Mince Pie eBook

Mince Pie by Christopher Morley

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Page 1

ON FILLING AN INK-WELL

Those who buy their ink in little stone jugs may prefer to do so because the pottle reminds them of cruiskeen lawn or ginger beer (with its wire-bound cork), but they miss a noble delight. Ink should be bought in the tall, blue glass, quart bottle (with the ingenious non-drip spout), and once every three weeks or so, when you fill your ink-well, it is your privilege to elevate the flask against the brightness of a window, and meditate (with a breath of sadness) on the joys and problems that sacred fluid holds in solution.

How blue it shines toward the light! Blue as lupin or larkspur, or cornflower—aye, and even so blue art thou, my scriven, to think how far the written page falls short of the bright ecstasy of thy dream! In the bottle, what magnificence of unpenned stuff lies cool and liquid: what fluency of essay, what fonts of song. As the bottle glints, blue as a squill or a hyacinth, blue as the meadows of Elysium or the eyes of girls loved by young poets, meseems the racing pen might almost gain upon the thoughts that are turning the bend in the road. A jolly throng, those thoughts: I can see them talking and laughing together. But when pen reaches the road's turning, the thoughts are gone far ahead: their delicate figures are silhouettes against the sky.

It is a sacramental matter, this filling the ink-well. Is there a writer, however humble, who has not poured into his writing pot, with the ink, some wistful hopes or prayers for what may emerge from that dark source? Is there not some particular reverence due the ink-well, some form of propitiation to humbug the powers of evil and constraint that devil the journalist? Satan hovers near the ink-pot. Luther solved the matter by throwing the well itself at the apparition. That savors to me too much of homeopathy. If Satan ever puts his face over my desk, I shall hurl a volume of Harold Bell Wright at him.

But what becomes of the ink-pots of glory? The conduit from which Boswell drew, for Charles Dilly in The Poultry, the great river of his Johnson? The well (was it of blue china?) whence flowed *Dream Children: a Revery*? (It was written on folio ledger sheets from the East India House—I saw the manuscript only yesterday in a room at Daylesford, Pennsylvania, where much of the richest ink of the last two centuries is lovingly laid away.) The pot of chuckling fluid where Harry Fielding dipped his pen to tell the history of a certain foundling; the ink-wells of the Cafe de la Source on the Boul' Mich'—do they by any chance remember which it was that R.L.S. used? One of the happiest tremors of my life was when I went to that cafe and called for a bock and writing material, just because R.L.S. had once written letters there. And the ink-well Poe used at that boarding-house in Greenwich Street, New York (April, 1844), when he wrote to his dear Muddy (his mother-in-law) to describe how he and Virginia had reached a haven of square meals. That hopeful letter, so perfect now in pathos—

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For breakfast we had excellent-flavored coffee, hot and strong—not very clear and no great deal of cream—veal cutlets, elegant ham and eggs and nice bread and butter. I never sat down to a more plentiful or a nicer breakfast. I wish you could have seen the eggs—and the great dishes of meat. Sis [his wife] is delighted, and we are both in excellent spirits. She has coughed hardly any and had no night sweat. She is now busy mending my pants, which I tore against a nail. I went out last night and bought a skein of silk, a skein of thread, two buttons, a pair of slippers, and a tin pan for the stove. The fire kept in all night. We have now got four dollars and a half left. To-morrow I am going to try and borrow three dollars, so that I may have a fortnight to go upon. I feel in excellent spirits, and haven't drank a drop—so that I hope soon to get out of trouble.

[Illustration]

Yes, let us clear the typewriter off the table: an ink-well is a sacred thing.

Do you ever stop to think, when you see the grimy spattered desks of a public post-office, how many eager or puzzled human hearts have tried, in those dingy little ink-cups, to set themselves right with fortune? What blissful meetings have been appointed, what scribblings of pain and sorrow, out of those founts of common speech. And the ink-wells on hotel counters—does not the public dipping place of the Bellevue Hotel, Boston, win a new dignity in my memory when I know (as I learned lately) that Rupert Brooke registered there in the spring of 1914? I remember, too, a certain pleasant vibration when, signing my name one day in the Bellevue's book, I found Miss Agnes Repplier's autograph a little above on the same page.

Among our younger friends, Vachel Lindsay comes to mind as one who has done honor to the ink-well. His *Apology for the Bottle Volcanic* is in his best flow of secret smiling (save an unfortunate dilution of Riley):

> Sometimes I dip my pen and find the bottle full of fire,
> The salamanders flying forth I cannot but admire....
> O sad deceiving ink, as bad as liquor in its way—
> All demons of a bottle size have pranced from you to-day,
> And seized my pen for hobby-horse as witches ride a broom,
> And left a trail of brimstone words and blots and gobs of gloom.
> And yet when I am extra good ... [*here I omit the transfusion of Riley*]
> My bottle spreads a rainbow mist, and from the vapor fine
> Ten thousand troops from fairyland come riding in a line.

I suppose it is the mark of a trifling mind, yet I like to hear of the little particulars that surrounded those whose pens struck sparks. It is Boswell that leads us into that habit of thought. I like to know what the author wore, how he sat, what the furniture of his

desk and chamber, who cooked his meals for him, and with what appetite he approached them. “The mind soars by an effort to the grand and lofty” (so dipped Hazlitt in some favored ink-bottle)—“it is at home in the groveling, the disagreeable, and the little.”

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I like to think, as I look along book shelves, that every one of these favorites was born out of an ink-well. I imagine the hopes and visions that thronged the author's mind as he filled his pot and sliced the quill. What various fruits have flowed from those ink-wells of the past: for some, comfort and honor, quiet homes and plenteousness; for others, bitterness and disappointment. I have seen a copy of Poe's poems, published in 1845 by Putnam, inscribed by the author. The volume had been bought for $2,500. Think what that would have meant to Poe himself.

Some such thoughts as these twinkled in my head as I held up the Pierian bottle against the light, admired the deep blue of it, and filled my ink-well. And then I took up my pen, which wrote:

A GRACE BEFORE WRITING

On Filling an Ink-well

This is a sacrament, I think!
Holding the bottle toward the light,
As blue as lupin gleams the ink:
May Truth be with me as I write!

That small dark cistern may afford
Reunion with some vanished friend,—
And with this ink I have just poured
May none but honest words be penned!

OLD THOUGHTS FOR CHRISTMAS

[Illustration]

A new thought for Christmas? Who ever wanted a new thought for Christmas? That man should be shot who would try to brain one. It is an impertinence even to write about Christmas. Christmas is a matter that humanity has taken so deeply to heart that we will not have our festival meddled with by bungling hands. No efficiency expert would dare tell us that Christmas is inefficient; that the clockwork toys will soon be broken; that no one can eat a peppermint cane a yard long; that the curves on our chart of kindness should be ironed out so that the "peak load" of December would be evenly distributed through the year. No sourface dare tell us that we drive postmen and shopgirls into Bolshevism by overtaxing them with our frenzied purchasing or that it is absurd to send to a friend in a steam-heated apartment in a prohibition republic a bright little picture card of a gentleman in Georgian costume drinking ale by a roaring fire of logs. None in his senses, I say, would emit such sophistries, for Christmas is a law unto

itself and is not conducted by card-index. Even the postmen and shopgirls, severe though their labors, would not have matters altered. There is none of us who does not enjoy hardship and bustle that contribute to the happiness of others.

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There is an efficiency of the heart that transcends and contradicts that of the head. Things of the spirit differ from things material in that the more you give the more you have. The comedian has an immensely better time than the audience. To modernize the adage, to give is more fun than to receive. Especially if you have wit enough to give to those who don't expect it. Surprise is the most primitive joy of humanity. Surprise is the first reason for a baby's laughter. And at Christmas time, when we are all a little childish I hope, surprise is the flavor of our keenest joys. We all remember the thrill with which we once heard, behind some closed door, the rustle and crackle of paper parcels being tied up. We knew that we were going to be surprised—a delicious refinement and luxuriant seasoning of the emotion!

Christmas, then, conforms to this deeper efficiency of the heart. We are not methodical in kindness; we do not "fill orders" for consignments of affection. We let our kindness ramble and explore; old forgotten friendships pop up in our minds and we mail a card to Harry Hunt, of Minneapolis (from whom we have not heard for half a dozen years), "just to surprise him." A business man who shipped a carload of goods to a customer, just to surprise him, would soon perish of abuse. But no one ever refuses a shipment of kindness, because no one ever feels overstocked with it. It is coin of the realm, current everywhere. And we do not try to measure our kindnesses to the capacity of our friends. Friendship is not measurable in calories. How many times this year have you "turned" your stock of kindness?

It is the gradual approach to the Great Surprise that lends full savor to the experience. It has been thought by some that Christmas would gain in excitement if no one knew when it was to be; if (keeping the festival within the winter months) some public functionary (say, Mr. Burleson) were to announce some unexpected morning, "A week from to-day will be Christmas!" Then what a scurrying and joyful frenzy—what a festooning of shops and mad purchasing of presents! But it would not be half the fun of the slow approach of the familiar date. All through November and December we watch it drawing nearer; we see the shop windows begin to glow with red and green and lively colors; we note the altered demeanor of bellboys and janitors as the Date flows quietly toward us; we pass through the haggard perplexity of "Only Four Days More" when we suddenly realize it is too late to make our shopping the display of lucid affectionate reasoning we had contemplated, and clutch wildly at grotesque tokens—and then (sweetest of all) comes the quiet calmness of Christmas Eve. Then, while we decorate the tree or carry parcels of tissue paper and red ribbon to a carefully prepared list of aunts and godmothers, or reckon up a little pile of bright quarters on the dining-room table in preparation for to-morrow's largesse—then it is

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that the brief, poignant and precious sweetness of the experience claims us at the full. Then we can see that all our careful wisdom and shrewdness were folly and stupidity; and we can understand the meaning of that Great Surprise—that where we planned wealth we found ourselves poor; that where we thought to be impoverished we were enriched. The world is built upon a lovely plan if we take time to study the blue-prints of the heart.

Humanity must be forgiven much for having invented Christmas. What does it matter that a great poet and philosopher urges “the abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusions to the First or Fundamental Energy”? Theology is not saddled upon pronouns; the best doctrine is but three words, God is Love. Love, or kindness, is fundamental energy enough to satisfy any brooder. And Christmas Day means the birth of a child; that is to say, the triumph of life and hope over suffering.

Just for a few hours on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day the stupid, harsh mechanism of the world runs down and we permit ourselves to live according to untrammeled common sense, the unconquerable efficiency of good will. We grant ourselves the complete and selfish pleasure of loving others better than ourselves. How odd it seems, how unnaturally happy we are! We feel there must be some mistake, and rather yearn for the familiar frictions and distresses. Just for a few hours we “purge out of every heart the lurking grudge.” We know then that hatred is a form of illness; that suspicion and pride are only fear; that the rascally acts of others are perhaps, in the queer webwork of human relations, due to some calousness of our own. Who knows? Some man may have robbed a bank in Nashville or fired a gun in Louvain because we looked so intolerably smug in Philadelphia!

So at Christmas we tap that vast reservoir of wisdom and strength—call it efficiency or the fundamental energy if you will—Kindness. And our kindness, thank heaven, is not the placid kindness of angels; it is veined with human blood; it is full of absurdities, irritations, frustrations. A man 100 per cent. kind would be intolerable. As a wise teacher said, the milk of human kindness easily curdles into cheese. We like our friends’ affections because we know the tincture of mortal acid is in them. We remember the satirist who remarked that to love one’s self is the beginning of a lifelong romance. We know this lifelong romance will resume its sway; we shall lose our tempers, be obstinate, peevish and crank. We shall fidget and fume while waiting our turn in the barber’s chair; we shall argue and muddle and mope. And yet, for a few hours, what a happy vision that was! And we turn, on Christmas Eve, to pages which those who speak our tongue immortally associate with the season—the pages of Charles Dickens. Love of humanity endures as long as the thing it loves, and those pages are packed as full of it as a pound cake is full of fruit. A pound cake will keep moist three years; a sponge cake is dry in three days.

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And now humanity has its most beautiful and most appropriate Christmas gift—Peace. The Magi of Versailles and Washington having unwound for us the tissue paper and red ribbon (or red tape) from this greatest of all gifts, let us in days to come measure up to what has been born through such anguish and horror. If war is illness and peace is health, let us remember also that health is not merely a blessing to be received intact once and for all. It is not a substance but a condition, to be maintained only by sound regime, self-discipline and simplicity. Let the Wise Men not be too wise; let them remember those other Wise Men who, after their long journey and their sage surmisings, found only a Child. On this evening it serves us nothing to pile up filing cases and rolltop desks toward the stars, for in our city square the Star itself has fallen, and shines upon the Tree.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

By a stroke of good luck we found a little shop where a large overstock of Christmas cards was selling at two for five. The original 5's and 10's were still penciled on them, and while we were debating whether to rub them off a thought occurred to us. When will artists and printers design us some Christmas cards that will be honest and appropriate to the time we live in? Never was the Day of Peace and Good Will so full of meaning as this year; and never did the little cards, charming as they were, seem so formal, so merely pretty, so devoid of imagination, so inadequate to the festival.

This is an age of strange and stirring beauty, of extraordinary romance and adventure, of new joys and pains. And yet our Christmas artists have nothing more to offer us than the old formalism of Yuletide convention. After a considerable amount of searching in the bazaars we have found not one Christmas card that showed even a glimmering of the true romance, which is to see the beauty or wonder or peril that lies around us. Most of the cards hark back to the stage-coach up to its hubs in snow, or the blue bird, with which Maeterlinck penalized us (what has a blue bird got to do with Christmas?), or the open fireplace and jug of mulled claret. Now these things are merry enough in their way, or they were once upon a time; but we plead for an honest romanticism in Christmas cards that will express something of the entrancing color and circumstance that surround us to-day. Is not a commuter's train, stalled in a drift, far more lively to our hearts than the mythical stage-coach? Or an inter-urban trolley winging its way through the dusk like a casket of golden light? Or even a country flivver, loaded down with parcels and holly and the Yuletide keg of root beer? Root beer may be but meager flaggonage compared to mulled claret, but at any rate 'tis honest, 'tis actual, 'tis tangible and potable. And where, among all the Christmas cards, is the airplane, that most marvelous and heart-seizing of all our triumphs? Where is the stately apartment house, looming like Gibraltar against a sunset sky? Must we, even at Christmas time, fool ourselves with a picturesqueness that is gone, seeing nothing of what is around us?

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It is said that man's material achievements have outrun his imagination; that poets and painters are too puny to grapple with the world as it is. Certainly a visitor from another sphere, looking on our fantastic and exciting civilization, would find little reflection of it in the Christmas card. He would find us clinging desperately to what we have been taught to believe was picturesque and jolly, and afraid to assert that the things of to-day are comely too. Even on the basis of discomfort (an acknowledged criterion of picturesqueness) surely a trolley car jammed with parcel-laden passengers is just as satisfying a spectacle as any stage coach? Surely the steam radiator, if not so lovely as a flame-gilded hearth, is more real to most of us? And instead of the customary picture of shivering subjects of George III held up by a highwayman on Hampstead Heath, why not a deftly delineated sketch of victims in a steam-heated lobby submitting to the plunder of the hat-check bandit? Come, let us be honest! The romance of to-day is as good as any!

Many must have felt this same uneasiness in trying to find Christmas cards that would really say something of what is in their hearts. The sentiment behind the card is as lovely and as true as ever, but the cards themselves are outmoded bottles for the new wine. It seems a cruel thing to say, but we are impatient with the mottoes and pictures we see in the shops because they are a conventional echo of a beauty that is past. What could be more absurd than to send to a friend in a city apartment a rhyme such as this:

As round the Christmas fire you sit
  And hear the bells with frosty chime,
Think, friendship that long love has knit
  Grows sweeter still at Christmas time!

If that is sent to the janitor or the elevator boy we have no cavil, for these gentlemen do actually see a fire and hear bells ring; but the apartment tenant hears naught but the hissing of the steam in the radiator, and counts himself lucky to hear that. Why not be honest and say to him:

I hope the janitor has shipped
  You steam, to keep the cold away;
And if the hallboys have been tipped,
  Then joy be thine on Christmas Day!

We had not meant to introduce this jocular note into our meditation, for we are honestly aggrieved that so many of the Christmas cards hark back to an old tradition that is gone, and never attempt to express any of the romance of to-day. You may protest that Christmas is the oldest thing in the world, which is true; yet it is also new every year, and never newer than now.

ON UNANSWERING LETTERS

[Illustration]

There are a great many people who really believe in answering letters the day they are received, just as there are people who go to the movies at 9 o’clock in the morning; but these people are stunted and queer.

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It is a great mistake. Such crass and breathless promptness takes away a great deal of the pleasure of correspondence.

The psychological didoes involved in receiving letters and making up one's mind to answer them are very complex. If the tangled process could be clearly analyzed and its component involutions isolated for inspection we might reach a clearer comprehension of that curious bag of tricks, the efficient Masculine Mind.

Take Bill F., for instance, a man so delightful that even to contemplate his existence puts us in good humor and makes us think well of a world that can exhibit an individual equally comely in mind, body and estate. Every now and then we get a letter from Bill, and immediately we pass into a kind of trance, in which our mind rapidly enunciates the ideas, thoughts, surmises and contradictions that we would like to write to him in reply. We think what fun it would be to sit right down and churn the ink-well, spreading speculation and cynicism over a number of sheets of foolscap to be wafted Billward.

Sternly we repress the impulse for we know that the shock to Bill of getting so immediate a retort would surely unhinge the well-fitted panels of his intellect.

We add his letter to the large delta of unanswered mail on our desk, taking occasion to turn the mass over once or twice and run through it in a brisk, smiling mood, thinking of all the jolly letters we shall write some day.

After Bill's letter has lain on the pile for a fortnight or so it has been gently silted over by about twenty other pleasantly postponed manuscripts. Coming upon it by chance, we reflect that any specific problems raised by Bill in that manifesto will by this time have settled themselves. And his random speculations upon household management and human destiny will probably have taken a new slant by now, so that to answer his letter in its own tune will not be congruent with his present fevers. We had better bide a wee until we really have something of circumstance to impart.

We wait a week.

By this time a certain sense of shame has begun to invade the privacy of our brain. We feel that to answer that letter now would be an indelicacy. Better to pretend that we never got it. By and by Bill will write again and then we will answer promptly. We put the letter back in the middle of the heap and think what a fine chap Bill is. But he knows we love him, so it doesn't really matter whether we write or not.

