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NO. 5

The
LYRIC WEST

A Magazine of American Verse



IN THIS ISSUE

Joan Dareth Prosper | Ruth E. McKee

Pauline Garner Curran | Robert Haven Schauffler

R. T. T. and others

A SCHOLAR-POET

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The Lyric West

Vol. IV, No. 5

A Magazine Of Verse

February, 1925

Edited by Roy Towner Thompson and Grace Atherton Dennen

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The Lyric West for February, 1925

Editors: Roy Towner Thompson, Grace Atherton Dennen

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Joan Dareth Prosper

Faggots

I stole your faggots for my winter burning,
But give you back my candle's glow instead.
I cheated you of stones, that I might leave you
This friendly bread.

Your cloak I wore a little time, unbidden,
Your sandals borrowed for my weary feet,
And in the shielding dusk drank from your table
Warm wine and sweet.

See, now I offer carven bowls and flagons
Ivory pale, wrought through the liliated night,
Wrought through a lonely hour by moon-dipped fingers,
For your delight.

My flame fills all your orange lamps at twilight,
My song upon your window curtain blows,
And where my tears fell on your garden, trembles
Another rose.

Sydney King Russell

Two Poems

CLAUDIA'S SONG

He is gone down the road
In the bright spring rain;
Heart, O my heart,
Shall we see him again?

Shall we hear his step
In the cadence we know,
He who has gone
Where the fickle winds blow?

What avail promises
Beating at my ears
Now that he is gone
Past reach of tears?

Now that he has strode on
And shut the last door,
Whisper, my heart:
Shall we ever see him more?

Now an empty hearth is
Dusted and swept,
What now are promises
Broken or kept?

Yesterday he smiled
And waved a light hand.
Last night we kissed,
Forgot we had planned

Never any parting,
Even for a day.
Cruel, cruel years
To bear him away!

Nearer the moon, now
And the farthest star
Than one the fickle winds
Have borne so far.

How can I sing
Any song save pain,
Now that he is gone
With the bright spring rain?

THE FLIGHT

Something is gone out of loveliness,
Poignant and strangely dear;
We watched it pass unsmiling,
Terrorless, without tear.

A shadow has fled from vision,
A voice is dumb to our call.
. . . Gone. . . and we sit empty-handed,
We to whom Beauty was all.

Paul Tanaquil

Paris — 1923

For M. . . .

Far down the street where the houses glisten,
Polished by moonlight, set in the sky,
Over the sound of our footsteps . . . Listen!
Was it a crying of fiddles or the wind's sigh?

Somebody whispered your name in wonder —
Didn't you hear it? Don't you know?
It was impalpable as April thunder,
Unreal as autumnal snow.

So is it always: my senses capture
A perilous treasure from Beauty's flame,
And deep in my heart I hear with rapture
Three magic syllables crying your name. . . .

Norma Miller

River Songs

The magnificence of your lacquered barge comes
stealing down with the current
As shadows creep eastward thru the long afternoon.
Dip your slim hands into the stream,
O most beautiful one,
And from the tips of your white fingers
Scatter the jade drops:
Have you plunged those fingers into the coffer of my
heart
That you may tsrew its jewels as carelessly
Over the bright water?

From your warm lips the words fall gayly
And I gather them like white pearls
To be treasured together upon the thread of my
enraptured remembrance.
But when the lips are pale and tight-drawn,
And the sounds that fall from them say unto me,
“Go hence!”
It is the thunder of the relentless axe
Tearing into the heart of a great tree.

I have yielded up my grief to the mists.
The soft, winding clouds drew it among them with gray
arms
And hid it from me.

I shall be sad no more
For my grief is gone among the mists
Fleeing down the river before the chill wind of the
 morning.
The new day sparkles upon a clear stream
But the sun makes no warmth in me.
I am a nerveless thing with no will.

Charles Wharton Stork

The New Dimension

Crutched on my weak, tradition-weighted mind,
I staggered lonely through the length and breadth
And depth of the visible universe. I walked
The charted roads of nothingness between
The stars that only led away, away;
Until I shrank back, shivering with affright,
Into my body. But although I held
My hands before my face, I could not lose
That staring vault, that mighty threatening void,
Like a huge eyeless demon whose cold hands
Groped ever nearer toward my pulsing throat.
Unsheltered from the winds of destiny,
I cowered in a dungeon without walls,
Waiting release that could not come, for Time
Was no less infinite, no less blind than Space.
My mind had splintered like a moldered staff.

