The Fun I Get Out of Life

E. Haldeman-Julius
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FOREWORD

Every now and then someone comes along and writes something with the title: "What Life Means to Me." When life does mean something to a man, to have him tell the rest of us about it is a worth-while and appreciated service. It helps others to find some meaning in a life which perhaps has not, up to the moment, meant much to them. And then there is the joy in life—the fun one can get out of it. I do not hesitate to confess, if I may use that word, that I get a lot of fun out of life. I enjoy life hugely. Not that it is a big joke, but it is lots of fun whether it is a joke or not.

In my Credo, herein printed, I speak of believing in "this life." Of course, for an agnostic and infidel like me, to speak of this life is a mistake. I admit it. But I protest that it is only a manner of speaking, and I hope I may be pardoned for it. I explain right here and now that I am quite aware that saying "this life" implies that there is something else besides. And so far as I know there is nothing else besides. What do I think of immortality? I reply with E. W. Howe that I don't think anything about it at all, for there isn't any.

E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS.
THE FUN I GET OUT OF LIFE

CREDO

I believe in my work.
I believe one should stop making money when he knows he has enough.
I believe in the United States.
I believe the day will come when the United States, the richest country materially, will learn that the goal is not to go on endlessly piling dollar on dollar but using honestly made dollars to make life beautiful, to make living an art, to seek truth.
I believe in self-education.
I believe in the Will to Wisdom.
I believe nothing is more important than honesty in thought.
I believe in freedom—to think, to speak, to feel, to live, to be happy.
I believe minorities have rights.
I believe the majority should be helped to self-culture.
I believe in the printing press.
I believe that Bunk is man's worst enemy.
I believe in facts.
I believe this life is the only life we know about, and that we know mighty little about that.
I believe in the power of books.
I believe the printed word can be used to make the United States truly civilized.
I believe man will never free himself intellectually until he frees himself from the clutches of the church.
I believe in the least amount of government; the less the better.
I believe poverty is a disgrace.
I believe in the war on quackery.
I believe in the power of publicity.
I believe it is vain and futile to guess what lies beyond the grave.
I believe all religions are man-made pieces of folly, conceived by men suffering from super-heated imaginations.
I believe in this life.
I believe it is not important that we should know what happens to us after death.
I believe that man is a funny animal.
ON BEING SENT AWAY

I am writing this in a hotel room in Kansas City, an exile. I have been hustled out of my home by a woman who said she thought I should go away for a couple of days. When I got home at noon yesterday, I found my bag packed and everything ready for a quick getaway. So I went. The last thing I heard Marcect say was that it would do me a world of good to get away for a little and be by myself. I agreed with her. I feel better already, thanks to Marcect.

The drive up here was a rest in itself. About 125 miles of quick riding, over roads that are good and other roads that are deplorable, gave me a chance to escape endless assaults on my time and energies. What a relief it is to run away from talk, from questions, from people who want to know things, from others who want to tell me things!

I got into Kansas City at about seven o'clock last night, and decided quickly to have feminine company for dinner. I dropped into the home of a friend—he was busy on a brief of some kind, but his beautiful wife, and an equally attractive friend, were there—so the three of us went to an eatery, where we did splendid justice to numerous dishes and a few cups, one of which contained gin.

The conversation was unimportant, and for that reason was of importance to me. These two splendid Persian cats had no manuscripts they wanted me to read; they had no suggestions for the world’s reformation; they did not want to show me how I might improve my publications; they were like Persian cats, beautiful things that take the world as they find it.

And now, the next morning, I rise to say that it was nice of Marcect to think of all that. All wives should send their husbands away at least once a month. It’s a great thing to be able to wander around for a few hours, chattering with inconsequential, attractive females. Feminism and all that sort of thing are marvelous inventions of modern civilization, but feminism cannot destroy the usefulness of that great army of beautiful creatures who see life as a pretty little game and who look on the world with sparkling eyes if once they are sure their mirrors tell them they are still beautiful.

These two women last night said nothing about their rights, their wrongs, the evils of the tariff or the necessity for a lower discount rate. One is married to a fine fellow who supplies her with everything she needs; the other, most likely, is looking for just that kind of a man. Others may weep over the plight of such creatures; I do not weep, I chuckle. Is it not enough to be beautiful?

Now pardon me just a moment, for I feel a call to become philosophical and profound. I am going to say a piece about morality. It is considered wrong for a married man to hold the hand of a woman who happens to be married to another man. It sounds fishy, but that’s the world and I have agreed to let the world go its own way. The notion seems to prevail in conventional circles that that should be done only by three kinds of men—a woman’s father, her brother, and finally, her hus-
band. Isn’t that sickening? It leaves me faint. But, we shall not protest. Remember, I said I am not going to try to change the world. But here we come to another notion: It seems to be taken as a thing perfectly all right for a man to hold the hands of two women at one time. There is a degree of safety and propriety in the sheer pressure of numbers.

I can’t quite recall what we talked about. We were together about three hours, and rattled along at the rate of about 300 words to the minute, but I don’t believe I could repeat ten words of it. Which indicates that the conversation was successful. It is all very well to have to remember what a witness says in a court, or what a Senator says in a speech, or what the President of the one and only United States says when he welcomes the delegates to the convention of the Amalgamated Toy Balloon Blowers’ Association. But that kind of conversation isn’t the chatter I want to listen to. Give me pretty nothings that require next to no head pressure, and I guarantee you a good time will be had by all. Needless to say, three hours of it may be two hours too much, but that doesn’t alter my argument. The position is sound, fundamentally. The trick is to know when one has had enough. But one shouldn’t be too scientific about such matters. Efficiency can spoil good horses and women. One should be competent—within reasonable limits. My dose was three hours. Others may want thirty-three hours. As Mr. Milt Gross might put it, “Difference pipple, difference ideas.”

I’ve really been trying for five minutes to figure out what we talked about, and I confess I got nowhere. I can swear we talked—volubly, tirelessly. We didn’t discuss literature. Not a word about religion or evolution. Psycho-analysis wasn’t even mentioned. No opinions were expressed on Luther Burbank, Clarence Darrow, Bryan or Coolidge. The thing is baffling. What did we talk about? Coming to think of it, I remember having talked about myself. At a certain time of the evening—say, about eleven o’clock—I discuss my own points of superiority as long as anyone will listen. Just why I will do this I cannot explain. All I know is that I do it. It is, perhaps, a form of exhibitionism, as all authorship is. But, just what I said about myself I cannot recall. The mystery persists. Well, whatever it was, I said nice things, be assured of that. Oh yes, I recall vividly one companion commenting on the plight of girls who had been “ruined.” That moved me to ask this weighty question: “What would the world’s history have been had there never been any ruined girls?” That question was silly, but it gave us something to talk about for another five minutes. Persons with imagination can do a whole lot of talking on a little question like that. I pass that problem on to my readers. Let them work on it a little.

I think we agreed ultimately that if there had never been any ruined girls this world we are in would never have been. The preachers may argue the world might have been better, but I, for one, do not care to get into a debate. I throw it out as a suggestion, hoping that those who live too pure lives will refrain from discussing it.

I recall another discussion. It was: Should a wife tell her husband all? The three of us agreed that she should not. Should a husband tell his wife all? No. This shows how intellectual the conversation finally became.
The argument then switched to: Should a husband pay his wife a salary? The younger one (unmarried) said Yes. The married one said she thought it sounded mercenary. I butted in with the comment that no matter what you call it, one's wife gets the money anyway, so why haggle over names? The married one persisted that it would be better to call it a Budget. I dismissed the Budget suggestion as inadequate. Budget, I claimed, suggested taxation, and taxation implies representation, for which we fought the Revolutionary War, and taxation brings to mind collectors, revenue agents, policemen, sheriffs, constables, assessors, county treasurers, income tax blanks—oh, the list was becoming formidable. I made Budget look mean. Then why not allowance? This from the single flapper. Allowance implies a dictatorship, said the other woman. This brought up a spirited discussion of Mussolini and Italian sardines and the Swiss Alps. There was no sense to that part of the conversation, but one thing will lead on to another. We finally ended the argument this way. One's wife will get the money whether it is called salary, wages, allowance, budget or confiscation. That leads me to believe that I won out, but I am not sure.

When we had disposed of bobbed hair, Jack Dempsey, twin beds, one-piece bathing suits, bald men, Fords as forces for immorality, Spanish shawls, bootleg prices, flesh-colored stockings, horses, the difference between Chesterfields and Camels, and about four hundred other subjects, I left these Persian cats at their home and hurried back to my hotel, where I gave word that I was not to be disturbed.

This meant I was to go to bed and sleep until I woke up. Do you know what that means? That means turning in and dying. That means no telegrams, no telephone calls, no letters, no conferences, no appointments, no service of any kind—sleep, endless sleep, undisturbed sleep—eight hours, ten hours, twelve hours—as many hours as one might need to sleep until one wakes up. That is what I did, and it worked.

I slept eleven hours by the clock, and I am able to say that every muscle cramp was smoothed out, every sore bone was healed, every wrinkle was laid out, every tired nerve was rested, every mark of overwork and strain was sent overboard. That's what it means to sleep until one wakes up. It is a rare luxury, I tell you. It comes once in a decade, it seems. At home, I usually have to allow myself to be awakened. There are a thousand reasons for getting up. For one reason, Cora has come by the clock to fry eggs and toast some bread and boil some coffee. That means we have to wake up in order to eat what Cora has made. Life begins with an appointment with the cook. She is persistent. Her salary demands service, service implies overhead, investment, wear and tear, depreciation—and all these things deny us the right to sleep until we wake up. Civilization is a tyrant.

When I woke up this morning, I actually didn't recognize myself. I was human. Such a condition deserves to be recorded in print. I bathe. I feel my muscles. They do not hurt. I look at my eyes. They are not red. I walk across the room. I do not hurry. I am calm. That's what happens when one sleeps until he wakes up. And I had to drive 125 miles to get it. How I hope Marcel will read this piece and absorb my subtle propaganda. This whole argument has been directed at her. She will get it. And she will be guided by my simple
and human philosophy. And other Marcets will read it, and other husbands will learn the luxury of sleeping until they wake up. In this manner does the printed word reform and uplift mankind. How useful is the printed word!

Life is a battle. One has to be eternally vigilant. The little things conquer and rule. It is hardest to overthrow the tyranny of trifles. Take a little, commonplace thing like a man's shirt. I like to put a clean shirt on every morning, but here's the rub; I have to unbutton six buttons before I can get into it. For years I patiently unbuttoned these little buttons, never realizing that the whole scheme was absurd and unreasonable. Then it came to me. I got hold of Mrs. Hughes, and we went into conference at once. I explained to her that after she irons the shirt, it would be better if she were simply to fold it over, leaving the buttons alone. I would then take the top shirt off the pile, and have nothing to do but put it on my manly back. The woman looked at me in bewilderment. This was revolutionary. There had never been such a suggestion in all history. There is no record of a man having ever requested his shirt buttons to be delivered in an unbuttoned state.

I became eloquent. I broke into poetry, after a fashion. I made wild and desperate gestures. I showed scientifically that it was possible to take an ironed shirt and fold it without buttoning the buttons. After four or five carefully executed demonstrations, I saw a light break. The idea landed. It worked. Now I go to my dresser and see a pile of shirts; I take the top one and it falls open automatically. I am in it in ten seconds. Isn't that something to gloat over? I pass this on to other husbands who may want to use my strategy. That's what I have been doing all my life—finding little things—trifles—and ironing them out. It is more important to solve the problem of a row of six little buttons than to prove that there is no God. One can live without the knowledge that there is a God, but one cannot live a full and complete life when he has to begin each day with the useless effort of unbuttoning six buttons on a single shirt.

Don't think I'm through. I haven't really started yet. Wait until you hear what comes next. It's getting better as I go deeper into my subject.

After about a week of unbuttoned buttons I realized that I had only begun to reform my own little world. As you may know, I do not use cuff-links on my sleeves. Instead, I have simple, sensible buttons. Now here is the peculiar thing I learned about Mrs. Hughes: She never used to button the sleeve buttons, though she was always careful to button the buttons down the front. So I went into another conference. I explained, with a world of illustration, that it would be a vast improvement if she were to leave the front buttons unbuttoned but button the sleeve buttons. This was another revolutionary proposal, but it worked. You get the point? Now, I am glad to say, the front buttons are unbuttoned and the sleeve buttons already buttoned. That means the shirt problem has been solved to the nth degree. I am at a loss to know what to do next. Perhaps the only ultimate solution would be to go shirtless, but that is a reform I am not ready to propose. These soft-collared, soft-cuffed, sensible shirts suit me, particularly since I get into them without unnecessary monkeying with buttons.
What an improvement since the days when laundresses not only buttoned up all the buttons but went through the crazy, wasteful, useless, dangerous practice of poking pins into all odd places! We men have practically whipped the pin evil; now let us all go the rest of the way and get our women to deliver shirts to us that are clean, whole and ready to go on our backs without wasted time and energy.

The reason I am going to all this trouble to explain these tremendous trifles to my readers is because I am feeling good this glorious Sunday morning, here in my Kansas City hotel room. My heart is full of humanity and love. And it is all because I was amused last night by two Persian cats and slept until I woke up. It takes a particularly adjusted individual to go to the bother of agitating for civilized alterations in the schedule of life. Crazy, worn, tired reformers usually take out their spite and venom with all sorts of freedom-killing prohibitions. But a rested man, one whose aches and pains have been slept out of his bones, thinks in terms of a fuller and better life, not one that has been robbed of all joy and indiscretion.

I plead for only what I think is sensible. I ask for unbuttoned shirt fronts and buttoned sleeves because I believe they will make life better and nobler, raising individuals to loftier peaks. I do not care to deprive any person—man or woman—of a single reasonable vice. I grant him all the virtues he can handle, provided he mans them reasonably and intelligently and decently. If a man isn’t offensive about his virtues, I am willing to let him go his way in peace. But when he neglects all sorts of pretty vices, I feel a sense of wrong, a sinking in the heart, a regret for man’s vanishing glories. I plead for reasonable, sensible, moderate vices, as I plead for less offensive, indecent and obscene virtues.

