believe they will live a charmed life. . . .

The custom of attaching an image of St. Christopher to an automobile has become so common that a great many cars come from the factory with the image worked into the body design. And yet ultra moderns claim this is *not* a superstition."

Not to believe in the efficacy of sacramentals or intercession of the saints is one thing; to call the medal a "traditional good luck token" is quite another. If there are those who out of ignorance feel that they are leading a charmed life—whatever that may be—by wearing the medal, that is only begging the issue. In paragraph three, Miss de

Lys establishes herself in the skeptical and naturalist tradition by blaming the ultra-moderns for not regarding this practice for what it is, a superstition.

Enough of this *Treasury*, and hurray for Chesterton, who said, "I would always trust the old wives fables against the old maids' facts!" Maybe *Treasury of American Superstitions* has already received more attention here than it warrants, but a sentence in the preface, written by Dr. Gerald Wendy, editorial writer of *Science Illustrated*, should be further examined. He says, "Indeed no one wants to forget the fairy tales and the mystic meanings, though every educated mind will want to put them in their place." Just how fairy tales got wedged in, who knows? At any rate, Claudia de Lys has failed to put the "mystic meanings" in their place. And what is the proper place of these "mystic meanings", these superstitions?

There is a superstition found in Radford's more reliable *Encyclopaedia of Superstition* (superstitions of the British Isles) which tells that if you take a three-legged footstool and sit at the crossroads at midnight on Hallowe'en and listen to the wind, you will learn all the important things that will befall you during the next twelve months. We Catholics could take three-legged footstools at any time and pray for a miracle if we pleased and there would be no superstition. For a superstition attributes in a serious manner to created things and circumstances—the day, the time, the kind of stool, the wind, the place—powers which belong to God alone. Certainly we believe that it is within the power of God to permit a revelation under these circumstances. God transcends nature when a miracle occurs. The Church—unlike the scientific materialists—has not bound God, and a miracle is but His liberty. There are those who would call the participant of such a ritual too credulous for words, and probably the same ones would be just as

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skeptical of the validity of St. Malachy's Prophecies.¹ The prophecies are generally considered not genuine, but the Church has not encouraged those believing in their authenticity to refrain from doing so.

According to an old legend, on the 21st of January, St. Agnes' Eve, young maidens asking the intercession of the saint, may dream of the man they will marry. Ben Jonson gives a version of the belief:

And on sweet Agnes' night
Pleases you the promised sight
Some of lovers, some of husbands
Which an empty dream discovers.

The girl may not receive her vision; the man may not receive his revelation. But that is all right too. For again, as Chesterton says, "As long as wit is mother wit, it can be as wild as it pleases!"

Those undismayed by the ridicule of the realists, who have perhaps only a vague belief in such old legends are not so un-wise, for they have learned to cling to them and to appreciate their beauty because of a truth expressed in a poet's lines:

O antique fables, beautiful and bright
And joyous with the joyous youth of yore:
O antique fables for a little light
Of that which shineth in you evermore,
To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes,
And bathe our old world with a new surprise
Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.

¹ St. Malachy (1094-1148), Irish Archbishop, was supposed to have received a vision when visiting Rome of the names of the popes from Celestinell (1144) to the end of the world. The 112 mystical mottoes—eg. Pius XII, "the angelic father"; Pius XI, "faith undaunted"—were discovered in the Vatican Archives in 1500.

FAIRY TALES, FABLES AND CLASSICAL MYTHS

A few sentences in one of the Rev. Dr. John T. Mc-Mahon's books on religious education give the ordinary evaluation of the use of mythology and fables as a means of teaching; he writes in *Building Character from Within* (Bruce, 1939) :

Example remains the best school of mankind. What we see done urges us to action. How rich we are in the example of the saints! Non-Catholic educators must rely on the fable of King Bruce and the spider or the industry of the ant, while we have such a wealth of literature to draw from in the lives of the saints. The appeal of the fable is dead. . .

"The appeal of the fable is dead!" This is not a new observation. For in fact, during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius there came to Rome an Egyptian sailor with a tale that on his voyage he had heard a strange voice off the islands of Paxi calling him to proclaim, "The great god of Pan is dead!" But still the god of Pan lived, and it is the obligation of educators who realize that classical mythology is an important part of our culture to keep alive the great fables. Many secondary schools have not retained a course in mythology in their curricula; however, "guidance" courses are receiving quite a popular response. But an appreciation of the myths for what they are, and an understanding of their functions will affirm that the old mythology was essentially a guidance course, perhaps even more effective than this comparatively new and so-called "preparation for living." For in the stories are not found the strained emphasis nor the militant zeal to convert, but rather the powerful and genial hint: a suggestion to examine and to amend. The Greeks' endeavor to clothe the mysteries of nature and of life in human form and event—and this is precisely what classical mythology is—has sur-

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vived not primarily because the stories were beautiful and striking, but because they impart something of vital truth. Milton said

'Tis not vain or fabulous
(Tho so esteem'd by shallow ignorance)
What the sage poets taught by the Heavenly Muse
Storied of old in high immortal verse,
Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell,
For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

The myths represent universal experience; they are the embodiments of moral ideas and values invariable in human life, and they are concerned with human life in a scrutinizing, concrete, competent way—a way more compelling than abstract statements. So, for example, the story of Prometheus is really a tale of right and wrong, of suffering and defeat. And in literature Prometheus becomes an established standard: the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley concerns the agony of a genius confined in a world of conventions.

