

## An Ogre by Profession

ARTHUR W. COMBS

**G**OING through some of my old papers recently I came across an exchange of poetry between me and one of my high school English teachers years ago which seems to me a delightful indication of a highly humane teacher at work.

Here is how it came about: When I was 14 years old I was a student in Hazel Poole's second year English class at West Side High School in Newark, New Jersey. Proper teaching of English in those days required students to memorize lengthy passages of poetry, and Miss Poole had assigned her class some sections from Milton's *L'Allegro*. Not having done my homework the evening before, I found myself next day sitting in class with a blank piece of paper in front of me while everyone else, it seemed, was busily delivering Milton's lines from memory.

Having nothing better to do, I began to compose a "poem" of my own, never expecting it really to be seen by my teacher. Suddenly, however, my paper was picked up by the monitor and passed on in with everyone else's. Here is what I had written:

### A Scholar's Lament

Rather than cheat as others might do,  
I'll write this little poem to you  
To tell you just how sad I am,  
That I can't memorize like Lamb,  
And rattle off at a lively gait  
The words of a poet whose blind state  
Kept him from the beauteous sights  
That we see on moonlit nights.  
I wish that I might yell and call  
"My homework isn't done at all."

Sad but true,  
What I tell to you,

Have pity on me,  
And I'll tell to thee,  
These words at a later date.

—A. W. Combs

Next day I anxiously went to class, fully expecting the indignant wrath of Miss Poole to descend on my head. Imagine my astonishment, therefore, when I got my paper back marked "90"! What is more, when I turned the paper over I found that Miss Poole had written a poem in reply:

### An Ogre by Profession

Lest, overcome by rash despair,  
You think Medusa's snaky hair,  
With power to strike its victims dead,  
Grows now upon your teacher's head,  
I hasten to accept with glee  
Your rhythmical apology.  
Fierce monsters in the days of old  
Had lenient moments, we are told—  
Dread Pluto's tears drowned out his ire  
When pleading Orpheus played his lyre;  
And Cerberus would his post forsake  
When gently fed with honey-cake.  
I, too, an ogre by profession,  
Am touched by your unique confession;  
Renouncing Milton's words sublime,  
I take instead your honest rhyme.—  
And if you wish to learn him yet,  
Some extra credit you may get.

—Hazel B. Poole

Miss Poole never knew this until many years after, but her humanistic gesture with its delightful touch of humor started me writing a private collection of poems that eventually filled several looseleaf volumes. Would that there were more Hazel Pooles.

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