The work of the world will be done better and more intelligently if all men and women were to treasure and cherish their vices as well as their virtues. Let me give you a concrete instance. Here is a man I know, who won the favors of a pretty and willing lassie. It happened that she worked in an office, where it was her job to report every morning at 8 o’clock. This girl met her man one evening and they spent all of that night by themselves, probably in an endless orgy of meditation and prayer. Just what happened is not for me to discuss. That is their business. But here is the moral of my story. They got up at about six in the morning. They had an early breakfast. At about seven-thirty he left her at the door of her office. She said: “I’m a half hour early, Frank; think of that.” To which Frank—who was something of a philosopher—replied: “You see what a wonderful thing vice is? It gets you to work a half-hour early.”

This demonstrates to my cracked head that reasonable vice has its industrial and economic advantages worthy of the best attentions of our captains of industry. If it can be shown that intelligent and moderate vice is superior to unreasonable and indecent virtue, that it means more production, larger dividends, better office management, reduced overhead, we can expect the powers in Wall Street to line up with the powers of freedom. I merely throw out this suggestion in the hope that some professors of sociology will go further into the matter. I am generous that way. I have nothing in mind but the betterment of humanity and the triumph of reasonable vices and the elimination of the more useless
virtues. I give this free pearl of wisdom to all sour-faced prohibitionists and Blue Sunday fanatics: Go to bed just once, sleep until you wake up, and then look yourself over. You will realize, for once, what it means to feel like a human being. Do it a few times within a single month and you will actually take a step towards becoming civilized. I know whereof I speak, for I have just gone through that experience and I want the whole world to know about it.

Now that I am in this good humor, let me slip into my next lecture. It is going to get deeper now, more philosophical, with a deeper current of logic, science and psychology. I figured it out this morning while in the bath-room scratching the surplus stubble off my well-formed chin. Preliminary to the depletion process I had taken into my artistic fingers a tube of Mennen’s Shaving Cream, upon which I find a portrait of the moustached Mr. Mennen himself, may his bones rest in deserved peace. I notice that Mr. Mennen did not shave off his upper lip whiskers. I think his business has suffered as a consequence. The suggestion, given out by Mr. Mennen himself, is to let the hair on one’s upper lip grow. I do not approve of that. I believe every hair, from one’s ears down to one’s Adam’s apple, should be cut down every morning, using a Gillette razor in the operation.

Mr. Mennen prints this line on the back of his tube: “A splendid shampoo for the entire family.” That is a dangerous suggestion and I want to see it rebuked. I do not want my tube of shaving cream used by my entire family as a shampoo. I want them to let my shaving cream alone. I did not purchase that shaving cream as a shampoo for the entire family. It is my own personal property, paid for in full, and I respectfully request Marcet, Alice, Henry and Josephine, including Cora, Mrs. Hughes and Harold, yes, and Mr. Miller, to refrain from using my shaving cream as a shampoo. But I am getting away from my subject.

This morning, let me begin again, I started to shave slowly, with a world of calm reserve and dignity. I was a study in poise and distinction. Nothing could hurry me. I was settled for the vast and incomparable pleasure of a wholesome and personality-building shave. It was then that this idea came to me, out of the blue ether: Would men be better off if nature were gradually to remove the hairs from one’s face, making shaving unnecessary? That’s quite a question, isn’t it? A great deal could be written on both sides. I am on the side of the hairs. I’ll tell you why. It seems to me that civilization would suffer an enormous setback if men were to evolve into a state of facial hairlessness. If a thing is properly used, only good can result. I will grant you that when men permitted their whiskers to grow they did vast injury to the race, but those days, thanks to Mr. Mennen and Mr. Gillette, are gone forever, though I do insist that Mr. Mennen should chop off that moustache. Each morning, in this year of 1926, millions and millions of men go through four or five minutes of hair slashing, many of them grumblingly, but others, I am proud to say, with a song on their lips.

I have made the discovery that all the world respects a man while he is shaving himself. A woman—all women—will wake up her husband to make him take his sleeping potion, will break into his thoughts while he is sitting at his library desk, but no woman, to my vast knowl-
edge, has ever so much as thought of interrupting a man in the act of shaving the whiskers off his chin. I believe there is not a single case on record. "Daddy is shaving," Marcey will say, in a husked voice, and Henry and Alice and Josephine will retire to a distant room. That shows how shaving is a preserver of individuality. "Take a man's shave away from him and what has he left? Almost nothing. It is his only escape from the tyranny of social life. So much for that. I am only getting into my argument.

Since man can get strict privacy only when he is shaving, what happens? He thinks. Not all men, of course. Some do. I am one of them. I shave quickly, subconsciously. I go through the motions automatically. I use about the same number of strokes each morning; the same number of seconds; the same quantity of Mennen's Shaving Cream. All is automatic. This leaves me free to think creatively with my conscious mind. I believe that every important decision I have ever made was worked out while scratching the whiskers off my face. When I say: "I'll think over your proposition tonight," I do not mean that literally. I go to sleep without giving the proposition any consideration; nor do I wake up in the night to think it over; nor do I work it out while dressing. It is when I begin to shave that I let my mind pounce on that particular problem, and in a few seconds or minutes I have it all worked out. Privacy—absolute privacy—and the complete freedom of the conscious mind mean that shaving is an important aid to creative men. That, it may be, is the reason for man's business and artistic superiority over women. If women would learn to shave they might make greater forward strides. So I say, by all means, let us not hope for so woeful a calamity as men without hairs on their faces. It would mean the end of science, discovery, industry, invention, art, literature, poetry and finance. Let me close this little lesson with this: When someone suggests a world of hairless men, do as I do; take your stand with the hairs. Abide by them. Have faith in man's whiskers. They are the mothers of progress. They are the makers of civilization. Long live the hairs on man's chin!

Women are the natural enemies of hair. Outside of a little thatch of hair on the knob they spend their lives and their substance fighting hairs. Instead of shaving them off their lips, when they happen to find a few stragglers, they rush to a beauty parlor to have them burned out by an electric needle. Poor, ignorant creatures. And look what they do to the hairs in their armpits. They used to let them alone; when I was a boy; now all shave them off. I'm against that. Now, to my regret, when one does look under, what does one see? Nothing. Just skin. It's all wrong. In these days it takes more than skin to excite a man's sensibilities—mine, at any rate. So I plead with the women of this age: You are making a serious mistake. I am speaking disinterestedly, as a friend of the sex.

Well, I've been working pretty steadily for about three hours; I'm hungry, so I shall knock off and go out for a steak. Stand by, as the radio announcers say. I'm not through yet. You can't tell what a good steak may do to me. It may set me up for another seven pages of copy. Going to bed and sleeping until I woke up put me in condition for the run of copy down to this paragraph; wait and see what a big chunk
of beef does. I intend to have a broiled steak, hashed brown potatoes, horse-radish, a pint of coffee, some hard rolls, unsalted butter, and some strawberry ice cream. I'll see you later.

Properly fed and physically adjusted for another spell at this little job of mine, I entered one of the Muehlebach elevators for the short, swift journey to my floor. It came to me that I had not been in an elevator for six months—not that it is important, but it does seem worth mentioning. For a few seconds I dwelt mentally on these marvelous lifting machines. Here, I said, is something worthy of one's complete admiration. It being my philosophy to apply my mind to this life, to this world, to the ground under this set of legs, I enjoy the endless pleasure of reflecting on everything connected with our daily round. I am one of those materialists who consider shaving brushes, razor blades, shirt buttons, Pobeco tooth-paste and such things most serious matters for thought and meditation. It is my belief that we do not give enough thought to them. A happier race, a better civilization will come when we take our minds out of the skies and turn to the things at hand. I believe I am right in this matter.

Let us take up again my little piece about shaving—the part that told about man's good fortune in stealing moment's of complete privacy while making his face hairs begin life all over again. I mentioned this fact to an unbeliever, and she said it was not true. To prove her position, she recalled a sensational piece of news about a man who, using one of the old-fashioned razors, was called suddenly by his wife, with the result that he cut off his own nose. This looked like a poor argument to me, I told the infidel. It really proved my point. This woman's act was so unusual, so shocking, so extraordinary that the man, in sheer excitement, yes, even temporary insanity, mutilated himself by removing part of his nose. I ask any reasonable person this: How many men can one find in the world who have cut off their noses as a consequence of being interrupted while shaving? Not a half-dozen in all recorded history. With that profound reflection I returned to my hotel. I believe my position was well maintained and that my discussion was soundly based.

As I got out of the elevator, I began thinking about Hamburger sandwiches. This didn't just happen. Hamburger had been in the back of my mind for days and days; Hamburger had been in my thoughts since that day, two or three weeks ago, when, stopping at our kitchen a moment, I asked Cora what had been decided for lunch. With a lordly gesture, she pointed to the skillet. Sure enough—Hamburger meat, frying in a lot of juice; on the table I saw round, ball-like rolls. I frowned quickly. There is something about Hamburger meat that pleases me, but yet the news did not appeal to me. Something was wrong. My subconscious mind was trying to push an argument in my conscious, and it was succeeding. Finally, it burst forth. "I know what's the matter, Cora," I exclaimed, all excited. "The meat is good, the slice of onion is the essence of great art itself, but the rolls, Cora, the rolls!"

"What's the matter with the rolls?" Cora demanded. "There aren't any better ones."

"I'll grant you that, Cora. But they're dry—dry as hay. I have
to chew them long and hard to get them soft and mealy. They dry up my salivary glands. Something should be done."

Cora thought hard for a moment; then came this:

"Why not butter the rolls?"

"A fair suggestion, but not altogether creative. A little butter does hardly anything towards softening a dry roll. A great quantity of butter spoils the sandwich."

Then I became inspired, a seer, an inventor, a prophet, a discoverer.

"Listen, Cora. An idea! A first-rate, genuine, real 100 percent idea. Take your rolls, cut them in half, then dip them into that juice in which you are frying that Hamburger meat and then toast them. What do you think of that?"

"It can be done. I've done that before, years ago, when I worked for some oil people in Wichita."

"You mean, Cora, that that idea is not my own? However, I discovered it for myself. You have been holding out on me. Here I have been masticating these dry rolls until my jaws ached, my nerves frayed, and all along we could have dipped the rolls in Hamburger juice and toasted them."

Words fail me when I try to describe those sandwiches. I leave them to my reader's imagination. If there is a heaven, there must be such sandwiches at every turn of the golden streets. There is a lesson for my pagans who would learn something of the art of life. We are ignorant men, but we can at least try not to cultivate our ignorance. Let us fight endlessly to broaden our victories, to win newer joys, to make this life an endless adventure, a heart quickening romance. And nothing can help one so much as rolls dipped in Hamburger gravy and toasted.

Such trifling victories make life an endless pleasure. Read your Kant, your Schopenhauer, your Nietzsche, but do not, I beg of you, forget life's mighty trifles. A single life is nothing more than the functioning of an endless number of trifles. Guard them, study them, learn something from them.

But the best men find defeat. Life is an endless battle, with its pains far in excess of its joys. Try as we will, work as we may, apply ourselves as our powers will permit, and some trifles will, in the end, continue to mock us. Let me give you a case at hand. For years and years I have been devoting my best energies to the problem of the pieces of soggy toast that one finds under a poached egg. What can you do with that piece of damp toast? I tried to eat one once, and failed. It simply would not go down. Did you ever know of any person in his full senses eating the toast that one finds under a poached egg? I doubt it.

I appeal to my most enlightened readers to apply themselves to this problem. If there is a solution, let me know at once, I beg of you. Civilization is a hoax, a hollow jest so long as we admit our defeat before this overwhelming riddle. Let us see whether or not this matter can be remedied. There should be a way out. As it is today, I eat the poached egg and our dog eats the toast. It's ridiculous. And yet, this problem may be without its remedy, like the problem of trying to make a horse fly. It can't be done, because the horse is too heavy. I am not a mechanical genius, but I know enough about life and nature's laws to dismiss this problem as one of our unsolvable mysteries. Do not waste
your time on this horse question; just devote yourself to the soggy toast. When the blind man tries to take the drunken man home, neither gets anywhere. I learned that when I was in short pants, long before the invention of B. V. D.'s, in days when I lived in the large, corrupt city of Philadelphia. Now I live on the Kansas desert, out in the wide, open spaces.

Well, I believe I shall proceed to pack up my little bag, get into my car and drive home. I believe this batch of copy isn't at all bad. I know I had some fun writing it. And now for another week of Little Blue Books, conferences, solicitations from salesmen and all the other hokum of business life. I've decided that when I get back to my office early tomorrow morning I shall try my best to become a little crankier, a little meaner, not because I am malicious but merely as a measure of self-preservation. I have come to the conclusion that I have been too internally polite. Last week, when harassed, I let myself break loose once, and it worked brilliantly. Now, after time and thought, I see that I did the right thing. A good outburst is good for one's gizzard, particularly when one is treated so outlandishly by traveling salesmen. Let me give you an illustration. I should be saving this for next week's sermon, but I shall go ahead now and get it on paper, even though it will mean a later start home.

There's a young fellow who sells envelopes for a splendid concern in Kansas City. He is the most persistent, the most insistent, the most tiresome go-getter to swoop down on me. I usually feel faint after one of his assaults. My blood pressure rises to about 210. I see apoplexy around the corner. He is the kind of salesman who goes on the theory that I do not know what I want, or how much I want. If I want 50,000 envelopes of a certain make, size and color, he decides it should be at least 200,000 and then follows a long, tiresome argument. This has been going on for years.

The other day I saw him in the front office. With a fierce gesture I pointed to Pete. "Talk to him," I bawled. "Pete knows what I want." Pete politely placed in his hand an order for 100,000 No. 5 return envelopes, that will be needed for some particular mail-order job in a few weeks. We shall need 100,000, no more, no less. The price is right—85 cents per thousand, printed. Everything is satisfactory. Go ahead and get out the envelopes. Ah, not with this fellow. Fifteen minutes later I came through the office again and he was still there, arguing with poor Pete. Pete didn't see how he could raise the order to 500,000. We wanted only 100,000. Then I heard him argue that he should be permitted to make up the 500,000 and he would hold them in Kansas City for our future needs. And all that sort of bunk. I saw red. Strange figures danced before my eyes. My lower lip dropped about an inch, showing my back teeth, including the bridge work on the left side.