Henry A. Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*—published in 1957 for the Council of Foreign Relations by Harper and Brothers—is one of the most respected books on the subject of nuclear warfare, and in it there are several instances of well-placed references to mythology. Dr. Kissinger begins Chapter 1, "The Challenge of the Nuclear Age":

"In Greek mythology, Nemesis, the goddess of fate sometimes punished man by fulfilling his wishes too completely. It has remained for the nuclear age to experience the full irony of this penalty."

The reference to this traditional example has served as a bond between past and present. Even without knowing the background of the story of Nemesis, the power of

the old myth is felt. And throughout our literature there are allusions to the figures of mythology because they are traditional, dateless, and, hence prone to generate understanding.



“Non-Catholic educators must rely on the fable of King Bruce and the spider or the industry of the ant, while we have such a wealth of literature to draw from the lives of the saints!” In a sentence, Father McMahon has unnecessarily diminished the usefulness of King Arthur and Sir Gawain—characters of honor which only the English tradition could have produced. The fables of La Fontaine, such as “The Grasshopper and the Ant” and *Æsop’s Fables*, which include such good lessons as “The Country Mouse and the City Mouse” are discarded. What might he have said of Cinderella? Perhaps this story too belongs to a tradition that is defunct. But the “moral” of the Cinderella tale is identical with that of Our Lady’s Magnificat: “*Exultavit humiles*. And a Child who is receptive Cinderella can later enjoy the Old Testament stories of Joseph, the boy sold into bondage by his brothers, who became the supreme governor under Pharaoh; of Moses, the deserted baby who became the mighty leader of the people; of David, the shepherd who became the king of Israel. He will appreciate much more a verse (and George Herbert wrote, “A verse may finde him who a sermon flies”) which the story of Esther inspired the seventeenth century poet, Francis Quarles, to compose:

Illustrious Princesse, had thy chance not beene,
To be a Captive, thou hadst bin no Queene:
Such is the Fortune our Misfortune brings,
Had we not first bin slaves, we’d n’ere beene Kinges.

Fed on such examples from mythology and biblical history, the child will eventually be ready for the example of Mary.

Rhesus' Feast

RICHARD SULLIVAN

Cacophony is the muse of the hour
When Rhesus Measly casts a lower;
The crowd chews gum
He frantically strums
And all the ushers cower.

The mob arose when he rippled his toes
In a primitive rhythm erotic
Shifting pneumatically into his pose
His shin bones thresh spasmodic.
Wobbly grins heat "debutante" hearts,
Soon roar to an inferno;
Smirks appear from the rabble in the rear
Sluicing pink lemonade out of Sterno.
Hip, hip, hip, lair,
None but the cool,
None but the cool,
None but the cool, detest the square.

* * *

Rhesus rules the stage
Shaggy from his cage
Callous thumb strums the strings
Readies now to sing.
Dimpled knees clasp the mike
All his mandates start with "like".
Ears wallow in vaseline strands
Struggle as he fans his hands
Across the guitar
Storied guitar
Houselights dim for atmosphere
Rhesus lobs the girls a leer,

Tightens strings
Winks to wings
Slithers into second gear.
Popcorn hails
Over balcony rails
Hips unwind
Bump and grind
Not unlike a chipmunk's tail.

* * *

Rhesus first a ballad tells
Of the flophouse where he dwells.
Sparse applause, his reward
Blows a sulking canine chord
Mumbles as he double takes
"Like y'all, this aint no wake."
Now the houselights blaze a green
Rhesus snarls and all lean,
Strokes strings, barks remarks
In a gutty baritone
Of a mongrel he disowned
Synod harks
To his barks
Interest sparks
Primordial barks
Throw the man a bone.

* * *

The peg-cuffed demadog led the whelps
In a flurry of extemporaneous yelps.
Pacing the lobby, an Irish cop
Ignorant of the Dixie fop
Thought 't'was a banshee cry
Breathed out a Celtic sigh
An ultrasonic note from his whistle stirred
But only Rin Tin Rhesus heard.
The kennel hushed as his ear
Shed a solid tallow tear.

Rhesus' Feast

Carelessly caressing the minor frets
He transcends his listless pets
Love is now the throbbing theme
Spotlight thickens to a blue moon beam
Rhesus strums the present numb
Memories of warm times hum
 Soft sounds curl
 Boy and girl
 Sparkling eyes
 Steady ties

Good Shepherd Hostel, here we come.

* * *

A chord elegiac sounds
For another of his hounds
Tears must fret his fuzzy cheeks
Matinees for three wild weeks
For Ole Shep has shed his hair
His tick-tacked flanks now are bare.
"Pity, " cries Rhesus, "Pity this dog,
Furry as a poly-wog".
Woe washes over the mourning hall
Tonsorial tragedies it recalls.