Another week passes by, and no further communication from Bill. We wonder whether he does love us as much as we thought. Still—we are too proud to write and ask.

A few days later a new thought strikes us. Perhaps Bill thinks we have died and he is annoyed because he wasn't invited to the funeral. Ought we to wire him? No, because

after all we are not dead, and even if he thinks we are, his subsequent relief at hearing the good news of our survival will outweigh his bitterness during the interval. One of these days we will write him a letter that will really express our heart, filled with all the grindings and gear-work of our mind, rich in affection and fallacy. But we had better let it ripen and mellow for a while. Letters, like wines, accumulate bright fumes and bubblings if kept under cork.

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Presently we turn over that pile of letters again. We find in the lees of the heap two or three that have gone for six months and can safely be destroyed. Bill is still on our mind, but in a pleasant, dreamy kind of way. He does not ache or twinge us as he did a month ago. It is fine to have old friends like that and keep in touch with them. We wonder how he is and whether he has two children or three. Splendid old Bill!

By this time we have written Bill several letters in imagination and enjoyed doing so, but the matter of sending him an actual letter has begun to pall. The thought no longer has the savor and vivid sparkle it had once. When one feels like that it is unwise to write. Letters should be spontaneous outpourings: they should never be undertaken merely from a sense of duty. We know that Bill wouldn't want to get a letter that was dictated by a feeling of obligation.

Another fortnight or so elapsing, it occurs to us that we have entirely forgotten what Bill said to us in that letter. We take it out and con it over. Delightful fellow! It is full of his own felicitous kinks of whim, though some of it sounds a little old-fashioned by now. It seems a bit stale, has lost some of its freshness and surprise. Better not answer it just yet, for Christmas will soon be here and we shall have to write then anyway. We wonder, can Bill hold out until Christmas without a letter?

We have been rereading some of those imaginary letters to Bill that have been dancing in our head. They are full of all sorts of fine stuff. If Bill ever gets them he will know how we love him. To use O. Henry's immortal joke, we have days of Damon and Knights of Pythias writing those uninked letters to Bill. A curious thought has come to us. Perhaps it would be better if we never saw Bill again. It is very difficult to talk to a man when you like him so much. It is much easier to write in the sweet fantastic strain. We are so inarticulate when face to face. If Bill comes to town we will leave word that we have gone away. Good old Bill! He will always be a precious memory.

A few days later a sudden frenzy sweeps over us, and though we have many pressing matters on hand, we mobilize pen and paper and literary shock troops and prepare to hurl several battalions at Bill. But, strangely enough, our utterance seems stilted and stiff. We have nothing to say. *My dear Bill*, we begin, *it seems a long time since we heard from you. Why don't you write? We still love you, in spite of all your shortcomings*.

That doesn't seem very cordial. We muse over the pen and nothing comes. Bursting with affection, we are unable to say a word.

Just then the phone rings. "Hello?" we say.

It is Bill, come to town unexpectedly.

“Good old fish!” we cry, ecstatic. “Meet you at the corner of Tenth and Chestnut in five minutes.”

We tear up the unfinished letter. Bill will never know how much we love him. Perhaps it is just as well. It is very embarrassing to have your friends know how you feel about them. When we meet him we will be a little bit on our guard. It would not be well to be betrayed into any extravagance of cordiality.

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And perhaps a not altogether false little story could be written about a man who never visited those most dear to him, because it panged him so to say good-bye when he had to leave.

A LETTER TO FATHER TIME

(NEW YEAR'S EVE)

Dear Father Time—This is your night of triumph, and it seems only fair to pay you a little tribute. Some people, in a noble mood of bravado, consider New Year's Eve an occasion of festivity. Long, long in advance they reserve a table at their favorite cafe; and becomingly habited in boiled shirts or gowns of the lowest visibility, and well armed with a commodity which is said to be synonymous with yourself—money—they seek to outwit you by crowding a month of merriment into half a dozen hours. Yet their victory is brief and fallacious, for if hours spin too fast by night they will move grindingly on the axle the next morning. None of us can beat you in the end. Even the hat-check boy grows old, becomes gray and dies at last babbling of greenbacks.

To my own taste, old Time, it is more agreeable to make this evening a season of gruesome brooding. Morosely I survey the faults and follies of my last year. I am grown too canny to pour the new wine of good resolution into the old bottles of my imperfect humors. But I get a certain grim satisfaction in thinking how we all—every human being of us—share alike in bondage to your oppression. There is the only true and complete democracy, the only absolute brotherhood of man. The great ones of the earth—-Charley Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks, General Pershing and Miss Amy Lowell—all these are in service to the same tyranny. Day after day slips or jolts past, joins the Great Majority; suddenly we wake with a start to find that the best of it is gone by. Surely it seems but a day ago that Stevenson set out to write a little book that was to be called "Life at Twenty-five"—before he got it written he was long past the delectable age—and now we rub our eyes and see he has been dead longer than the span of life he then so delightfully contemplated. If there is one meditation common to every adult on this globe it is this, so variously phrased, "Well, bo, Time sure does hustle."

Some of them have scurvily entreated you, old Time! The thief of youth, they have called you; a highwayman, a gipsy, a grim reaper. It seems a little unfair. For you have your kindly moods, too. Without your gentle passage where were Memory, the sweetest of lesser pleasures? You are the only medicine for many a woe, many a sore heart. And surely you have a right to reap where you alone have sown? Our strength, our wit, our comeliness, all those virtues and graces that you pilfer with such gentle hand, did you not give them to us in the first place? Give, do I say? Nay, we knew, even as we clutched them, they were but a loan. And the great immortality of the race endures, for every day that we see taken away from ourselves we see added to our children or our

grandchildren. It was Shakespeare, who thought a great deal about you, who put it best:

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Nativity, once in the main of light,
  Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight
  And Time that gave doth now his gift confound—

It is to be hoped, my dear Time, that you have read Shakespeare's sonnets, because they will teach you a deal about the dignity of your career, and also suggest to you the only way we have of keeping up with you. There is no way of outwitting Time, Shakespeare tells his young friend, "Save breed to brave him when he takes thee hence." Or, as a poor bungling parodist revamped it:

Pep is the stuff to put Old Time on skids—
Pep in your copy, yes, and lots of kids.

It is true that Shakespeare hints another way of doing you in, which is to write sonnets as good as his. This way, needless to add, is open to few.

Well, my dear Time, you are not going to fool me into making myself ridiculous this New Year's Eve with a lot of bonny but impossible resolutions. I know that you are playing with me just as a cat plays with a mouse; yet even the most piteous mousekin sometimes causes his tormentor surprise or disappointment by getting under a bureau or behind the stove, where, for the moment, she cannot paw him. Every now and then, with a little luck, I shall pull off just such a scurry into temporary immortality. It may come by reading Dickens or by seeing a sunset, or by lunching with friends, or by forgetting to wind the alarm clock, or by contemplating the rosy little pate of my daughter, who is still only a nine days' wonder—so young that she doesn't even know what you are doing to her. But you are not going to have the laugh on me by luring me into resolutions. I know my weaknesses. I know that I shall probably continue to annoy newsdealers by reading the magazines on the stalls instead of buying them; that I shall put off having my hair cut; drop tobacco cinders on my waistcoat; feel bored at the idea of having to shave and get dressed; be nervous when the gas burner pops when turned off; buy more Liberty Bonds than I can afford and have to hock them at a grievous loss. I shall continue to be pleasant to insurance agents, from sheer lack of manhood; and to keep library books out over the date and so incur a fine. My only hope, you see, is resolutely to determine to persist in these failings. Then, by sheer perversity, I may grow out of them.

[Illustration]

What avail, indeed, for any of us to make good resolutions when one contemplates the grand pageant of human frailty? Observe what I noticed the other day in the Lost and Found column of the New York *Times*:

LOST—Hotel Imperial lavatory, set of teeth. Call or communicate Flint, 134 East 43d street. Reward.

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Surely, if Mr. Flint could not remember to keep his teeth in his mouth, or if any one else was so basely whimsical as to juggle them away from him, it may well teach us to be chary of extravagant hopes for the future. Even the League of Nations, when one contemplates the sad case of Mr. Flint, becomes a rather anemic safeguard. We had better keep Mr. Flint in mind through the New Year as a symbol of human error and disappointment. And the best of it is, my dear Time, that you, too, may be a little careless. Perhaps one of these days you may doze a little and we shall steal a few hours of timeless bliss. Shall we see a little ad in the papers:

> LOST—Sixty valuable minutes, said to have been stolen by the unworthy human race. If found, please return to Father Time, and no questions asked.

Well, my dear Time, we approach the Zero Hour. I hope you will have a Happy New Year, and conduct yourself with becoming restraint. So live, my dear fellow, that we may say, “A good Time was enjoyed by all.” As the hands of the clock go over the top and into the No Man’s Land of the New Year, good luck to you!

Your obedient servant!

WHAT MEN LIVE BY

What a delicate and rare and gracious art is the art of conversation! With what a dexterity and skill the bubble of speech must be maneuvered if mind is to meet and mingle with mind.

There is no sadder disappointment than to realize that a conversation has been a complete failure. By which we mean that it has failed in blending or isolating for contrast the ideas, opinions and surmises of two eager minds. So often a conversation is shipwrecked by the very eagerness of one member to contribute. There must be give and take, parry and thrust, patience to hear and judgment to utter. How uneasy is the qualm as one looks back on an hour’s talk and sees that the opportunity was wasted; the precious instant of intercourse gone forever: the secrets of the heart still incommunicate! Perhaps we were too anxious to hurry the moment, to enforce our own theory, to adduce instance from our own experience. Perhaps we were not patient enough to wait until our friend could express himself with ease and happiness. Perhaps we squandered the dialogue in tangent topics, in a multitude of irrelevances.

[Illustration]

How few, how few are those gifted for real talk! There are fine merry fellows, full of mirth and shrewdly minted observation, who will not abide by one topic, who must always be lashing out upon some new byroad, snatching at every bush they pass. They

are too excitable, too ungoverned for the joys of patient intercourse. Talk is so solemn a rite it should be approached with prayer and must be conducted with nicety and forbearance. What steadiness and sympathy are needed if the thread of thought is to be unwound without tangles or snapping! What forbearance, while each of the pair, after tentative gropings here and yonder, feels his way toward truth as he sees it. So often two in talk are like men standing back to back, each trying to describe to the other what he sees and disputing because their visions do not tally. It takes a little time for minds to turn face to face.

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Very often conversations are better among three than between two, for the reason that then one of the trio is always, unconsciously, acting as umpire, interposing fair play, recalling wandering wits to the nub of the argument, seeing that the aggressiveness of one does no foul to the reticence of another. Talk in twos may, alas! fall into speaker and listener: talk in threes rarely does so.

It is little realized how slowly, how painfully, we approach the expression of truth. We are so variable, so anxious to be polite, and alternately swayed by caution or anger. Our mind oscillates like a pendulum: it takes some time for it to come to rest. And then, the proper allowance and correction has to be made for our individual vibrations that prevent accuracy. Even the compass needle doesn't point the true north, but only the magnetic north. Similarly our minds at best can but indicate magnetic truth, and are distorted by many things that act as iron filings do on the compass. The necessity of holding one's job: what an iron filing that is on the compass card of a man's brain!

We are all afraid of truth: we keep a battalion of our pet prejudices and precautions ready to throw into the argument as shock troops, rather than let our fortress of Truth be stormed. We have smoke bombs and decoy ships and all manner of cunning colorizations by which we conceal our innards from our friends, and even from ourselves. How we fume and fidget, how we bustle and dodge rather than commit ourselves.

In days of hurry and complication, in the incessant pressure of human problems that thrust our days behind us, does one never dream of a way of life in which talk would be honored and exalted to its proper place in the sun? What a zest there is in that intimate unreserved exchange of thought, in the pursuit of the magical blue bird of joy and human satisfaction that may be seen flitting distantly through the branches of life. It was a sad thing for the world when it grew so busy that men had no time to talk. There are such treasures of knowledge and compassion in the minds of our friends, could we only have time to talk them out of their shy quarries. If we had our way, we would set aside one day a week for talking. In fact, we would reorganize the week altogether. We would have one day for Worship (let each man devote it to worship of whatever he holds dearest); one day for Work; one day for Play (probably fishing); one day for Talking; one day for Reading, and one day for Smoking and Thinking. That would leave one day for Resting, and (incidentally) interviewing employers.

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The best week of our life was one in which we did nothing but talk. We spent it with a delightful gentleman who has a little bungalow on the shore of a lake in Pike County. He had a great many books and cigars, both of which are conversational stimulants. We used to lie out on the edge of the lake, in our oldest trousers, and talk. We discussed ever so many subjects; in all of them he knew immensely more than we did. We built up a complete philosophy of indolence and good will, according to Food and Sleep and Swimming their proper share of homage. We rose at 10 in the morning and began talking; we talked all day and until 3 o'clock at night. Then we went to bed and regained strength and combativeness for the coming day. Never was a week better spent. We committed no crimes, planned no secret treaties, devised no annexations or indemnities. We envied no one. We examined the entire world and found it worth while. Meanwhile our wives, who were watching (perhaps with a little quiet indignation) from the veranda, kept on asking us, "What on earth do you talk about?"

Bless their hearts, men don't have to have anything to talk *about*. They just talk.

And there is only one rule for being a good talker: learn how to listen.

THE UNNATURAL NATURALIST

It gives us a great deal of pleasure to announce, officially, that spring has arrived.

Our statement is not based on any irrelevant data as to equinoxes or bluebirds or bock-beer signs, but is derived from the deepest authority we know anything about, our subconscious self. We remember that some philosopher, perhaps it was Professor James, suggested that individuals are simply peaks of self-consciousness rising out of the vast ocean of collective human Mind in which we all swim, and are, at bottom, one. Whenever we have to decide any important matter, such as when to get our hair cut and whether to pay a bill or not, and whether to call for the check or let the other fellow do so, we don't attempt to harass our conscious volition with these decisions. We rely on our subconscious and instinctive person, and for better or worse we have to trust to its righteousness and good sense. We just find ourself doing something and we carry on and hope it is for the best.

From this deep abyss of subconsciousness we learn that it is spring. The mottled goosebone of the Allentown prophet is no more meteorologically accurate than our subconscience. And this is how it works.

Once a year, about the approach of the vernal equinox or the seedsman's catalogue, we wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning. This is an immediate warning and apprisement that something is adrift. Three hundred and sixty-four days in the year we wake, placidly enough, at seven-ten, ten minutes after the alarm clock has jangled. But on this particular day, whether it be the end of February or the middle

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of March, we wake with the old recognizable nostalgia. It is the last polyp or vestige of our anthropomorphic and primal self, trailing its pathetic little wisp of glory for the one day of the whole calendar. All the rest of the year we are the plodding percheron of commerce, patiently tugging our wain; but on that morning there wambles back, for the nonce, the pang of Eden. We wake at 6 o'clock; it is a blue and golden morning and we feel it imperative to get outdoors as quickly as possible. Not for an instant do we feel the customary respectable and sanctioned desire to kiss the sheets yet an hour or so. The traipsing, trolloping humor of spring is in our veins; we feel that we must be about felling an aurochs or a narwhal for breakfast. We leap into our clothes and hurry downstairs and out of the front door and skirmish round the house to see and smell and feel.

It is spring. It is unmistakably spring, because the pewit bushes are budding and on yonder aspen we can hear a forsythia bursting into song. It is spring, when the feet of the floorwalker pain him and smoking-car windows have to be pried open with chisels. We skip lightheartedly round the house to see if those bobolink bulbs we planted are showing any signs yet, and discover the whisk brush that fell out of the window last November. And then the newsboy comes along the street and sees us prancing about and we feel sheepish and ashamed and hurry indoors again.

There may still be blizzards and frozen plumbings and tumbles on icy pavements, but when that morning of annunciation has come to us we know that winter is truly dead, even though his ghost may walk and gibber once or twice. The sweet urge of the new season has rippled up through the oceanic depths of our subconsciousness, and we are aware of the rising tide. Like Mr. Wordsworth we feel that we are wiser than we know. (Perhaps we have misquoted that, but let it stand.)

There are other troubles that spring brings us. We are pitifully ashamed of our ignorance Of nature, and though we try to hide it we keep getting tripped up. About this time of year inquisitive persons are always asking us: "Have you heard any song sparrows yet?" or "Are there any robins out your way?" or "When do the laburnums begin to nest out in Marathon?" Now we really can't tell these people our true feeling, which is that we do not believe in peeking in on the privacy of the laburnums or any other songsters. It seems to us really immodest to keep on spying on the birds in that way. And as for the bushes and trees, what we want to know is, How does one ever get to know them? How do you find out which is an alder and what is an elm? Or a narcissus and a hyacinth, does any one really know them apart? We think it's all a bluff. And jonquils. There was a nest of them on our porch, we are told, but we didn't think it any business of ours to bother them. Let nature alone and she'll let you alone.

[Illustration]

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But there is a pettifogging cult about that says you ought to know these things; moreover, children keep on asking one. We always answer at random and say it's a wagtail or a flowering shrike or a female magnolia. We were brought up in the country and learned that first principle of good manners, which is to let birds and flowers and animals go on about their own affairs without pestering them by asking them their names and addresses. Surely that's what Shakespeare meant by saying a rose by any other name will smell as sweet. We can enjoy a rose just as much as any one, even if we may think it's a hydrangea.

And then we are much too busy to worry about robins and bluebirds and other poultry of that sort. Of course, if we see one hanging about the lawn and it looks hungry we have decency enough to throw out a bone or something for it, but after all we have a lot of troubles of our own to bother about. We are short-sighted, too, and if we try to get near enough to see if it is a robin or only a bandanna some one has dropped, why either it flies away before we get there or it does turn out to be a bandanna or a clothespin. One of our friends kept on talking about a Baltimore oriole she had seen near our house, and described it as a beautiful yellowish fowl. We felt quite ashamed to be so ignorant, and when one day we thought we saw one near the front porch we left what we were doing, which was writing a check for the coal man, and went out to stalk it. After much maneuvering we got near, made a dash—and it was a banana peel! The oriole had gone back to Baltimore the day before.

We love to read about the birds and flowers and shrubs and insects in poetry, and it makes us very happy to know they are all round us, innocent little things like mice and centipedes and goldenrods (until hay fever time), but as for prying into their affairs we simply won't do it.

SITTING IN THE BARBER'S CHAIR

Once every ten weeks or so we get our hair cut.

