

"WHO FEEL GREAT TRUTHS AND TELL THEM"

Some one has written that "poets are all who love—who feel great truths and tell them." That being true, it may fairly be said that Will M. Maupin, who for so many years has given entertainment to Commoner readers, is a poet. The Commoner receives so many letters commending Mr. Maupin's work that it has been thought proper to give to the readers of this publication a brief sketch of his life and characteristics.

Mr. Maupin was born in Missouri, August 31, 1863. He obtained his primary education in the public schools of Illinois and Missouri, and graduated from a country print shop. In 1881 he became an apprentice in the office of the Holt County Sentinel, Oregon, Mo., and since then has been connected with some branch of the art preservative. In conjunction with his creditors he has owned and, invariably according to his own sweet will, has edited several country newspapers and some of these—if not, indeed, all of them—he has, because of his editorial independence, made what may, in truth, be called a most "glorious failure."

His talents were early recognized by editors of daily newspapers, and he was soon called to that field where he made a creditable record. For many years he wrote paragraphs and verse for the Omaha Daily World-Herald, and the readers of that newspaper have a delightful recollection of the great services Mr. Maupin rendered in that important field. In 1901 Mr. Maupin associated himself with The Commoner, and the character of his work for this publication is well understood.

Perhaps those Commoner readers who have been entertained by Mr. Maupin's uniformly excellent work will be interested in knowing that he has a wife and three children—two little girls and one big boy. A son and daughter died in infancy, and perhaps those who have been touched by some of his splendid verses will be interested in learning that his poems relating to children have been inspired by the emotions growing out of his acquaintance with his own little ones.

Not every one who can make a rhyme is entitled to rank as a poet.

"Give me a theme," the little poet cried,
"And I will do my part."
"Tis not a theme you need," the world replied;
"You need a heart."

Mr. Maupin has the "heart." His writings do not necessarily show it, because some of the most heartless men have been able to write some of the most touching verse.

On one occasion I read a beautiful poem descriptive of the deep affection the writer felt for his wife, and it need not be said that later I was amazed to learn that one of the breakfast table diversions of that so-called poet was to hurl tea-cups at the subject of his muse.

That "flowers should not be reserved for the bier, but should be bestowed at the time when they will do the most good" is a rule to be adhered to for the benefit of society as well as for the gratification of the one to whom the tribute is paid. All too often society learns of the fine characteristics of a man when it is too late for society to avail itself of the opportunities for profit; and perhaps those who have been pleased with Mr. Maupin's writings in the past will read his writings in the future with increased interest in the light of some of the things that are here said.

Commoner readers need not be told of Mr. Maupin's versatility. His stern arraignment of "The Frenzied Financiers" of the day as shown, for instance, in his poem of September 9, entitled "Valiant Defenders of the National Honor," or in his poem of October 6, "Put it Back," indicates the intensely practical side of his character. Among all the contributions with respect to the conclusion of the peace treaty at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, none was more complete than Mr. Maupin's poem of September 8, entitled "Peace." His "Fables in Rhyme and Prose" are now famous wherever The Commoner circulates. "My Mother's Song," and "The Foundations of Faith," written years ago must have touched the heart of every one who had the fine privilege of reading those excellent verses.

But it is in his poems of childhood that Mr. Maupin is at his best. One of the sweetest poems is entitled "Whip Behind," and in these verses is emphasized the fact that the meanest man on earth is the one who, when a little lad hitches

his sled to a wagon "always whips behind." And those who participate in the innocent pleasures of the children will have no difficulty in joining with Mr. Maupin in the fine tribute:

"God bless the man who's kind enough
To smile and look ahead;
Who never growls because a boy
Hooks on a little sled.
May health be his, and length of years,
And may he fortune find;
For nothing is too good for him
Who never whips behind."

One poem entitled "Hello Pop!" and another entitled "The Baby's Shoes" will make an appeal to every parent who has loved and lost. But there are many of Mr. Maupin's associates who happen to know the circumstancer under which these two beautiful poems were written. Years ago, as now, the writer was Mr. Maupin's office associate, and has no difficulty in remembering a little one, long since fallen asleep, who had the habit of poking his little head in the door and exclaiming "Hello, Pop!" And for one with that recollection it is not at all difficult to understand



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the lines of the simple verse descriptive of the cheery greeting, while the little one lived, nor of the hope expressed in the concluding lines:

"When, after Death's cold, chilly hands
Have loosed the last of earthly bands,
And caused Life's weary load to drop;
I'll feel it is supremest joy
To meet at heaven's gate my boy
And hear his welcome, 'Hello, Pop!'"