 Sad some felt
 Losing their pelt
 Judge demanded
 Ducktails disbanded

Mocked by peroxidized molls.

* * *

Rhesus feels a break he's earned
So all the boys likewise adjourn
Time for a jolt of virgin snow
Noose a nylon at the elbow.
Sniffing's fine until age nine
These young men tread a main-line
Watch the vein crawl into sight,
A leukemic worm elite,

Hone that spike to a needle point
On the damp concrete.
Blend water with the poppy flour
Flight now leaving for an ethereal bower.
 Eye-dropper
 Vein popper
 Snow flows
 Pupils glow
Cloud eight floats in low,
Swallows all for a trip
Reserved for only those most hip.
For the flight a slight fee,
The maintenance of a white monkey.

* * *

Rhesus plucks a martial wire
Pumping spirits even higher
Music with an army beat
Sets to tapping suede-shod feet.
The curled darlings of the Green Dragon
Uncap the official flagon
Someone's syphoned all the booze,
Someone's cruising for a bruise.
Warlords gather in the aisle
Part with diplomatic smiles
Garrison belts snake over nuckles
Fanged with razor sharp brass buckles
 Zip guns cock
 Switch blades lock
 Broken bottles scarved in socks
 Hiding jagged whiskey jaws
 Hungry for a cheek to gnaw
All brawl while debs fawn,
"Gee your boy friends ear is gone."
But hark! "Pay wergild," Rhesus sings,
"Vendettas are the sloppiest things."

Rhesus' Feast

Ah'll auction an inch of my left sideburn
To buy for the daid a common urn."
Darwin's theory seems correct,
Witness Rhesus, though erect.

Rumbling's adolescent fun
Switch blade, zip gun
Scratch an ofay on the run
Rumbling's adolescent fun.

The Little Ones

What mold is that upon the loaf?
Classify these brave bread-eaters,
Incant your Latin label.
They would be honored to know they are known.
How many protozoa can fit on the head of a needle?
Snicker at the same question asked of angels.
Describe them,
Count their legs on your fingers and toes,
Tell me they are a menace.
I will answer that they don't eat much,
That they must have come from the mud of the Nile.
What's this, no longer interested, now they make penicillin
from coal dust.
I toast you green mould!

RICHARD SULLIVAN

A Warm Victory

J. SOULAK

THERE were several thousand men in the city that winter looking for work. They wanted a job, any job, that would pay them a dollar or so a day, just enough for a couple of meals, a bath, and a night's lodging. Many of these men were young, brawny, aggressive-appearing individuals. Others were older with soft eyes and greying beards long in need of shaving. One of these latter men had walked from one denial to another with dulling despair. Walking, looking, thinking; that was about all he could hope to do on this cold January day.

Even when his eyes passed carefully over the brown-stone building of McLeary & Company, Iron Foundry, he showed no sign of hope. He had never worked in a foundry and did not feel particularly qualified for such employment, but it was the next place on the street, so he turned in.

Opening the door to the office he entered. It was warm, much more comfortable than outside. However, the heat seemed to be the single comfort the room offered. The only light came from a dusty window which cast lengthening shadows. A deafening roar erupted from beyond the farthest wall, causing the visitor to be even more uncomfortable.

"What do you want?" called a voice from a desk in one corner of the room.

Straining his eyes to see where the words had come from he said, "I want a job, any sort of job."

"That doesn't mean much around here," said McLeary. "What's your name?"

"Mr. Brandt. Mr. Russel T. Brandt."

A Warm Victory

"Well, we haven't anything today. Stop back tomorrow." As he was about to resume work among the papers in front of him a thought occurred. "Wait a minute. Are you able to do laborer's work for a dollar a day?"

"Yes sir, with a chance I could show you I'm a lot stronger than I look."

"Okay, we'll see about that," said McLeary. "There's a pile of castings in the yard. I want them broken up. If you're the man for the job it'll be worth a dollar a day for two or three days. Go out in back. One of the boys in the shop will give you a hammer," he said pointing to the door.

With a smile of gratitude Mr. Brandt opened the door and stepped into the foundry yard. Requesting the sledge-hammer at the door of the shop brought a smile to the faces of the two men standing there.

"Guess you can handle this twelve-pounder alright," said the huskier of the two while motioning with his head toward a pile of castings directly across the yard.

Closing the door of the shop the two men turned to one another. "The heartless devil," said the broad-shouldered man. "That makes the third guy this week. It was different with the others, they were big and strong. This fellow doesn't look as though he can last more than half an hour."

Mr. Brandt looked at the pile of castings. They were round, about ten inches in diameter. Each one was hollow with a small hole at one end, apparently for the purpose of filling them with lead for use as weights on underwater cables, buoys, and other objects. Picking one up he estimated it to weigh about eighteen pounds. At first glance he expected it would crack at the slightest touch of the hammer.

