

Philosopher of Folly's Column

Poem About John Maynard Is Finally Discovered by Ted Robinson

The Metaphysician's Experiment

I am trying, I am yearning,
I am seeking, I am hinting,
I am twisting, I am turning,
I am prying, I am squinting;
And some day when my inspection
Gets me just precisely twisted,
I shall go in a direction
That you didn't know existed!
With a sudden whirr of pinions,
I shall make a right ascension
To the absolute dominions
That we call the Fourth Dimension.
And my absence will confound you
Though you're absolutely near me—
I'll be with you, all around you,
But you cannot see or hear me...
There! (I had a sudden sinking
That was hopeful while it lasted)
It will happen quick as winking—
Gosh, but you'll be flabbergasted!

Concerning John Maynard

A great many correspondents have hurried to my aid in the matter of the poem about John Maynard. And I remembered the poem as soon as I saw the first line. Edward Church Smith remembered five complete stanzas and wrote them down for me; this is the first half of the first stanza:

'Twas on Lake Erie's broad expanse,
One bright midsummer's day,
The gallant steamer, Ocean Queen,
Swept proudly on her way . . .

I have received a letter on the subject from Rimmer, also, who says that the poem is found in Sheldon's Fifth Reader (1882) and the author is the well-known Anonymous. But that Granger's Index to Poetry and Recitations credits Horatio Alger, jr., with the authorship.

Without investigating any further, I give strong credence to the attribution last given. The whole poem of 12 eight-line stanzas is Algerish in every detail. Horatio Alger, jr., seems to have been guided by the one safe rule, never to use an original expression when a cliché was available, and never to let a sentence go plain when it could be embellished by a bromide. The last two lines of the second stanza make a magnificent example of the poetaster's prosaic vocabulary:

Alas too late, though quick and sharp

And clear his orders came,
No human efforts could avail!

To quench the assiduous flame.

I am still searching, however, for what I asked for in the first place—the prose piece about the same legend. I think I am on its trail, however, and I should be more than grateful to Mrs. Nina Fitzsimmons if she would send me her version.

The German ballade, which I spoke of the other day, is by Theodore Fontane. It is a very dramatic piece, and ends with the epitaph supposed to have been inscribed in golden letters on a marble monument in Buffalo:

"Hier ruht John Maynard. In
Qualm und Brand
Hielt er das Steuer fest in der
Fand.
Er hat uns gerettet, er traegt die
Kron',
Er starb fuer uns, unser Liebe sein
Lohn.

John Maynard."