"What the hell's the matter anyway?" I inquired.

"I want to show you why you will save money by ordering 500,000—"

"But we have need for only a lousy 100,000. Why do you stand there and argue for fifteen minutes when we know what we want?"

"I'm trying to help you—"

"Help us like hell. Get out of here when you get your order. You're
the worst pest we know. I hate you high-powered bores. Why don’t
you conduct yourself in an orderly, intelligent manner, and sell us what
we want. We aren’t a lot of lunkheads. We know we want 100,000 of
these wretched envelopes, and not a half million. Now for Christ’s sake
beat it.”

I had never talked that way to anyone before. It all came out sud-
denly. The wretch withdrew in disorder and for another half hour I
was kept busy trying to get myself back to my normal, quiet self. Anger
is stupid, wasteful, destructive, but in this case it worked. Pete, polite
as a bond salesman, had withstood his assault for fifteen minutes; my
anger had routed him in 15 seconds. It worked. Now I am going to do
that again, and I have three or four fellows all lined up. The next time
they poke their heads in my office I shall be all set for violent, profane
conduct. A certain typewriter salesman, several paper salesmen, an ink
man and two or three peddlers of advertising will be given quick, sum-
mary treatment. That is one thing I have made up my mind to do, now
that I have been in Kansas City long enough to rest and meditate.

Just one more word, and I shall finish. My readers know that I,
a materialist, have great respect for facts and that one of my favorite
words is accuracy. In writing this week’s Batch of copy I have been
away from my library, my reference books and my best authorities.
Under such circumstances I like to be particularly careful. Whatever
historical references I may have made, I have quoted from memory,
though my impression right now is that it will be impossible to check
me on a single statement made in this week’s piece. While down in the
dining-room a while ago I almost missed my usually perfect fork-aim
when the thought dashed through my mind that I was not altogether
sure about one of my statements. I refer to the one that my shirts have
six buttons down the front. Now that is not a trifle, by any means.

It is quite possible that a thousand years hence some stickler for facts
and accuracy might take a special trip to the Haldeman-Julius Museum,
where a special department will be devoted to an exhibition of my shirts.
He might count the buttons, and then what? Suppose there were only
five buttons! Where would I stand? If a man can’t be accurate about
the number of buttons down the front of his shirt, what business has he
talking about anything under the sun? I could feel myself turning pale,
cold sweat forming on my forehead. I looked around; I was not being
watched. I slipped my hand up to my throat. I felt the first button
under my tie. One. Then down a little, halfway between the collar and
the top of my vest. Two. Then a finger went down, under my tie, for
the full distance it could travel. Three. Then I looked sheepish. How
silly. Why not wait until I get back in my room? But I couldn’t enjoy
my meal. The thing persisted. Then I poked under my vest and lost
all count. So I started over again, this time drawing a line over my
stomach, figuring that I would work down to it, then finish the job from
the other end, working up. When I got through, I could account for
only five! But such a matter is too important for snap judgment. I
would recheck the count later. So I ate on, making the mental note that
if there were only five I would, as my contribution to truth, go through
all of my copy and change it to the facts. One should always be accurate.

In my room I took off coat and vest and stood before the mirror.
Slowly I counted. One, two, three, four, five—and, wow, a buttonhole and no button! Had Mrs. Hughes done her full duty there would have been six. So my copy stands. Truth is checked, rechecked and vindicated. Such love for truth should not go unrewarded. I suggest that the trustees of the Haldeman-Julius Museum clip this part about my passion for accuracy and frame it. It should hang in the shirt department. And now, dear hearts, I have shot my wad. My story is told. I hope I haven’t been too intellectual for my more immature readers. Farewell.

CARL SANDBURG

It was nice of Carl Sandburg to stop writing poetry long enough to send me a friendly note about Dust, a novel Marcet and I wrote about five years ago. Here is Carl’s piece, written on the letterhead of the Chicago Daily News, which he serves as cinema editor:

I just thought I would write you today that I have on several occasions heard Oliver R. Barrett, who is a rare bird as a lawyer and a bookman, volunteer the remark that Dust is on his list of the few, the five or six, finest, surest and strongest books of fiction he has met in his life. . . . And as I slanted through it again a few nights ago I said it would be slow finding its real audience and it will linger along a good while.

I used to work on the same newspaper with Carl in Milwaukee, about fifteen years ago. He covered the labor run, while I did police. In those hectic days Carl was still to arrive. He was writing poetry even then, but little of it had been published. Then, with a rush, he came into his own a few years later in Chicago. And since then he has been a world figure. Carl is one of my keenest admirations. He is as striking a personality as he is great in poetry. Here is an authentic voice, singing the beauties, the vigor, the greatness and the lustiness of American life.

Carl and I, back in the old days, used to drink a lot of beer and smoke atrocious stogies—long, skinny, shapeless stogies that burned like a Pittsburgh furnace and cost, if I remember, two for seven cents. The beer, made right at home in the brewery that made Milwaukee famous, cost a nickel a bumper, with sandwiches and pretzels thrown in for good measure. Ach, Gott in himmel, those were the days. Now one has to pay ten cents for near beer that tastes like wet ashes. The country has grown more prosperous, but less human. Think of the savage absurdity of passing a law against beer! Why, if it hadn’t been for beer back in those remote days when I was a busted youngster I would have starved to death, and there never would have been any Little Blue Books. Think that over, you Drys.

We used to go into Schlitz’s beer garden—a magnificent place—drink good beer, hear an enormous, rackety brass band and make goo-goo eyes at beer-guzzling damsels with broad hips and double chins. I hope some Milwaukeean will tell me what has become of Schlitz’s famous garden. Has it been turned into a movie palace? A Child’s restaurant? A Woolworth store? Give me all the details. I am hardened for the worst. The girls, I suppose, have all married and joined the Epworth League.

No wonder Carl became a poet. How could he help it? There was
beer in those days. Now he is dry, like the rest of us. What this country needs is a barrel of beer for each grown man. Will we get it? We will not. By the time Congress gets around to legalizing beer, little Henry will be an old man with whiskers on his chin and I will be away off in heaven playing a crazy harp and annoying all my angel neighbors.

Here am I—just hobbling into my thirty-seventh year—soured on the world, a pessimist, an agnostic, an evolutionist, a Darrowite, a Christ-killer, a destructive critic—all the result of not being able to lay my trembling hands on a bottle of beer. That’s the whole trouble. I want beer, and can’t get it.

The only people who are getting a real kick out of life are the kill-joys and the pious brethren. They get happiness out of depriving us of anything that gives us pleasure. And as they are going down the line with one censorship after another, life, to them, is a rosy, joyous thrill. Damn them all to hell, I say. Are you with me?

Tobacco will go next. They’ve already outlawed cigarettes in Kansas. The pipe and cigar will get hit in good time. Tonight I heard two yokels arguing about tobacco. One claimed he liked it because it was a stimulant. The other chirped in with: “Aw, hell, tobacco ain’t no stimulant; it’s just a habit.” This really has nothing to do with my argument. I am ringing it in only because I thought it was so funny.

No wonder the papers are so full of crazy doings. The world is cracked. Here is an item on the first page of the Kansas City Star. It tells of a meeting of about seventy-five business men in Pleasanton, Kans. One of the Kiwanis members had just returned from Washington, where he had shaken hands with old Cal himself. This impressed the gathering so tremendously that a motion was passed to have the distinguished member, at the close of the doings, station himself at the door so that each member might shake the hand that had shaken the hand of the President. Isn’t that perfect idiocy? It takes the prize, for class A boobyry.

Here’s another news article. It tells about a speech made by a Pittsburg, Kans., banker. He bewailed the fact that when anything bad happened in his beloved city the newspaper correspondents sent out the news to the world. This hurt the town. He proposed a Censorship Committee to pass on all reports wired by newspaper correspondents. Can you picture the committee of Rotarians holding forth at the Western Union office, passing on all newspaper dispatches? Then he warmed up and complained about Joplin, Mo., a pretty good town about thirty miles away. Joplin keeps its theaters and movies open on Sunday, which shows that Joplin has achieved a degree of civilization. Pittsburg shuts up everything on Sunday. The result is that hundreds of Pittsburgers get into their cars on Sunday and drive down to Joplin for some fun. Our Pittsburg banker declared, in heated language, that Joplin was conducting itself unconstitutionally by benefiting from Pittsburg’s blue Sundays. One can get new ideas about Constitutional law by sticking around Pittsburg.

And so it goes on. Endless streams of bunk and hokum. I can’t read ten lines of a newspaper without finding something to laugh about. Here’s a town down in Texas that passed an ordinance forbidding chickens to wander about the public streets. It goes on to say that any chickens caught wandering around will be confiscated by the town mar-
shall and turned over to the local preachers. They don’t get enough chicken dinners from their victims. So the town marshal is to be put to work rounding up some stray ones for the pious grafters. Isn’t that a funny one?

Here’s another one. A Kiwanis club put on a debate between two women. The subject was: “Resolved, That Good Cooking Keeps the Old Man at Home.” This was to be followed by a reading entitled “Gone with a Handsomer Man.” She probably was a good cook.

Good sense is gone, seemingly for good. Not only good sense, but common decency. Honor has been forgotten. Consider, I ask you, the amazing case of General Butler, erstwhile Police Commissioner in Philadelphia, now back at his old job with the marines. Recently he was the guest of honor at a dinner. His host, an army officer, is alleged to have had some hootch on the table. Butler immediately preferred charges against his host, and the poor dub is now awaiting court martial. Think how low a man can stoop when he can turn his host over to the military law. And what amazed me was that Butler’s conduct was taken generally as proper and right. No one seemed to feel that Butler was a cad and a cur. So goes the world. Honor? Where is it?

Here’s a magazine that quotes approvingly from an ass who said that God made the water in order to enable man to float his boats. Here’s another editor who says that when you leave the United States you feel immediately that you are in a foreign country. One can pick up reams of that sort of stuff every day.

And yet, I get hot letters from readers bawling me out for calling attention to the world’s bunk. I am told, again and again, that I should realize that what I call bunk has an important, even necessary, place in a nation’s life. I am told, in so many words, that the average American businessman finds, in sham ideals and sentimentality, just what I find in intelligent books, in plays and music—an escape from the duller realities of existence. It is argued that the dull boy should believe that by keeping his eyes off the clock, by getting to work on time and by being a willing servant he will become a prosperous businessman like his employer. I am told to remember that the dull boy’s commonplace dreams save him from realizing his utter impotency, the ineffectuality of the forty or fifty more years he is to spend above the ground. I am asked not to use the word “debunk” and to try to understand the value of the dreamy soothsayers, like Frank Crane, who put sugar on an otherwise tasteless outlook for millions of Americans. After all, it is argued, sugar is better than no flavor at all.

I have yet to learn of a single yokel who has been deprived of his taffy by anything I have said or done. The fact of the matter is, I reach no yokels. They are too busy attending the movies, listening in on the radio and reading the Macfadden magazines, to pay the slightest attention to a grumbler like myself. My publications are not read by Frank Crane’s customers.

I have a lot of fun listening to the yokel-baiters. They amuse me. I like to repeat their absurdities. This does not mean that I am debunking the boobs. That is impossible. My Little Blue Books and my periodicals are not read by the slanheads. I reach only the merest minority of the American public. I talk to men and women who
are at least partially debunked. No one is entirely free of hokum. We are all tainted.

I do not believe that all men and women must have bunk. There are several hundred thousand young people who are able to read intelligently and understandably. I know I am reaching some of them through my publications. There is my audience. I am not trying to catch boobs. Rather am I reaching out for those who can use a full set of brains. They are ready for meat, not taffy. I try to give them solid nourishment. They seem to like it. Others do not, and they go to other pastures, with my blessings. My job is to expose the quacks and to give a hearing to those who have something genuine to say. Some little headway is being made. But it will not make over the world. Boobery is in the saddle. And that's all there is to it.

The mob is always ready for the pap ladled out by the quacks. Religious superstition, political hokum, idiotic thinking, sham education, fakes and hypocrisies are everywhere. But does this mean the minority shall not be allowed to enjoy the circus, to have a good laugh? Is the minority to be denied the right to spit on the shams and quackeries of the popular leaders? Is the minority to be deprived of the pleasure of exploring the realms of sound thinking, of science, of truth-seeking philosophy? I, for one, say No.

And so it goes. I started my little piece talking about Carl Sandburg, and here I am lecturing on boobery and quackery. It shows what can happen when one is turned loose on a well-conditioned typewriter, with no one to interrupt him while he goes meandering on, talking about anything that pops into his mind. I ask your forgiveness.

WHY, INDEED?

WHY?" is a curious little word. Who can ever answer it fully when it is fired at one, with the question mark sticking up at the end of it so impertinently and annoyingly. A simple little question, with that "Why?" as its keynote, will often set one wondering about something that ought, I suppose, to be fairly clear. For example, Mrs. J. S. (San Angelo, Texas) writes pointblank in what amounts to the form of a question: "It is a pity that a man with your brilliant mind, a man who can write so forcibly and is so well-informed, will waste his time writing the things you write. I wonder if you believe them all."

This gives me a feeling of sad futility. It shows me that, after all, there is a great deal of waste in my writing—so far as Mrs. J. S. and similar ones are concerned. Almost am I inclined to say with Samuel Butler: "In that I write at all I am among the damned." Certainly anyone who writes is bound to be damned, so far as purely human objurgation goes, to a considerable extent. Everybody who disagrees with the opinions he expresses in painfully wrought sentences and at such accommodating length will wonder why he wastes his time in writing such stuff. For what this woman's little note amounts to is the question: Why do you write so much that I do not believe in? And logically, or I should say naturally, following this is the question: Do you believe in these
things yourself? Most people are at a loss to imagine others really believing in ideas which they who read them do not believe in.

Now if I wanted to answer Mrs. J. S. honestly and seriously I should say that of course I believe in everything that I write—to a certain extent, from a certain viewpoint, and at the certain time that I write it. But of course also my mind is always busy, more or less, and I am continually seeing life from new angles. Again, whether I really believe in something that I write depends on how serious I am when I write it. Of that last Mrs. J. S. and all my readers will have to judge.