Mr. Brandt vigorously set to work. The initial

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blows glanced off the surface of the casting as if it were under a spell. He removed his coat. Picking up the hammer he swung more diligently. It was a vain effort. He tried two others. They were all the same.

A half hour came and passed. The two men in the shop noticed the man beginning to weaken. His movements were becoming slower as his aged body wearied from the monumental task. Just then the noon whistle blew. As the men from the shop filed past the working figure, they stopped momentarily to give him a smile of encouragement.

"It's no use," said one of the men standing in the doorway of the shop. "You may as well quit like all the others. We tried it too, we know. It looks easy enough, but it can't be done. If you could catch it from the inside you might be more successful, not like this."

The tired man dropped the sledge-hammer. He looked bewildered. "Why did McLeary give me the job then?"

"Just for a joke," said the husky man as he came over and leaned against the wall. "It's just so he can have a laugh. But I guess you don't know how it all started. You see, McLeary has always been known as a pretty sharp businessman. No one could outwit or out-trade him. That was up to the time he bought these old castings at an auction sale. He picked 'em up cheap. Guess he thought they could be melted down and made into new castings. Well sir, he put us to work on them. We couldn't do any better than you. Then he tried it; with the same result. That really made him mad. So he hired ten or twelve guys in the past year. None of them lasted more than half a day. When they all gave up it seemed to make him feel better. It's been his joke ever since," he said. The old man

A Warm Victory

began to shiver. "But enough of this, it's too cold out here; come on inside," he offered.

As Mr. Brandt approached the door of the shop he noticed a faucet projecting from the side of the building. Beneath it was part of a metal barrel to catch the dripping water. It was half-full of ice. The husky man kicked it as he passed, "Kind of cold out today," he ironically suggested.

At the same moment Mr. Brandt's eyes filled with excitement. "I've got it, I've got it; I know just what to do," he repeated rapidly.

He ran back to the pile of castings, picked up one and returned to fill it with water from the faucet. "It's cold enough out here; shouldn't take long for it to freeze," he remarked while setting it alongside the building.

The husky man looked at him rather puzzled. Suddenly his eyes flashed as he said, "I'll be darned. That sure is a good idea. Boy, the old man will never get over this."

Once inside the husky man shared his lunch with the old man. They fell into a busy conversation about the castings. When the whistle blew Mr. Brandt opened the door of the shop and walked directly to the office of Mr. McLeary.

"What, you through already?" said the harsh voice as the door opened.

"No sir," said Mr. Brandt.

"Well then, how many have you broken up?" came the question.

"Just one, sir," was the reply.

"You think I'm going to pay you a dollar just for that?"

"No, I thought we could make a bargain," said Mr. Brandt. "Seeing as how you want those castings broken

up I was thinking you might see fit to pay me fifteen or twenty cents apiece for all I break up."

The man at the desk thought a moment. "Well, I don't know. But I'll tell you what I will do. I'll give you ten cents apiece, no more, for all you can break up in the next twenty-four hours. Is it a bargain?" he asked.

"Agreed," said Mr. Brandt as they exchanged promises. "Thank you. See you in the morning then."

With these words he quickly strode out of the room. Immediately he set to work. With the energy of one possessed he carried each casting to the faucet, filled it with water and carefully placed it, along with the others, in a neat row against the building. It was hard work. Evening shadows were beginning to fill the yard when Mr. Brandt finished. Everyone had gone long ago. Before leaving for the night he counted the castings. "Yep, two hundred and thirty-four," he said to himself while giving them one last look.

The next morning Mr. Brandt's carefully arranged rows lay shattered and twisted. Each casting lay open to his gaze. Ice was visible through the jagged edges of each shell. It was a warm victory, one that brought a light twinkle to his eyes as he surveyed the scene to make certain each one was broken.

When Mr. McLeary walked into the yard and saw what had happened he flew into a violent rage. "Why, why you cheap swindler. Ten cents apiece! I ought to have you thrown in jail for cheating me," he cursed. With each word his face became more deeply flushed. Pointing to the door of the office he said, "The cashier will give you what you've got coming. Take your money and get out. And don't ever show your face around here again!"

Receiving his twenty-three dollars and forty cents

A Warm Victory

from the cashier Mr. Brandt was about to go through the gate when the husky man from the shop hailed him.

“Readings Wire Works, a couple of blocks down the street, they’ll give you a job. I told their foreman about you last night. Just mention my name. He said they would be able to use you.” With that he turned and hurried back to the shop. Opening the door his head swung around and Mr. Brandt waved as the man shouted, “Good luck!”

Sure enough, when Mr. Brandt turned in at the sign down the street the mention of the husky man’s name brought a wide grin to the face of the man in the office. A warm hand gripped his as he said, “You bet we’ve got a job for you. Anybody that can outdo Lonny McLeary is always welcome here. But first, sit down and tell me how you did it.”

The Greatest Drama

The babblings of men,
The scribblings of pen,
Can never come near
To describe that sheer

Agony; that mystery of Love, when He died for all,
When He felt the nails, and tasted the gall.
When the Divine Eagle hovered 'twixt earth and sky
And forgave His murderers . . . both you and I.