We are not generally parsimonious of our employer's time, but somehow we do hate to squander that thirty-three minutes, which is the exact chronicide involved in despoiling our skull of a ten weeks' garner. If we were to have our hair cut at the end of eight weeks the shearing would take only thirty-one minutes; but we can never bring ourselves to rob our employer of that much time until we reckon he is really losing prestige by our unkempt appearance. Of course, we believe in having our hair cut during office hours. That is the only device we know to make the hateful operation tolerable.

To the times mentioned above should be added fifteen seconds, which is the slice of eternity needed to trim, prune and chasten our mustache, which is not a large group of foliage.

We knew a traveling man who never got his hair cut except when he was on the road, which permitted him to include the transaction in his expense account; but somehow it seems to us more ethical to steal time than to steal money.

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We like to view this whole matter in a philosophical and ultra-pragmatic way. Some observers have hazarded that our postponement of haircuts is due to mere lethargy and inertia, but that is not so. Every time we get our locks shorn our wife tells us that we have got them too short. She says that our head has a very homely and bourgeois bullet shape, a sort of pithecanthropoid contour, which is revealed by a close trim. After five weeks' growth, however, we begin to look quite distinguished. The difficulty then is to ascertain just when the law of diminishing returns comes into play. When do we cease to look distinguished and begin to appear merely slovenly? Careful study has taught us that this begins to take place at the end of sixty-five days, in warm weather. Add five days or so for natural procrastination and devilment, and we have seventy days interval, which we have posited as the ideal orbit for our tonsorial ecstasies.

When at last we have hounded ourself into robbing our employer of those thirty-three minutes, plus fifteen seconds for you know what, we find ourself in the barber's chair. Despairingly we gaze about at the little blue flasks with flowers enameled on them; at the piles of clean towels; at the bottles of mandrake essence which we shall presently have to affirm or deny. Under any other circumstances we should deeply enjoy a half hour spent in a comfortable chair, with nothing to do but do nothing. Our barber is a delightful fellow; he looks benign and does not prattle; he respects the lobes of our ears and other vulnerabilia. But for some inscrutable reason we feel strangely ill at ease in his chair. We can't think of anything to think about. Blankly we brood in the hope of catching the hem of some intimation of immortality. But no, there is nothing to do but sit there, useless as an incubator with no eggs in it. The processes of wasting and decay are hurrying us rapidly to a pauperish grave, every instant brings us closer to a notice in the obit column, and yet we sit and sit without two worthy thoughts to rub against each other.

Oh, the poverty of mortal mind, the sad meagerness of the human soul! Here we are, a vital, breathing entity, transformed to a mere chemical carcass by the bleak magic of the barber's chair. In our anatomy of melancholy there are no such atrabiliar moments as those thirty-three (and a quarter) minutes once every ten weeks. Roughly speaking, we spend three hours of this living death every year.

And yet, perhaps it is worth it, for what a jocund and pantheistic merriment possesses us when we escape from the shop! Bay-rummed, powdered, shorn, brisk and perfumed, we fare down the street exhaling the syrups of Cathay. Once more we can take our rightful place among aggressive and well-groomed men; we can look in the face without blenching those human leviathans who are ever creased, razored, and white-margined as to vest. We are a man among men and our untethered mind jostles the stars. We have had our hair cut, and no matter what gross contours our cropped skull may display to wives or ethnologists, we are a free man for ten dear weeks.

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BROWN EYES AND EQUINOXES

“What is an equinox?” said Titania.

I pretended not to hear her and prayed fervently that the inquiry would pass from her mind. Sometimes her questions, if ignored, are effaced by some other thought that possesses her active brain. I rattled my paper briskly and kept well behind it.

“Yes,” I murmured husbandly, “delicious, delicious! My dear, you certainly plan the most delightful meals.” Meanwhile I was glancing feverishly at the daily Quiz column to see if that noble cascade of popular information might give any help. It did not.

Clear brown eyes looked across the table gravely. I could feel them through the spring overcoat ads.

“What is an equinox?”

“I think I must have left my matches upstairs,” I said, and went up to look for them. I stayed aloft ten minutes and hoped that by that time she would have passed on to some other topic. I did not waste my time, however; I looked everywhere for the “Children’s Book of a Million Reasons,” until I remembered it was under the dining-room table taking the place of a missing caster.

When I slunk into the living room again I hastily suggested a game of double Canfield, but Titania’s brow was still perplexed. Looking across at me with that direct brown gaze that would compel even a milliner to relent, she asked:

“What is an equinox?”

I tried to pass it off flippantly.

“A kind of alarm clock,” I said, “that lets the bulbs and bushes know it’s time to get up.”

“No; but honestly, Bob,” she said, “I want to know. It’s something about an equal day and an equal night, isn’t it?”

“At the equinox,” I said sternly, hoping to overawe her, “the day and the night are of equal duration. But only for one night. On the following day the sun, declining in perihelion, produces the customary inequality. The usual working day is much longer than the night of relaxation that follows it, as every toiler knows.”

“Yes,” she said thoughtfully, “but how does it work? It says something in this article about the days getting longer in the Northern Hemisphere, while they are getting shorter in the Southern.”

“Of course,” I agreed, “conditions are totally different south of Mason and Dixon’s line. But as far as we are concerned here, the sun, revolving round the earth, casts a beneficent shadow, which is generally regarded as the time to quit work. This shadow —”

“I thought the earth revolved round the sun,” she said. “Wasn’t that what Galileo proved?”

“He was afterward discovered to be mistaken,” I said. “That was what caused all the trouble.”

“What trouble?” she asked, much interested.

“Why, he and Socrates had to take hemlock or they were drowned in a butt of malmsey, I really forget which.”

“Well, after the equinox,” said Titania, “do the days get longer?”

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“They do,” I said; “in order to permit the double-headers. And now that daylight saving is to go into effect, equinoxes won’t be necessary any more. Very likely the pan-Russian Soviets, or President Wilson, or somebody, will abolish them.”

“June 21 is the longest day in the year, isn’t it?”

“The day before pay-day is always the longest day.”

“And the night the cook goes out is always the longest night,” she retorted, catching the spirit of the game.

“Some day,” I threatened her, “the earth will stop rotating on its orbit, or its axis, or whatever it is, and then we will be like the moon, divided into two hostile hemispheres, one perpetual day and the other eternal night.”

She did not seem alarmed. “Yes, and I bet I know which one you’ll emigrate to,” she said. “But how about the equinoctial gales? Why should there be gales just then?”

I had forgot about the equinoctial gales, and this caught me unawares.

“That was an old tradition of the Phoenician mariners,” I said, “but the invention of latitude and longitude made them unnecessary. They have fallen into disrepute. Dead reckoning killed them.”

“And the precession of the equinoxes?” she asked, turning back to her magazine.

This was a poser, but I rallied stoutly. “Well,” I said, “you see, there are two equinoxes a year, the vernal and the autumnal. They are well known by coal dealers. The first one is when he delivers the coal and the second is when he gets paid. Two of them a year, you see, in the course of a million years or so, makes quite a majestic series. That is why they call it a procession.”

Titania looked at me and gradually her face broke up into a charming aurora borealis of laughter.

“I don’t believe you know any more about the old things than I do,” she said.

And the worst of it is, I think she was right.

163 INNOCENT OLD MEN

I found Titania looking severely at her watch, which is a queer little gold disk about the size of a waistcoat button, swinging under her chin by a thin golden chain. Titania’s methods of winding, setting and regulating that watch have always been a mystery to me. She frequently knows what the right time is, but how she deduces it from the data

given by the hands of her timepiece I can't guess. It's something like this: She looks at the watch and notes what it says. Then she deducts ten minutes, because she remembers it is ten minutes fast. Then she performs some complicated calculation connected with when the baby had his bath, and how long ago she heard the church bells chime; to this result she adds five minutes to allow for leeway. Then she goes to the phone and asks Central the time.

"Hullo," I said; "what's wrong?"

"I'm wondering about this daylight-saving business," she said. "You know, I think it's all a piece of Bolshevik propaganda to get us confused and encourage anarchy. All the women in Marathon are talking about it and neglecting their knitting. Junior's bath was half an hour late today because Mrs. Benvenuto called me up to talk about daylight saving. She says her cook has threatened to leave if she has to get up an hour earlier in the morning. I was just wondering how to adjust my watch to the new conditions."

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“It’s perfectly simple,” I said. “Put your watch ahead one hour, and then go through the same logarithms you always do.”

“Put it ahead?” asked Titania. “Mrs. Borgia says we have to put the clock *back* an hour. She is fearfully worried about it. She says suppose she has something in the oven when the clock is put back, it will be an hour overdone and burned to a crisp when the kitchen clock catches up again.”

“Mrs. Borgia is wrong,” I said. “The clocks are to be put ahead one hour. At 2 o’clock on Easter morning they are to be turned on to 3 o’clock. Mrs. Borgia certainly won’t have anything in the oven at that time of night. You see, we are to pretend that 2 o’clock is really 3 o’clock, and when we get up at 7 o’clock it will really be 6 o’clock. We are deliberately fooling ourselves in order to get an hour more of daylight.”

“I have an idea,” she said, “that you won’t get up at 7 that morning.”

“It is quite possible,” I said, “because I intend to stay up until 2 a.m. that morning in order to be exactly correct in changing our timepieces. No one shall accuse me of being a time slacker.”

Titania was wrinkling her brow. “But how about that lost hour?” she said. “What happens to it? I don’t see how we can just throw an hour away like that. Time goes on just the same. How can we afford to shorten our lives so ruthlessly? It’s murder, that’s what it is! I told you it was a Bolshevik plot. Just think; there are a hundred million Americans. Moving on the clock that way brings each of us one hour nearer our graves. That is to say, we are throwing away 100,000,000 hours.”

She seized a pencil and a sheet of paper and went through some calculations.

“There are 8,760 hours in a year,” she said. “Reckoning seventy years a lifetime, there are 613,200 hours in each person’s life. Now, will you please divide that into a hundred million for me? I’m not good at long division.”

With docility I did so, and reported the result.

“About 163,” I said.

“There you are!” she exclaimed triumphantly. “Throwing away all that perfectly good time amounts simply to murdering 163 harmless old men of seventy, or 326 able-bodied men of thirty-five, or 1,630 innocent little children of seven. If that isn’t atrocity, what is? I think Mr. Hoover or Admiral Grayson, or somebody, ought to be prosecuted.”

I was aghast at this awful result. Then an idea struck me, and I took the pencil and began to figure on my own account.

“Look here, Titania,” I said. “Not so fast. Moving the clock ahead doesn’t really bring those people any nearer their graves. What it does do is bring the ratification of the Peace Treaty sooner, which is a fine thing. By deleting a hundred million hours we shorten Senator Borah’s speeches against the League by 11,410 years. That’s very encouraging.”

“According to that way of reckoning,” she said with sarcasm, “Mr. Borah’s term must have expired about 11,000 years ago.”

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“My dear Titania,” I said, “the ways of the Government may seem inscrutable, but we have got to follow them with faith. If Mr. Wilson tells us to murder 163 fine old men in elastic-sided boots we must simply do it, that’s all. Peace is a dreadful thing. We have got to meet the Germans on their own ground. They adopted this daylight-saving measure years ago. They call it Sonnenuntergangverderbenpraxis, I believe. After all, it is only a temporary measure, because in the fall, when the daylight hours get shorter, we shall have to turn the clocks back a couple of hours in order to compensate the gas and electric light companies for all the money they will have lost. That will bring those 163 old gentlemen to life again and double their remaining term of years to make up for their temporary effacement. They are patriotic hostages to Time for the summer only. You must remember that time is only a philosophical abstraction, with no real or tangible existence, and we have a right to do whatever we want with it.”

“I will remind you of that,” she said, “at getting-up time on Sunday morning. I still think that if we are going to monkey with the clocks at all it would be better to turn them backward instead of forward. Certainly that would bring you home from the club a little earlier.”

“My dear,” I said, “we are in the Government’s hands. A little later we may be put on time rations, just as we are on food rations. We may have time cards to encourage thrift in saving time. Every time we save an hour we will get a little stamp to show for it. When we fill out a whole card we will be entitled to call ourselves a month younger than we are. Tell that to Mrs. Borgia; it will reconcile her.”

A lusty uproar made itself heard upstairs and Titania gave a little scream. “Heavens!” she cried. “Here I am talking with you and Junior’s bottle is half an hour late. I don’t care what Mr. Wilson does to the clocks; he won’t be able to fool Junior. He knows when it’s, time for meals. Won’t you call up Central and find out the exact time?”

A TRAGIC SMELL IN MARATHON

Marathon, Pa., April 2.

This is a very embarrassing time of year for us. Every morning when we get on the 8:13 train at Marathon Bill Stites or Fred Myers or Hank Harris or some other groundsel philosopher on the Cinder and Bloodshot begins to chivvy us about our garden. “Have you planted anything yet?” they say. “Have you put litmus paper in the soil to test it for lime, potash and phosphorus? Have you got a harrow?”

That sort of thing bothers us, because our ideas of cultivation are very primitive. We did go to the newsstand at the Reading Terminal and try to buy a Litmus paper, but the agent didn’t have any. He says he doesn’t carry the Jersey papers. So we buried some old copies of the *Philistine* in the garden, thinking that would strengthen up the soil a

bit. This business of nourishing the soil seems grotesque. It's hard enough to feed the family, let alone throwing away good money on feeding the land. Our idea about soil is that it ought to feed itself.

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Our garden ought to be lusty enough to raise the few beans and beets and blisters we aspire to. We have been out looking at the soil. It looks fairly potent and certainly it goes a long way down. There are quite a lot of broken magnesia bottles and old shinbones scattered through it, and they ought to help along. The topsoil and the humus may be a little mixed, but we are not going to sort them out by hand.

Our method is to go out at twilight the first Sunday in April, about the time the cutworms go to roost, and take a sharp-pointed stick. We draw lines in the ground with this stick, preferably in a pleasant geometrical pattern that will confuse the birds and other observers. It is important not to do this until twilight, so that no robins or insects can watch you. Then we go back in the house and put on our old trousers, the pair that has holes in each pocket. We fill the pockets with the seed, we want to plant and loiter slowly along the grooves we have made in the earth. The seed sifts down the trousers legs and spreads itself in the furrow far better than any mechanical drill could do it. The secret of gardening is to stick to nature's old appointed ways. Then we read a chapter of Bernard Shaw aloud, by candle light or lantern light. As soon as they hear the voice of Shaw all the vegetables dig themselves in. This saves going all along the rows with a shingle to pat down the topsoil or the humus or the magnesia bottles or whatever else is uppermost.

Fred says that certain vegetables—kohl-rabi and colanders, we think—extract nitrogen from the air and give it back to the soil. It may be so, but what has that to do with us? If our soil can't keep itself supplied with nitrogen, that's its lookout. We don't need the nitrogen in the air. The baby isn't old enough to have warts yet.

[Illustration]

Hank says it's no use watering the garden from above. He says that watering from above lures the roots toward the surface and next day the hot sun kills them. The answer to that is that the rain comes from above, doesn't it? Roots have learned certain habits in the past million years and we haven't time to teach them to duck when it rains. Hank has some irrigation plan which involves sinking tomato cans in the ground and filling them with water.

Bill says it's dangerous to put arsenic on the plants, because it may kill the cook. He says nicotine or tobacco dust is far better. The answer to that is that we never put fertilizers on our garden, anyway. If we want to kill the cook there is a more direct method, and we reserve the tobacco for ourself. No cutworm shall get a blighty one from our cherished baccy pouch.

Fred says we ought to have a wheel-barrow; Hank swears by a mulching iron; Bill is all for cold frames. All three say that hellebore is the best thing for sucking insects. We echo the expletive, with a different application.

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You see, we have no instinct for gardening. Some fellows, like Bill Stites, have a divinely implanted zest for the propagation of chard and rhubarb and self-blanching celery and kohl-rabi; they are kohl-rabid, we might say. They know, just what to do when they see a weed; they can assassinate a weevil by just looking at it. But weevils and cabbage worms are unterrified by us. We can't tell a weed from a young onion. We never mulched anything in our life; we wouldn't know how to begin.

But the deuce of it is, public opinion says that we must raise a garden. It is no use to hire a man to do it for us. However badly we may do it, patriotism demands that we monkey around with a garden of our own. We may get bitten by a snapping bean or routed by a rutabaga or infected by a parsnip. But with Bill and those fellows at our heels we have just got to face it. Hellebore!

What we want to know is, How do you ever find out all these things about vegetables? We bought an ounce of tomato seeds in desperation, and now Fred says "one ounce of tomato seeds will produce 3,000 plants. You should have bought two dozen plants instead of the seed." How does he know those things? Hank says beans are very delicate and must not be handled while they are wet or they may get rusty. Again we ask, how does he know? Where do they learn these matters? Bill says that stones draw out the moisture from the soil and every stone in the garden should be removed by hand before we plant. We offered him twenty cents an hour to do it.

The most tragic odor in the world hangs over Marathon these days; the smell of freshly spaded earth. It is extolled by the poets and all those happy sons of the pavement who know nothing about it. But here are we, who hardly know a loam from a lentil, breaking our back over seed catalogues. Public opinion may compel us to raise vegetables, but we are going to go about it our own way. If the stones are going to act like werewolves and suck the moisture from our soil, let them do so. We don't believe in thwarting nature. Maybe it will be a very wet summer and we shall have the laugh on Bill, who has carted away all his stones.

And we should just like to see Bill Stites write a poem. We bet it wouldn't look as much like a poem as our beans look like beans. And as for Hank and Fred, they wouldn't even know how to begin to plant a poem!

BULLIED BY THE BIRDS

Marathon, Pa., May 2.

I insist that the place for birds is in the air or on the bushy tops of trees or on smooth-shaven lawns. Let them twitter and strut on the greens of golf courses and intimidate the tired business men. Let them peck cinders along the railroad track and keep the

trains waiting. But really they have no right to take possession of a man's house as they have mine.

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The nesting season is a time of tyranny and oppression for those who live in Marathon. The birds are upon us like Hindenburg in Belgium. We go about on tiptoe, speaking in whispers, for fear of annoying them. It is all the fault of the Marathon Bird Club, which has offered all sorts of inducements to the fowls of the air to come and live in our suburb, quite forgetting that humble commuters have to live there, too. Birds have moved all the way from Wynnewood and Ambler and Chestnut Hill to enjoy the congenial air of Marathon and the informing little pamphlets of our club, telling them just what to eat and which houses offer the best hospitality. All our dwellings are girt about with little villas made of condensed milk boxes, but the feathered tyrants have grown too pernickety to inhabit these. They come closer still, and make our homes their own. They take the grossest liberties.