Then, as if sprung within me from a seed
Long hidden in the darkness, Truth was there,
Standing in naked purity beside me,
Winged as an angel, golden as a star.
Taking my hand, she bade me rise and spread
The unused pinions of my spirit, when
We soared away, not through the tangible air,
But sheer above what mortal sense can grasp.
I looked beneath, and lo! the realm of Space

Lay spread before me like a level plain,
Whose length and breadth I compassed in one glance
As easily as the mind recalls a thought
Of yesterday. At first the silver mists
Of Time would pass between, obscuring, till
We won above them, when their tenuous threads
Grew thought-transparent as a spider's film.
We now were come — where never a cloud of Time
Had soared — into the deathless heart of Being,
Where Knowledge, Joy, and Will are one, like light
And heat and radiant energy combined

In a great sun; and I was lost therein
As a thin flake of flame in a great storm
Of whirling conflagration.

With a shock,
Gentle as when a streamlet grounds a skiff,
My soul returning touched my body's shore,
And I was glad. I was not fitted yet
To dwell in timeless Being, but I knew
My spirit was not fettered by the weight
Of Space or Time, those shadows that man's thought
Has cast from his own body. Oh, I knew
And know that I am part of the vast light
And heat and radiance that I dare not name.

Ruth E. McKee

If

If love should come
Moth-winged and jester-cowled
To my door
I would let him in.

And if he should sit down
At the far end of the room
And talk lightly of Plato
And seriously of kittens
And never about himself at all
I would give him my heart.

Raymond Kresensky

Asphodel

By an oaken cradle bending,
You will hear a breath
Blown by the child's soft stirring,
Now in the arms of death.

Clinging to a gray-white marker,
Pressing sunken mounds
Brushed by sighing cedars,
You will hear old sounds.

Sounding me with silver hammers
You will hear a bell
Speaking to your sorrow
Sweetest asphodel.

Beulah May

The Color of the Night

You are to me the color of the night.
A crooked street in Chinatown with a dragon winding
past to sharp, brazen music;
The beautiful shops of Hollywood and the long lines of
purring machines going to the play;
A movie extra coming home late from the studio, her
painted face showing like a mask of tragedy;
The Plaza and the Old Mission on Saturday night when
all Mexico congregates in an air thick with garlic
and cigarettes;
A high bridge over the Los Angeles River and the
railroad signals gleaming in the swift, yellow
stream;
The heavily scented orange trees asleep under the
moon as the grim wolf hills keep guard;
And the long road leading on and on into mystery, into
the dark.
You are to me the color of the night.

Winifred Davidson

April Afternoon, Point Loma

1769

There feasted on these heights wild earth-hued folk,

Scoffing I know, and jesting in the sun.

“A whale, a mighty, a prodigious one

Approaches!” mockers cried. Out of thin smoke,

Far, arching high into the sky there broke

Strange rotund shapes of Spanish sails, gray . . .

dun,

The *San Antonio*, Christ’s galleon,

Now raised Point Loma, now Guijarros woke.

What fear! The black sun hung within a veil;

The headland rocked, and those Coahuillas felt

Vague dread, the while crazed seabirds’ rising wail

Made savage laughter into terror melt.

The ship of God heaved to; prayer like a gale

Swept down La Playa where awed Indians knelt.

Betty Dickinson Frazee

Two Lyrics

Within your silences you keep
Your unsaid words like flocks of sheep
Behind their pasture bars so high
I often watch them passing by,
Or count them drifting off to sleep.
Some day I shall find a way
To lead your foolish words astray,
Maybe with a crook or bell,
Maybe a look — I cannot tell —
Only this, they will not stay!
Though in your silences you keep
Them folded now like flocks of sheep,
Shepherding them well.

*

My dear love keeps his quietude
Like faithful monk his holy rood,
Yet once in his unguarded look
I found a word-illuminated book.

At aves sweet and holy writ
I translate them bit by bit,
And find at last that it is meant
That love be kept a sacrament.

Dear love, you keep your quietude

Like faithful monk his holy rood,
But once in your unguarded look
I read a word-illuminated book!