There His Mother stood,
As every Mother would
Weighed down with grief
Yet firm in Her belief
That there hung Her Son
With the Father . . . One.
O Christ! on that day
When sin had its way
Where was I? In the crowd
Of voices, shouting aloud
For death. I stand . . .
Cursing with upraised hand
And wild eyes hard
Piercing the Heart of God.
No, the babblings of men,
The scribblings of pen,
Can never come near
To describe that sheer

Agony.

THADDEUS MCGEOUGH, '60

Obituary

BRIAN SULLIVAN

*He leaves one daughter,——; five sons——;
nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.
The funeral will be held Saturday morning at
eight from his home, followed by a solemn re-
quiem Mass in——'s Church at nine. Burial
will be in St.——'s Cemetery.*

My time has gone; my time has come, Oh Lord.
Death, the clown, he coaxed my final rattle.
Dead now, done I remain

the corpse.

Resting now; the bed still warm, the sweat still wet beneath.
Backbone arched, my hand in fist;

This body yet prepared for fight, I alone remain
the corpse.

Tongue, dented by the day and nightly pain, my life's
Last malt, gripped tightly 'twixt ten gritted teeth.
Eyes, filmed with salt where tears have dried, stare wide
With pupils full dilate, the shutters spread to fleeing light.
Throat, dry from hot and final hiss, now silent cools—
The duct where once poured fluctuate the warming wine
of life.

Life gone, zephyr fled, this hollow cell
Can plead or weep no more. But tears could never once
Erase what time, the finger, wrote.

*The tapestry is woven
The pattern is complete;
Wrap him for the parting time
Wrap him for the heat.*

My time has come; my time has gone, oh Lord.
Earth upon me lightly, gently lay;
Beneath the sod I alone remain
the corpse.

Specter

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

It was dark and drear and near to night;
Evening time had passed in hasty flight,
Leaving in its stead a sudden calm,
Giving rise to nagging, nervous qualms.

Monastery walls of weathered gray
Stood in shadows of that parting day,
While I within my small and cloistered cell
Sat in contemplation's holy spell.

Suddenly I sensed a specter's stare
Peering at me from the portal stair.
With a silent step he hovered near;
On his face he wore a morbid sneer.

Crimson was the saber in his hand,
Crimson was his glass of running sand;
Black the color of his horrid gown,
Blacker yet the shading of his frown.

Aghast! Terror naked in my eye,
Disbelieving what I did espy,
Clutched in horror's frozen grasp
Paralyzed I stood and faintly gasped.

In a melancholy, eerie tone
Kindered to a vague and dying groan
This unhallowed, hateful spirit said
"Shortly now you will be counted dead."

Specter

Shrilly shouting out a ghastly laugh,
Eying gleefully his crimson glass,
He continued then his eerie drone—
“I am death and claim you for my own!”

“Oh no, not I! Let another die”,
Was my terrified and anguished cry.
Craven fear in all its quaking might
Ordered me to flee that evil sight.

Just then on the cloister fell
Mellow tolling of the chapel bell—
Vesper’s call to mark the end of day,
Vespers bidding all to come and pray.

Hooded Friars could be clearly heard
Chanting out the joyful Psalmist’s words.
Softly came this phrase of holy light—
“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

These prophetic words dispersed the gloom,
Tumbled all the terror of the tomb.
Strength and courage flowed within my soul
As these words foretold a happy goal.

“Time for me is done and die I must—
I remember well that man is dust.
He too, bloody, passed from mortal life,
Why then should I fear your crimson knife?”

“Strike me with your bloody saber, Ghost!
Do not linger, be my lethal host.
Now fulfill your long predestined chore,
Lead me lifeless through your timeless door.”

In a flash of brilliant, blinding light
Death transformed into a hallowed sight.
Bright and comely stood an angel there.
Ugly death had gone I know not where.

Then this smiling seraph sweetly said,
“Dread is done, thus death for you is dead.
Come with me unto that final tryst.
Come—I’ll lead you to the risen Christ.”



Reprimand

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

A sneering cynic took a stroll
In search of aught that might console.

He saw September on a knoll,
And then a mare with newborn foal.
He heard a rapid’s gushing roll,
And echo’s hollow throated toll —

Yet saw nor heard naught to console
His misanthropic, sorry soul.

Oh sneering cynic end your stroll.
Crawl back into your murky hole!

The Christmas Gift

THADDEUS MCGEOUGH, '60

"Merry Christmas, Walter!"

"Thanks, the same to you." The reply came from a well-dressed man about forty years old. His bouyant step made him seem to skip through the powdery snow. Delicate flakes of snow laced the shoulders of his dark topcoat. He walked along, thinking of his business and family. He had, in fifteen years, risen from a teller to be the vice-president of the First National Bank.

"I'm a lucky man," he mused, "I've got a good job, a devoted wife and two healthy children. Everything seems to be going right . . . "

His thoughts were interrupted as he neared the church where great numbers of smiling people were filing in for midnight Mass. When he came to the corner next to the church, his smile faded, his light step slowed down.