I am fond of birds, but I think the line must be drawn somewhere. The clothes-line, for instance. The other day Titania sent me out to put up a new clothesline; I found that a shrike or a barn swallow or some other veery had built a nest in the clothespin basket. That means we won't be able to hang out our laundry in the fresh Monday air and equally fresh Monday sunshine until the nesting season is over.

Then there is a gross, fat, indiscreet robin that has taken a home in an evergreen or mimosa or banyan tree just under our veranda railing. It is an absurdly exposed, almost indecently exposed position, for the confidential family business she intends to carry on. The iceman and the butcher and the boy who brings up the Sunday ice cream from the apothecary can't help seeing those three big blue eggs she has laid. But, because she has nested there for the last three springs, while the house was unoccupied, she thinks she has a perpetual lease on that bush. She hotly resents the iceman and the butcher and the apothecary's boy, to say nothing of me. So these worthy merchants have to trail round a circuitous route, violating the neutral ground of a neighbor, in order to reach the house from behind and deliver their wares through the cellar. We none of us dare use the veranda at all for fear of frightening her, and I have given up having the morning paper delivered at the house because she made such shrill protest.

[Illustration]

Frightening her, do I say? Nay, it is *we* who are frightened. I go round to the side of the house to prune my benzine bushes or to plant a mess of spinach and a profane starling or woodpecker bustles off her nest with shrewish outcry and lingers nearby to rail at me. Abashed, I stealthily scuffle back to get a spade out of the tool bin and again that shrill scream of anger and outraged motherhood. A throstle or a whippoorwill is raising a family in the gutter spout over the back kitchen. I go into the bathroom to shave and Titania whispers sharply, "You mustn't shave in there. There's

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a tomtit nesting in the shutter hinge and the light from your shaving mirror will make the poor little birds crosseyed when they're hatched." I try to shave in the dining-room and I find a sparrow's nest on the window sill. Finally I do my toilet in the coal bin, even though there is a young squeaking bat down there. A bat is half mouse anyway, so Titania has less compassion for its feelings. Even if that bat grows up bow-legged on account of premature excitement, I have to shave somewhere.

We can't play croquet at this time of year, because the lawn must be kept clear for the robins to quarry out worms. The sound of mallet and ball frightens the worms and sends them underground, and then it's harder for the robins to find them. I suppose we really ought to keep a stringed orchestra playing in the garden to entice the worms to the surface. We have given up frying onions because the mother robins don't like the odor while they're raising a family. I love my toast crusts, but Titania takes them away from me for the blackbirds. "Now," she says, "they're raising a family. You must be generous."

If my garden doesn't amount to anything this year the birds will be my alibi. Titania makes me do my gardening in rubber-soled shoes so as not to disturb the birds when they are going to bed. (They begin yelping at 4 a.m. right outside the window and never think of my slumbers.) The other evening I put on my planting trousers and was about to sow a specially fine pea I had brought home from town when Titania made signs from the window. "You simply mustn't wear those trousers around the house in nesting season. Don't you know the birds are very sensitive just now?" And we have been paying board for our cat on Long Island for a whole year because the birds wouldn't like his society and plebeian ways.

Marathon has come to a pretty pass, indeed, when the commuters are to be dispossessed in this way by a lot of birds, orioles and tomtits and yellow-bellied nuthatches. Some of these days a wren will take it into its head to build a nest on the railroad track and we'll all have to walk to town. Or a chicken hawk will settle in our icebox and we'll starve to death.

As I have said before, I believe in keeping nature in its proper place. Birds belong in trees. I don't go twittering and fluffing about in oaks and chestnuts, perching on the birds' nest steps and getting in their way. And why should some swarthy robin, be she never so matronly, swear at me if I set foot on my own front porch?

A MESSAGE FOR BOONVILLE

When corncob pipes went up from a nickel to six cents, smoking traditions tottered. That was a year or more ago, but one can still recall the indignation written on the faces

of nicotine-soaked gaffers who had been buying cobs at a jitney ever since Washington used one to keep warm at Valley Forge. It was the supreme test of our determination to win the war: the price of Missouri meerschaums went up 20 per cent and there was no insurrection.

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Yesterday we went out to buy our annual corncob, and were agreeably surprised to learn that the price is still six cents; but our friend the tobacconist said that it may go up again soon. We took the treasure, gleaming yellow with fresh varnish, back to our kennel, and we are smoking it as we set down these words. A corncob is sadly hot and raw until it is well sooted, but the ultimate flavor is worth persecution.

The corncob pipes we always buy come from Boonville, Mo., and we don't see why we shouldn't blow a little whiff of affection and gratitude toward that excellent town. Moreover, Boonville celebrated its centennial recently: it was founded in 1818. If the map is to be believed, it is on the southern bank of the Missouri River, which is there spanned by a very fine bridge; it is reached by two railroads (Missouri Pacific and M., K. and T.) and stands on a bluff 100 feet above the water. According to the two works of reference nearest to our desk, its population is either 4252 or 4377. Perhaps the former census omits the 125 men of the town who are so benighted as to smoke briars or clays.

Delightful town of Boonville, seat of Cooper County, you are well named. How great a boon you have conferred upon a troubled world! Long after more ambitious towns have faded in the memory of man your quiet and soothing gift to humanity will make your name blessed. I like to imagine your shady streets, drowsing in the summer sun, and the rural philosophers sitting on the verandas of your hotels or on the benches of Harley Park ("comprising fifteen acres"—New International Encyclopedia), looking out across the brown river and puffing clouds of sweet gray reek. Down by the livery stable on Main street (there must be a livery stable on Main street) I can see the old creaky, cane-bottomed chairs (with seats punctured by too much philosophy) tilted against the sycamore trees, ready for the afternoon gossip and shag tobacco. I can imagine the small boys of Boonville fishing for catfish from the piers of the bridge or bathing down by the steamboat dock (if there is one), and yearning for the day when they, too, will be grown up and old enough to smoke corncobs.

[Illustration]

What is the subtle magic of a corncob pipe? It is never as sweet or as mellow as a well-seasoned briar, and yet it has a fascination all its own. It is equally dear to those who work hard and those who loaf with intensity. When you put your nose to the blackened mouth of the hot cob its odor is quite different from that fragrance of the crusted wooden bowl. There is a faint bitterness in it, a sour, plaintive aroma. It is a pipe that seems to call aloud for the accompaniment of beer and earnest argument on factional political matters. It is also the pipe for solitary vigils of hard and concentrated work. It is the pipe that a man keeps in the drawer of his desk for savage hours of extra toil after the stenographer has powdered her nose and gone home.

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A corncob pipe is a humble badge of philosophy, an evidence of tolerance and even humor. It requires patience and good cheer, for it is slow to “break in.” Those who meditate bestial and brutal designs against the weak and innocent do not smoke it. Probably Hindenburg never saw one. Missouri’s reputation for incredulity may be due to the corncob habit. One who is accustomed to consider an argument over a burning nest of tobacco, with the smoke fuming upward in a placid haze, will not accept any dogma too immediately.

There is a singular affinity among those who smoke corncobs. A Missouri meerschaum whose bowl is browned and whose fiber stem is frayed and stringy with biting betrays a meditative and reasonable owner. He will have pondered all aspects of life and be equally ready to denounce any of them, but without bitterness. If you see a man on a street corner smoking a cob it will be safe to ask him to watch the baby a minute while you slip around the corner. You would even be safe in asking him to lend you a five. He will be safe, too, because he won’t have it.

Think, therefore, of the charm of a town where corncob pipes are the chief industry. Think of them stacked up in bright yellow piles in the warehouse. Think of the warm sun and the wholesome sweetness of broad acres that have grown into the pith of the cob. Think of the bright-eyed Missouri maidens who have turned and scooped and varnished and packed them. Think of the airy streets and wide pavements of Boonville, and the corner drug stores with their shining soda fountains and grape-juice bottles. Think of sitting out on that bluff on a warm evening, watching the broad shimmer of the river slipping down from the sunset, and smoking a serene pipe while the local flappers walk in the coolness wearing crisp, swaying gingham dresses. That’s the kind of town we like to think about.

MAKING MARATHON SAFE FOR THE URCHIN

The Urchin and I have been strolling about Marathon on Sunday mornings for more than a year, but not until the gasolineless Sabbaths supervened were we really able to examine the village and see what it is like. Previously we had been kept busy either dodging motors or admiring them as they sped by. Their rich dazzle of burnished enamel, the purring hum of their great tires, evokes applause from the Urchin. He is learning, as he watches those flashing chariots, that life truly is almost as vivid as the advertisements in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, where the shimmer of earthly pageant first was presented to him.

Marathon is a village so genteel and comely that the Urchin and I would like to have some pictures of it for future generations, particularly as we see it on an autumn morning when, as I say, the motors are kenneled and the landscape has ceased to vibrate. In the douce benignance of equinoctial sunshine we gaze about us with eyes of

inventory. Where my observation errs by too much sentiment the Urchin checks me by his cooler power of ratiocination.

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Marathon is a suburban Xanadu gently caressed by the train service of the Cinder and Bloodshot. It may be recognized as an aristocratic and patrician stronghold by the fact that while luxuries are readily obtainable (for instance, banana splits, or the latest novel by Enoch A. Bennett), necessaries are had only by prayer and advowson. The drug store will deliver ice cream to your very refrigerator, but it is impossible to get your garbage collected. The cook goes off for her Thursday evening in a taxi, but you will have to mend the roof, stanch the plumbing and curry the furnace with your own hands. There are ten trains to take you to town of an evening, but only two to bring you home. Yet going to town is a luxury, coming home is a necessity. The supply of grape juice seems almost unlimited, yet coal is to be had catch-as-catch-can.

Another proof that Marathon is patrician at heart is that nothing is known by its right name! The drug store is a “pharmacy,” Sunday is “the Sabbath,” a house is a “residence,” a debt is a “balance due on bill rendered.” A girls’ school is a “young ladies’ seminary,” A Marathon man is not drafted, he is “inducted into selective service.” And the railway station has a porte cochere (with the correct accent) instead of a carriage entrance. A furnace is (how erroneously!) called a “heater.” Marathon people do not die—they “pass away.” Even the cobbler, good fellow, has caught the trick; he calls his shop the “Italo-American Shoe Hospital.”

This is an innocent masquerade! If Marathon prefers not to call a flivver a flivver, I shall not expostulate. And yet this quaint subterfuge should not be carried quite so far. Stone walls are made for sunny lounging; yet stone walls in Marathon are built with uneven vertical projections to discourage the sedentary. Nothing is more delightful than a dog; but there are no dogs in Marathon. They are all airedales or spaniels or mastiffs. If an ordinary dog should wag his tail up our street the airedales would cut him dead. Bless me, Nature herself has taken to the same insincerity. The landscape round Marathon is lovely, but it has itself well in hand. The hills all pretend to be gentle declivities. There is a beautiful little sheet of water, reflecting the trailery of willows, a green salute to the eye. In a robuster community it would be a swimming hole—but with us, an ornamental lake. Only in one spot has Nature forgotten herself and been so brusque and rough as to jut up a very sizable cliff. This is the loveliest thing in Marathon: sunlight and shadow break and angle in cubist magnificence among the oddly veined knobs and prisms of brown stone. Yet this cliff or quarry is by common consent taboo among us. It is our indelicacy, our indecency. Such “residences” as are near modestly turn their kitchens toward it. Only the blacksmith and the gas tanks are hardy enough to face this nakedness of Mother Earth—they, and excellent Pat Lemon, Marathon’s humblest and blackest citizen, who contemplates that rugged and honest beauty as he tills his garden on the land abandoned by squeamish burghers. That is our Aceldama, our Potter’s Field, only approached by the athletic, who keep their eyes from Nature’s indiscretion by vigorous sets of tennis in the purple shadow of the cliff.

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Life is queerly inverted in Marathon. Nature has been so bullied and repressed that she fawns about us timidly. No well-conducted suburban shrubbery would think of assuming autumn tints before the ladies have got into their fall fashions. Indeed none of our chaste trees will even shed their leaves while any one is watching; and they crouch modestly in the shade of our massive garages. They have been taught their place. In Marathon it is a worse sin to have your lawn uncut than to have your books or your hair uncut. I have been aware of indignant eyes because I let my back garden run wild. And yet I flatter myself it was not mere sloth. No! I want the Urchin to see what this savage, tempestuous world is like. What preparation for life is a village where Nature comes to heel like a spaniel? When a thunderstorm disorganizes our electric lights for an hour or so we feel it a personal affront. Let my rearward plot be a deep-tangled wild-wood where the happy Urchin may imagine something more ferocious lurking than a posse of radishes. Indeed, I hardly know whether Marathon is a safe place to bring up a child. How can he learn the horrors of drink in a village where there is no saloon? Or the sadness of the seven deadly sins where there is no movie? Or deference to his betters where the chauffeurs, in their withered leather legs, drive limousines to the drug store to buy expensive cigars, while their employers walk to the station puffing briar pipes?

I had been hoping that the war would knock some of this topsy-turvy nonsense out of us. Maybe it has. Sometimes I see on the faces of our commuters the unaccustomed agitation of thought. At least we still have the grace to call ourselves a suburb, and not (what we fancy ourselves) a superurb. But I don't like the pretense that runs like a jarring note through the music of our life. Why is it that those who are doing the work must pretend they are not doing it; and those not doing the work pretend that they are? I see that the motor messenger girls who drive high-powered cars wear Sam Browne belts and heavy-soled boots, whereas the stalwart colored wenches who labor along the tracks of the Cinder and Bloodshot console themselves with flimsy waists and light slippers. (A fact!) By and by the Urchin will notice these things. And I don't want him to grow up the kind of chap who, instead of running to catch a train, loiters gracefully to the station and waits to be caught.

THE SMELL OF SMELLS

I Smelt it this morning—I wonder if you know the smell I mean?

It had rained hard during the night, and trees and bushes twinkled in the sharp early sunshine like ballroom chandeliers. As soon as I stepped out of doors I caught that faint but unmistakable musk in the air; that dim, warm sweetness. It was the smell of summer, so wholly different from the crisp tang of spring.

It is a drowsy, magical waft of warmth and fragrance. It comes only when the leaves and vegetation have grown to a certain fullness and juice, and when the sun bends in his orbit near enough to draw out all the subtle vapors of field and woodland. It is a

smell that rarely if ever can be discerned in the city. It needs the wider air of the unhampered earth for its circulation and play.

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I don’t know just why, but I associate that peculiar aroma of summer with woodpiles and barnyards. Perhaps because in the area of a farmyard the sunlight is caught and focused and glows with its fullest heat and radiance. And it is in the grasp of the relentless sun that growing things yield up their innermost vitality and emanate their fragrant essence. I have seen fields of tobacco under a hot sun that smelt as blithe as a room thick with blue Havana smoke. I remember a pile of birch logs, heaped up behind a barn in Pike County, where that mellow richness of summer flowed and quivered like a visible exhalation in the air. It is the goodly soul of earth, rendering her health and sweetness to her master, the sun.

[Illustration]

Every one, I suppose, who is a fancier of smells, knows this blithe perfume of the summer air that is so pleasant to the nostril almost any fine forenoon from mid-June until August. It steals pungently through the blue sparkle of the morning, fading away toward noon when the moistness is dried out. But when one first issues from the house at breakfast time it is at its highest savor. Irresistibly it suggests worms and a tin can with the lid jaggedly bent back and a pitchfork turning up the earth behind the cow stable. Fishing was first invented when Adam smelt that odor in the air.

The first fishing morning—can’t you imagine it! Has no one ever celebrated it in verse or oils? The world all young and full of unmitigated sweetness; the Garden of Eden bespangled with the early dew; Adam scrabbling up a fistful of worm’s and hooking them on a bent thorn and a line of twisted pampas grass; hurrying down to the branch or the creek or the bayou or whatever it may have been; sitting down on a brand-new stump that the devil had put there to tempt him; throwing out his line; sitting there in the sun dreaming and brooding....

And then a tug, a twitch, a flurry in the clear water of Eden, a pull, a splash, and the First Fish lay on the grass at Adam’s foot. Can you imagine his sensations? How he yelled to Eve to come—look—see, and, how annoyed he was because she called out she was busy....

Probably it was in that moment that all the bickerings and back-talk of husbands and wives originated; when Adam called to Eve to come and look at his First Fish while it was still silver and vivid in its living colors; and Eve answered she was busy. In that moment were born the men’s clubs and the women’s clubs and the pinochle parties and being detained at the office and Kelly pool and all the other devices and stratagems that keep men and women from taking their amusements together.

Well, I didn’t mean to go back to the Garden of Eden; I just wanted to say that summer is here again, even though the almanac doesn’t vouch for it until the 21st. Those of you who are fond of smells, spread your nostrils about breakfast time tomorrow morning and see if you detect it.

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A JAPANESE BACHELOR

The first obligation of one who lives by writing is to write what editors will buy. In so doing, how often one laments that one cannot write exactly what happens. Suppose I were to try it—for once!

I have been lying on the bed—where the landlady has put a dark blue spread, instead of the white one, because I drop my tobacco ashes—smoking, and thinking about a new friend I met today. His name is Kenko, a Japanese bachelor of the fourteenth century, who wrote a little book of musings which has been translated under the title "The Miscellany of a Japanese Priest." His candid reflections are those of a shrewd, learned, humane and somewhat misogynist mind. I have been lying on the bed because his book, like all books that make one ponder deeply on human destiny, causes that feeling of mind-sickness, that swimming pain of the mental faculties—or is it caused by too much strong tobacco?

My acquaintance with Kenko began only last night, when I sat in bed reading Mr. Raymond Weaver's very pleasant article about him in a recent *Bookman*. My last act before turning out the light was to lay the magazine on the table, open at Mr. Weaver's essay, to remind me to get a copy of Kenko the first thing this morning. Happily to-day was Saturday. I don't know what I should have done if it had been Sunday. I felt that I could not wait another day without owning that book. I suspected it was a good deal in the mood of another bachelor, an Anglo-American Caleb of to-day—Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith, whose whimsical "Trivia" belongs on the same shelf.

This morning I tried to argue myself out of the decision. It may be a very expensive book, I thought; it may cost two or three dollars; I have been spending a lot of money lately, and I certainly ought to buy some new undershirts. Moreover, this has been a bad week; I have never written those paragraphs I promised a certain editor, and I haven't paid the rent yet. Why not try to find the book at a library? But I knew the only library where I would have any chance of finding Kenko would be the big pile at Fifth avenue and Forty-second street, and I could not bear the thought of having to read that book without smoking. I felt instinctively (from what Mr. Weaver had written) that it was the kind of book that requires a pipe.

