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help us to become articulate: *the poet makes it possible to think that which could only be felt before.*"

The passage which I have italicised is a more reasonable, a more critical way of stating Shelley's oracular saying that "poets are the legislators of the universe." It will also serve as an example of Mr. Roberts's solid and unbiased interests. He is not afraid of being traditional: indeed, throughout his book he stresses the importance of tradition, and the value of continuity. "The man who has done most to discover among the rules of the past those which are most suited to his own needs," he says,

is most likely to stumble on new rules; and the good critic, like the good poet, must be not only intelligent, sensitive and well acquainted with traditional rules, but also psychologically normal, so that though he may recognise good new poetry long before he can explain or justify his admiration, he is not likely to be misled by private, idiosyncratic work which happens to express something peculiar to himself and the poet—or perhaps not intended by the poet at all.

All his plans for development and explanation, in technique and in subject matter are based upon this sane exploiting of experience, the demand from the poet with a new voice that the music shall be traditional plus something more.

"The good poem is that which yet is seen, in retrospect, to be right."

And as for the reader's attitude toward this new and possibly bewildering element in the poem, Mr. Roberts reminds us that the vitality and continuance of our enjoyment of poetry is signalled more by our disappointments and losses than by our successful efforts to hug our delights. In his view, the attitude of Faust towards Helen, "stay, thou art fair," leads only to conservatism and academic snobbery, and cuts us off from new poetic experience and joy. "The dates of the births of our enthusiasms for tragic poems are less significant than the order of their death: the former depended largely on the accident of our first encounters with them (though sometimes years elapsed before we 'realised' a poem); the latter indicate the development of our own emotional sensibility, a widening of our experience. We remember the day when we ceased to find our passion for Swinburne satisfactory, and the day that Doune made our enthusiasm for Rupert Brooke look silly."

This conscientiousness, this humility, settle the direction and the method of Mr. Roberts's study. He begins by revising the critical terminology; he proceeds to examine the difference between sign and symbol; he then subdivides symbols into sensuous and symbolic images, and so strips himself for a just definition of the scope of poetry and criticism. To this end he suggests that "a training in mathematics or the classical languages" is valuable since it "enables the student to detach himself from the tyranny of his native language. He does not confuse nameability with objectivity."

It is, perhaps, an inevitable consequence of this method that Mr. Roberts should be led to concern himself—at least in this book—with modern poets whose meaning is obscure and whose technique is telescopic or kaleidoscopic. Naturally, the critic, having so faithfully built up such a fine critical machine (I cannot praise it too highly), looks for corkscrew bends and disgusting surfaces on which to try it out. Unfortunately, he is thus led to a certain virtuosity which is not interested in the poets who are trying to express their own relationship with the bewildering modern world by means of a minimum technique, striving toward a water-like clarity and simplicity.

It is a pity; because by this restriction of his practice Mr. Roberts is in danger of being claimed by those lily-minded and fatuous people, the highbrows and fashionables, as one of themselves. He is not that; he is a critic who commands serious attention. He has worked, and thought, and he has a lot to teach. I for one am grateful to him. I have learned, from his book; to renew my sensibility and disinterestedness towards poetry, and to throw off that dreadful unsuspected indifference which creeps over us as we pass from bright youthfulness into the fogs of middle-aged affairs and greedy fears.

RICHARD CHURCH

## A GRINGO IN ECUADOR

Interlude in Ecuador. By JANET MACKAY. *Duckworth.*  
10s. 6d.

The world seems to be full of lady luxury-travellers who write books. Lady This has passed through Abyssinia, the Duchess of That has spent a moment or two in Tristan da Cunha, a typist has cruised to Madeira—all must write their pretty tripping accounts, full of those little adventures and flirtations and gossiping anecdotes which are so amusing to the narrators, but generally so dull and wearisome to us. We never really travel with these writers: they may return in imagination to their adventures on the Nile or the Irawaddy, but somehow we are never with them. They may scale the Andes or Himalayas, but all the time we sit securely at home, both in reality and imagination, in unemotional and unadventurous armchairs. It needs a Hudson or a Darwin to take us out of ourselves, to make us feel and see the things that they have felt and seen, as Hudson makes us feel and see the blossoming peach-trees in *Far Away and Long Ago*. In a great travel-book we never think to ask ourselves "Is this piffle?" or "Is this true?" but in a little travel-book we are constantly telling ourselves "This is piffle," and not caring whether it is true or not.