Standing on the snow covered curbstone was an old man bundled up in an old topcoat at least five sizes too big for him. Like a dirty burlap bag, it hung from his shoulders to his ankles. His cracked shoes were heel-less. A grimy cap protected his head from the snow. His face, framed with a week old dirty-white beard, was staring at the church. He was not begging. His gaze fell from the church and rested upon Walter. His dull, grey eyes looked searchingly into the clean-shaven face.

No word was spoken.

With lowered eyes, Walter hurried in to attend his semi-annual Mass. Christmas and Easter—that was Walter's profession of faith. Every Christmas and Easter for the past twelve years these two men met in the same place.

The Alembic

Having lost all his former gaiety, Walter's eyes studied the snow as he shuffled the remaining few yards to the church.

"Merry Christmas, Walt!"

"Thanks."

Receiving such a half-hearted reply, the couple who had extended the friendly greeting looked at each other in surprise. With a shrug of their shoulders, they entered the church.

Walter entered the church and tried to hide himself in a dark corner in the back.

"Adeste fidelis . . . "

"Nice choir," he thought, sliding into a half-sitting, half-kneeling position. "Oh, my gloves." He took off his dark calf skin gloves, folded them and looked around.

Mass was about to begin.

It was then that the old man shuffled up the aisle. Making as devout a genuflection as his age would permit, he knelt in the third pew in front of Walter.

"Why does he have to sit in front of me? There are a lot of other places he could have sat." Walter could feel his anger rise.

"Gloria in excelsis Deo . . . " The cracking voice of the priest passed over the coughing congregation.

Abstractedly, Walter went through the motions of standing, kneeling and sitting until the "Sanctus bell" rang him back to reality.

To get his mind off the old man, Walter grabbed a book lying on the bench, opened it and started to read: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." His mind fogged; he stared blindly at the print.

Walter tried to relax his tense nerves and think. "He wouldn't take anything from me." He cast a hurried glance around for the thought had come to him so force-

The Christmas Gift

fully that he wondered if he had said it out loud. He had not.

“Or would he?” The thought silently stole its way into Walter’s mind.

The warning bell for the consecration sounded. His stomach was jumping. Thoughts were racing through his brain. What should he do? How could he do anything? His whole body was quivering internally. Suddenly he knelt up straight and looked at the Host held high.

For the first time in years he prayed: “O Christ, You’re really in that Host. Forgive me for being so blind and selfish. Help me.”

He stared blankly at the uplifted chalice, then his eyes fell on the old man in front of him.

The long lines forming for Communion took his mind and eyes off the old man. Finally Mass was resumed when all had received.

“Ite, Missa est.”

Walter’s whole body was shaking, giving testimony to the internal struggle. He broke out in a cold sweat. His hands were clammy as he pulled his gloves on.

The old man got up, devoutly blessing himself with his worn rosary and walked toward the door. A gloved hand touched his shoulder as he was about to go out into the cold, snowy night.

“Do, uh, do you want to come with me to get something to eat?” Walter felt foolish as he blurted out the question. His dark eyes stared at the worn shoes.

The old man, sensing Walter’s embarrassment, took his arm and nodded.

Together they crunched their way to the car through the drifting snow. Walter studied the new fallen snow. The old man’s uplifted face felt the snow melt on its tear-stained cheeks.

Silently they got into the car and drove on in silence.

"Here we are," sighed Walter as he stopped in front of a modern home. He jumped out; the old man hesitated.

"Come on in," he urged.

After fumbling with the key, Walter opened the front door. The two men brushed the snow off themselves, went into the warm living room, past the tinsel-laden Christmas tree and into the kitchen.

"I'll have the coffee ready in a minute—instant coffee, that is," whispered Walter as he put a pot of water on the stove to boil.

Seeing the old man absorbed in a magazine, Walter slipped out of the room. His stomach felt airy and light. The blood was pounding its way through his body. He was happy and his body sang with his happiness. He went to the guest room and fixed the bed.

The coffee stifled the conversation and was an excuse for the silence. Finally Walter felt he could not keep the question unasked any longer.

"Have you a place to stay tonight?"

"Yep, well, that is . . . sure I do."

"You really don't, do you?"

"No."

"Good, I mean, you can stay here tonight. That is if you want to. The guest room is all set."

A silent, thankful acceptance settled Walter's doubts.

They decided to go to bed about four o'clock.

After a hot shower, the old man, in a clean pair of pajamas, was sitting on the edge of his bed when he heard Walter go by the room.

"Good night, Wally," he whispered.

"Good night, Dad."

A Place of Death

ROBERT R. AUBIN

There is a swamp in the forest deep,
Where at dusk the ghouls and gargoyles leap
From their graves to play in their grotesque way,
But vanish from sight come the light of day.

Where the moon is nil and the wind is still
Griffins lurk on a nearby hill to search
For the mortal beings who roam,
And unknowingly enter this fatal zone.

Then their bodies are lost and their souls depart,
And the vampires start on their still warm hearts
To suck the fluid of life from within,
And their life as a zombie will soon begin.

