

G. W. PROFESSOR WRITES POETRY AS A PASTIME



Prof. Troutman

The six poems which I have turned over to the staff of *The Pilot* represent the best products growing out of a short period in my life when I took to writing poetry as a pastime. This period began during the spring of 1953 when I was stationed at Goldsboro, awaiting shipment for army service overseas. I was included in a group alerted for the long train trip across the continent, and time hung heavy on my mind. Yet the excitement of facing the many unknowns before me plus a consciousness of physical well being inspired a lyrical strain of thought and led to some first attempts at versifying. During the journey across the United States by rail and across the Pacific by ship, I probably continued my attempts to put ideas and impressions into poetic form. But it was not until I was landed on the French colonial island of New Caledonia and had had an opportunity to enjoy this natural paradise par excellence, that I seriously applied myself to this form of literature. I turned out quite a number of poems, most of which I destroyed immediately, some I kept with me, reworking and revising them from time to time. After a few months, I awakened to the fact that my ambitions were greater than my talents. I gave up the writing of verse and have never attempted it since.

If a person has the slightest poetic strain in him, scenes on the island of New Caledonia will call it forth. Volcanic mountain ranges seem to rise into the clouds and then fall abruptly into the sea. In the deep inlets and bays, coral growths produce a changing pattern of colors as the angles of the sun's rays vary with the time of day. Streams of clear water push down through narrow coves and deep gorges between mountains. Rocks of many hues in the stream bed lend a touch of al-

most unearthy beauty to these cascading streams. The poem, "Tontouta" is an attempt to describe the New Caledonian river, Tontouta. Not only in my choice of words, but in the meter and form, I have sought to convey a picture of a stream descending rapidly from high hills into a peaceful bay at the foot of mountain ranges. "Markea Valley" was written to describe a river near the capital city of New Caledonia, Numea. The actual name of the river was Dumbea. But obviously such a name does not very well lend itself to poetical usage. The description of the scene is authentic, however. "The Lament of a Deserted Ship" was inspired by the sight of several large sailing vessels which had been brought into a shallow bay and apparently abandoned. A person could not avoid the feeling that this was an unnatural end for such graceful ships. "A Sonnet to Youth" was a compliment (at least, so it was intended) for the vibrant, healthy and handsome young French people which I saw in the vicinity of Numea.

"The Coming of a Snowstorm" was written in an effort to recapture from the past an experience which I knew there was no chance of enjoying in the tropics. "To a True Friend" was probably composed as a tribute to all those who at that time and who during the past years bettered my life through their friendships.

Tontouta

Down from the mountains
Piercing the skies
Down from the fountains
That secretly rise
Out of the faults
And out of the ridges
Through rocky vaults
And under bridges
Down to the valley
Down to the sea
Clear waters rally
Impetuously.

Down in the valley
Down near the sea
Clear waters rally
In rocky lee.
Pools of crystal
Skies of blue
Edibles vestal
Changing hue:
A gallery
Of nature's art
Whose votary
Is my own heart.

William F. Troutman, Jr.

Markea Valley

On a sunny island far away you hoard your treasure rare,
Where the blue Markea River runs down its cascade stair.
Your walls are rain-bows framed in green, mist-arches of cliff and fowers,
That skyward rear their pillars great like ancient fortress towers;
Clouds on high enfold dark peaks in shimmering snow-white crowns
And shadows cast on your face below, which pass as lovers' frowns.

From these beauty-haunted steepes in wild and desperate flight,
As a streamer of silver ribbon, a cataract lunges white;
And in your basin, like a rug of careless, colored pattern,
Lie the boulders that thunder down into your apesless canyon.
This stoney bed Markea loves, where in lilting stride
Her waters pure as heaven's dew flow down to meet the tide.

A tranquil pool of marvelous depth lies cool and crystal clear
In the cloister of your naked heat as bold as a sparkling tear;
While everywhere on flashing wings, dart birds from tree to tree
With throats a-swell to sing your praise in glad, free symphony.
And ever down that golden aisle my heart in fancy goes
And burns again, gay and young, where blue Markea flows.

William F. Troutman, Jr.

A Sonnet To Youth

To make for Youth a dress, I would not dare;
For though I gathered fabrics by the rod
And never ceased for rest or daily fare,
I would as nearly come to clothing God!
For Youth will have no circlet bind her waist,
Nor bear the softest weave upon her limbs;
Her every move is tuned to Freedom's haste,
And far and near she roves to please his whims.
Yet once suppose her form with silks were draped:
Could all this dadelé attire supply the gloss
To match her thousand changing moods, though rare?
Of all its treasured gems and ores and dross?
To make for Youth a dress I would not dare,
When she so wants the earth and heavens to wear!

William F. Troutman, Jr.

The Lament Of A Deserted Ship

A half moon shines with feeble light
Upon my rusted hull tonight,
As once beneath the Dipper's rim
It blazed on my rigging, full and trim;
And waves career my broken bow
With pity in the harbor now.

But once they rushed my straining sides
With all the fury that abides
In the clashing legions of the deep.
The unleashed winds would blunt its knife
Against my battered prow till life
For all my valour was broken bow
Once men in reverent, thankful tone
Praised my graces; and the storm
With ugly face and hair a-swarm
Fled the boat with churned ship.
And left me crowned in a sun-lit bow.

Through many a season my sails full-spread
Sought distant shores, by the trade winds sped;
And people often gazed in wonder
On my burnished spars in cities yonder,
And toasted my name in drink and song
In revels wild the whole night long.

But age and battle left their scars
Upon my prow, my keel, and spars.
No more they put me out to sea;
No more do men in dignity reveal;
I recall my skill and speak my name:
I am too old, and leaky, and lame!
They left me here to dream and rot
In this sheltered cove . . . and soon forgot.

They left me here to rust and die
A stinky death! I know not why
They did not release me to the wind.
And the jealous waves and let me spend
One last good hour of battle, there
Where the fierce storm-call is sounding clear:
And the rattle of death in the hurricane
Could rally my strength yet once again.

Then let them batter, flail, and twist
Let them crush my frame in their grisly fists;
And let me die as a brave soul dies,
Beneath thundrous waves and crashing skies!

William F. Troutman, Jr.

To A True Friend

Friendship is love devoid of passion's art,
A love that leans upon a kindred soul
And begs from it the strength to meet the trials
That every man must face in daily walks.
Thus, as the oak accepts the mineral food
The turbid earth yields up to hungry roots
And deems it not a sacrifice to bow
Unto that soil, though void of golden ore—
Or as the blossom seeks the migrant sun,
When, low, dark clouds unfold the generous rays,
Because it so well knows that warmth and light
May hidden be, but never quite destroyed,
So I, my friend, need none of art's device
To vindicate the ties of love for you.

William F. Troutman, Jr.

A Sonnet

The Coming Of A Snowstorm

The sky at dusk was lowering, cold and gray,
And in the laden hush of the winter chill
I was sure I heard soft footsteps play
Among the pine trees brittle on the hill.
I crossed the pasture and listened to the rill
As it wheezed and gurgled and strove so hard to rise
Through Youth's masonry, I felt a thrill
In that low sound; felt nature's charm devise
A tact warning quiet beyond my eyes:
For the ragged elm in whispers low and tense
Betrayed excitement through a demure guise,
And nervous sparrows in the hedge could sense
The coming of an elfin host in white
Descending on silent wings through all the night.

William F. Troutman, Jr.

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