Pauline Garner Curran

The Running Dawn

The trees on the horizon of the night
Are sleeping with the door of dreams ajar,
While slowly comes the shy and trembling dawn
To dance before the moon, whose sudden flight
She follows swiftly now and follows far —
With lifted head and running like a fawn
She hears the footsteps of the trailing wind
And feels his swaying fingers through her hair;
With laughter and low whisper, blushing, breaks
The vigil of the stars; glancing behind
She gaily calls the wild things from their lair
And calling louder — Ah! the morning wakes!

Frank Mitvalsky

Three Poems

PLAYMATES

Race with me, wind
Along this beach,
Your heels behind
Just out of reach.

Play with me, waves;
Play you are sheep
I drive to caves
And watch and keep.

Dance with me, tree
Shake off your dust;
Be young and free.
Come, dance! You must.

Play, play, play, play!
How long
Is a day
Filled with song!

THE LIFE OF A POET

A child who never cared to play
Who ran and ran and ran away;

A boy silent in company;
Who always found something to see;

A youth who would look down and sigh
And mention vivid days gone by;

An old man who could never talk
And had a most peculiar walk.

All he had never done or said
Is in a book that will be read.

SAND

Sand growing this great tree,
Sand that we all detest;
Sand, growing dreams in me
And making my unrest.

Weak shapeless sand,
That dwindles, that blows by;
I hold you in my hand —
Dust of what dreams have I?

Frances Wierman

Bill Harper

HOVE-TO

Old Billy Harper is done with the sea;
Done with calm, storm, and bum grub;
Done with cursing, card-cheating, and fo'castle fights;
Done with eagle-eyed men who became minor kings
When the three-mile was passed; done with booze;
Done with women who had only sex and quick claws
That frisked him; done with wrecks
Where the officers acted like incomplete gods;
Done with whalers and salvage; fishing and smuggling;
Done with floating prisons and moving cold hells;
Done! With the whole salty he-man life of the sea!
Old Billy Harper is guarding the gate
Of a movie lot; dull-eyed and fat-paunched,
He squats in an easy chair eight hours a day;
A soft job, good money, sweet girls, polite men —
Billy looks at the ten-pointed star
Tattooed on his red, hairy wrist.
His sagging lips quiver; "Oh, Hell — it's no use —
I'm done with the sea!"

WOMEN

Bill Harper, grizzled old salt, says women are like the
 sea,
They *are* the sea; crystallized waves, walking about!
Round the heart of a man they creep as water around a
 bark;
Bear him to calm sweet harbor he's seen in lonely
 dreams,
Or dash him on hidden rock; they float him so smoothly
He's not aware of the drift till he scrapes on a bar!
Women can draw a man up on waves of the soul
Till he touches God; or drag him down in a trough
Where the icy water is heavily black as despair.
They sting him to effort with salty broadsides of scorn,
Make murmuring, rippling tide of talk, forever
Revealing small secrets of driftwood and weed;
But in their depths as in depth of the sea
There is Silence, where Mysteries primeval abide,
Beautiful women with eyes amethyst as ocean at dawn,
Green as brine in the dusk; grey like the Arctic main,
Who lure you, yet slip from your hawser with satiny
 guile
They're dangerous! The Woman, the Sea, are riddles
No man ever solves!
Women are love and powerful and terrible, like the sea
—
Says old Bill Harper, seasoned lover and tar!

MONEY

Landlubbers wonder why sailors can't hold on to coin.
Bill Harper says he figured it out.
It's the sea — womanlike, jealous, loving and cruel.
It maddens her when she sees sailors going ashore,
And her soul goes cat-footing after them!
(The soul of the Sea is at one with rhythmical sounds,
Things that sparkle and clatter; rooms like a fo'castle;)
Softly she leads her men to dingy cellars and dens,
Low-ceilinged, smoky rooms where she turns them over
To women and men who drag them down like
 undertow.
They're filled with liquor and dope;
Their leave is eaten by futile angling
For the good time they're longing to have —
But never get! They're cheated; their pockets picked;
Then, penniless, they're shoved into the street.
The Sea, who loves them, smiles and sings
Of new ships, easy berths, long shore leaves
And plenty of money at the end —
Lonely and broke, the sailors listen; sign up once more,
And the Sea is happy, she has them again!
Sailors can't keep money, says Bill,
Because the Sea won't let them!