Most solemnly, however, I do assure the lady that I believe—cross my heart and hope to die—in the basic, important, determining ideas that underlie my philosophy of life. On the whole I am not certain—not too certain. But I am pretty well convinced of my general attitude, and of the bunkishness of certain kinds of bunk that exist in this world. One way that I can detect certain kinds of bunk, in fact, is by the certainty of the bunk-shooter regarding questions that I know very well he is as ignorant of, in the last analysis, as I am.

For instance, God and the future life—Mrs. J. S. wonders if I believe what I write about these subjects, and why I write about them. I will content myself to say that I write about them because it interests me to do so, and because I am firmly—yes, most sincerely—convinced that the illusions concerning these ideas interrupt and corrupt the civilized business of thinking about life, of putting more joy and intelligence into our scheme of life. And do I believe that God and the future life are bunk? I certainly do believe that any theory about them which has thus far been promulgated is bunk, and that the latest theory which will be announced the day after tomorrow (and pretending, like the rest, to be the final complete truth about the whole mystery) will be bunk no less. Because nobody knows. They are not able to show how, by any manner of means, they could know about these things. And it is fair enough that I am willing to take potluck with the rest of them, and admit that neither do I know—that I too am an agnostic. The difference between the agnostic and others is that the one admits his ignorance about the great mystery of life, while the others are not willing to admit it.

But, after all, I don’t entirely know why I wrote this particular article in reply to such a simple question. Simply my mind moved, the hand followed, and the typewriter responded.

A WORD TO THE BARBERS

GETTING into the barber’s chair to have my hair clipped is like getting into the dentist’s chair to have a molar pulled. What I mean is simply this: I procrastinate, until I become an object of ridicule. I make a dozen beginnings. I even walk towards the shop three or four times, but allow myself to be deflected on the way. I like barbers. They usually are pleasant fellows, well up on the latest gossip. But I fight shy of them, because I am stingy with my time.

The other day, a friend of mine brought me this message:

"I was getting shaved today," he told me, "and the barber mentioned the important news that he had just cut your hair again. It created a
sensation. He added the rather personal observation that he considered it strange that you shave yourself. He said: 'Funny, ain't it, how a man like him, with all his money, shaving himself?'

I know it would be useless for me to explain to the estimable gentleman that I do not count my quarters. If anything, I am generous with them. I never would even so much as think of bewailing a two-bit piece passed into the palm of a worthy son of the scissors. I could argue myself blue and green in the face, and still be far from convincing him that I have good reasons for preferring to shave myself each morning.

I like to be shaved before breakfast, not after. I like to shave myself, because that is a good time to think. It takes me just about three minutes to scratch the surplus stubble off my chin. I do the job quickly, and well, if I may boast. So I shave myself, much to the alarm of my good barber friends. But it is not done to save twenty-five cents. I would be willing to pay twice that sum each morning for the privilege of wielding my own razor in my own sweet way. If there were a huge war-tax on self-shaving, I should be the first one to pay it, convinced I was getting a bargain.

It would take me five minutes to get to the barber and back, not counting the ten or fifteen minutes needed for the operation, providing I were lucky enough to get into the chair immediately. The chances are I would have to await my turn. Besides, I don't like barber shaves. They are too slow, too thorough, too conscientious. I like quick shaves, not thorough ones. If I depended on the barber, I am sure it would mean two or three shaves a week, instead of seven. It would work out that way, even though I might be determined to get daily service. Then, I can't think in a barber's chair. I can only wonder what the barber is thinking about, and that doesn't interest me in the slightest. I might have to talk, and I do not like to talk while I am shaving. I like to go through the operation alone, in my own bathroom, away from the world.

No, it is not economy. It is my character that forces me to do my own razor-work. That's the truth, though there's not a barber who will believe me. Barbers all believe we shave ourselves in order to save money. Poor fellows, they are blind to the truth, and I know not how to bring them to the light. So, I can only say: You can cut my hair when I get around to it, but you cannot cut off my whiskers.

A GOOD, SIMPLE MURDER

EVERY town ought to have a good, simple, honest murder about twice a year. You can't beat a murder to take the minds of the gossips off a lot of harmless people who are managing to have a little fun out of life.

Yes, thank you, we are enjoying a very fine murder right here in Girard. The other day a woman is alleged to have shot and killed her old man—her sixth husband, by the way. Why she bothered herself about such a messy job I don't quite understand, because she seems to have learned the secret and mystery of quick divorce. For about $50 she could have gotten rid of hubby No. 6. Now it will most likely cost her at least $300 to get a jury to find her Not Guilty. There's great
Economic waste there, it seems to me. Won't people ever learn? The woman, when questioned, said she just "wanted to forget all about it." She didn't like the idea of the sheriff bringing up a lot of unpleasant memories.

All of the women are greatly interested in this case, as they are in anything having to do with the getting, keeping or getting rid of a husband. It's quite a study and one must be ready to pick up ideas here and there.

One Girardian disposed of the case very simply, in much the manner many of us use when we are disposing of other people's property: "He's better off dead, and she's better off in the pen."

One has to admit that that just about leaves nothing more to be done. Little Alice, on the other hand, is worried about the jury, if there ever will be a jury. "What," she asks, "will she do in case her other six husbands happen to get on the jury?" That's a question I can't answer. What will she do? What will the jury do?

This major case has taken the town's mind off a lot of minor scandal, and in that it is a good thing. Would there not be social saving in having two murders a year instead of two hundred petty scandals? By that I mean, we would have the two hundred little scandals, but everybody would be too busy talking murder to bother about them. That's a little idea that is worth thinking about.

Alice Gets Down to Cases

We can learn a great deal from our children. They have a certain naive, realistic directness of thought at times that is deadly to the pretensions of their elders. One of the worst mental habits is that of generalization. We cannot guard against it too carefully. Like everyone, I sometimes sin in this respect. The other day at table there was some discussion of animals, dogs and cats, from a domestic point of view. Without any great concentration of mind on the question, and as it were casually, I remarked that I could live very well without animals.

Alice looked at me with genuinely thoughtful inquiry. Her mind worked quickly. She didn't try to see this question, or to argue it, from an abstract point of view. She flew straight to the point of plain, downright, matter-of-fact example.

"Live without animals?" queried she. At once her imagination passed over seas and continents, and she said:

"Could you live in the Sahara Desert—"

A moment of suspense. The merest hesitation for a climax. And then:

"—without a camel?"

Utterly beaten was I. At this one direct, telling, vital stroke I collapsed and was conscience-stricken. Damply like a rag my generalization fell as the bright banner of Alice's specific instance arose and waved its defiance at the airy, cocksure talkers.

Of course I explained to Alice that I could live in Girard without a camel. And, to recover my prestige, I amused the children by telling
them I was going to buy an elephant, teach him to use roller skates and ride him to and from the plant.

But hereafter, for a week or so at least, I shall not make a remark without immediately, specifically adding: "Now, you understand, that doesn't apply to life in the Sahara Desert."

MY IDLE ELECTRIC FAN

ALL THIS summer I've had an electric fan in my study, but I've not used it in weeks. I find that if I go ahead and work or read I'll forget all about the heat, but if I turn on the fan the hum of it keeps the heat in my thoughts. Besides, I don't happen to like the kind of coolness that is the result of a fan. There's something bunky about it, though I'm not expert enough to figure out just what it is. Swishing up the air, it seems to me, is the wrong way of going about it.

It would be on a par with making heat in the cold days and having some kind of a machine to "spray" it around. The radiator is a much better heat machine. Now, if man would only make a "cold machine," enabling us to turn on the cold in the same way we turn on the heat, there would be some sense to it. Engineers ought to get to work on this problem.

It's a disgrace to reflect that man hasn't found a sensible way of keeping comfortably cool in the dog days. Of course, I mean in one's own home, not in a movie house that ices the air. I'm a customer the first time someone puts a "cold machine" on the market—one that will work in one's home.

The thing isn't at all unreasonable. Look how we are putting in these new ice-box systems that make their own ice electrically. I understand that these new companies are making enormous fortunes, and they haven't even begun to get their machines to the public.

As I see it, the ice man is doomed. His days are numbered, and I don't see any tears being shed. The ice man fits into a lot of jokes—particularly about the ice man and the policeman's wife, though I can't remember the point of the snappy joke right now. There may be some regrets on the part of those neglected wives who looked forward to the daily visits of the ice man. I have never been a witness to their doings, so I cannot say how serious this loss will be. The ice man's emotional life never interested me a whole lot.

The same electricity that makes the cold in a frigidair system could send cold through pipes in all the rooms of one's home. That's what I want to see invented, and I hope it is done soon. When that day comes I will take that silent electric fan which is now staring me in the face and haul it up to the garret, where I shall let it take on a thick coat of dust. I hate those things. And yet by some crazy quirk, I bring one into my library every summer, even though I rarely turn on the juice.
I GO TO CHURCH

HERE I am—this beautiful, sunny day, warm May Monday morning—back in my Muehlebach room in Kansas City, after a lively pair of days in which I had bought me a new Lincoln coupe (a classy, spiffy, rakish thing that took my fancy the moment I put eyes on it), spent hours (see following pages) with Clarence Darrow, Sinclair Lewis, Gilbert Frankau, the Rev. L. M. Birkhead, and, among other excesses, went to divine services yesterday morning for meditation and prayer.

In a few hours I shall be leaving for home, God willing, but, before beginning the ride south, I want to jot down a few pieces for my readers, while I have the time and still remember what I want to say. I’m feeling good, with the carbon all removed, and, postponing the really deep stuff, I want to mention, casually of course, without boasting, that almost thirty minutes ago I tackled my first cantaloupe for this season, which in itself makes this a most important day for me and my petted grub-bag under my belt. Last week I had my first strawberries; the week before, my first cucumbers (oh, how I love them); and this week starts right off with a sweet, juicy, chilled cantaloupe. Oh, boy! God is love! And there are more thrills to come—big slices of watermelon, luscious peaches and cream, and—well, that’s all I can think of at this glorious moment...

And so, I went to church yesterday morning—to the Rev. L. M. Birkhead’s pretty little place—All Soul’s Unitarian Church—and heard a splendid talk on Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*—a sane, clear, sensible, civilized review of a clear-eyed, straight-thinking man who impresses me as being just about ninety percent debunked, which is saying a lot. An hour spent in Birkhead’s congregation convinces me that there is hope—even for the church. As I told the pastor, if Kansas City were my home I should, most likely, be found passing the collection plate each Sunday morning at the Rev. Birkhead’s place—Praise the Lord! But I should tell the whole story while I am at it, in the service of truth. The fact is, my dear brethren, that this sermon followed a bit of singing by one of the best-dressed and most beautiful women this hardened sinner ever set eyes on. I tell you, she was a dream—almost as nifty as my new car—no, even superior in looks, streamline and complexion. Looking on her, and listening to her charming singing, gave me—what shall I call it?—spiritual kick? Call it that, if the word “spiritual” means anything to you. Oh, she was beautiful! A dream! I don’t know the young singer’s name, but her picture is stamped on my finely sensitized memory so that I could pick her out of a crowd of a hundred thousand. I tell you, my brethren, it is worth going to church just for the gigantic kick one can get from looking at her. And to have such a delicious, eye-fetching sight followed by Birkhead’s intelligent, civilized sermon, means nothing more than this: Mankind is progressing. Take it from me. I know what I am talking about. The world hasn’t gone to hell yet. We’re headed there, I grant you, but there is hope, as Dr. Munyon used to say twenty-five years ago. I could go on raving like this for ten pages, and still be holding fast to facts, for it is my
humble opinion that I am a competent appreciator of fast cars and pretty singers. I might look into those churches too.

During the sermon, Birkhead dropped a line that went something like this: "As Mr. Haldeman-Julius, who happens to be in this audience this morning, said, etc., etc."
I could hear a buzz, buzz—the punishment one endures for being a celebrity (for I am such), and when the fine fellow ended his excellent talk, I was taken in hand by the pastor and introduced right and left, front and back, to dozens of men and women, many of them readers of my publications, thanks to the Lord. In the rush and excitement of saying "delighted," "how do you do," "thank you," "how kind of you," "you are too generous," "a splendid suggestion," "I should love to read the manuscript"—in this rush, I say, I lost sight of the beautiful singer and never saw her again. So goes this cruel and disillusioning world.

SINCLAIR LEWIS

I AM writing this piece on hotel paper, using a stubby, unsharpened pencil. I tried the pen, but it screeches and scratches too much. My Corona is down home, for it was not my intention to do any writing this trip.

It is a case of writing this batch of copy now—or never. If I get home, it won't be done. So I shall stick around until I work my right hand into a state of paralysis, for even now this lead pencil is beginning to cramp my style. Why, I haven't even a sharpener. In desperation, a few moments ago, I hurried into the bathroom and took out a new razor blade, which I shall use to keep this pencil in writing condition, even though I get the carpet covered with slivers of wood and make the maids curse my memory and take my name in vain.

Enough of this chatter. Let us on to the more weighty matters. For there, my readers, stands the great and only Sinclair Lewis, the mighty debunker, the best fighter in our crowd. This was my first meeting with one of my greatest admirations, and I was properly impressed, let me tell you in all candor. This was an important day in my young life, and I had brains enough to know it. We liked each other from the first second. This is a plain fact, not bunk. I know I liked him, and he said right off: "I like you, you damned Bolshevik. How do you keep out of jail? Have you been tarred and feathered yet? Let's see—what the hell will I call you? I can't call you Haldeman-Julius. Oh, yes, Manuel. Call me 'Red.'"

And I did. He is "Red"—with red hair and red freckles, about five feet and ten or eleven inches and weighs about 135 pounds, I should guess. He isn't what I should call a prize beauty, but, oh, how you love the rascal! He captures one in a second—hearty, enthusiastic, appreciative, colorful and profane. What a collection of heaven-sent vocables! All the bad words that have only four letters are used with skill and abandon. It's great!