Well, I thought, I won't decide this too hastily; I'll walk down to the post office (four blocks) and make up my mind on the way. I knew already, however, that if I didn't go downtown for that book it would bother me all day and ruin my work.

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I walked down to the post office (to mail to an editor a sonnet I thought fairly well of) saying to myself: That book is imported from England, it may be a big book, it may even cost four dollars. How much better to exhibit the stoic tenacity of all great men, go back to my hall bedroom (which I was temporarily occupying) and concentrate on matters in hand. What right, I said, has a Buddhist recluse, born either in 1281 or 1283, to harass me so? But I knew in my heart that the matter was already decided. I walked back to the corner of Hallbedroom street, and stood vacillating at the newsstand, pretending to glance over the papers. But across six centuries the insistent ghost of Kenko had me in its grip. Annoyed, and with a sense of chagrin, I hurried to the subway.

In the dimly lit vestibule of the subway car, a boy of sixteen or so sat on an up-ended suitcase, plunged in a book. I can never resist the temptation to try to see what books other people are reading. This innocent curiosity has led me into many rudenesses, for I am short-sighted and have to stare very close to make out the titles. And usually the people who read books on trolleys, subways and ferries are women. How often I have stalked them warily, trying to identify the volume without seeming too intrusive. That weakness deserves an essay in itself. It has led me into surprising adventures. But in this case my quarry was easy. The lad—I judged him a boarding school boy going back to school after the holidays—was so absorbed in his reading that it was easy to thrust my face over his shoulder and see the running head on the page—“The Light That Failed.”

I left the subway at Pennsylvania Station. Just to appease my conscience, I stopped in at the agreeable Cadmus bookshop on Thirty-third street to see if by any chance they might have a second-hand copy of Kenko. But I know they wouldn’t; it is not the kind of book at all likely to be found second-hand. I tarried here long enough to smoke one cigarette and pay my devoirs to the noble profession of second-hand bookselling. I even thought, a little wildly, of buying a copy of “The Monk” by M.G. Lewis, which I saw there. So does the frenzy rage when once you unleash it. But I decided to be content with paying my devoirs to the proprietor, a friend of mine, and not go on (as the soldier does in Hood’s lovely pun) to devour my pay. I hurried off to the office of the Oxford University Press, Kenko’s publishers.

It should be stated, however, that owing to some confusion of doors I got by mistake into the reception room of the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Billiard Table Company, which is on the same corridor as the salesroom of the Oxford Press. It was a pleasant reception room, not very bookish in aspect, but in my agitation I was too eager to feel surprised by the large billiard table in the offing. I somewhat startled a young man at an adding machine by demanding, in a husky voice, a copy of “The Miscellanies of a Japanese Priest.” I was rather nervous by this time, lest for some reason I should not be able to buy a copy of Kenko. I feared the publishers might be angry with me for not having made a round of the bookstores first. The young man saw that I was chalking the wrong cue, and forwarded me.

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In the office of the Oxford Press I met a very genial reception. I had been, as I say, apprehensive lest they should refuse to sell me the book; or perhaps they might not have a copy. I wondered what credentials I could offer to override their scruples. I had made up my mind to tell them, if they demurred, that I had once published an essay to prove that the best book for reading in bed is the General Catalogue of the Oxford University Press. This is quite true. It is a delightful compilation of several thousand pages, on India paper. But to my pleasant surprise the Oxonians seemed not at all surprised at the sudden appearance of one asking, in a voice a little shaken with emotion, for a copy of the "Miscellanies." Mr. Campion and Mr. Krause, who greeted me, were kindness itself.

"Oh, yes," they said, "we have a copy." And in a minute it lay before me. One of those little green and gold volumes in the Oxford Library of Prose and Poetry. "How much?" I said. "A dollar forty." I paid it joyfully. It is a good price for a book. Once I wrote a book myself that sells (when it does sell) at that figure. When I was at Oxford I used to buy the O.L.P.P. books for (I think) half a crown. In 1917 they were listed at a dollar. Now $1.40. But I fear Kenko's estate doesn't get the advantage of increased royalties.

The first thing to do was to find a place to read the book. My club was fifteen blocks away. The smoking room of the Pennsylvania Station, where I have done much reading, was three long blocks. But I must dip into Kenko immediately. Down in the hallway I found a shoe-shining stand, with a bowl of indirect light above it. The artist was busy in the barber shop near-by. Admirable opportunity. I mounted the throne and fell to. The first thing I saw was a quaint Japanese woodcut of a buxom maiden washing garments in a rapidly purling stream. She was treading out a petticoat with her bare feet, presumably on a flat stone. In a black storm-cloud above a willow tree a bearded supernatural being, with hands spread in humorous deprecation, gazes down half pleased, half horrified. And the caption is, "Did not the fairy Kume lose his supernatural powers when he saw the white legs of a girl washing clothes?" Yet be not dismayed. Kenko is no George Moore.

By and bye the shoeshiner came out and found me reading. He was apologetic. "I didn't know you were here," he said. "Sorry to keep you waiting." Fortunately my shoes needed shining, as they generally do. He shined them, and I still sat reading. He was puzzled, and tried to make out the title of the book. At that moment I was reading:

One morning after a beautiful snowfall I sent a letter to a friend's house about something I wished to say, but said nothing at all about the snow. And in his reply he wrote: "How can I listen to a man so base that his pen in writing did not make the least reference to the snow! Your honorable way of expressing yourself I exceedingly regret." How amusing was this answer!

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The shoeshiner was now asking me whether anything was wrong with the polish he had put on my boots, so I thought it best to leave.

In the earlier pages of Kenko's book there are a number of allusions to the agreeableness of intercourse with friends, so I went into a nearby restaurant to telephone to a man whom I wished to know better. He said that he would be happy to meet me at ten minutes after twelve. That left over half an hour. I felt an immediate necessity to tell some one about Kenko, so I made my way to Mr. Nichols's delightful bookshop (which has an open fire) on Thirty-third Street. I showed the book to Mr. Nichols, and we had a pleasant talk, in the course of which she showed me the five facsimile volumes of Dickens's Christmas books, which he had issued. In particular, he read aloud to me the magnificent description of the boiling kettle in the first "Chirp" of "The Cricket on the Hearth," and pointed out to me how Dickens fell into rhyme in describing the song of the kettle. This passage Mr. Nichols read to me, standing in front of his fire, in a very musical and sympathetic tone of voice which pleased me exceedingly. I was strongly tempted to buy the five little books, and wished I had known of them before Christmas. With a brutal effort at last I pulled out my watch, and found it was a quarter after twelve.

I met my friend at his office, and we walked up Fourth Avenue in a flush of sunshine. From Twenty-fourth to Forty-second Street we discussed the habits of English poets visiting this country. At the club we got onto Bolshevism, and he told me how a bookseller on Lexington Avenue, whose shop is frequented by very outspoken radicals, had told him that one of these had said, "The time is coming, and not far away, when the gutters in front of your shop will run with blood as they did in Petrograd." I thought of some recent bomb outrages in Philadelphia and did not laugh. With such current problems before us, I felt a little embarrassed about turning the talk back to so many centuries to Kenko, but finally I got it there. My friend ate chicken hash and tea; I had kidneys and bacon, and cocoa with whipped cream. We both had a coffee eclair. We parted with mutual regret, and I went back to the Hallbedroom street, intending to do some work.

Of course you know that I didn't do it. I lit the gas stove, and sat down to read Kenko. I wished I were a recluse, living somewhere near a plum tree and a clear running water, leisurely penning maxims for posterity. I read about his frugality, his love of the moon and a little music, his somewhat embittered complaints against the folly of men who spend their lives in rushing about swamped in petty affairs, and the sad story of the old priest who was attacked by a goblin-cat when he came home late at night from a pleasant evening spent in capping verses. I read with special pleasure his seven Self-Congratulations, in which he records seven occasions when he felt that

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he had really done himself justice. The first of these was when he watched a man riding horseback in a reckless fashion; he predicted that the man would come a cropper, and he did so. The next four self-congratulations refer to times when his knowledge of literary and artistic matters enabled him to place an unfamiliar quotation or assign a painted tablet to the right artist. One tells how he was able to find a man in a crowd when everyone else had failed. And the last and most amusing is an anecdote of a court lady who tried to inveigle him into a flirtation with her maid by sending the latter, richly dressed and perfumed, to sit very close to him when he was at the temple. Kenko congratulates himself on having been adamant. He was no Pepys.

I thought of trying to set down a similar list of self-congratulations for myself. Alas, the only two I could think of were having remembered a telephone number, the memorandum of which I had lost; and having persuaded a publisher to issue a novel which was a great success. (Not written by me, let me add.)

I found my friend Kenko a rather disturbing companion. His condemnation of our busy, racketing life is so damned conclusive! Having recently added to my family, I was distressed by his section “Against Leaving Any Descendants.” He seems to be devoid of the sentiment of ancestor worship and sacredness of family continuity which we have been taught to associate with the Oriental. And yet there is always a current of suspicion in one’s mind that he is not really revealing his inmost heart. When a bachelor in his late fifties tells us how glad he is never to have had a son, we begin to taste sour grapes.

I went out about six o’clock, and was thrilled by a shaving of shining new moon in the cold blue winter sky—“the sky with its terribly cold clear moon, which none care to watch, is simply heart-breaking,” says Kenko. As I walked up Broadway I turned back for another look at the moon, and found it hidden by the vast bulk of a hotel. Kenko would have had some caustic remark for that. I went into the Milwaukee Lunch for supper. They had just baked some of their delicious fresh bran muffins, still hot from the oven. I had two of them, sliced and buttered, with a pot of tea. Kenko lay on the table, and the red-headed philosopher who runs the lunchroom spotted him. I have always noticed that “plain men” are vastly curious about books. They seem to suspect that there is some occult power in them, some mystery that they would like to grasp. My friend, who has the bearing of a prizefighter, but the heart of an amiable child, came over and picked up the book. He sat down at the table with me and looked at it. I was a little doubtful how to explain matters, for I felt that it was the kind of book he would not be likely to care for. He began spelling it out loud, rather laboriously—

> Section 1. Well! Being born into this world there are, I suppose,
> many aims which we may strive to attain.

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To my surprise he showed the greatest enthusiasm. So much so that I ordered another pair of bran muffins, which I did not really want, so that he might have more time for reading Kenko.

“Who was this fellow?” he asked.

“He was a Jap,” I said, “lived a long time ago. He was mighty thick with the Emperor, and after the Emperor died he went to live by himself in the country, and became a priest, and wrote down his thoughts.”

“I see,” said my friend. “Just put down whatever came into his head, eh?”

“That’s it. All his ideas about the queer things a fellow runs into in life, you know, little bits of philosophy.”

I was a little afraid of using that word “philosophy,” but I couldn’t think of anything else to say. It struck my friend very pleasantly.

“That’s it,” he said, “philosophy. Just as you say, now, he went off by himself and put things down the way they come to him. Philosophy. Sure. Say, that’s a good kind of book. I like that kind of thing. I have a lot of books at home, you know. I get home about nine o’clock, and I most always read a bit before I go to bed.”

How I yearned to know what books they were, but it seemed rude to question him.

He dipped into Kenko again, and I wondered whether courtesy demanded that I should order another pot of tea.

“Say, would you like to do me a favor?”

“Sure thing,” I said.

“When you get through with that book, pass it over, will you? That’s the kind of thing I’ve been wanting. Just some little thoughts, you know, something short. I’ve got a lot of books at home.”

His big florid face gleamed with friendly earnestness.

“Sure thing,” I said. “Just as soon as I’ve finished it you shall have it.” I wanted to ask whether he would reciprocate by lending me one of his own books, which would give me some clue to his tastes; but again I felt obscurely that he would not understand my curiosity.

As I went out he called to me again from where he stood by the shining coffee boiler. “Don’t forget, will you?” he said. “When you’re through, just pass it over.”

I promised faithfully, and tomorrow evening I shall take the book in to him. I honestly hope he'll enjoy it. I walked up the bright wintry street, and wondered what Kenko would have said to the endless flow of taxicabs, the elevators and subways, the telephones, and telegraph offices, the newsstands and especially the plate-glass windows of florists. He would have had some urbane, cynical and delightfully disillusioning remarks to offer. And, as Mr. Weaver so shrewdly says, how he would enjoy "The Way of All Flesh!"

I came back to Hallbedroom street, and set down these few meditations. There is much more I would like to say, but the partitions in hall bedrooms are thin, and the lady in the next room thumps on the wall if I keep the typewriter going after ten o'clock.

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TWO DAYS WE CELEBRATE

[Illustration]

If we were asked (we have not been asked) to name a day the world ought to celebrate and does not, we would name the 16th of May. For on that day, in the year 1763, James Boswell first met Dr. Samuel Johnson.

This great event, which enriched the world with one of the most vivid panoramas of human nature known to man, happened in Tom Davies's bookshop in Covent Garden. Mr. and Mrs. Davies were friends of the Doctor, who frequently visited their shop. Of them Boswell remarks quaintly that though they had been on the stage for many years, they "maintained an uniform decency of character." The shop seems to have been a charming place: one went there not merely to buy books, but also to have a cup of tea in the back parlor. It is sad to think that though we have been hanging round bookshops for a number of years, we have never yet met a bookseller who invited us into the private office for a quiet cup. Wait a moment, though, we are forgetting Dr. Rosenbach, the famous bookseller of Philadelphia. But his collations, held in amazed memory by many editioneers, rarely descend to anything so humble as tea. One recalls a confused glamor of ortolans, trussed guinea-hens, strawberries reclining in a bowl carved out of solid ice, and what used to be known as vintages. It is a pity that Dr. Johnson died too soon to take lunch with Dr. Rosenbach.

"At last, on Monday, the 16th of May," says Boswell, "when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back parlor, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies, having perceived him through the glass door, announced his awful approach to me. Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated." The volatile Boswell may be forgiven his agitation. We also would have trembled not a little. Boswell was only twenty-two, and probably felt that his whole life and career hung upon the great man's mood. But embarrassment is a comely emotion for a young man in the face of greatness; and the Doctor was speedily put in a good humor by an opportunity to utter his favorite pleasantry at the expense of the Scotch. "I do, indeed, come from Scotland," cried Boswell, after Davies had let the cat out of the bag; "but I cannot help it." "That, sir," said Doctor Johnson, "is what a great many of your countrymen cannot help."

The great book that dated from that meeting in Davies's back parlor has become one of the most intimately cherished possessions of the race. One finds its admirers and students scattered over the globe. No man who loves human nature in all its quirks and pangs, seasoned with bluff honesty and the genuineness of a cliff or a tree, can afford to step into a hearse until he has made it his own. And it is a noteworthy illustration of the biblical saying that whosoever will rule, let him be a servant. Boswell made himself the servant of Johnson, and became one of the masters of English literature.

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It used to annoy us to hear Karl Rosner referred to as “the Kaiser’s Boswell.” For to *boswellize* (which is a verb that has gone into our dictionaries) means not merely to transcribe faithfully the acts and moods and import of a man’s life; it implies also that the man so delineated be a good man and a great. Horace Traubel was perhaps a Boswell; but Rosner never.

It is pleasant to know that Boswell was not merely a kind of animated note-book. He was a droll, vain, erring, bibulous, warm-hearted creature, a good deal of a Pepys, in fact, with all the Pepysian vices and virtues. Mr. A. Edward Newton’s “Amenities of Book Collecting” makes Boswell very human to us. How jolly it is to learn that Jamie (like many lesser fry since) wrote press notices about himself. Here is one of his own blurbs, which we quote from Mr. Newton’s book:

Boswell, the author, is a most excellent man: he is of an ancient family in the west of Scotland, upon which he values himself not a little. At his nativity there appeared omens of his future greatness. His parts are bright, and his education has been good. He has traveled in post chaises miles without number. He is fond of seeing much of the world. He eats of every good dish, especially apple pie. He drinks Old Hock. He has a very fine temper. He is somewhat of a humorist and a little tinctured with pride. He has a good manly countenance, and he owns himself to be amorous. He has infinite vivacity, yet is observed at times to have a melancholy cast. He is rather fat than lean, rather short than tall, rather young than old. His shoes are neatly made, and he never wears spectacles.

This brings the excellent Boswell very close to us indeed: he might almost be a member of the Authors’ League. “Especially apple pie, bless his heart!”

When we said that Boswell was a kind of Pepys, we fell by chance into a happy comparison. Not only by his volatile errors was he of the tribe of Samuel, but in his outstanding character by which he becomes of importance to posterity—that of one of the great diarists. Now there is no human failing upon which we look with more affectionate lenience than that of keeping a diary. All of us, in our pilgrimage through the difficult thickets of this world, have moods and moments when we have to fall back on ourselves for the only complete understanding and absolution we will ever find. In such times, how pleasant it is to record our emotions and misgivings in the sure and secret pages of some privy notebook; and how entertaining to read them again in later years! Dr. Johnson himself advised Bozzy to keep a journal, though he little suspected to what use it would be put. The cynical will say that he did so in order that Bozzy would have less time to pester him, but we believe his advice was sincere. It must have been, for the Doctor kept one himself, of which more in a moment.

“He recommended to me,” Boswell says, “to keep a journal of my life, full and unreserved. He said it would be a very good exercise and would yield me great satisfaction when the particulars were faded from my remembrance. He counselled me

to keep it private, and said I might surely have a friend who would burn it in case of my death."

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Happily it was not burned. The Great Doctor never seemed so near to me as the other day when I saw a little notebook, bound in soft brown leather and interleaved with blotting paper, in which Bozzy's busy pen had jotted down memoranda of his talks with his friend, while they were still echoing in his mind. From this notebook (which must have been one of many) the paragraphs were transferred practically unaltered into the Life. This superb treasure, now owned by Mr. Adam of Buffalo, almost makes one hear the Doctor's voice; and one imagines Boswell sitting up at night with his candle, methodically recording the remarks of the day. The first entry was dated September 22, 1777, so Bozzy must have carried it in his pocket when Dr. Johnson and he were visiting Dr. Taylor in Ashbourne. It was during this junket that Dr. Johnson tried to pole the large dead cat over Dr. Taylor's dam, an incident that Boswell recorded as part of his "Flemish picture of my friend." It was then also that Mrs. Killingley, mistress of Ashbourne's leading inn, The Green Man, begged Boswell "to name the house to his extensive acquaintance." Certainly Bozzy's acquaintance was to be far more extensive than good Mrs. Killingley ever dreamed. It was he who "named the house" to me, and for this reason The Green Man profited in fourpence worth of cider, 134 years later.