Miss Mackay's book falls somewhere between these two classes. It is in fact a book of picturesque journalism. Miss Mackay, a barrister by profession, had from her sister in Ecuador a long-standing, do-drop-in-at-any-time sort of invitation to spend a holiday in Santa Elena. Abruptly, one day, she accepted it. Consulting the Ecuadorean Consul ("a Canadian, who had never seen Ecuador") she found that he thought her mad even to be thinking of visiting that country—a country "filthy and fever-ridden, devastated by malaria, small-pox, yellow fever and typhoid." But she persisted, took a course of elementary Spanish, was vaccinated on a discreet—afterwards not so discreet—part of her anatomy, packed her bag, and sailed for Guayaquil. Arriving she was enchanted, and her book is mainly an account of her journeys from Guayaquil to her sister in Santa Elena and from Santa Elena to Quito and the mountains. She has a shrewd and witty eye for the essentials—the people, the customs and the landscape. Sometimes she can convey the feeling of all three in a single deft paragraph:

There is no doubt that the Indians hate us all, not only gringos but Spanish Ecuadoreans as well. There is no slightest kinship between the gentle, tragic-voiced Indian or half-caste of the Coast and the sullen, silent fellow of the Andes, and his woman. In their street markets they sit silent beside piles of potatoes or corn or alfalfa. In their dark little shops, windowless and doorless, they squat beside pile upon pile of warm, hand-woven ponchos, or sit on the pavement with feet thrust before them, silent still. They neither

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make any effort to sell their goods nor talk among themselves. They just sit. And one can almost hear the warning rumblings of their thoughts like the rumblings in one of their volcanoes before the top blows off.

With the people she is, perhaps, at her best. Indians, priests, waiters, Americans, the resident English, the Ecuadoreans themselves—she sketches them all on her bright thumb-nail, with shrewd strokes. And now and then she brings the country, with the volcanoes and the snow and the tropical mist and the bouganvilleas and the lavender water-lilies and the cathedral towns, and the silent Indians just vividly enough before one's eyes to make one long, also, for a sister in Ecuador.

H. E. BATES

## Week-end Competitions

Number 204

### Set by Gerald Bul'ett

If the Nazi persecution of the Jews and the de-judaizing of Jesus Christ had happened in the time of Dr. Johnson, Boswell would certainly have wheedled from his illustrious friend a pronouncement on the subject. For the best hypothetical passage from the *Life*, recording such a dialogue (among other things: i.e., in a plausible setting), we offer a First Prize of Two Guineas and a Second Prize of Half a Guinea. No entry should exceed 300 words. Since we are playing with history, there is no reason why Lord Chesterfield and Voltaire should not be of the party; but any others present must be people whom Johnson is recorded to have met.

#### RULES—

1. Envelopes should be marked with the number of the Problem, in the top left-hand corner, and should be addressed to COMPETITIONS, 10 Great Queen St., W.C.2. Solutions must reach the Editor by first post on Friday, February 16.
2. Competitors may use a pseudonym. Typescript is not insisted on, but writing must be on one side of the paper only.
3. The Editor's decision is final. He reserves the right to print in part or as a whole any matter sent in, whether it be awarded a prize

or not. MSS. cannot be returned. When no entries reach the required standard no prize will be awarded.

4. No competitor is eligible for more than one prize in any one week.

The results of last week's competition will be announced in our next issue.

### RESULT OF COMPETITION 202

#### Report by Sir John Squire

The standard of the entry was not very high. Many competitors were defeated by the metre, and even wrote an inadequate number of lines in their verses, and far too many tried to be political. Not one produced what I had hoped for: namely, a rousing song, like the model, one that would take verse by verse all the Categories to which the Monster might belong. One contributor did approach what was needed with a Chorus which ran:

It's the Monster of Loch Ness, my boys,  
Oh yes, my boys,  
Loch Ness, my boys,  
It's the Monster of Loch Ness, my boys,  
See the *Times* and the *Mail* and the *Express*!  
It may be like a conger, boys,  
But it's longer boys,  
And stronger boys,  
So here's the end of my song—er boys,  
About the Monster of Loch Ness.

The rest, alas, did not live up to this singable chorus. Many indulged in dialect. William Bliss was the best of them, but too short. Guy Hadley and M. J. H. had amusing digs at the press, and L. V. Upward also deserves commendation. I was very much disappointed with the general scepticism about the Monster's existence. The two best entries are by Arthur Oliver and Lt.-Col. H. P. Garwood. Neither approaches perfection, but Mr. Oliver's is more singable.

#### I

Travellers have often told a tale  
Of strange unlikely looking creatures:  
Most of them are rather like a whale  
With one or more unusual features.  
Now the very latest comes from Inverness;  
The simple-minded natives swear  
That a Leviathan  
Ten yards higher than  
Anything except, perhaps, a plesiosaurus