A SAILOR'S GOD

Bill Harper says there's a God because there's a Sea.
In the old days, Bill Harper and a mast, swaying
together,
Became the center of a tremendous circle, whose line
Moored the uttermost star. Then he thought about God.
Science-men tell us the Sea came first
And the earth and beasts were born out of it.
Bill thinks the Sea is the eldest child of the Lord
And the most like Him.
Its wonderful, murmuring, deep-toned chant
Is an echo of the Creative Voice. When He said:
"Let there be Light!" the words must have rolled
Like the Sea when it booms among rocks.
When God talks of men He must sound like the
crooning
Of southern water around coral isles.
God and the Sea have no form; yet both
Can take any shape. Men think
They read God as a Sailor the Sea. They but watch
His signals, knowing naught of His code!
Still — men can't have much to do with the Sea
Without learning somewhat of God!
Says Bill Harper, who from a swaying mast
Surveyed the universe.

Mary Brent Whiteside

Completion

When others say:

“I gave my best today,”

Master, I only bring

The broken fragments of an offering.

Thy beauty is a shadow on my breast,

And I have never learned the measure of my best.

I could not give

This greater thing, and live

Pale days of mortal breath, —

The best would bring finality and death.

When I have given the ultimate in me,

I shall know godhood and its immortality.

Robert Haven Schauffler

Message

It comes across the foam
To end my hideous dream,
Trustworthy as the breath
Of the dark angel when he bids us home
After the transient episode called death,
And bright as the first gleam
From out the shining scroll
That is the secret gift of each new-bidden soul.

Mary Sinton Leitch

In Bruton Churchyard

“Here lieth Ann, Beloved Wife” . . . I trace
The letters in the old and sunken stone,
A record moss and ivy will efface
To leave you, Ann, forevermore unknown,
While still the shadows, weaving and un-weaving
Their patterns, will dance lightly on, ungrieving.

Was there a heart within your crumbled breast
That leaped at sound of some low-whispered word?
Can one so dead have uttered careless jest,
Rejoiced in scent of flower or song of bird?
And did you walk among old graves, discover
Sweet violets there, and laugh with child or lover?

Perhaps . . . and yet too long — too long — you have
lain
Beneath the sod; too deeply I mistrust
The unsubstantial yesterday; in vain
Would summon out of centuries of dust
Reality to touch you and awaken,
“Beloved Ann” — forgotten and forsaken!

Dorothy Hawley Cartwright

To a Girl in a Blue Dress

Was it the dress
 That made me kiss her?
For I must confess
That her pretty dress
 Became the miss. . . . Her
Eyes were bluer, though, I guess
Than her pretty frock — oh yes!
 Still, why did I kiss her?

I said, “You have a pretty dress” —
 In my clumsy way, like this. Her
Blue eyes smiled a coy caress;
And then, what could I do but press
Her laughing lips in tenderness?
 Yet *why* did I kiss her?
Was it — the dress?

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Ruth Clay Price

View Point

Flowers are content,
Sun-stirred, wind-bent,
On their stem.

Perhaps my life's routine
May seem serene
— To them!

A Prisoner Sings

THE SWALLOW BOOK (*Das Schwalbenbuch*) by ERNST TOLLER.
English version by Ashley Dukes. London. Humphrey Milford:
Oxford University Press. 1924.

Ernst Toller, who was recently released after serving five years' imprisonment in the fortress of Neiderschonenfeld for the part he played in the Munich Soviet, has been known to a small American audience through his two plays, *The Machine Wreckers* and *Masses and Men*. Powerful as these plays are in their stark sincerity and dramatic power, he will command now further respect and admiration from this small volume of verse.

In the first stanza of this poem he epitomizes the whole story of the famous *Reading Gaol* poem:

A friend died in the night.

Alone.

The prison walls kept death-watch.

Autumn will come soon.

The ache, the ache burns deep.

Forsakenness.

It was in this ecstatic forsakenness he “dreamed the holy song of being,” for the ache and monotony was relieved by two Swallows who built their nest just outside his cell, and brought with them their life of creativeness for which he languished. He watched them in their nestbuilding and one morning he saw within the nest, “five noble temples of engendered life.” It is this element of Toller that reflects something of the tender mysticism of St. Francis as he salutes his brothers and sisters, the birds.