There is another day we have vowed to commemorate, by drinking great flaggonage of tea, and that is the 18th of September, Dr. Johnson's birthday. The Great Cham needs no champion; his speech and person have become part of our common heritage. Yet the extraordinary scenario in which Boswell filmed him for us has attained that curious estate of great literature the characteristic of which is that every man imagines he has read it, though he may never have opened its pages. It is like the historic landmark of one's home town, which foreigners from overseas come to study, but which the denizen has hardly entered. It is like Niagara Falls: we have a very fair mental picture of the spectacle and little zeal to visit the uproar itself. And so, though we all use Doctor Johnson's sharply stamped coinages, we generally are too lax about visiting the mint.

But we will never cease to pray that every honest man should study Boswell. There are many who have topped the rise of human felicity in that book: when reading it they feel the tide of intellect brim the mind with a unique fullness of satisfaction. It is not a mere commentary on life: it *is* life—it fills and floods every channel of the brain. It is a book that men make a hobby of, as golf or billiards. To know it is a liberal education. I could have understood Germany yearning to invade England in order to annex Boswell's Johnson. There would have been some sense in that.

What is the average man's conception of Doctor Johnson? We think of a huge ungainly creature, slovenly of dress, addicted to tea, the author of a dictionary and the center of a tavern coterie. We think of him prefacing bluff and vehement remarks with "Sir," and having a knack for demolishing opponents in boisterous argument. All of which is passing true, just as is our picture of the Niagara we have never seen; but how it misses the inner tenderness and tormented virtue of the man!

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So it is refreshing sometimes to turn away from Boswell to those passages where the good old Doctor has revealed himself with his own hand. The letter to Chesterfield is too well known for comment. But no less noble, and not nearly so well known, is the preface to the Dictionary. How moving it is in its sturdy courage, its strong grasp of the tools of expression. In every line one feels the weight and push of a mind that had behind it the full reservoir of language, particularly the Latin. There is the same sense of urgent pressure that one feels in watching a strong stream backed up behind a dam:

I look with pleasure on my book, however defective, and deliver it to the world with the spirit of a man that has endeavored well. That it will immediately become popular I have not promised to myself: a few wild blunders, and risible absurdities, from which no work of such multiplicity was ever free, may for a time furnish folly with laughter, and harden ignorance in contempt, but useful diligence will at last prevail, and there never can be wanting some who distinguish desert; who will consider that no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away; that a whole life cannot be spent upon syntax and etymology, and that even a whole life would not be sufficient; that he, whose design includes whatever language can express, must often speak of what he does not understand; that a writer will sometimes be tarried by eagerness to the end, and sometimes faint with weariness under a task, which Scaliger compares to the labors of the anvil and the mine; that what is obvious is not always known, and what is known is not always present; that sudden fits of inadvertency will surprise vigilance, slight avocations will seduce attention, and casual eclipses of the mind will darken learning; and that the writer shall often in vain trace his memory at the moment of need, for that which yesterday he knew with intuitive readiness, and which will come uncalled into his thoughts to-morrow.

I know no better way of celebrating Doctor Johnson's birthday than by quoting a few passages from his "Prayers and Meditations," jotted down during his life in small note-books and given shortly before his death to a friend. No one understands the dear old doctor unless he remembers that his spirit was greatly perplexed and harassed by sad and disordered broodings. The bodily twitchings and odd gestures which attracted so much attention as he rolled about the streets were symptoms of painful twitchings and gestures within. A great part of his intense delight in convivial gatherings, in conversation and the dinner table, was due to his eagerness to be taken out of himself. One fears that his solitary hours were very often tragic.

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There were certain dates which Doctor Johnson almost always commemorated in his private notebook—his birthday, the date of his wife's death, the Easter season and New Year's. In these pathetic little entries one sees the spirit that was dogmatic and proud among men abasing itself in humility and pouring out the generous tenderness of an affectionate nature. In these moments of contrition small peccadilloes took on tragic importance in his mind. Rising late in the morning and the untidy state of his papers seemed unforgivable sins. There is hardly any more moving picture in the history of mankind than that of the rugged old doctor pouring out his innocent petitions for greater strength in ordering his life and bewailing his faults of sluggishness, indulgence at table and disorderly thoughts. Let us begin with his entry on September 18, 1760, his fifty-second birthday:

RESOLVED, D.j.

To combat notions of obligation.

To apply to study.

To reclaim imaginations.

To consult the resolves on Tetty's [his wife's] coffin.

To rise early.

To study religion.

To go to church.

To drink less strong liquors.

To keep a journal.

To oppose laziness by doing what is to be done to-morrow.

Rise as early as I can.

Send for books for history of war.

Put books in order.

Scheme of life.

The very human feature of these little notes is that the same good resolutions appear year after year. Thus, four years after the above, we find him writing:

Sept. 18, 1764.

This is my 56th birthday, the day on which I have concluded 55 years.

I have outlived many friends, I have felt many sorrows. I have made few improvements. Since my resolution formed last Easter, I have made no advancement in knowledge or in goodness; nor do I recollect that I have endeavored it. I am dejected, but not hopeless.

I resolve,

To study the Scriptures; I hope, in the original languages. Six hundred and forty verses every Sunday will nearly comprise the Scriptures in a year.

To read good books; to study theology.

To treasure in my mind passages for recollection.

To rise early; not later than six, if I can; I hope sooner, but as soon as I can.

To keep a journal, both of employment and of expenses. To keep accounts.

To take care of my health by such means as I have designed.

To set down at night some plan for the morrow.

To-morrow I purpose to regulate my room.

* * * * *

At Easter, 1765, he confesses sadly that he often lies abed until two in the afternoon; which, after all, was not so deplorable, for he usually went to bed very late. Boswell has spoken of “the unseasonable hour at which he had habituated himself to expect the oblivion of repose.” On New Year’s Day, 1767, he prays: “Enable me, O Lord, to use all enjoyments with due temperance, preserve me from unseasonable and immoderate sleep.” Two years later than this he writes:

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“I am not yet in a state to form many resolutions; I purpose and hope to rise early in the morning at eight, and by degrees at six; eight being the latest hour to which bedtime can be properly extended; and six the earliest that the present system of life requires.”

One of the most pathetic of his entries is the following, on September 18, 1768:

“This day it came into my mind to write the history of my melancholy. On this I purpose to deliberate; I know not whether it may not too much disturb me.”

From time to time there have been stupid or malicious people who have said that Johnson’s marriage with a homely woman twenty years older than himself was not a love match. For instance, Mr. E.W. Howe, of Atchison, Kan., in most respects an amiable and well-conducted philosopher, uttered in *Howe’s Monthly* (May, 1918) the following words, which (I hope) he will forever regret:

“I have heard that when a young man he (Johnson) married an ugly and vulgar old woman for her money, and that his taste was so bad that he worshiped her.”

Against this let us set what Johnson wrote in his notebook on March 28, 1770:

This is the day on which, in 1752, I was deprived of poor dear Tetty. When I recollect the time in which we lived together, my grief of her departure is not abated; and I have less pleasure in any good that befalls me, because she does not partake it. On many occasions, I think what she would have said or done. When I saw the sea at Brighthelmstone, I wished for her to have seen it with me. But with respect to her, no rational wish is now left but that we may meet at last where the mercy of God shall make us happy, and perhaps make us instrumental to the happiness of each other. It is now 18 years.

Let us end the memorandum with a less solemn note. On Good Friday, 1779, he and Boswell went to church together. When they returned the good old doctor sat down to read the Bible, and he says, “I gave Boswell Les Pensees de Pascal, that he might not interrupt me.” Of this very copy Boswell says: “I preserve the book with reverence.” I wonder who has it now?

So let us wish Doctor Johnson many happy returns of the day, sure that as long as paper and ink and eyesight preserve their virtue he will bide among us, real and living and endlessly loved.

THE URCHIN AT THE ZOO

I don’t know just what urchins think about; neither do they, perhaps; but presumably by the time they’re twenty-eight months old they must have formed some ideas as to what is possible and what isn’t. And therefore it seemed to the Urchin’s curators sound and

advisable to take him out to the Zoo one Sunday afternoon just to suggest to his delightful mind that nothing is impossible in this curious world.

Of course, the amusing feature of such expeditions is that it is always the adult who is astounded, while the child takes things blandly for granted. You or I can watch a tiger for hours and not make head or tail of it—in a spiritual sense, that is—whereas an urchin simply smiles with rapture, isn't the least amazed, and wants to stroke the "nice pussy."

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It was a soft spring afternoon, the garden was thronged with visitors and all the indoor animals seemed to be wondering how soon they would be let out into their open-air inclosures. We filed through the wicket gate and the Urchin disdained the little green go-carts ranked for hire. He preferred to navigate the Zoo on his own white-gaitered legs. You might as well have expected Adam on his first tour of Eden to ride in a palanquin.

The Urchin entered the Zoo much in the frame of mind that must have been Adam's on that original tour of inspection. He had been told he was going to the Zoo, but that meant nothing to him. He saw by the aspect of his curators that he was to have a good time, and loyally he was prepared to exult over whatever might come his way. The first thing he saw was a large boulder—it is set up as a memorial to a former curator of the garden. "Ah," thought the Urchin, "this is what I have been brought here to admire." With a shout of glee he ran to it. "See stone," he cried. He is an enthusiast concerning stones. He has a small cardboard box of pebbles, gathered from the walks of a city square, which is very precious to him. And this magnificent big pebble, he evidently thought, was the marvelous thing he had come to examine. His custodians, far more anxious than he to feast their eyes upon lions and tigers, had hard work to lure him away. He crouched by the boulder, appraising its hugeness, and left it with the gratified air of one who has extracted the heart out of a surprising and significant experience.

The next adventure was a robin, hopping on the lawn. Every child is familiar with robins which play a leading part in so much Mother Goose mythology, so the Urchin felt himself greeting an old friend. "See Robin Red-breast!" he exclaimed, and tried to climb the low wire fence that bordered the path. The robin hopped discreetly underneath a bush, uncertain of our motives.

Now, as I have no motive but to attempt to record the truth, it is my duty to set down quite frankly that I believe the Urchin showed more enthusiasm over the stone and the robin than over any of the amazements that succeeded them. I suppose the reason for that is plain. These two objects had some understandable relation with his daily life. His small mind—we call a child's mind "small" simply by habit; perhaps it is larger than ours, for it can take in almost anything without effort—possessed well-known classifications into which the big stone and the robin fitted comfortably and naturally. But what can a child say to an ostrich or an elephant? It simply smiles and passes on. Thereby showing its superiority to some of our most eminent thinkers. They, confronted by something the like of which they have never seen before—shall we say a League of Nations or Bolshevism?—burst into shrill screams of panic abuse and flee the precinct! How much wiser the level-headed Urchin! Confronting the elephant, certainly an appalling sight to so small a mortal, he looked at the curator, who was carrying him on one shoulder, and said with an air of one seeking gently to reassure himself, "Elphunt won't come after Junior." Which is something of the mood to which the Senate is moving.

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It was delightful to see the Urchin endeavor to bring some sense of order into this amazing place by his classification of the strange sights that surrounded him. He would not confess himself staggered by anything. At his first glimpse of the emu he cried ecstatic, “Look, there’s a—,” and paused, not knowing what on earth to call it. Then rapidly to cover up his ignorance he pointed confidently to a somewhat similar fowl and said sagely, “And there’s another!” The curious moth-eaten and shabby appearance that captive camels always exhibit was accurately recorded in his addressing one of them as “poor old horsie.” And after watching the llamas in silence, when he saw them nibble at some grass he was satisfied. “Moo-cow,” he stated positively, and turned away. The bears did not seem to interest him until he was reminded of Goldylocks. Then he remembered the pictures of the bears in that story and began to take stock of them.

The Zoo is a pleasant place to wander on a Sunday afternoon. The willow trees, down by the brook where the otters were plunging, were a cloud of delicate green. Shrubs everywhere were bursting into bud. The Tasmanian devils those odd little swine that look like small pigs in a high fever, were lying sprawled out, belly to the sun-warmed earth, in the same whimsical posture that dogs adopt when trying to express how jolly they feel. The Urchin’s curators were at a loss to know what the Tasmanian devils were and at first were led astray by a sign on a tree in the devils’ inclosure. “Look, they’re Norway maples,” cried one curator. In the same way we thought at first that a llama was a Chinese ginkgo. These errors lead to a decent humility.

There is something about a Zoo that always makes one hungry, so we sat on a bench in the sun, watched the stately swans ruffling like square-rigged ships on the sparkling pond, and ate biscuits, while the Urchin was given a mandate over some very small morsels. He was much entertained by the monkeys in the open-air cages. In the upper story of one cage a lady baboon was embracing an urchin of her own, while underneath her husband was turning over a pile of straw in a persistent search for small deer. It was a sad day for the monkeys at the Zoo when the rule was made that no peanuts can be brought into the park. I should have thought that peanuts were an inalienable right for captive monkeys. The order posted everywhere that one must not give the animals tobacco seems almost unnecessary nowadays, with the weed at present prices. The Urchin was greatly interested in the baboon rummaging in his straw. “Mokey kicking the grass away,” he observed thoughtfully.

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Down in the grizzly-bear pit one of the bears squatted himself in the pool and sat there, grinning complacently at the crowd. We explained that the bear was taking a bath. This presented a familiar train of thought to the Urchin and he watched the grizzly climb out of his tank and scatter the water over the stone floor. As we walked away the Urchin observed thoughtfully, “He’s dying.” This somewhat shocked the curators, who did not know that their offspring had even heard of death. “What does he mean?” we asked ourselves. “He’s dying,” repeated the Urchin in a tone of happy conviction. Then the explanation struck us. “He’s drying!” “Quite right,” we said. “After his bath he has to dry himself.”

We went home on a crowded Girard Avenue car, thinking impatiently that it will be some time before we can read “The Jungle Book” to the Urchin. In the summer, when the elephants take their bath outdoors, we’ll go again. And the last thing the Urchin said that night as he fell asleep was, “Mokey kicking the grass away.”

FELLOW CRAFTSMEN

Robert Urwick, the author, was not yet so calloused by success that he was immune from flattery. And so when he received the following letter he was rather pleased:

Mr. Robt. Urwick, dear sir I seen your story in this weeks Saturday Evn Cudgel, not that I can afford to buy journals of that stamp but I pick up the copy on a bench in the park. Now Mr. Urwick I am a poor man but I was brought up a patron of the arts and I am bound to say that story of yours called Brass Nuckles was a fine story and I am proud to compliment you upon it. Mr. Urwick that brings me to another matter upon which I have been intending to write you upon for a long time but did not like to risk an intrusion. I used to dable in literature to some little extent myself if that will lend a fellow feeling for a craftsman in distress. I am a poor man, out of work through no fault of mine but on account of the illness of my wife and my sitting up with her at nights for weeks and weeks I could not hold my job whch required mentle concentration of a vigorous sort. Now Mr. Urwick I have a sick wife and seven children to support, and the rent shortly due and the landlord threatens to eject us if I don’t pay what I owe. As it happens my wife and I are hoping to be blessed again soon, with our eighth. Owing to my love and devotion for the fine arts we have named all the earlier children for noted authors or writers Rudyard Kipling, W.J. Bryan, Mark Twain, Debs, Irvin Cobb, Walt Mason and Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Now Mr. Urwick I thought that I would name the next one after you, seeing you have done so much for literature Robert if a boy or Roberta if a girl with Urwick for a middle name thus making you a godfather in a manner of speaking. I was wondering whether you would not feel like making a little godfathers gift for this innocent babe now about to come into the world and to bare your name. Say twenty dollars, but not a check if it can be avoided as owing to tempry ambarrassment I am not holding any bank account, and currency would be easier for me to convert into the necesity of life.

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I wrote this letter once before but tore it up fearing to intrude, but now my need compels me to be frank. I hope you will adorn our literature with many more beautiful compositions similiar to Brass Nuckles.

Yours truly

Mr Henry Phillips 454 East 34 St.

Mr. Urwick, after reading this remarkable tribute twice, laughed heartily and looked in his bill-folder. Finding there a crisp ten-dollar note, he folded it into an envelope and mailed it to his admirer, inclosing with it a friendly letter wishing success to the coming infant who was to carry his name.

A fortnight later he found on his breakfast table a very soiled postal card with this message:

Dear and kind friend, the babe arrived and to the joy of all is a boy and has been cristened Robert Urwick Phillips. Unfortunately he is a sicly infant and the doctor says he must have port wine at once or he may not survive. His mother and I were overjoyed at your munificant gift and hope some day to tell the boy of his beanefactor, Mr. Kipling only sent five spot to his namesake. Do you think you could spare five dollars to help pay for port wine Yours gratefully

Henry Phillips?

Mr. Urwick was a little surprised at the thought of port wine for one so young, but happening to be bound down town that morning he thought it might be interesting to look in at Mr. Phillips' residence and find out how his godchild was faring. If the child were really in distress he might perhaps contribute a small sum to insure proper medical care.

The address proved to be a shabby tenement house hedged by saloons. A ragged little girl (he wondered whether she were Ella Wheeler Wilcox Phillips) pointed him to Mr. Phillips's door. Meeting no answer, he entered.

The room was empty—a single room, with a cot bed, an oil stove and a table littered with stationery and stamps. Of Mrs. Phillips, his namesake or the other seven he saw no signs. He advanced to the table.

Evidently Mr. Phillips was not a ready writer and his letters cost him some pains. Several lay open on the table in different stages of composition. They were all exactly the same in wording as the first one Urwick had received. They were addressed to Booth Tarkington, Don Marquis, Ellen Glasgow, Edna Ferber, Agnes Repplier, Holworthy Hall and Fannie Hurst. Each letter offered to name some coming child after these

Parnassians. Near by lay a pile of old magazines from which the industrious Mr. Phillips evidently culled the names of his literary favorites.

Urwick smiled grimly and tiptoed from the room. On the stairs he met a fat charwoman. He asked her if Mr. Phillips were married. "Whisky is his wife and child," she replied.

A month later Urwick put Phillips into a story which he sold to the *Saturday Evening Cudgel* for $500. When it was published he sent a marked copy of the magazine to the father of Robert Urwick Phillips with the following note:

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“Dear Mr. Phillips—I owe you about $490. Come around some day and I’ll blow you to lunch.”