This was transpiring in his rooms in the Ambassador Hotel, on the eighth floor. He was in his temporary workroom, a small chamber, scattered with books and papers, his secretary, Mrs. Birkhead, working on his letters. "Red" Lewis was in his shirt-sleeves—a white shirt, with
soft collar attached, the kind I wear and boost so consistently that one might take me for a paid press agent for the shirt plutocrats. The fact is, I don’t even get a free shirt for all the free advertising I throw their way. They’re an ungrateful bunch.

Sinclair’s—I mean Red’s—shirt was tieless, and over his eyes he wore a green—what do you call those celluloid things?—shades? curtains? rain wipers? You know what I mean.

“Say, Manuel, the Monthly’s great. You’re doing a fine job. I’m for it. I wish I had time to write for it, but you understand—this novel simply must be finished. I’m filled up to here with it. You’ll like this novel I’m writing. It’s just in line with what you are doing in the Monthly. These preachers are going to get a trimming.”

“What are you going to call it? We all know what you’re up to, Red. Have you decided on a title yet?”

“No, not yet. I’ve got a bunch of ideas—”

“Why not call it ‘Bible Belt’?”

“That won’t do, Manuel. That’s too flippant; too Menckenese.”

“Call it anything. But get it done. We can hardly wait until it’s finished.”

“I’m going to northern Minnesota tomorrow, to get a cabin and settle down to work. I have all my material—filled up to here—and aching for the job.”

(My fingers are getting sore handling this pencil. I’ve just wrapped a handkerchief around it, so I believe I’m all set for another mess of copy.)

What a worker “Red” Lewis is! How honest, thorough, conscientious, meticulous! I love and admire men who do their jobs in a workmanlike manner. I loathe and despise careless, slipshod stabs at a piece of work that should have been done wholeheartedly. Sinclair Lewis is a serious, sincere artist. He is tireless. He throws everything into the scales. I know how he has gone about this preacher job, and I am ready to shout my acclaim. He has missed nothing. Not a phase of this great novel material has been treated superficially. Mark my words—Lewis’ novel about the pulpit pounders will be a masterpiece—greater than Main Street and Babbitt rolled into one. That’s saying a mouthful, for I admire both of those useful and creative novels. This job has been waiting around for years, and here is the right artist for this tremendous undertaking. We have had no end of mealy-mouthed novels about the church, the “best” of them nothing more than tracts for Modernism—a form of bunk that is worse than Fundamentalism, to my crack-brained way of looking at things.

“Red” Lewis has been in Kansas City for months getting his material. He has gone about it with the thoroughness of a German economist. The homes of preachers have been invaded; he has nosed around in their “parlors,” their studies, their backyards and their bathrooms. He knows everything that one can learn about our preacher guys. These rooms in the Ambassador have been used for weeks for what Sinclair Lewis calls his “Sunday School Class.” Fifteen preachers have been coming here regularly, and “Red” has dug into their minds and their hearts. He has opened them up; the wheels have been watched at their work—oh, he simply has his facts, and we know that with his
facts in hand the writing will be done with the speed of the gifted and finished writer. We have no doubts about “Red” Lewis’ craftsmanship. Before long the world will be given a great book.

(Gee, I wish I had learned to write with my left hand. This right fist is about all in, and I haven’t told half my story yet. Even this handkerchief that I am using as a cushion for my fingers is beginning to play out. But I’ll stick it through—if only this pencil doesn’t get worn down any shorter, because the top of it is almost even with my knuckles now. Ah, if that singer were here now, and if she were a crack stenographer—I’d make some headway!)

“Red” and I walked into the next room, where we found eight or ten men and two women. I was introduced all around, for some of them were strangers to me—a mixed lot of preachers, communists, socialists, plutocrats, lawyers and an accountant. Also, an intelligent and delightful Negro, Mr. Love, I believe. And there was dear old Darrow, grumpy and witty as ever, ready for his debate on the prohibition bunk scheduled that night in a church, where the Rev. Burris Jenkins was to hold down the lid for the drys. Darrow was feeling especially chipper, because the old war-horse had just won a mighty battle in Detroit, where the Sweet defendant had been found not guilty. You may read about that in Marce’s Big Blue Book, Clarence Darrow’s Two Great Trials. The fact is, Marce didn’t come with me to Kansas City because she wanted to stick to her job of getting the Sweet story written. I tell you this is some literary family. If Henry and Alice ever get the literary bug old daddy will have to buy some new presses.

(Golly, I’ve decided to give up this handkerchief and go back to my sore, bare fingers on this hard, unyielding wood. If I don’t get my second wind soon they are likely to find a dead man in Room 829, Hotel Muchlebach.)

GILBERT FRANKAU

HEN came the Englishman—Captain Gilbert Frankau—a nice chap, and all that, you know. Very English. Good fellow. Pleasing personality. London accent. Gloves. Stick. Real nifty guy. I liked him. (Say, these short sentences are finer for a poor boob with sore fingers. It isn’t a new art form—it’s plain cramps in my right hand. Well, I guess I’ll light a fresh cigar: maybe that will cheer me up. If that doesn’t work I’ll go down a little later and eat a steak. Steaks always work wonders with me. They’re the greatest medicine in the world.)

Then came the singing. “Red” passed around the hymn books, and about a half dozen of us—“Red,” Birkhead, Frankau, Schoolcraft and myself and somebody else—started in on “At the Cross, at the Cross Where I First Saw the Light.” It was wonderful. I was in good voice. The others were a little off pitch, but this didn’t seem to bother us any. Then came “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” which we did perfectly. Then Brother “Red” led in prayer and with the Amen I said:
"Let's all have another drink." To which the others responded with, "You bet your tootin'."

"Red," Gilbert and I hit it together nicely from the start. I've heard a lot about Gilbert Frankau, but I confessed I had never read any of his books or articles. He assured me that I had missed a whole lot, but I voiced my skepticism.

"I understand you are a best seller over there and that you are coming through fast over here, but to be honest with you I always put you alongside E. Phillips Oppenheim, Harold Bell Wright and Zane Grey," I confessed, with disarming frankness.

"You're quite wrong," replied Gilbert. "I really am an important writer."

"You know," said "Red," "I always hated Gilbert. I've never read any of his books. He's the worst Tory in England."

"I'm the only real Tory," Gilbert broke in, his charming smile fetching us. He is a fine looking chap, in his early forties. I'm sure women must be crazy about him.

"I've always hated you," said "Red."

"I've always hated you," said Gilbert.

"But I like you now that I've met you," "Red" went on. "And isn't it funny how we went out of our way to avoid each other in England?"

"I had a horror that I might meet you some day. So I thought up a lot of insulting things to say to you so that I might continue hating you."

"And I had a whole mouthful myself," said "Red," with amusing earnestness.

"And now I like you, though I've read only one Sinclair Lewis book."

"You want to read all of his books," I said, in a stage whisper. "He's a better man than you are, though I like you."

"And I like you."

"Oh, let's have another drink."

Gilbert Frankau likes everything I hate, and hates everything I admire. I like H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw. He detests them. I loathe Mussolini. He worships that vile and murderous tyrant. He believes in pure dictatorships. I dread and despise them. He admires the Prussian officers of 1914. I cannot even think of them without cursing. He talks of the "dirty Huns." I love the German people. Frankau thinks the working class should be crushed with submission: and I'm for the workers, in my own way. He is a Tory of Tories. And I like him. I should love to hate him. Why should one meet one's intellectual, social and cultural enemy, and like him a whole lot? It's absurd. Yes, I shall buy one of his books.

A little later, while the visitors were leaving "Red" took me by the shoulders in that warm-hearted, friendly way of his, and said:

"Manuel, I'm giving a dinner at six this evening. Will you come? Just four of us—you, Gilbert and Birkhead. Say you'll come."

"Delighted. It will be a pleasure."

I learned that Gilbert was stopping at my hotel—in room 831, in
fact; almost a next-door neighbor, and as I had my car I offered to take him along with me, so we might insult each other some more. He accepted. So we went out together—he to do some writing; I to go to bed for a two-hour nap.

On our way up to the hotel Gilbert told me about the hanging of Gerald Chapman, which he had witnessed as a representative of the Hearst press. He got on my nerves again, for Gilbert is wildly in favor of more and better hangings, while I, poor pacifist, believe in no capital punishment, not even for our Chapmans.

"You're sentimental. Why waste pity for a dirty, little rat like Chapman?" he burst forth. "He earned his painless death. I was rather bored by the scene. I have seen too many fine men go to their deaths in the war to waste my sympathy over such rubbish. I wrote an aloof detached story about it—a new kind of a report for the readers of your sentimental newspapers."

"I don't see how excessive punishment will stop crime. You Englishmen are too hard-boiled about such things. You used to hang pickpockets."

"And we should do it again. There should be more capital punishment. It is the only remedy."

I then changed the subject.

"Tell me," I asked, "what do you think about Joseph McCabe?"

"McCabe? McCabe? Who is he?"

"You have never heard of McCabe?"

"No."

I changed the subject again.

"What do you think of our Bible Belt?" I asked him.

"In England religion means nothing. We never think about it. Over there it is all politics and labor. Here it is all religion. I do not understand it."

"Your people are more civilized," I said, "thanks to your Joseph McCabes. We need his genius in these States. Religious fanaticism is sweeping onward. It is a great menace. It is not only powerful in matters of religion; it is also a mighty political machine. It must be crushed."

"We simply can't understand your country's religious fervor. Your Dayton monkey trial seems so utterly impossible to us. We are unable to realize that it is a genuine performance and not a huge hoax."

"It is very real, and dangerous," I said.

"And perfectly bewildering. Isn't it true that fornication is the Republic's national sport?"

"Yes. Much more so in the rural and small-town sections than in the very large cities. The people in the enormous cities have other ways of letting off steam. In the Bible Belt the people have only Fundamentalism and fornication."

"That's very well put. I've marked that with great interest, though I have been in the country only a short while."

Parking at the Muehlebach, Mr. Gilbert Frankau went to his writing; I went to my little snooze.
A LITTLE DINNER GANG

INCLAIR LEWIS was in splendid spirits and kept us amused with numerous shafts of characterization, wit and sarcasm. He's a rare bird, thoroughly debunked and free.

"I tell you, fellows," he remarked once, after a thoughtful pause, "we're sitting here talking about authors and great men, but we don't seem to remember that there is a great author, still living, who is above Thomas Hardy, Shaw, Wells, Conrad (for one feels he is still alive)—I refer to Rudyard Kipling."

"Righto," came from the men.

"Wells' things will be unread three years after his death," said Frankau.

"Except 'Tono Bungay,'" Sinclair corrected.

"And his early short stories," I added, "particularly his 'Country of the Blind' and his tales of imaginative science."

"Perhaps you are both right," Frankau agreed.

"Kipling is great—master of fiction and a wonderful poet," Lewis continued. "His works will be read and admired a thousand years from now. And we seem to forget that he is still alive, still among the living and breathing men. I hate his ideas, I cannot accept what he stands for, but I can admire his art. He is a great artist."

We all nodded our heads.

"Tell me," said Sinclair Lewis to me, "what do you think of the Mercury?"

"I like it tremendously," I answered quickly. "I read every word of it. But let me tell you, I believe Mencken is allowing his magazine to become over-departmentized. It has brilliant flashes of life, but there's too much of the intellectual about it and not enough of American life on the American of this day and hour."

"I think you're right," said Lewis. "I don't think Mencken knows a great deal about American life. He should get out of Baltimore and New York and come out here for a trip."

"I believe," I went on, "that America is the most interesting country in the world. I love this country—I have a passion for the United States—a hundred and sixteen million human beings fighting, hating, loving, wooing, building, creating, working, grasping, living, feeling, reaching, suffering, laughing—and foolish. What a scene! What a show!"

"A bully show!" exclaimed Frankau.

"Yes, the greatest circus in the world," I almost shouted. "As an editor I want that life reflected, reported. You are doing that in your novels, Red. You need not be told how your novels have influenced me in my work."

"I know it; I can see it," said Lewis.

"You have opened up the American scene for literary material. You in novels; my job is to get a lot of talented, young newspapermen and students to do it in articles. Articles about the United States—about its fakers and its bank-shooters; about its foolishness and its dreams; about its new things and its gestures and spasms—Jim-jams, I might say. We
want to know what is going on in this vast, great country of ours, the liveliest and most interesting country in the world. We want facts about Florida, the Kansas farmer, the little and big towns. Too much has been written about New York—"

I was becoming eloquent. As I read my words again I realize some of the sentences were unuttered; they were on my tongue, but unsaid because Lewis talked so fast and didn’t give me my full chance.

"New York—too much has been written about New York," said Lewis.

"True," I agreed. "New York impresses me as a vast crazy-house—lunatics, but not stupid. Out here, we are not so crazy, but more stupid."

"I want to write an article," said Sinclair Lewis; "it should be done. I want to show how freedom of thinking and speaking has been menaced by what we call ‘good taste.’ Damn this talk about ‘good taste.’ That’s the matter with liberal England—too much fear of bad taste. You don’t talk against the king or the Prince of Wales, or the Church, because it just ‘isn’t done,’ not ‘good taste.’ And we have the same nonsense over here. Do something, and you are abused for your ‘bad taste,’ your ‘cheap notoriety,’ your hunger for ‘free publicity.’ I turned down the Pulitzer prize for honest, clearly stated reasons. I did it as a serious artist. What was the answer?—‘bad taste,’ ‘publicity,’ and that sort of thing. I tell you one must learn not to be afraid of ‘bad taste.’"

"Be mean," I said. "Insult your readers freely. Damn this yowling about good taste."

I saw Mr. Frankau squirming, and knew that he was not entirely with us. But that was the Englishman in him.

And so went the conversation. We kicked the ball around for hours. It was good fun, and I enjoyed every minute of it.

"Listen, Gilbert," said Lewis to my fellow-guest, "what I am anxious to see above all things is good talk—conversation. It is the most important thing in life. There isn’t enough of it. I am a reformer in the sense that I want to see a great deal more good conversation."