I remember well the occasion when "The Baby's Shoes" was written. Mr. Maupin and myself were then employed on the Omaha World-Herald. The members of the family were visiting at North Bend, Neb., and he was suddenly summoned there to the death bed of the baby who had so often greeted him "Hello, Pop!" The baby was stricken with diphtheria and died, and on the next evening's mail we received from Mr. Maupin the following verses:

THE BABY'S SHOES

Lay them away, stained by a mother's tears;
Precious keepsakes through the coming years.
The baby's shoes, the tips now slightly worn,
Their spring heels frayed by running o'er the floor—
Lay them away, with heartstrings wrenched
and torn,
For baby's feet will wear them never more.
But through the gloom of all the coming years
The baby's shoes will ope the fount of tears.

Lay them away, and sacred memory
Will cluster 'round them till his face we see—
Until in robes of angel's purest white,
With harp swept by his little fingers blest,
His smile shall banish all the gloom of night
And call us to the Father's endless rest.
Those little shoes! Through all the coming years
They'll speak of him, and fill our eyes with tears.

Lay them away! No more will baby's feet
Run to the gate with pattering music sweet.
Upon the shores of brighter, endless day
He stands. He smiles and waves his hand,
And after we have quit life's weary way
We'll greet our baby in that better land.
And so we'll keep these shoes through all the years,
And they shall banish all our doubts and fears.

Perhaps a dozen newspaper men were gathered in the reporters' room when these verses were given to one of them to read. Every one of these men had seen much of life. The man to whom the verses had first been handed read, perhaps, two or three lines, and then passing it to a neighbor hurriedly left the room. The other started to read, but he in turn passed it to another, and departed; and so on after the other, in the parlance of the street, "fell down" in the effort to read these simple verses. Of course the familiarity with the circumstances under which they had been written had much to do with the fact that no one was able to read the poem throughout. The last man to whom it was handed sent it to the printer while all the other members of the group of "hardened" newspaper men hurriedly made their exit.

When you know the circumstances under which this touching bit of verse was written, can you blame them?

"The Road to Smilleville" is one of Mr. Maupin's optimistic poems, with which, doubtless, many Commoner readers are entirely familiar; and "Dood Mornin'" is another one descriptive of the cheery, daily greeting familiar to every happy parent. "The Beautiful Kingdom" is one of his sweetest poems. This, as will be remembered, had reference to the "Kingdom of Never Grow Old," where "hearts that are light as the clear skies above," where "children are ruling with scepters in hand, for youth is the monarch of one happy band," where "the laughter of little ones, borne on the air, is surcease for sorrow and cure for all care," where "the gates are unlocked by a sweet baby kiss, and love sits enthroned in the city of bliss, in the kingdom of Never-Grow-Old."

"The Look-Out Man" is one of the prettiest poems ever written appropriate to the Christmas time. It contains a warning to the children—some such warning as even we grown folks often need. According to this tale

Now listen, little children, an' I'll tell a story true,
An'-better you remember, 'cause it means a lot to you.

An' if you heed th' lesson, then when Chris'mas time is here
You'll get a lot of pleasure, an' a lot o' Chris'mas cheer.

"The Look-Out man is walkin' when the stars begin to peep
To see if little children are in bed and fast asleep,
And all who act up naughty and don't mind their ma's and pa's
The Look-Out man is watchin' and he'll tell old Santa Claus.

"The Look-Out man is peepin' through the winders every night,
And countin' up the children who are always actin' right
An' goin' off to bed at onct when told 'tis time to go
An' never poutin', not a bit, or takin' clothes off slow.
'He puts 'em in his good book, but the bad ones in the bad,
And when he writes a bad one he jus' looks, Oh, awful sad,
'Cause he knows they won't get nothin'. Better mind your ma's and pa's;
The Look-Out man is watchin' and he'll tell old Santa Claus."

If "poetry is something to make us wiser and better by continually revealing those types of beauty and truth which God has set in all men's souls," then Will M. Maupin rendered service to the world in the many beautiful lines he has written.

RICHARD L. METCALFE.