THE KEY RING

[Illustration]

I know a man who carries in his left-leg trouser pocket a large heavy key ring, on which there are a dozen or more keys of all shapes and sizes. There is a latchkey, and the key of his private office, and the key of his roll-top desk, and the key of his safe deposit box, and a key to the little mail box at the front door of his flat (he lives in what is known as a pushbutton apartment house), and a key that does something to his motor car (not being an automobilist, I don’t know just what), and a key to his locker at the golf club, and keys of various traveling bags and trunks and filing cases, and all the other keys with which a busy man burdens himself. They make a noble clanking against his thigh when he walks (he is usually in a hurry), and he draws them out of his pocket with something of an imposing gesture when he approaches the ground glass door of his office at ten past nine every morning. Yet sometimes he takes them out and looks at them sadly. They are a mark and symbol of servitude, just as surely as if they had been heated red-hot and branded on his skin.

Not necessarily an unhappy servitude, I hasten to remark, for servitude is not always an unhappy condition. It may be the happiest of conditions, and each of those little metal strips may be regarded as a medal of honor. In fact, my friend does so regard them. He does not think of the key of his roll-top desk as a reminder of hateful tasks that must be done willy-nilly, but rather as an emblem of hard work that he enjoys and that is worth doing. He does not think of the latchkey as a mandate that he must be home by seven o’clock, rain or shine; nor does he think of it as a souvenir of the landlord who must be infallibly paid on the first of the month next ensuing. No, he thinks of the latchkey as a magic wand that admits him to a realm of kindness “whose service is perfect freedom,” as say the fine old words in the prayer book. And he does not think of his safe deposit box as a hateful little casket of leases and life insurance policies and contracts and wills, but rather as the place where he has put some of his own past life into voluntary bondage—into Liberty Bondage—at four and a quarter per cent. Yet, however blithely he may psychologize these matters, he is wise enough to know that he is not a free man. However content in servitude, he does not blink the fact that it is servitude.

“Upon his will he binds a radiant chain,” said Joyce Kilmer in a fine sonnet. However radiant, it is still a chain.

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So it is that sometimes, in the lulls of telephoning and signing contracts and talking to salesmen and preparing estimates and dictating letters “that must get off to-night” and trying to wriggle out of serving on the golf club’s house committee, my friend flings away his cigar, gets a corncob pipe out of his desk drawer, and contemplates his key ring a trifle wistfully. This nubby little tyrant that he carries about with him always makes him think of a river in the far Canadian north, a river that he visited once, long ago, before he had built up all the barbed wire of life about his spirit. It was a green lucid river that ran in a purposeful way between long fringes of pine trees. There were sandy shelves where he and a fellow canoeist with the good gift of silence built campfires and fried bacon, or fish of their own wooing. The name of that little river (his voice is grave as he recalls it), was the Peace; and it was not necessary to paddle if you didn’t feel like it. “The current ran” (it is pathetic to hear him say it) “from four to seven miles an hour.”

The tobacco smoke sifts and eddies into the carefully labeled pigeonholes of his desk, and his stenographer wonders whether she dare interrupt him to ask whether that word was “priority” or “minority” in the second paragraph of the memo to Mr. Ebbsmith. He smells that bacon again; he remembers stretching out on the cool sand to watch the dusk seep up from the valley and flood the great clear arch of green-blue sky. He remembers that there were no key rings in his pocket then, no papers, no letters, no engagements to meet Mr. Fonseca at a luncheon of the Rotary Club to discuss demurrage. He remembers the clear sparkle of the Peace water in the sunshine, its downward swell and slant over many a boulder, its milky vexation where it slid among stones. He remembers what he had said to himself then, but had since forgotten, that no matter what wounds and perplexities the world offers, it also offers a cure for each one if we know where to seek it. Suddenly he gets a vision of the whole race of men, campers out on a swinging ball, brothers in the common motherhood of earth. Born out of the same inexplicable soil bred to the same problems of star and wind and sun, what absurdity of civilization is it that has robbed men of this sense of kinship? Why he himself, he feels, could enter a Bedouin tent or an Eskimo snow-hut and find some bond of union with the inmates. The other night, he reflects, he saw moving pictures of some Fiji natives, and could read in their genial grinning faces the same human impulses he knew in himself. What have men done to cheat themselves of the enjoyment of this amazing world? “We’ve been cheated!” he cries, to the stenographer’s horror.

He thinks of his friends, his partners, his employees, of conductors on trains and waiters in lunchrooms and drivers of taxicabs. He thinks, in one amazing flash of realization, of all the men and women he has ever seen or heard of—how each one nourishes secretly some little rebellion, some dream of a wider, freer life, a life less hampered, less mean, less material. He thinks how all men yearn to cross salt water, to scale peaks, to tramp until weary under a hot sun. He hears the Peace, in its far northern valley, brawling among stones, and his heart is very low.

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“Mr. Edwards to see you,” says the stenographer.

“I’m sorry, sir,” says Edwards, “but I’ve had the offer of another job and I think I shall accept it. It’s a good thing for a chap to get a chance——”

My friend slips the key ring back in his pocket.

“What’s this?” he says. “Nonsense! When you’ve got a good job, the thing to do is to keep it. Stick to it, my boy. There’s a great future for you here. Don’t get any of those fool ideas about changing around from one thing to another.”

“OWD BOB”

CHAPTER I

(INTRODUCES OUR HERO)

Loitering perchance on the western pavement of Madison avenue, between the streets numbered 38 and 39, and gazing with an observant eye upon the pedestrians passing southward, you would be likely to see, about 8:40 o’clock of the morning, a gentleman of remarkable presence approaching with no bird-like tread. This creature, clad in a suit of subfuse respectable weave, bearing in his hand a cane of stout timber with a right-angled hornblende grip, and upon his head a hat of rich texture, would probably also carry in one hand (the left) a leather case filled with valuable papers, and in the other hand (the right, which also held the cane) a cigarette, lit upon leaving the Grand Central subway station. This cigarette the person of our tale would frequentatively apply to his lips, and then withdraw with a quick, swooping motion. With a rapid, somewhat sidelong gait (at first somehow clumsy, yet upon closer observation a mode of motion seen to embrace certain elements of harmony) this gentleman would converge upon the southwest corner of Madison avenue and 38th street; and the intent observer, noting the menacing contours of the face, would conclude that he was going to work.

[Illustration]

This gentleman, beneath his sober but excellently haberdashered surtout, was plainly a man of large frame, of a Sam Johnsonian mould, but, to the surprise of the calculating observer, it would be noted that his volume (or mass) was not what his bony structure implied. Spiritually, in deed, this interesting individual conveyed to the world a sensation of stoutness, of bulk and solidity, which (upon scrutiny) was not (or would not be) verified by measurement. Evidently, you will conclude, a stout man grown thin; or, at any rate, grown less stout. His molded depth, one might assess at 20 inches between the eaves; his longitude, say, five feet eleven; his registered tonnage, 170; his cargo, literary; and his destination, the editorial sancta of a well-known publishing house.

This gentleman, in brief, is Mr. Robert Cortes Holliday (but not the “stout Cortes” of the poet), the editor of *The Bookman*.

CHAPTER II

(OUR HERO BEGINS A CAREER)

“It would seem that whenever Nature had a man of letters up her sleeve, the first gift with which she has felt necessary to dower him has been a preacher sire.”

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R.C.H. of N.B. Tarkington.

Mr. Holliday was born in Indianapolis on July 18, 1880. It is evident that ink, piety and copious speech circulated in the veins of his clan, for at least two of his grandfathers were parsons, and one of them, Dr. Ferdinand Cortez Holliday, was the author of a volume called “Indiana Methodism” in which he was the biographer of the Rev. Joseph Tarkington, the grandfather of Newton B. Tarkington, sometimes heard of as Booth Tarkington, a novelist. Thus the hand of Robert C. Holliday was linked by the manacle of destiny to the hand of Newton B. Tarkington, and it is a quaint satisfaction to note that Mr. Holliday’s first book was that volume “Booth Tarkington,” one of the liveliest and soundest critical memoirs it has been our fortune to enjoy.

Like all denizens of Indianapolis—“Tarkingtonapolis,” Mr. Holliday calls it—our subject will discourse at considerable volume of his youth in that high-spirited city. His recollections, both sacred and profane, are, however, not in our present channel. After a reputable schooling young Robert proceeded to New York in 1899 to study art at the Art Students’ League, and later became a pupil of Twachtman. The present commentator is not in a position to say how severely either art or Mr. Holliday suffered in the mutual embrace. I have seen some of his black and white posters which seemed to me robust and considerably lively. At any rate, Mr. Holliday exhibited drawings on Fifth avenue and had illustrative work published by *Scribner’s Magazine*. He did commercial designs and comic pictures for juvenile readers. At this time he lived in a rural community of artists in Connecticut, and did his own cooking. Also, he is proud of having lived in a garret on Broome street. This phase of his career is not to be slurred over, for it is a clue to much of his later work. His writing often displays the keen eye of the painter, and his familiarity with the technique of pencil and brush has much enriched his capacity to see and to make his reader see with him. Such essays as “Going to Art Exhibitions,” and the one-third dedication of “Walking-Stick Papers” to Royal Cortissoz are due to his interest in the world as pictures.

While we think of it, then, let us put down our first memorandum upon the art of Mr. Holliday:

First Memo—Mr. Holliday’s stuff is distilled from life!

CHAPTER III

(IN WHICH OUR HERO DARTS OFF AT A TANGENT)

It is not said why our hero abandoned bristol board and india ink, and it is no duty of this inquirendo to offer surmise. The fact is that he disappeared from Broome street, and after the appropriate interval might have been observed (odd as it seems) on the campus of the University of Kansas. This vault into the petals of the sunflower seems

so quaint that I once attempted to find out from Mr. Holliday just when it was that he attended courses at that institution.

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He frankly said that he could not remember. Now he has no memory at all for dates, I will vouch; yet it seems odd (I say) that he did not even remember the numerals of the class in which he was enrolled. A “queer feller,” indeed, as Mr. Tarkington has called him. So I cannot attest, with hand on Book, that he really was at Kansas University. He may have been a footpad during that period. I have often thought to write to the dean of the university and check the matter up. It may be that entertaining anecdotes of our hero’s college career could be spaded up.

Just why this remote atheneum was sconce for Mr. Holliday’s candle I do not hazard. It seems I have heard him say that his cousin, Professor Wilbur Cortez Abbott (of Yale) was then teaching at the Kansas college, and this was the reason. It doesn’t matter now; fifty years hence it may be of considerable importance.

However, we must press on a little faster. From Kansas he returned to New York and became a salesman in the book store of Charles Scribner’s Sons, then on Fifth avenue below Twenty-third street. Here he was employed for about five years. From this experience may he traced three of the most delightful of the “Walking-Stick Papers.” It was while at Scribner’s that he met Joyce Kilmer, who also served as a Scribner book-clerk for two weeks in 1909. This friendship meant more to Bob Holliday than any other. The two men were united by intimate adhesions of temperament and worldly situation. Those who know what friendship means among men who have stood on the bottom rung together will ask no further comment. Kilmer was Holliday’s best man in 1913; Holliday stood godfather to Kilmer’s daughter Rose. On Aug. 22, 1918, Mrs. Kilmer appointed Mr. Holliday her husband’s literary executor. His memoir of Joyce Kilmer is a fitting token of the manly affection that sweetens life and enriches him who even sees it from a distance.

Just when Holliday’s connection with the Scribner store ceased I do not know. My guess is, about 1911. He did some work for the New York Public Library (tucking away in his files the material for the essay “Human Municipal Documents”) and also dabbled in eleemosynary science for the Russell Sage Foundation; though the details of the latter enterprise I cannot even conjecture. Somehow or other he fell into the most richly amusing post that a belletristic journalist ever adorned, as general factotum of *The Fishing Gazette*, a trade journal. This is laid bare for the world in “The Fish Reporter.”

About 1911 he began to contribute humorous sketches to the Saturday Magazine of the New York *Evening Post*. In 1912-13 he was writing signed reviews for the New York *Times* Review of Books. 1913-14 he was assistant literary editor of the New York *Tribune*. His meditations on the reviewing job are embalmed in “That Reviewer Cuss.” In 1914 the wear and tear of continual hard work on Grub Street rather got the better of him: he packed a bag and spent the summer in England. Four charming essays record

his adventures there, where we may leave him for the moment while we warm up to another aspect of the problem. Let us just set down our second memorandum:

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[Illustration]

Second Memo—Mr. Holliday knows the Literary Game from All Angles!

CHAPTER IV

(OUR HERO'S BOOK AND HEART SHALL NEVER PART)

Perhaps I should apologize for treating Mr. Holliday's "Walking-Stick Papers" in this biographical fashion. And yet I cannot resist it for this book is Mr. Holliday himself. It is mellow, odd, aromatic and tender, just as he is. It is (as he said of something else) "saturated with a distinguished, humane tradition of letters."

The book is exciting reading because you can trace in it the growth and felicitous toughening of a very remarkable talent. Mr. Holliday has been through a lively and gruelling mill. Like every sensitive journalist, he has been mangled at Ephesus. Slight and debonair as some of his pieces are, there is not one that is not an authentic fiber from life. That is the beauty of this sort of writing—the personal essay—it admits us to the very pulse of the machine. We see this man: selling books at Scribner's, pacing New York streets at night gloating on the yellow windows and the random ring of words, fattening his spirit on hundreds of books, concocting his own theory of the niceties of prose. We see that volatile humor which is native in him flickering like burning brandy round the rich plum pudding of his theme. With all his playfulness, when he sets out to achieve a certain effect he builds cunningly, with sure and skillful art. See (for instance) in his "As to People," his superbly satisfying picture (how careless it seems!) of his scrubwoman, closing with the precis of Billy Henderson's wife, which drives the nail through and turns it on the under side—

> Billy Henderson's wife is handsome; she is rich; she is an excellent cook; she loves Billy Henderson.

See "My friend the Policeman," or "On Going a Journey," or "The Deceased"—this last is perhaps the high-water mark of the book. To vary the figure, this essay dips its Plimsoll-mark full under. It is freighted with far more than a dozen pages might be expected to carry safely. So quietly, so quaintly told, what a wealth of humanity is in it! Am I wrong in thinking that those fellow-artists who know the thrill of a great thing greatly done will catch breath when they read this, of the minor obits in the press—

We go into the feature headed "Died," a department similar to that on the literary page headed "Books Received." ... We are set in small type, with lines following the name line indented. It is difficult for me to tell with certainty from the printed page, but I think we are set without leads.

In such passages, where the easy sporting-tweed fabric of Mr. Holliday's merry and liberal style fits his theme as snugly as the burr its nut, one feels tempted to cry joyously (as he says in some other connection), "it seems as if it were a book you had written

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yourself in a dream." And follow him, for sheer fun, in the "Going a Journey" essay. Granted that it would never have been written but for Hazlitt and Stevenson and Belloc. Yet it is fresh distilled, it has its own sparkle. Beginning with an even pace, how it falls into a swinging stride, drugs you with hilltops and blue air! Crisp, metrical, with a steady drum of feet, it lifts, purges and sustains. "This is the religious side" of reading an essay!

Mr. Holliday, then, gives us in generous measure the "certain jolly humors" which R.L.S. says we voyage to find. He throws off flashes of imaginative felicity—as where he says of canes, "They are the light to blind men." Where he describes Mr. Oliver Herford "listing to starboard, like a postman." Where he says of the English who use colloquially phrases known to us only in great literature—"There are primroses in their speech." And where he begins his "Memoirs of a Manuscript," "I was born in Indiana."

We are now ready to let fall our third memorandum:

Third Memo—Behind his colloquial, easygoing (apparently careless) utterance, Mr. Holliday conceals a high quality of literary art.

CHAPTER V

(FURTHER OSCILLATIONS OF OUR HERO)

Mr. Holliday was driven home from England and Police Constable Buckington by the war, which broke out while he was living in Chelsea. My chronology is a bit mixed here; just what he was doing from autumn, 1914, to February, 1916, I don't know. Was it then that he held the fish reporter job? Come to think of it, I believe it was. Anyway, in February, 1916, he turned up in Garden City, Long Island, where I first had the excitement of clapping eyes on him. Some of the adventures of that spring and summer may be inferred from "Memories of a Manuscript." Others took place in the austere lunch cathedral known at the press of Doubleday, Page & Company as the "garage," or on walks that summer between the Country Life Press and the neighboring champaigns of Hempstead. The full story of the Porrier's Corner Club, of which Mr. Holliday and myself are the only members, is yet to be told. As far as I was concerned it was love at first sight. This burly soul, rumbling Johnsonianly upon lettered topics, puffing unending Virginia cigarettes, gazing with shy humor through thick-paned spectacles—well, on Friday, June 23, 1916, Bob and I decided to collaborate in writing a farcical novel. It is still unwritten, save the first few chapters. I only instance this to show how fast passion proceeded.

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It would not surprise me if at some future time Mrs. Bedell's boarding house, on Jackson Street in Hempstead, becomes a place of pilgrimage for lovers of the essay. They will want to see the dark little front room on the ground floor where Owd Bob used to scatter the sheets of his essays as he was retyping them from a huge scrapbook and grooming them for a canter among publishers' sanhedrim. They will want to see (but will not, I fear) the cool barrel-room at the back of George D. Smith's tavern, an ale-house that was blithe to our fancy because the publican bore the same name as that of a very famous dealer in rare books. Along that pleasant bar, with its shining brass scuppers, Bob and I consumed many beakers of well-chilled amber during that warm summer. His urbanolatrous soul pined for the city, and he used in those days to expound the doctrine that the suburbanite really has to go to town in order to get fresh air.

In September, 1916, Holliday's health broke down. He had been feeling poorly most of the summer, and continuous hard work induced a spell of nervous depression. Very wisely he went back to Indianapolis to rest. After a good lay-off he tackled the Tarkington book, which was written in Indianapolis the following winter and spring. And "Walking-Stick Papers" began to go the rounds.