EDWIN MARKHAM

LATER: It is now pretty late in the afternoon. I stopped writing a little after the noon hour, and went to join my friend, Mr. George M. Husser, of the Better Business Bureau, in the Hotel Baltimore, where he took me into the dining room of the Ad Club to meet Edwin Markham. I spent about a half hour with that wonderful old man—74 years old, sound as a rock, clear-minded, healthy, witty, amusing.

The aged poet was very nice to me; and his burst of friendly feeling made me most happy. We held each other’s hands during most of our talk and I felt surges of the deep affection I feel for this extraordinary personality.

"I want to come down to Girard," said Mr. Markham.

"By all means, do," I urged in full sincerity. "We should love to
have you. You have meant a great deal to me. We all love you—the whole country loves you, you beautiful old man, you."

His eyes brightened.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Haldeman-Julius," he said, in that fine clear voice of his. "I think a great deal of the work you are doing. I want my poems to appear in your Blue Books. I think they are great books—a wonderful library."

I thanked him for this kindly expression and gave him a tight squeeze.

"And you look so well," I exclaimed. "I heard you lecture years and years ago in New York. How I adored the picture you made—long, white hair, white beard (fuller than now)—you were so beautiful I missed half your lecture."

Mr. Markham laughed, firmly, a happy catch in his throat.

"And you are feeling well?" I asked.

"Never better. Always on the go. I am still good for work."

"Good for twenty or twenty-five years," I said.

"I don't doubt it. Watch for a new poem of mine in an early number of Mencken's magazine—"

"Congratulations! I'm happy to see you reach the intellectuals. You have been reaching almost every element except the so-called intelligentsia—"

"It made me happy."

"Of course it did, and with good reason."

Mr. Markham then went on to tell me that he is working on a collected edition of his complete poetical and prose works, which will be issued by Doubleday, Page and Company. He was kind enough to add that he was anxious to have a Little Blue Book volume of selected poems. I assured him nothing could make me happier than to be able to add his name to my list of Blue Book authors. So we mixed a little business talk with our pleasant exchanges, which added just that much more to my feeling of good will.

A RECORD

MR. HUGHES washes my shirts and B. V. D.'s, and in numerous other ways sets herself down as a person of downright usefulness. In addition, she is a keen judge of music and poetry. The other day she brought a record all wrapped up in a newspaper. And she put it on our Victrola for my personal benefit and uplift. I listened to the song, and then I took down the words. It should be given the widest publicity. Listen, dear hearts, to

BRYAN'S LAST FIGHT

Listen, now, all you good people,
And a story I will tell
About a man named Mr. Bryan,
The man that we all loved so well.

He believed the Bible's teachings
And he stood for what was right;
He was strong in his convictions
And for them he'd always fight.

When the good folks had their trouble
Down in Dayton far away,
Mr. Bryan went to help them
And he worked both night and day.

There he fought for what was righteous
And the battle it was won,
Then the Lord called him to heaven,
For his work on earth was done.

If you want to go to heaven
When your work on earth is through,
You must believe as Mr. Bryan;
You will fail unless you do.

Now he's gone way up in heaven,
Where he'll find an open door,
But the lesson that he taught us
It will live forever more.

Editor's Note: Today (Sunday) is my day of rest. To celebrate it I wrote thirty pages of copy.

A JOKE THAT DIDN'T GO VERY WELL

We were at breakfast—Henry, Alice and myself. Looking up from a copy of Life, which had just arrived, I said:

"Here's a joke, Alice. Come over and look at it."

She left her bowl of Post Toasties, raisins and cream.

"Here it is. It is called 'Putting on a Lot of Dog.' You see it?
It is an automobile, with six dogs standing on the hood, the fenders and the running boards. Do you see the joke?"

"Of course I see it. It means the same as stepping on the gas."

"No, no, my dear. Don't you know the meaning of the expression 'Putting on the Dog'? It is very modern slang."

"I never heard it before," Alice insisted.
I turned to my left and found little Henry looking over my shoulder.

"I see the joke," said Henry. "It means the people who own the car put a lot of dogs all around the car and all over it, and that's why they call it putting on a lot of dog."

"No, no, Henry. You are both wrong. This joke seems to be a little old for you. In fact, I feel this joke was too old the moment it was born. I think we'll just pass it up and proceed with our breakfast. You'll be late for school if we hang around here arguing about this joke. Besides, it isn't a funny joke. It is stupid."

"I'm not stupid," Henry announced.

"I didn't say you were, Henry. I said the joke was stupid."

"But if I can't understand a stupid joke it means I am stupid."

"It means nothing of the sort," I went on. "I didn't say you were stupid, nor did I even imply that you were stupid. You are not stupid. Only the joke is stupid."
"Well, what I don’t understand is, why do you call it a joke?" Alice asked, soberly. She had been looking at that picture all through my argument with Henry. "All I can see about it is an automobile with a lot of dogs standing on it. There’s nothing funny about that. We often have dogs on our car. And nobody laughs. People like dogs."

"So do I, Alice, within reason."

"Then why do you think a picture of a lot of nice dogs is a joke? They’re nothing to laugh about."

"Alice, I didn’t laugh at any dogs. I didn’t even laugh at this joke. I merely asked you a civil question—did you see the joke? You didn’t. Henry didn’t. That’s all I am interested in. I meant no personal affront."

I’m not going to get those kids started again. The next time I see a poor joke I intend to keep it to myself.

EDGAR SALTUS AND HIS COLLAPSE

The house is quiet; the Kansas wind comes howling down from the North; inside, it is warm, and I have finished a fat batch of copy—so I feel I have earned the right to rest back on my couch and enjoy this book which has just come—Edgar Saltus, written by his widow. I settle back for several hours of pecking into the life of a man who created one of the most colorful and bloodcurdling books ever written—his life of the Russian Czars, The Imperial Orgy. I read only four paragraphs when, bang! I come on a gigantic, mountaneous structure of bunk, thus:

When, later in life, he became interested in occultism, and the possibility of having an astrological chart was suggested, there was no one living who could tell him the exact hour. Trivial as it may seem, he would have given much to ascertain it. The Libra qualities assigned to those born in October were all his. This fact made him keen to know how they would be modified or increased by that of the sign rising at the hour of his birth.

And so it goes on—Scorpio, the Sun in Taurus, and the rest of the occult twaddle. I shall continue my reading, of course, but here I am back at my machine for another little spell even after I had told myself that I was through for the next few hours and would relax with some pleasurable reading. Here is the bunk-swatter’s punishment. He cannot enjoy himself, even when he tries his best. He feels he must brand hokum when he sees it, though it means the end of his earned rest.

Bunk—everywhere one sees bunk—it is ridiculous to hope to escape it even for an hour. There is no denying the fact that I could get a whole lot more fun out of life if these slips from sanity and realism did not bother me. But they do, and I cannot escape my reactions to these insults directed at my intelligence. Well, we shall call it a night, and, without further complaint and growling I shall return to this book, hoping that the rest will be better than the beginning.

But, before quitting this bit of writing, let me add that I recall something I read in one of Charles Darwin’s letters. I go searching for it. Ah, I find it—I thumb the pages—I find it. I read it again, and smile. How true it is in this case of the brilliant and astonishing Saltus, who, as a young man, turned to Schopenhauer for his daily
food, who considered "religions were superstitions for the ignorant and credulous. They offered nothing. With Schopenhauer came Spinoza."

Man's funny, wandering, wavering mind—what a treacherous machine it is! Today an infidel and a skeptic—tomorrow a believer in horoscopes and astrology! But let us return to Darwin, whose sentence I want to quote: "With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value, or at all trustworthy."

Well, I did return to the book, and read it through without a halt—324 pages of Edgar Saltus' unhappy and suffering life. I have always admired some of Saltus' books, for here was a stylist of rare ability, a brilliant wit and a fertile corner of sparkling epigrams. He was a hard, conscientious worker, a finished craftsman who turned out a great volume of copy. Handsome, with gold in his pockets, a lady's man, Saltus traveled a road marked with numerous love affairs. Wherever he went, young girls were warned against him, older ones threw themselves in his way. Two of his marriages were tragic failures. At the height of his powers, when he was well into middle life, he met Marie, a slip of a girl, who turned his head, sent him into spasms of emotional torture and turned him into a helpless, whining kitten. He chased her half around the globe; wooed her for years, and finally, when she had completely made him over, she married him—now an old man.

This book is the tragic story of a man, taken at his superb prime and broken slowly and mercilessly on the wheel of woman. The writer's story is a record of her almost ruthless annihilation of everything in him that was individual and creative. She drove out his wit, his wisdom, his realistic ideas, and moulded a creature closer to her muddled notions—a mystic, Theosophist, an Occultist, a seeker of spooks and ghosts in numerous mediumistic studios, a talker of moonshine twaddle, a delver in the hokumistic tomes of Eastern rattlepates—in short, a damned fool.

And this transformation, to her way of looking, was a glorious ennoblement! a divine transformation! A step up the ladder to a higher sphere! What a tragic fall!

He deserted his own ego, his own personality, his own genius in order to take and hold this girl. He was willing to make any sacrifice to get her, and she demanded, and got, her pound of flesh.

The first effect was in his work. He was no longer the Edgar Saltus admired by Hunecker, Wilde and others. He turned to potboilers—many of them merely his old yarns rewritten to "make them better," which meant nothing more than taking fair potboilers and filling them with Theosophical moonshine.

Mrs. Saltus tells a frank, amazing story. She hides little. The whole sordid tragedy is there, written simply and well, despite some inconsequential lapses. Her style is good, considering the purposes to which she put it. She makes Saltus and herself live—at times the book reads like a novel. There were many moments when I thought I was reading something out of Dreiser. The book is not entirely honest—no biography ever written has been entirely honest—but it tells more than I had been led to expect. There is little about their sex life, though one gets the impression that there was little of it in their unhappy, stormy
lives. We do know that he was desperate over her—call that love, if that pleases you—and we do know that she was proud to be the mental and artistic keeper of her husband, but one cannot see the slightest signs of a genuine affection. She had a famous man for a husband, and she had something in her that enabled her to command him, and she used her powers to the last. She took the sparkling, brilliant genius and made of him an unhappy, miserable, forlorn, helpless, defeated old man. What a collapse! But there is nothing to lead one to believe that she was the least bit malicious about his life and talent. She thought she was helping him, freeing him from “materialism” and leading him to the “higher life” and all that sort of balderdash. Many a person has been “helped” into a living hell, into a dismal and destructive defeat, by those who thought they were “improving” matters. That’s the way the world is made, and one can do nothing about it.

Mrs. Saltus grows softly lyrical when she describes a scene late in their married life. He has been switched into spookland, and now he is searching its literature for “great truths.” Listen:

All this time he was studying “The Secret Doctrine,” going over each stanza slowly, thoughtfully, weighing each word and its meaning—searching for gold.

He burst into my room one day without knocking—a thing he never omitted to do. I realized that only an internal earthquake could have caused such forgetfulness. Throwing a book in my lap, he sank into a chair and exclaimed:

“Blind—blind and conceited ass that I have been! All my life I have been searching for truth. Now I have found it. Life’s problems are over.”

My skeptical mind does not leap with excitement over the prospect of having someone put in my hands a book that will solve life’s problems. There simply is no such book. Life’s problems can be solved by no book in all the world; in fact, there is no book that can even state life’s problems, let alone solve them. But let us return to Mrs. Saltus, who is still holding the book that has “solved all of life’s problems.” It turns out, from the sentences quoted a minute later, that the book is merely another masterpiece of super-bunk. His quotation is a mystical hodge-podge, an intellectual spasm. To return to Mrs. Saltus:

Taking the book from my hand, he said:

“Listen to this. ‘Said the Flame to the spark, thou art myself—my image and my shadow. I have cloathed myself in thee—and thou art my vahan, until the day be with us, when thou shalt re-become myself—and others thyself—and me.’

He read the stanza three times very slowly, his emotion so intense that tears stood in his eyes. At that moment he touched the highest pinnacle of his life. It was his Mount of Transfiguration. As soon as he was sufficiently master of himself to speak, he said:

“Let me send your name and my own this very day to Adyar to join the Theosophical Society?”

This moment of semi-lunacy was his “Mount of Transfiguration,” whatever that idiotic phrase may mean. What a tragic, depressing picture! Edgar Saltus reading the purest drivel ever written, and his biographer saying that at this moment he touched the highest pinnacle of his life! What a bewildering mechanism the human mind is! To me, he was at the lowest—to another he was at the very highest! And probably both of us are entirely wrong! I come back to Darwin’s sentence about the human mind, and I reflect how sensible it sounds.
HE KNEW WHAT WAS THE MATTER

Once had an editorial assistant who did good work, but who would go on unholy drinking sprees. He would give a week to drinking; then, a week to sobering up, and then he would be good for another month, during which he was the best and most useful chap I ever knew. But once he didn’t stop at the end of a week—he went on week after week, and, alas, month after month. I am not sure how long that bat lasted, but it seems to me he went at it for four or five months. When I finally got a look at him, my heart sank. He was thin—the skinniest fellow I ever set eyes on. His eyes were far back in their sockets. His manner was disheartening. His digestion was shot to pieces. Now, it isn’t my job to preach to people (we have too much preaching in this world) but that meant nothing, for I started off like a Baptist evangelist.

For half an hour I held forth. I argued. I begged. I made emotional and intellectual pleas. I drew on science, history, philosophy, poetry, biography and morality. I made a great case. My plea should have been taken down in shorthand. I couldn’t repeat it, for I was inspired when I got into action, and when it was all over I could not re-vitalize my spent emotions. I warned him against the jim-jams. I told him he would end up in the booby-hatch. I said the hoosegow might get him. I pointed out his complexion, his eyes, his blue lips, his trembling hands, his fleshless bones. I advised him to take the cure; in my enthusiasm I offered to lend him the money. When I was through I felt there was nothing more any person could say. Whatever was to be said, whatever could be said, I had said. When I finished, he looked up at me, a thin smile on his lips, and said:

“You don’t understand what the matter is—”
“I don’t? I’m telling you you’re dying on your feet—”
“No, you’re on the wrong track. You don’t seem to get it.”
“I don’t? Then tell me what the matter is.”
“I’ll tell you in a word. The whole trouble with me is I’ve been drinking too much!”