This motley crew know just what to do.
When the weather gets cold and the frosty clue
Of winter surrounds with mysterious grace,
They bury themselves in their resting place.

Lines

Enough! my song within.
I've humored you long enough
But now I'm going to wring you out.
I thought before it best
To suffer you follow your course,
But lazy Muse you've loafed enough.
Begin now Bitch!
Come out where I can catch you
And whip you and listen to your howl.

BRIAN SULLIVAN

I Survived the H-Bomb

There's no light
There's no hope
See the hills
And angry slopes

Hear the sea
Murmuring low
Look about
The hazy glow

There's no life
I'm all alone
No more food
Just skin and bone

Planes up high
Dropped many bombs
Brightest flashes
Then the calm

Fish that swam
Swim no more
Birds that flew
Lay on the shore

Beasts that roam
Have no home
Lie on the ground
Burnt to the bone

The earth is brown
No green I See
No plant survived
The treachery

I walk alone
The deadly ground
No noise I hear
But my heart pound

How did I live
I do not know
Still slowly falls
The dusty snow

The sky dark grey
The snow is brown
Now I pray
My echo sounds

I cannot breathe
My throat is raw
I no longer see
What I saw before

I gasped for air
My head spun 'round
I fell so slowly
To the dusty ground

My skin is dry
Soft rotten grime
My death I died
The thousandth time

When

When the last star is named;
And the last wave is tamed;
When the last fire has flamed,
 My love for you
 Will still be true.

When all the sands are numbered;
And the last child has wondered
When the last cloud thundered,
 My love for you will
 Will still be true.

When there is no song to sing;
And there are no bells to ring;
When buds don't hear the call of spring,
 Then my love will be growing,
 For I will be knowing
 More about you.

When the last of the rivers run dry;
And birds no longer haunt the sky;
When babies forget how to cry,
 Then my love for you
 Will still be new.

As long as there's a last,
A future, present and a past,
I'll love you then,
As I love you now,
Where there'll be no when
Or where or how.

THADDEUS MCGEOUGH, '60

Landlocked

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

This landlocked life's too tame,
Every dreary day's the same,
There's a dearth of zest and flame
Mid you dwellers on the shore.

So I'm breaking out my gear
For my chartered course is clear,
And I'll leave without a tear
This congested life ashore

Yes, I'm heading for the bay,
Back to watch the tenders play
Round the tankers anchored gay,
Soon to leave the cluttered shore.

And I'm putting out to sea
Where a seaman knows he's free,
Where the breezes also flee
To escape the stilted shore.

When I feel the rolling deck
And the spray upon my neck
Then I'll take a farewell check
On the dim receding shore.

Then I'll thank the Lord for ships
With their bows that heave and dip,
For the songs on sailors lips
That are never sung ashore.

Then I'll thank the Lord for storms,
For winds both cold and warm,
And this soul that can't conform
To your dreary life ashore.

The Retarded Child

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

I am the one who dwells apart
With darkness in my mind;
I dwell apart with lonely heart—
My thoughts, you see, are blind.

But no! It's clear you do not see;
How else explain my need.
Nor do you hear my patient plea,
Or hearing pay no heed.

You boast the progress of this age
In sciences and art,
But share with me no heritage
For still I stand apart.

It is not I who am impaired,
But you, who are so late
In dissipating my despair
By telling me to wait.

This is a doleful cross I bear,
But you could teach me song
By kindly showing that you cared
And helping me belong.

One day before the judgment seat
You'll surely stand alone;
A God of Justice then will mete
The mercy that you've shown.

Misery

BRIAN SULLIVAN

HE was alone. The rain was quiet and like a thick fog or mist. The ground oozed sponge-like but silent beneath his feet and his collar was turned up against the rain, but there was always the mud.

He walked slowly as in deep thought or in some kind of daze; his shoes sank a little with every step; and inside, the feet felt pinched . . . cold. Cars would occasionally glare up behind him and swish splashing past. Once he saw a face, a woman's and peering at him through a steam spread window; he wondered. He thought to himself as the rear red lights blinked and faded around a corner; then everything was quiet. His thoughts followed the car and imagined him being inside on his way to a night on the town—warm with a beautiful girl next to him and his happiness.

He felt alone and sad . . . poetic. He began a song as he often did alone, but stopped. A poet, he looked at the sky. The sickly mist had been dyed a morbid red by the city's light; but to look took more effort than he wanted to give; his fists deeper into his raincoat pockets, he looked down dejected.

At an intersection he turned left down a boulevard. "Some food," he thought, "then a movie might be best. At any rate, I have to kill some time so's I get back at the barracks late enough to make things look like they're still all right." And he walked his way along the road leading to the city beneath the ugly light.

The boulevard was divided in two by a small canal. The shimmering of the street light on the water, lovely

Misery

and a joy to lovers, deepened his pain. He felt more alone when he saw a beautiful thing; it was beauty that he had lost. The rain was colder now; he looked into it hatefully as if to curse its heartlessness. He wiped his face, straightened his collar, then raised his arm to hail the tired bus coming down the boulevard. It slowed to a stop and sighed. He got on. The ride was short. Standing on the sidewalk, he looked up at the city—alive, gay, bustling and lonely.