He must suffer, but there is little bitterness resulting from his suffering, little invective in these verses as he contemplates man's inhumanity. He dreams in his cell:

Moonlight and stars are my companions too,
And shimmering fields.

He also contemplates the social system, the ruthless system that imprisons him:

Europe how poor thou art!

Thy household beasts are like thy men,
Misshapen, haggard, crippled, impotent.

O sadness of their eyes!

When they are prized, we prize their pedigree

As men are prized for their accomplishment,

Their history, and not their living selves.

And not their living selves!

The poem moves forward from the beginning swift and strong like a mountain stream, full of lyricism and beauty. He is inspired by the swallows' song, their life and their tragedy. He watches them come home to the nest in the early sullen spring morning with empty bills and at sunset their naked little bodies cling
To their mother's breast in helpless confidence

Here is the tragedy of birds and how powerfully he expresses it:

O man, O man, saw you the weeping of a bird?

Autumn comes and the necessary migration to warmer climes and for the last time he will hear the swallows' song; no more the mates of his captivity will warm his cell with "vibrating melody," or will he watch their "winging curves of

flight.”

The poem ends in a powerful climax:

Men call you brutes,
And pride is in their voice when they pronounce the
word.
O you who mount above their folly!
I have learned to bow before the wonder of your
brutishness.

Until men find themselves again,
Until they are not
And yet are,
Their struggles will but bring
New struggles,
And their holiest transformation will unfold
New transformation.

W. H. Lench

A Scholar-Poet

POEMS, by CHARLES MINER LEWIS. New Haven. Yale University Press. 1924.

It is a pleasure to find a book of poems so thoroughly marked by classical restraint and a sense of ideal beauty. The best traditions of culture are reflected in these crystal pure lines; the poems reflect a life spent in “studious cloisters pale.” Quite naturally the poems have elevation and detachment; and there is a certain lucidity that is Greek. One is frequently reminded of Matthew Arnold’s wistful yearning for the ideal. The first poem in the volume is fairly representative:

ISRAFEL

Forever chanting an untroubled song,
In realms of cold tranquility he stands
Full-fronted to the Splendor. Not with hands
Are swept those angel lute-strings, but along
His heart the harmonies flow pure and strong,
And thrill with ecstasy the seraph bands
Star-clustered round him. In these lower lands,
Where pain and passion and the tale of wrong
Are never stilled, and even love’s eyes are wet,
Rarely does some lost echo reach our ears,
From that high rapture wandering; — and yet,
Were I with Israfel beyond the spheres,
He still should hardly woo me to forget
The untuned cycles of these jarring years.

The spirit of Matthew Arnold’s “Self-dependence” and of Henley’s “Invictus” is reflected in the following:

AT SEA

The wind blows fresh and steady; on the quarter-deck I
stand
The starlit skies above me, and the tiller in my hand.
With boundless seas behind me, and in front the
unknown shore,
I sing this song of triumph, and of gladness evermore.
I flinch not, and I fear not, for above the reeling mast
Serene and changeless ever my star is standing fast.
So let the black seas buffet me, they cannot overwhelm,
For still and clear my star shines near, my hand is on
the helm.
I sail, I know not whither; I know not, ask not, whence;
For questioning were idle; where all answer were
pretence;
But forward still and onward I drive my course afar;
I am my own soul's pilot, and I chase my own soul's
star.

In "Mountain Moods" Professor Lewis is very happily proficient in the difficult art of blank verse. He expresses the exaltation of a mountain climber who seeks and finds communion with nature in her wildest moods. The following passage is taken from the heart of the poem:

Alone,
The mountaineer, in insolent delight,
As from the rock-reefed shores of time's last verge
Challenged the pageant of eternity.
Then, as the storm rose over him, and poured
Its carnival of clamor and black night
Above the hidden summit, the cold wind

Flapped round him, filled with sleet, and stung his sense
To the mad joy of conflict; and he crept
From rock to jutting rock, from root to root,
Now lying prone with tight grasp, to catch breath,
Now borne in a blind rush through storm and darkness
Till foot or hand again found anchorage.