A PARTICULARLY OFFENSIVE SPECIES OF PEST

I get many readable, interesting letters from readers. They help make my job worth the bother. But let me say that it isn’t all pleasant, easy sailing.

I seem to attract every nut in the country who has some particular set of crank notions he seeks to exploit. If they have some elaborate scheme for saving the world, rest assured they will shoot it to me.

It is simply staggering how many men there are in this country (the women seem to be immune) who get up printed leaflets with headlines something like this: *Plan for Solution of the World’s Ills*. That usually is enough for me. It is a waste of time to even read the junk. These fellows who think they can solve all the world’s ills by passing some kind
of a pet law, or organizing a fancy society, or establishing some change in the form of bank credits—these fellows, I say, are hopeless bores.

I believe it was Mr. Bok and his peace plan that turned loose this vast army of sociological nuts. They got started on his peace plan and now they are going right down the line solving every ill that society suffers.

Usually, the plans take up one side of an 8½x11 leaflet, printed at the author's expense as a matter of public service, and offered to the world as the cure for all its troubles.

Another kind of bore that is particularly offensive to me is the nut who writes religious leaflets that are loaded with scores of Biblical references. They are crammed with: See Timothy 4-11-44; See Hootchy-Cootchie 44-11-4; See Rev. I4ch; 33-44:28 down to 86-64:89 $2.98 C.O.D. It's terrible, and there seems to be no remedy. I get their leaflets and throw them into my wastebasket unread. They never show a grain of good sense.

ANOTHER KIND OF BORE

HERE is one kind of out-of-town subscriber who gets my nanny.

Every now and then I am visited by some reader who has been following my stuff for years and drops in to see what sort of an animal I look like. I always like to meet my readers—except this particular type.

He comes in quietly, gives me a low-voiced howdy-do and sits down without another word. There is a long silence and then I realize that it is up to me to do all the talking.

If I ask him anything, he answers with a grunt; he just looks at me as much as to say: "You do all the talkin'; I'm here to see the show."

I usually handle such fellows the same way:

Where are you from?
Did you come by train or auto?
If by auto, are the roads good?
If by train, were there any accidents?
Was the train on time?
How's the crop out your way?
Have you had as much rain this year as two summers ago?
Do you think a Poland-China hog is better than a Duroc-Jersey?
And if so, will you give all facts, dates and references, in writing?
Do you think it is a good idea for a man to wear his B. V. D.'s all winter?
What do the wheat growers and alfalfa haulers think of Madame LaRue's facial cream?
Do you think it is right for a woman to wear a two-piece bathing suit, when a one-piece suit costs less and is easier to put on?

I keep these questions up for ten or fifteen minutes, usually getting a nod or a shake for answers. When I play out of questions and know how many children he has, when Susie last had the croup, and how Johnny skipped the third grade, because he was so darned smart, I usually pop out with: "How would you like to see the plant?" There is a
in the main I agree with her likes and dislikes. At this writing
she is desperately excited over Jack London’s The Call of the
Wild and White Fang, two remarkable stories. She drops in
on me, all aflutter, every time White Fang learns something new. As a
puppy, White Fang did many amusing and impressive things, and Alice
followed them breathlessly. She tells me she doesn’t care at all for Alice
in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and I agree with her
wholeheartedly, for these two “classics” have been grossly overvalued.
I found them boresome, and second Alice in her curt rejection of them.
She also cares not at all for Treasure Island, and I am with her in this
prejudice. Stevenson’s romance, to me, is a tiresome book, and Alice
supports me in my position. Neither of us cares the least bit for Sand-
burg’s children’s stories. In fact, Alice and I agree pretty generally, with
the single exception of Black Beauty. I consider that book trashy, but
Alice read it through three times, and wept copiously whenever Black
Beauty was in distress. But then, Alice is crazy about horses, so that
must explain her love for this story about a horse.

KANSAS FLIES

HERE is one subject Kansas boosters never discuss—the pecu-
liar sturdiness and hardiness of Kansas flies. This may sound
incredible, I know, but be assured I am speaking the truth, the
literal, accurate truth: I have to keep a fly-swatter within reach
right up to Christmas each year. Did you ever hear of such a thing?
A Kansas fly lives longer than the flies I’ve dealt with in any other
State. They are the most insistent pests known to me. They seem to
have everything their own way, for it is rare indeed to find a Kansan
using a fly-swatter. Kansans ignore flies, and I often wish I could get
into that state of mind, but I simply can’t. I have a horrible feeling of
unrest and discomfort when I know there are flies in my office or library.
Kansas flies endure drought, blizzard and hailstorm. They have
no fears over the vicissitudes of nature. They laugh at zero weather,
until about Christmas, when they die of old age.
I come into my office some cold, mournful December morning and
do not see a fly in sight. Ah, the season is over! The cold has killed
them off! You can see them around the window-sill, on the sunny side of the room, and they look totally and completely dead. If you pick one up, he feels lifeless. That’s all bunk. He is sunning himself, waiting to be thawed out. At about nine o’clock he is his old self again—vigorously ambitious, full of pep.

The Kansas flies are the go-getters of the species. However, the rate of fly mortality is very high around my office. But at what a price! Think of the time lost, the energy wasted, the wear and tear on the swatters, the loss of temper and good feeling, the depreciation of first-rate editorial ideas—ideas that sound good while I am on my way to my office, but which go glimmering when I begin a fly-swatting crusade.

I know it sounds crazy to be harping on this subject around the end of December, but I say, in all seriousness, that I have only just finished my yearly battle, with a few skirmishes still to be fought.

Incidentally, I want to say that there is only one way to “get” a Kansas fly. You can’t do it with fly-poison. You can’t poison a Kansas fly. This stuff you scatter around is all bunk. It will make human beings miserable, bring on fits of sneezing and make breathing almost impossible, but a Kansas fly goes lightly on his way, utterly indifferent to this childish stuff.

As for fly-paper—a real, dignified, self-reliant Kansas fly—and they usually are that way—will pay no attention to fly-paper. Fly-paper is left to bother cats and dogs.

There is only one weapon that works—and here I speak as an expert, qualified after long years of experience. That weapon is an old-fashioned swatter.

Long live the swatters! Yet, even at that, the flies live long—too long, in Kansas.

ONE OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

Some readers have the notion that the employees in the Little Blue Book plant are all candidates for Rhodes scholarships.

The idea prevails in some quarters that the girls read Aeschylus and Euripides during lunch hour, devour Shakespeare and Emerson on their way home, and spend their evenings and part of their nights absorbing the wisdom of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Alas, the facts do not permit such an impression to go out. The girls read Snappy Stories, True Love Story Magazine, and the various Confession magazines, with some movie periodicals thrown in for variety. Comic sections are all too popular.

Here is something that happened only the other day. A lassie whose job it is to fill out the copyright blanks that are forwarded to the Register of Copyrights, found herself stumped when she came upon “4,000 Most Essential English Words,” a little volume that has this sub-caption: “A Basic Literacy Test.” There are lines on the copyright application for the author’s name and land of birth. When she came to the author, she calmly wrote down his name as: Mr. A. Basic Literacy Test. And then she came in to find out whether or not Mr. A. Basic Literacy Test is an American citizen. When she was told that “A Basic Literacy Test”
is not a man's name but the book's sub-title, she shook her bobbed head and exclaimed: "How'm I to know without askin'?" What puzzles me is how she came to put a period after the "A." I suppose she felt something or other was missing and decided to "fix it up."

A CHRISTMAS CARD

HAVE been flooded with Christmas cards. You know the kind I mean. Like:

As scurrying snow and sighing winds
Announce the Christmas night,
May your home be a cheery place
In the flood of the yule log's light.

But here is one that is different. And it is from Charles W. Wood, who now calls himself "Executive Secretary of The Xmas Boosters." His card has a line of figures marching across the page, carrying printed banners, as follows:

We Want a Business Religion
Down with Radicalism
Down with Youth
All for Christ and Military Training
Bigger and Bloodier Christmases
Down with the Peace-Makers.

And then comes this little gem:

PROCLAMATION

Whereas, in the name of God, Amen,
We're doing our Christmas wheezes,
It behooves us now and behooves us more,
Perhaps, than it ever behooved us before,
Since the days way back before the war;
To get the right dope on Jesus.

He wasn't no meek and lowly guy,
And it's time we all knew better.
He was full of ginger and full of go—
For Old Bruce Barton has told us so:
And Old Bruce Barton, he ought to know:
A Regular He Go-Getter.

For God so loved the world, it seems,
And He knew so well what all's man—
He so understood our lack of pep,
And our hopeless state and our dwindling rep,
Unless some hustler would put us hep,
That He sent us his Supersalesman.

He sent us his Advertising Star
Who moved the load we were carryin'.
Never once whimpering, "What's the use?"
He jumped in the seat and he stepped on the juice;
As a matter of fact (according to Bruce)
Christ was our First Rotarian.
Which clears the way, you can easily see,
For a Christmas truly delectable.
For it only confirms what we always knew,
And have wanted to tell the damned Pacifist crew,
That Jesus, he wasn't no sawed-off Jew
But was really very respectable.

Glory to God in the Highest Key!
And on earth let's crow like roosters.
We can lick the world if it comes to the worst:
So we'll whoop it up till our whoopers burst—
For God and Country—America First!

That's a funny piece of writing, even though it is not written from
the freethinker's viewpoint. Wood, unfortunately, is something of a
Christian Socialist, but knowing him as I do I find it easy to forgive him.
Charles W. Wood was a delightful bum, when I knew him back in 1914.
A free-lance writer who could do a funny article now and then and make
some kind of a living at the work, he knew how to forget the responsi-
bilities of authorship and enjoy life.

I remember vividly how New York woke up one morning and found
itself in the clutches of a serious beer shortage. The saloons from Four-
teenth Street and Seventh Avenue down to Park Row were dry—and
prohibition had not yet been clapped down on us. It was a terrible mor-
ing, and no one seemed to know the cause—no one, except little me and
Charlie. We had started bright and early the morning before, and we
had visited something like eighty-two saloons, where he drank up all the
beer in sight. We kept at this job from about 8 a.m. until long after
midnight. Our decision to quit came only after we realized that our
territory had been mopped dry, and we were not able to wander uptown
on account of the unsteady condition of our legs. So we called it a day.
They still talk about that drought south of Fourteenth Street. Poor
people! It was a dirty trick.

I remember how amused Charlie Wood was over something I said.
We got to talking about prostitutes, as men will after they have been
together over five minutes, and he asked me what I thought about them.
I gave my own personal opinion in this way: "I do not like them because
one can never find them off duty." He repeated that all over New
York, and I believe they are still talking about it, though I believe my
remark has much more philosophy in it than humor.

I also remember how we had to make a decision. We were expected
to try to walk uptown, and the question arose: Should we walk up Sixth
Avenue, where the elevated roars, or up Fifth Avenue, where the nice
buses run. Wood decided it this way: "Let's walk up Fifth Avenue. If
we walk up Sixth we'll save only a nickel, but if we walk up Fifth Ave-
uue we'll save a dime." That wasn't so bad. I remember I even laughed
at the time, which showed I got the joke even in the condition I was in.
New Yorkers see the joke of course but you outsiders should be in-
formed that a ride on the elevated costs only a nickel, while a ride on a
bus costs a dime. Now you can laugh.
IRISH STEW

HERE'S a peculiar thing that has been bothering me. I have been trying to "place" Irish Stew in the great family of foods, and I persist in classifying Irish Stew as a second cousin to Hash. It happens that I loathe, hate and despise Hash, as my readers know. I am always ready to go out of my way to heap insult and contempt on Hash. But Irish Stew—oh, there we are in sacred realms. Gentlemen, I simply worship, adore, admire and love Irish Stew. The very thought of Irish Stew makes my mouth water. I can taste the soft, delicious meat, the cooked potatoes and the other vegetables—yes, let me confess it, I can even smack my lips over the bread dipped in the stew-juice.

And it happens that I am the only person on the Haldeman-Julius Farm who loves, worships and admires Irish Stew. Marcell, Alice, Henry, Josephine, Cora, Harold, Mr. Miller—all look contemptuously on Irish Stew. I have to beg, whine and wheedle, before I can get a plate of good Irish Stew—and, let me say here, in all sincerity, that Cora can make the best Irish Stew I ever tasted.

When I finally get my Irish Stew requisition O. K.'d, and the dish is scheduled for formal production, a shudder seems to pass over our household. The result is, I have my Irish Stew brought up to my library—brought up on a tray, so that the rest of the family may eat what it pleases down below.

I claim that Irish Stew is one of the most creative culinary masterpieces in the long list of good things to eat. But I do not recall odes written to Irish Stew, nor lyrics, nor sonnets. No symphonies have been composed to Irish Stew. No great paintings. No monuments have been erected to the great and noble inventor of the Irish Stew. And, coming to think of it, I recall none of my friends who ever went into raptures over a steaming plate of Irish Stew. Can it be that I stand alone in my admiration for Irish Stew? I knocked Hash a few weeks ago, and thought that target would have no defenders, only to learn that Hash stands high in the public's regard. But Irish Stew stands high with me. Once a week, oh, friends—once a week, I pray you, bring me Irish Stew!

I INVEST IN A NEW CORONA

I have just given myself a new model Corona and am now writing my first piece on it. It feels good—much better than the old one—and I expect to get a great deal of satisfaction out of it. The old one did hard, steady service for about seven or eight years, and last night it seemed to go to pieces all at once. Parts broke and got jammed, and I found two or three pretty good editorial ideas slipping away from me for lack of a machine. I puttered around trying to fix the poor old invalid, but I gave it up as a hopeless job and went to bed.

This morning I brought it down to the office and told Peter to call up the Corona man at Pittsburg and make a trade for me. It was amus-
ing to see and hear Peter go about it. He was determined to get me a good trade, and | could now state that he certainly did. He would make
an excellent horse-trader. He got me a fifteen-dollar allowance on that
old piece of machinery, which was about five dollars more than I ex-
pected. He tried real hard to get me $30, but went down to defeat. The
typewriter man assured him that after he gets it fixed up and in good
running order he will be glad to accept $7.50 for it. But this is like trad-
ing an old car—one can worry himself to death trying to guess what the
dealer is going to get for the old thing. And I refuse to worry. The
American Magazine in its issue of July, 1923, said it is fatal to one's
success to worry. So I shall not worry.