It took him longer than he expected to find that quaint, little restaurant they had always gone to. He chose a booth for one and didn't go near where they had always sat. The waiter shuffled up to the table . . . the little man smiled. He ordered, and the waiter scribbled, left the table and, after a few minutes, returned with a clattering of plates and silverware. Then he went away.

"Why did I ever come here . . . I oughta just go back and forget all about it . . . oh, why was I such a . . . dammit I love her . . . why was I such a fool?"

"Oh waiter, could I have a glass of water, please?" The little man went away with his smile and left him alone.

"She was all I ever talked about in the last few weeks since I met her. All the guys ever heard was how beautiful she was, her smile, the things we'd talked about, the way she wore her hair—for the last month that's all they heard. I'd look like a fool if they found out." He looked at a couple across from him. They weren't talking but the girl had a smile on her face. The waiter came back—the meal. He put it down and went away. It looked like a fine dinner, but he couldn't eat. Weakly he motioned to the waiter, "I'm sorry, but I don't feel too good right now. Can I have my check?"

He hurried. Outside it was still raining, but away from the restaurant, and the light, and the smiles, he felt somewhat relieved. Turning, he walked a few steps, stop-

ped, then crossed the street. He bought his ticket at the booth and hurried through the lobby. In the front there were a few empty seats; he chose one and sat there with his head drooped and his shoulders rounded. Not looking at the screen, he only stared at the floor. It was littered with bits of spilled candy, popcorn, gum and other specks. With the sole of his shoe he scraped away a small section. It was an island in a storm-wrecked sea. He paused; a droplet of rain washed a tiny circle, dried and disappeared.

The lights glared and the people started to leave. They filed out slowly and blinking. He watched them go, many of them hand in hand, many of them talking to one another . . . smiling. If there were only one among them who would listen. He wanted to talk now. He wanted to tell how first he noticed . . . and suspected . . . and then knew.

The rain had stopped. There were more people on the street. His eyes strayed restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street. One to talk to; only one bit of sympathy; but the crowds flitted by heedless of him and his misery . . . He wandered lonely.

Red and blue neon colored him indigo as he walked beneath them and into the shadowy bar room they announced. A few of the faces looked at him and back again at their own troubles when he stepped up to the bar. He ordered something insignificant.

"D'you have the time, there?" said a voice next to him.

"A little afta eleven," said someone to his left. Then the first voice: "My wife's always nagging at me. Just the least little thing an' she's ready to scratch my eyes out."

Maybe this man would listen. He had to talk about how she had been once; how he was sure that she really

Misery

had cared for him. And then the strange way she became cold, and how she had been impatient and angry at anything he did; and at last the time he saw her with someone else, somebody perhaps a little more handsome, a little more entertaining. And the fight, she invented it; he couldn't even answer her; choked, he could say nothing.

The two voices were still talking. He waited and said:

"Tonight er I er my girl told me I could go to hell."

"Oh poor boy and ya think that's just awful, don't you?"

"You don't understand. I love her very much and now I'm nothing to her."

"Well listen kid there must be a milyen girls like her in the world. Why don ya jus go out there again and find another one."

"But that isn't how it is. You see, I loved her."

"Yeah I know kid; I loved my wife too."

At the barracks everyone was asleep. It didn't matter anymore. He slipped into bed and for a time just lay there staring. The night was very dark.



The Challenge

I cast this gauntlet to the Lord,
"Oh love me if you dare."
He brandished forth His holy sword
And so the duel declared.

He flashed His steel in fast advance;
I parried stroke for stroke
We swiftly dodged in swordman's dance
And never once we spoke.

I made a lunge — too late I plunged,
He deftly checked my blade.
The steel on steel had loudly rung
I backed with half a blade.

Undone! Half-armed! I cast it down
And thought that I might plea.
I noted then His holy frown
And sought instead to flee.

With lightening thrust he stayed my flight
Then issued this decree,
"I'll spare your life Oh wretched knight,
Now if you dare, love Me!"

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

“With What Praises to Extoll Thee I Know Not”

The mountain peaks that stand against the sky
And share the heavens with the clouds on high,

The crimson colors cast by parting sun
That pictures to the earth that day is done,

The planets poised upon the firmament
Pursuing each its course with plain intent,

And all the marvels wondrously dispersed
Throughout the vast and spacious universe,

These, all these are but remnant, sundry scraps
Remaining after God in splendor wrapped
The Virgin Mother of His only Son.

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

I saw a tiny worm and spat on it.
The worm, he sneered, “Your corpse, I’ll feast on it.”
I smashed the tiny worm into the dirt.
His sneering words my pride had hurt.

The moral of the little tale is this —
For proud, contemptful man all is not bliss.
A man for all his prideful, strutting might
But makes a menu for the crawling mite.

WILLIAM A. HOLIAN