But Professor Lewis' finest poetical accomplishment is his version in heroic couplets of that most perfect of all romance tales, *Gawayne and the Green Knight*. The author is master of his medium; he not only retells the story (with considerable liberty and several omissions, it is true) but cuts not a few poetic capers after the manner of Byron in *Don Juan*. Like Byron he frequently interrupts his tale with an aside, making overtures to the reader, confidentially, to describe his difficulties or his omissions. When the Green Knight's head is cut off

The axe flashed through,
Cutting the Green Knight cleanly right in two,
And split the hard stone floor like kindling wood.
The head dropped off; out gushed the thick, hot blood
Like — I can't find the simile I want,
But let us say a flood of *crème de menthe*!

But it is in the welded beauty of story and form that the strength of the poem lies. Professor Lewis found in this tale a theme thoroughly congenial, and in his choice of form a medium in which he was both happy and successful.

Professor Lewis was, from 1899 until his death in 1923, a member of the English Department at Yale University. He will be remembered as the editor of the *Yale Series of Younger Poets*.

R. T. T.

Briefer Mention

IN PLEASANT PLACES, by CLARA MASON FOX. Los Angeles. Grafton Publishing Corporation. 1924.

This is the response of a lover of nature to the outward physical beauty of California. The theme is not new, but one cannot help surrendering to the enthusiasm of the author who takes up, with unflagging interest, one phase after another of our "little paradise." If one enjoys the canyons, the deserts, the ocean sunsets, and the thousand other attractions of nature, one cannot help liking this book. Through its pages the reader visits again in his imagination the most pleasant places he knows. The book is effectively illustrated with ten full page photographs.

Between Editor and Reader

We should like to speak a word for blank verse. While lyrical poetry is usually more pleasing to the ear, blank verse offers greater possibilities for sustained effects; it is a larger instrument, requires greater power and skill, and yields correspondingly greater results. There is a great organ-like quality in Milton's blank verse, a dynamic power which lifts and transforms the listener. There are many other types — one has only to mention the many-keyed instrument of the master musician, Shakespeare — down to the easy, conversational type sometimes employed for narratives. But all types have a certain run-on quality, a fluency, an elasticity, a plastic potency, which affords the artist infinite artistic opportunities. These inherent artistic opportunities of blank verse have, in the present instance, been augmented by the offer of a money prize, announced elsewhere in this issue.

From discriminating sources we have received many laudatory comments on Dr. Wann's review of Masters' *New Spoon River* in our last issue. Many readers felt that it was fair, well-considered criticism, and — what cannot be said of all reviews — very readable. The poems most generally praised last month were "I Bring You Silence, My Beloved," by Nellie Burget Miller, and the series of five poems by Frank Mitvalsky.

Contributors

In our last issue one half of the contributors appeared for the first time. In this issue only two are new-comers: Raymond Kresensky, who sends his work from Chicago, and Mrs. Wierman, of Los Angeles. The latter is a member of the Verse Writers Club of Southern California. Of former contributors, Joan Dareth Prosper of Seattle has been attracting much comment for her freshness of viewpoint and sincerity of expression. Her poem, "Faggots," in this issue, was inspired by the feeling that the artist-creator frequently offers his fellow-men reparation for broken laws in the enduring beauty of his gifts. Charles Wharton Stork, the veteran editor of *Contemporary Verse*, is well known to poetry readers. His poems have appeared in *Harpers*, *Poetry*, and many other magazines. We are glad to hear that he has recently been made president of the Poetry Society of America. Frank Mitvalsky writes that he is a freshman in the University of Arizona. We regret that, in last month's comments, we relegated Miss Sallie Kinsman to the junior high school. She rightfully belongs to the Anaheim (California) Junior College where she is a freshman.

Announcement of Prizes

THE LYRIC WEST announces the following prizes:

The Sarah Bixby Smith Prize of fifty dollars will be given for the best lyric poem published in the fourth volume of the magazine, *i. e.*, from October, 1924, to September, 1925, inclusive.

The Ben Field Prize of fifty dollars will be given for the best narrative poem published in the fourth volume of the magazine.

The judges for the above two prizes will be announced in a later issue.

The Charles Granger Blanden Prize of fifty dollars will be given for the best poem in blank verse published in the magazine during the year 1925. The judges for this prize will be: Charles Granger Blanden, the donor; Samuel Travers Clover, editor of the *Argonaut*; and Roy Towner Thompson.