This new machine is writing like a charm. I am getting to like it
better at each line. The touch is light—almost as light as an L. C. Smith.
The improvements are numerous, and all of them good. I am particu-
larly pleased with the ribbon, which reverses automatically, a vast im-
provement on the old way of unscrewing one side and tightening the
other. The whole little contraption is useful and I welcome it to my
library desk, where I hope to use it often, wearing it out in the work of
pounding sense into the morons and trying to debunk this bunk-laden,
superstitious world. If you notice any kind of an improvement in my
journalistic efforts, credit is to my new Corona.

"ASK YOUR BANKER"

In buying this new little Corona I found it necessary to write
a mean, little check for $45 (you remember, I hope, that I had
a $15 allowance for the old one), and this set me thinking about
banks and bankers. Then I remembered an editorial I had read
in Collier's a few weeks ago, entitled "Ask Your Banker," which
impressed me as a fine piece of bunk. The editorial told about the dear
American public losing something like a billion and a half each year
through the purchase of worthless and fraudulent stocks, which is not
far from $13 each for every man, woman and child in the nation. Then
came this pearl of wisdom, this clear-cut solution: "Much of this could
have been saved had we consulted our bankers. We, as a nation, use our
banks. Why not also use our bankers?"

I do not pose as a financial wizard. I have never taken on the
thankless job of telling people what to do with their money. I have
enough trouble taking care of my own funds without bothering other
people about their affairs. I am just a hard-working publisher, who
minds his own business and tries to make a living without taking prop-
erty that does not belong to him. But I have kept my eyes and ears open
a little, and I believe I know a little about banks and bankers. It is my
observation that a banker is the last person in the world to ask about
investments. Every bad enterprise that is selling off worthless securities
has a crew of bankers behind it, either trying to make a big haul or trying
to "get out from under."

I have seen many a shady enterprise endorsed by bankers who held
notes that were not of much account but which might be met if the almost
defaulting concern were given help in disposing of its practically worthless securities.

Here is an individual who was a poor business man. I know him well. I shall not identify him, for that would not help my argument. He was a mess as a business, and the banker held about $20,000 of his paper, on which he had small hopes of collecting. This banker had that individual incorporate, had him sell the stock (with the banker's full endorsement), the notes were met out of the first money taken in—and the public was left to hold the sack. Had anyone dropped in on that banker for financial advice, would he not have advised the purchase of stock in that doomed company he was sponsoring?

Bankers like to tell you to buy "conservative" investments—don't try to get more than six percent for your money, and all that sort of thing. I know a good many bankers, and if they make less than twelve or fifteen percent on their money they begin to talk about the decay of religion and the menace of bolshevism.

Bankers like to see you buy the investments that bring small returns, so they may get their share of the transaction. The average bank dividend in this country, whether State or National banks, is about twelve percent. There is nothing "conservative" about that. Bankers sell great quantities of securities, they underwrite practically all of the great bond issues, whether for American industries, or foreign governments. Are they satisfied with a mere six percent? Yes, if it is intended for you. They, on their end of the bargain, take in much more.

There is no such thing as an absolutely safe bond. Any kind of a bond issue may default. The fact that you are earning six percent on your bonds does not mean that those securities are the least bit safer than an industrial or foreign issue that pays eight, nine and even ten percent. But, by arguing "safety," you are propagandized into believing you should get only six percent, which leaves a handsome margin for the bankers and distributors of securities.

This does not mean our bankers are dishonest. They are entirely within the law. They merely get you into a state of mind that will make you want to give them a share of your profits.

So much for knocking. You ask for constructive suggestions. I can almost hear that deathless bromide: "Anybody can tear down; but can you build up? We all like constructive criticism!" I've heard that a million times and notice that it is always said with a grand air of discovery, with an impressiveness that leaves one speechless. So, I shall try to be constructive! My suggestion is, if you have only a tiny sum put aside, not to invest it at all, but keep it available. If you have a modest sum, buy Liberty Bonds. If you have plenty of money to invest, then study the financial page of a good newspaper and buy only such securities as are listed on the New York Stock Exchange and the Curb. When you buy listed securities you are buying marketability, which is an important factor. Also, you can get the entire financial record of every listed issue. You can then use your head. This information is available to the public. Your banker will, most likely, try to steer you away from listed securities and try to talk you into buying something that has only local significance and which may never have ready marketability.
Thoughts on a New Key-Ring

Business concern has just sent me a little gift—a new device for keys. It is a leather affair, which closes somewhat like a small-sized wallet. Inside, one finds a row of six metal "hooks" which will take care of as many keys. It is a nice-looking thing, and, I believe, something of an improvement on the old-fashioned metal key-ring I have been using for over a dozen years. In just what manner it is better I do not know, for I have not given it much thought, though I do confess I feel vaguely that it is a step forward in the science of holding keys. I imagine the improvement lies in the fact that the keys are enfolded in a leather covering, thereby keeping the points of the keys from cutting holes in one's pocket, though I might add that I do not recall having suffered such a calamity. Again, the keys are kept in something that resembles order, enabling one to get to the right key with a minimum of effort. Or, maybe it is just a new toy, thought out by a clever inventor. I notice that the contraption has this stamped on it: "Pat. Pending." However, it didn't cost me anything, and, besides, my name is stamped on it—in gold, though I notice the donor failed to insert the hyphen and slipped in an extra "n" for good measure. But we shall let that pass. A gift is a gift, and one should not be too critical, especially when it gives one a subject for a piece of copy.

Now that I have finished my dissertations on the key-holder, let me begin ruminating over the keys. I am reminded by something in the back of my mind (my subconscious?) that for many years I have been wanting to take inventory of the keys on my old key-ring. I recall having suggested a survey of the keys—many suggestions, in truth—without results, for some little quirk in the back of my head did not go click, so the keys remained on the ring, even though I knew that some were never used.

As I have already said, this new key-holder has hooks for only six keys. This meant a decision at once. The old ring had many more than six keys, so I began taking off the essential ones first.

The first was the key to the company's mail box. That is about the most important key I have. It is my key to the entire world. When I use that key I open a box that contains hundreds, and even thousands, of letters from the entire world. This key shows signs of wear; its lettering is beginning to disappear. It is a precious key—it means life, friendship, orders, money, manuscripts, information, criticism, abuse, commendation, warnings, threats, magazines, newspapers, books, clippings, subscriptions for my publications and a thousand and one other intimate contacts with the great, wide world. This little key makes Girard as big as the universe. It brings the world to me. Without this
key, life in Girard would be impossible. Without this key, life would be aimless, senseless, pointless, uninteresting, unstimulating, joyless, impersonal. When this key opens a half-empty box, it means distress at the plant—the threat of bad business. When the box is full, overflowing, it means new life and enthusiasm. It means new orders for thousands and thousands of Little Blue Books. It means more circulation for the Monthly. It means comment on the parade of life. It means life, laughter, activity, conflict, humor, tragedy. Yes, that key is important. It is given the first book, so that I can get it without fumbling, as I have had to do these many years when I had it on the old ring. Perhaps that is one of the improvements the inventor had in mind when he announced "Pat. Pending."

My next key is the one for my personal mail box. I ask myself: Why do I carry this key? I get all my mail through the company’s box. There really is no such thing as a "personal letter" to me, now that I get so many thousands of letters. The most personal letter in the world would have to go through the front office, where it would be opened by the girls, read by two or three persons and then turned over to my secretary, who will read it again before passing it on to me, if he does decide to let me see it. And yet, I have this "personal" box; I have been carrying its key for years; I have been paying a regular rental for it. I make a quick and sensible decision. I shall take this key back and get for it my 20-cent deposit. I shall abandon that personal box which I never use. I wonder if the inventor had that economy in mind? No, I am sure he never thought of it. That is my own invention—one for which I cannot take out a patent.

The third key is the one to the front door at the house. But I have still another key for the side door, and it is the side door I usually use. Why have two keys? Why not simplify my key-life? Yes, there is another sensible decision. I shall dispose of that front-door key—since I never use it—and hang it up on a nail in my desk—and forget about it.

Then comes the next key. It is important, and goes into my new key-holder without a moment’s hesitation. It is the master-key to the plant. It lets me in after working hours, when I want to go through the darkened plant. I like to wander through the plant when no one is working. It gives me a better idea of the jobs that are being done. I can visualize tomorrow’s work better. I even think up some schemes while I wander to and fro. Besides, this important key lets me in on Sunday. Yes, it is a useful and necessary key—it goes on.

The next key opens the warehouse across the street. I never have occasion to use it. When I want to see what is called Warehouse No. 2, I usually go during working hours, when it is wide open. I have been carrying this key for years—and never using it. I shall hang it up on the nail in my desk—and forget about it.

But there are other keys left on the old ring. I try to figure out what they are for, but I cannot. Here is one that has "Stude" stamped on it. By Satan, that is a key that belonged to a car I had six or seven years ago. I’ve been carrying it all these years. Here is another one that was used for a car I traded in three or four years ago. I bite my lips. This is too absurd. Here is a key that fits a trunk. I do not travel with trunks any longer. I used to do that years ago. Now I just carry
a suitcase or two. That key will be carried up into the garret and be put into the trunk lock, where it belongs. I have been carrying it ten years!

And here are three other keys that defy me. I cannot place them after the most intense efforts at arousing my memory. They look very impressive—Yale keys—but I know not what they were for. I smile. They may have been the key to furnished rooms when I was living in New York fifteen years ago! What doors could they open? What doors did they open? I ask myself these questions—I wait—but there is no answer. They are mysterious, homeless keys to vague, unknown doors—doors that I shut forever.

I look over my new key-holder again, for I want to make sure I am putting in only the keys I shall want. I check them over again—and yet again—and am finally satisfied. Yes, they open real doors—necessary doors. I put the holder in my pocket. It feels like a small wallet. It seems to be a pound lighter in weight. I have a sigh. I look at my orphaned keys—my friendless wait—keys that know not their locks—and I throw them away. Then my thoughts go to the business concern that sent me this little gift. I am grateful—deeply thankful. I cannot get out of my mind the fact that I, usually careful about unnecessary baggage, have been carrying useless keys for three, six, eight, ten and even fifteen years. How we hate to discard the useless and the wornout and the obsolescent! How we like to hold on to our keys that know no locks! How we hate to let go of the meaningless! How we love to clutter up our lives, as we weigh down our key-rings! But I have fought my little battle—years too late, I confess—and I have won!

YOUNG VANDERBILT IS SHOCKED

GEORG BRANDES' The Jesus Myth has created quite a little discussion. The book does not need me as a defender, for Brandes has drawn on his brilliant and deep scholarship to make this work practically immune to attack. However, attacks have appeared, as numerous clippings show. Here is one from the Los Angeles Illustrated Daily News, a tabloid paper for morons. The editor and publisher of this lowbrow paper, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., writes a signed editorial in which he bemoans the Danish critic's essays. I do not intend to get into a discussion with this crude and almost illiterate youngster who is playing at publishing. But I do not want to pass up without notice two words that Vanderbilt uses. They are: "Poor Brandes!" Imagine the spectacle! This intellectual child in arms standing before the towering figure of the great Brandes and 'sighing: Poor Brandes! Poor Vanderbilt!

ANOTHER GO-GETTER IN ACTION

FEW days ago I was visited by a typical Babbitt, who represented the advertising department of a large, 15-cent magazine. It is not my intention to relate what happened, except to mention that the question came up whether or not I had read a certain article in the last issue of his magazine. As I had not had the pleasure, he promptly, with an air of pompousness, promised to mail it
to me. I demurred, saying that I would pick up a copy the next time I visited the magazine stand at the corner drug store. But he would have none of this. No; I must accept his copy, with his compliments! The idea! Wanting to buy it at the stands! No, he would see to it that a copy went out as soon as he got back to his office in Chicago. I didn't want to get into a long argument about so trivial a matter, so I let it slide. Sure enough, he kept his word. This morning the copy arrived by mail, but the boob had mailed it in a sealed envelope, making it first class. And as he had put only a ten-cent stamp on it, I had to pay a Postage Due charge of 34 cents! If he had let me alone, I could have bought a copy for 15 cents! And back in Chicago is a pompous ass who blows hot-air about Service and Co-operation and Personal Attention and the other fine slogans of the Babbitts, little knowing that at this end his victim is nursing his bruises, however slight they may be. Why didn't that fellow let me alone? And since he insisted on mailing it to me why didn't he know that a magazine cannot be mailed third class when it is sealed? But what is the use?

THE COMPLEAT ANGLER

Well, it was a hard, stubborn fight, but the battle is over and I have come forth the victor, though I admit I am somewhat winded. At times my cause looked hopeless. There were moments when stark failure faced my efforts. But I battled on—and won.

It all began with my decision to publish that famous classic—The Compleat Angler, Izaak Walton's masterpiece. I scheduled the volume, and thought I could go about my other duties without further bother, but here I was wrong, as I soon learned to my sorrow.

After I put through a book for publication my own duties are practically at an end, for an elaborate, and efficient, system has been worked out for handling the numerous processes. The copy is edited, the type is set, the proof is read, the matter is paged, the editorial department reads the proof several times after the composing room thinks it is through with it, the plates are made, the book is scheduled for publication, the presswork is arranged, the covers are handled in another department, the sheets are folded, stitched, trimmed and the finished books are put into stock. Meanwhile, the book is advertised. I could go on like this for about a page and still cover not over half the processes.

It is complicated, and when anything slips there are numerous headaches. Big Blue Book No. B-11 was not destined for easy sailing.

The trouble began in the composing room. No, the thing was all wrong—who ever heard of the word complete being spelled compleat? So, the "error" was "caught." Wherever the word appeared, it was changed. Then the folios were set—118 of them, which makes quite a job, and here again the "error" was "caught." Then the proofreader changed it and had the whole business reset, much to the disgust of the typesetters. Then the editorial department got the composing room's O. K. proofs, and decided a serious error had been made in spelling complete. The proof was marked back to complete, but the typesetters