I have alluded more than once to Mr. Holliday's book on Tarkington. This original, mellow, convivial, informal and yet soundly argued critique has been overlooked by many who have delighted to honor Holliday as an essayist. But it is vastly worth reading. It is a brilliant study, full of "onion atoms" as Sydney Smith's famous salad, and we flaunt it merrily in the face of those who are frequently crapehanging and dirging that we have no sparkling young Chestertons and Rebecca Wests and J.C. Squires this side of Queenstown harbor. Rarely have creator and critic been joined in so felicitous a marriage. And indeed the union was appointed in heaven and smiles in the blood, for (as I have noted) Mr. Holliday's grandfather was the biographer of Tarkington's grandsire, also a pioneer preacher of the metaphysical commonwealth of Indiana. Mr. Holliday traces with a good deal of humor and circumstance the various ways in which the gods gave Mr. Tarkington just the right kind of ancestry, upbringing, boyhood and college career to produce a talented writer. But the fates that catered to Tarkington with such generous hand never dealt him a better run of cards than when Holliday wrote this book.

The study is one of surpassing interest, not merely as a service to native criticism but as a revelation of Holliday's ability to follow through a sustained intellectual task with the same grasp and grace that he afterward showed in the memoir of Kilmer in which his heart was so deeply engaged. Of a truth, Mr. Holliday's success in putting himself within Tarkington's dashing checked kuppenheimers is a fine achievement of projected psychology. He

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knows Tarkington so well that if the latter were unhappily deleted by some “wilful convulsion of brute nature” I think it undoubtable that his biographer could reconstruct a very plausible automaton, and would know just what ingredients to blend. A dash of Miss Austen, Joseph Conrad, Henry James and Daudet; flavored perhaps with coal smoke from Indianapolis, spindrift from the Maine coast and a few twanging chords from the Princeton Glee Club.

Fourth Memo—Mr. Holliday is critic as well as essayist.

CHAPTER VI

(OUR HERO FINDS A STEADY JOB)

It was the summer of 1917 when Owd Bob came back to New York. Just at that juncture I happened to hear that a certain publisher needed an editorial man, and when Bob and I were at Browne’s discussing the fate of “Walking-Stick Papers” over a jug of shandygaff, I told him this news. He hurried to the office in question through a drenching rain-gust, and has been there ever since. The publisher performed an act of perspicuity rare indeed. He not only accepted the manuscript, but its author as well.

So that is the story of “Walking-Stick Papers,” and it does not cause me to droop if you say I talk of matters of not such great moment. What a joy it would have been if some friend had jotted down memoranda of this sort concerning some of Elia’s doings. The book is a garner of some of the most racy, vigorous and genuinely flavored essays that this country has produced for some time. Dear to me, every one of them, as clean-cut blazes by a sincere workman along a trail full of perplexity and struggle, as Grub Street always will be for the man who dips an honest pen that will not stoop to conquer. And if you should require an accurate portrait of their author I cannot do better than quote what Grote said of Socrates:

Nothing could be more public, perpetual, and indiscriminate as to persons than his conversation. But as it was engaging, curious, and instructive to hear, certain persons made it their habit to attend him as companions and listeners.

Owd Bob has long been the object of extreme attachment and high spirits among his intimates. The earlier books have been followed by “Broome Street Straws” and “Peeps at People,” vividly personal collections that will arouse immediate affection and amusement among his readers. And of these books will be said (once more in Grote’s words about Socrates):

> Not only his conversation reached the minds of a much wider circle,
> but he became more abundantly known as a person.

Let us add, then, our final memorandum:

Fifth Memo—These essays are the sort of thing you cannot afford to miss. In them you sit down to warm your wits at the glow of a droll, delightful, unique mind.

So much (at the moment) for Bob Holliday.

THE APPLE THAT NO ONE ATE

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[Illustration]

The other evening we went to dinner with a gentleman whom it pleases our fancy to call the Caliph.

Now a Caliph, according to our notion, is a Haroun-al-Raschid kind of person; one who governs a large empire of hearts with a genial and whimsical sway; circulating secretly among his fellow-men, doing kindnesses often not even suspected by their beneficiaries. He is the sort of person of whom the trained observer may think, when he hears an unexpected kindness-grenade exploding somewhere down the line, “I’ll bet that came from the Caliph’s dugout!” A Caliph’s heart is not surrounded by barbed wire entanglements or a strip of No Man’s Land. Also, and rightly, he is stern to malefactors and fakers of all sorts.

It would have been sad if any one so un-Caliphlike as William Hohenzollern had got his eisenbahn through to Bagdad, the city sacred to the memory of a genial despot who spent his cabarabian nights in an excellent fashion. That, however, has nothing to do with the story.

Mr. and Mrs. Caliph are people so delightful that they leave in one’s mind a warm afterglow of benevolent sociability. They have an infinite interest and curiosity in the hubbub of human moods and crotchets that surrounds us all. And when one leaves their doorsill one has a genial momentum of the spirit that carries one on rapidly and cheerfully. One has an irresistible impulse to give something away, to stroke the noses of horses, to write a kind letter to the fuel administrator or do almost anything gentle and gratuitous. The Caliphs of the world don’t know it, but that is the effect they produce on their subjects.

As we left, Mr. and Mrs. Caliph pressed upon us an apple. One of those gorgeous apples that seem to grow wrapped up in tissue paper, and are displayed behind plate glass windows. A huge apple, tinted with gold and crimson and pale yellow shading off to pink. The kind of apple whose colors are overlaid with a curious mist until you polish it on your coat, when it gleams like a decanter of claret. An apple so large and weighty that if it had dropped on Sir Isaac Newton it would have fractured his skull. The kind of apple that would have made the garden of Eden safe for democracy, because it is so beautiful no one would have thought of eating it.

That was the kind of apple the Caliph gave us.

It was a cold night, and we walked down Chestnut street dangling that apple, rubbing it on our sleeve, throwing it up and down and catching it again. We stopped at a cigar store to buy some pipe tobacco. Still running on Caliph, by which we mean still beguiled by his geniality, we fell into talk with the tobacconist. “That’s a fine apple you have there,” said he. For an instant we thought of giving it to him, but then we reflected

that a man whose days are spent surrounded by rich cigars and smokables is dangerously felicitous already, and a sudden joy might blast his blood vessels.

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The shining of the street lamps was reflected on the polished skin of our fruit as we went our way. As we held it in our arms it glowed like a huge ruby. We passed a blind man selling pencils, and thought of giving it to him. Then we reflected that a blind man would lose half the pleasure of the adventure because he couldn't see the colors. We bought a pencil instead. Still running on Caliph, you see.

In our excitement we did what we always do in moments of stress—went into a restaurant and ordered a piece of hot mince pie. Then we remembered that we had just dined. Never mind, we sat there and contemplated the apple as it lay ruddily on the white porcelain tabletop. Should we give it to the waitress? No, because apples were a commonplace to her. The window of the restaurant held a great pyramid of beauties. To her, an apple was merely something to be eaten, instead of the symbol of a grand escapade. Instead, we gave her a little medallion of a buffalo that happened to be in our pocket.

Already the best possible destination for that apple had come to our mind. Hastening zealously up a long flight of stairs in a certain large building we went to a corner where sits a friend of ours, a night watchman. Under a drop light he sits through long and tedious hours, beguiling his vigil with a book. He is a great reader. He eats books alive. Lately he has become much absorbed in Saint Francis of Assisi, and was deep in the "Little Flowers" when we found him.

"We've brought you something," we said, and held the apple where the electric light brought out all its brilliance.

He was delighted and his gentle elderly face shone with awe at the amazing vividness of the fruit.

"I tell you what I'll do," he said. "That apple's much too fine for me. I'll take it home to the wife."

Of course his wife will say the same thing. She will be embarrassed by the surpassing splendor of that apple and will give it to some friend of hers whom she thinks more worthy than herself. And that friend will give it to some one else, and so it will go rolling on down the ages, passing from hand to hand, conferring delight, and never getting eaten. Ultimately some one, trying to think of a recipient really worthy of its deliciousness, will give it to Mr. and Mrs. Caliph. And they, blessed innocents, will innocently exclaim, "Why we never saw such a magnificent apple in all our lives."

And it will be true, for by that time the apple will gleam with an unearthly brightness, enhanced and burnished by all the kind thoughts that have surrounded it for so long.

As we walked homeward under a frosty sparkle of sky we mused upon all the different kinds of apples we have encountered. There are big glossy green apples and bright red

apples and yellow apples and also that particularly delicious kind (whose name we forget) that is the palest possible cream color—almost white. We have seen apples of strange shapes, something like a pear (sheepnoses, they call them), and the Maiden Blush apples with their delicate shading of yellow and debutante pink. And what a poetry in the names—Winesap, Pippin, Northern Spy, Baldwin, Ben Davis, York Imperial, Wolf River, Jonathan, Smokehouse, Summer Rambo, Rome Beauty, Golden Grimes, Shenango Strawberry, Benoni!

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We suppose there is hardly a man who has not an apple orchard tucked away in his heart somewhere. There must be some deep reason for the old suspicion that the Garden of Eden was an apple orchard. Why is it that a man can sleep and smoke better under an apple tree than in any other kind of shade? Sir Isaac Newton was a wise man, and he chose an apple tree to sit beneath. (We have often wondered, by the way, how it is that no one has ever named an apple the Woolsthorpe after Newton's home in Lincolnshire, where the famous apple incident occurred.)

An apple orchard, if it is to fill the heart of man to the full with affectionate satisfaction, should straggle down a hillside toward a lake and a white road where the sun shines hotly. Some of its branches should trail over an old, lichened and weather-stained stone wall, dropping their fruit into the highway for thirsty pedestrians. There should be a little path running athwart it, down toward the lake and the old flat-bottomed boat, whose bilge is scattered with the black and shriveled remains of angleworms used for bait. In warm August afternoons the sweet savor of ripening drifts warmly on the air, and there rises the drowsy hum of wasps exploring the windfalls that are already rotting on the grass. There you may lie watching the sky through the chinks of the leaves, and imagining the cool, golden tang of this autumn's cider vats.

You see what it is to have Caliphs in the world.

AS TO RUMORS

MADRID, Jan. 17.—Nikolai Lenine was among the Russians who landed at Barcelona recently, according to newspapers here.—News item.

It is rather important to understand the technique of rumors. The wise man does not scoff at them, for while they are often absurd, they are rarely baseless. People do not go about inventing rumors, except for purposes of hoax; and even a practical joke is never (to parody the proverb) hoax et praeterea nihil. There is always a reason for wanting to perpetrate the hoax, or a reason for believing it will be believed.

Rumors are a kind of exhalation or intellectual perfume thrown off by the news of the day. Some events are more aromatic than others; they can be detected by the trained pointer long before they happen. When things are going on that have a strong vibration —what foreign correspondents love to call a "repercussion"—they cause a good deal of mind-quaking. An event getting ready to happen is one of the most interesting things to watch. By a sort of mental radiation it fills men's minds with surmises and conjectures. Curiously enough, due perhaps to the innate perversity of man, most of the rumors suggest the exact opposite of what is going to happen. Yet a rumor, while it may be wholly misleading as to fact, is always a proof that something is going to happen. For instance, last summer when the news was full of repeated reports of Hindenburg's death, any sane man could foresee that what these reports really meant was not

necessarily Hindenburg's death at all, but Germany's approaching military collapse. Some German prisoners had probably said "Hindenburg ist kaput," meaning "Hindenburg is done for," *i.e.*, "The great offensive has failed." This was taken to mean that he was literally dead.

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In the same way, while probably no one seriously believes that Lenine is in Barcelona, the mere fact that Madrid thinks it possible shows very plainly that something is going on. It shows either that the Bolshevik experiment in Petrograd has been such a gorgeous success that Lenine can turn his attention to foreign campaigning, or that it has been such a gorgeous failure that he has had to skip. It does not prove, since the rumor is "unconfirmed," that Lenine has gone anywhere yet; but it certainly does prove that he is going somewhere soon, even if only to the fortress of Peter and Paul. There may be some very simple explanation of the rumor. "You go to Barcelona!" may be a jocular Muscovite catchword, similar to our old saying about going to Halifax, and Trotzky may have said it to Lenine. At any rate it shows that the gold dust twins are not inseparable. It shows that Bolshevism in Russia is either very strong or very near downfall.

When we were told not long ago that Berlin was strangely gay for the capital of a prostrate nation and that all the cafes were crowded with dancers at night, many readers were amazed and tried to console their sense of probability by remarking that the Germans are crazy anyway. And yet this rumor of the dancing mania was an authentic premonition of the bloodier dance of death led by the Spartacus group. If Berlin did dance it was a cotillon of despair, caused by infinite war weariness, infinite hunger to forget humiliation for a few moments, and foreboding of troubles to come. Whether true or not, no one read the news without thinking it an ominous whisper.

Coming events cast their rumors before. From a careful study of rumors the discerning may learn a good deal, providing always that they never take them at face value but try to read beneath the surface. People sometimes criticize the newspapers for printing rumors, but it is an essential part of their function to do so, provided they plainly mark them as such. Shakespeare speaks of rumors as "stuffing the ears of men with false reports," yet if so this is not the fault of the rumor itself, but of the too credible listener. The prosperity of a rumor is in the ear that hears it. The sagacious listener will take the trouble to sift and winnow his rumors, set them in perspective with what he knows of the facts and from them he will then deduce exceedingly valuable considerations. Rumor is the living atmosphere of men's minds, the most fascinating and significant problem with which we have to deal. The Fact, the Truth, may shine like the sun, but after all it is the clouds that make the sunset beautiful. Keep your eye on the rumors, for a sufficient number of rumors can compel an event to happen, even against its will.

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No one can set down any hard and fast rules for reading the rumors. The process is partly instinctive and partly the result of trained observation. It is as complicated as the calculation by which a woman tells time by her watch which she knows to be wrong—-she adds seventeen minutes, subtracts three, divides by two and then looks at the church steeple. It is as exhilarating as trying to deduce what there is going to be for supper by the pervasive fragrance of onions in the front hall. And sometimes a very small event, like a very small onion, can cast its rumors a long way. Destiny is unlike the hen in that she cackles before she lays the egg.

The first rule to observe about rumors is that they are often exactly opposite in tendency to the coming fact. For instance, the rumors of secrecy at the Peace Conference were the one thing necessary to guarantee complete publicity. Just before any important event occurs it seems to discharge both positive and negative currents, just as a magnet is polarized by an electric coil. Some people by mental habit catch the negative vibrations, others the positive. Every one can remember the military critics last March who were so certain that there would be no German offensive. Their very certainty was to many others a proof that the offensive was likely. They were full of the negative vibrations.

An interesting case of positive vibrations was the repeated rumor of the Kaiser's abdication. The fact that those rumors were premature was insignificant compared with the fact that they were current at all. The fact that there were such rumors showed that it was only a matter of time.

It is entertaining, if disconcerting, to watch a rumor on its travels. A classic example of this during the recent war is exhibited by the following clippings which were collected, I believe, by Norman Hapgood:

From the *Koelnische-Zeitung*:

"When the fall of Antwerp became known the church bells were rung." (Meaning in Germany.)

[Illustration]

From the Paris *Matin*:

"According to the *Koelnische-Zeitung*, the clergy of Antwerp were compelled to ring the church bells when the fortress was taken."

From the London *Times*:

"According to what the *Matin* has heard from Cologne, the Belgian priests, who refused to ring the church bells when Antwerp was taken, have been driven away from their places."

From the *Corriere Della Sera*, of Milan:

“According to what the *Times* has heard from Cologne, via Paris, the unfortunate Belgian priests, who refused to ring the church bells when Antwerp was taken, have been sentenced to hard labor.”

From the *Matin* again:

“According to information received by the *Corriere Della Sera*, from Cologne, via London, it is confirmed that the barbaric conquerors of Antwerp punished the unfortunate Belgian priests for their heroic refusal to ring the church bells by hanging them as living clappers to the bells with their heads down.”

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Be hospitable to rumors, for however grotesque they are, they always have some reason for existence. The Sixth Sense is the sense of news, the sense that something is going to happen. And just as every orchestra utters queer and discordant sounds while it is tuning up its instruments, so does the great orchestra of Human Events (in other words, The News) offer shrill and perhaps misleading notes before the conductor waves his baton and leads off the concerted crash of Truth. Keep your senses alert to examine the odd scraps of hearsay that you will often see in the news, for it is in just those eavesdroppings at the heart of humanity that the press often fulfills its highest function.

OUR MOTHERS

[Illustration]

When one becomes a father, then first one becomes a son. Standing by the crib of one's own baby, with that world-old pang of compassion and protectiveness toward this so little creature that has all its course to run, the heart flies back in yearning and gratitude to those who felt just so toward one's self. Then for the first time one understands the homely succession of sacrifices and pains by which life is transmitted and fostered down the stumbling generations of men.

Every man is privileged to believe all his life that his own mother is the best and dearest that a child ever had. By some strange racial instinct of taciturnity and repression most of us lack utterance to say our thoughts in this close matter. A man's mother is so tissued and woven into his life and brain that he can no more describe her than describe the air and sunlight that bless his days. It is only when some Barrie comes along that he can say for all of us what fills the eye with instant tears of gentleness. Is there a mother, is there a son, who has not read Barrie's "Margaret Ogilvy?" Turn to that first chapter, "How My Mother Got Her Soft Face," and draw aside the veils that years and perplexity weave over the inner sanctuaries of our hearts.

Our mothers understand us so well! Speech and companionship with them are so easy, so unobstructed by the thousand teasing barriers that bar soul from eager soul! To walk and talk with them is like slipping on an old coat. To hear their voices is like the shake of music in a sober evening hush.

There is a harmony and beauty in the life of mother and son that brims the mind's cup of satisfaction. So well we remember when she was all in all; strength, tenderness, law and life itself. Her arms were the world: her soft cheek our sun and stars. And now it is we who are strong and self-sufficing; it is she who leans on us. Is there anything so precious, so complete, so that return of life's pendulum?

And it is as grandmothers that our mothers come into the fullness of their grace. When a man's mother holds his child in her gladdened arms he is aware (with some instinctive sense of propriety) of the roundness of life's cycle; of the mystic harmony of life's ways. There speaks humanity in its chord of three notes: its little capture of completeness and joy, sounding for a moment against the silent flux of time. Then the perfect span is shredded away and is but a holy memory.

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The world, as we tread its puzzling paths, shows many profiles and glimpses of wonder and loveliness; many shapes and symbols to entrance and astound. Yet it will offer us nothing more beautiful than our mother's face; no memory more dear than her encircling tenderness. The mountain tops of her love rise as high in ether as any sun-stained alp. Lakes are no deeper and no purer blue than her bottomless charity. We need not fare further than her immortal eyes to know that life is good.

How strangely fragmentary our memories of her are, and yet (when we piece them together) how they erect a comfortable background for all we are and dream. She built the earth about us and arched us over with sky. She created our world, taught us to dwell therein. The passion of her love compelled the rude laws of life to stand back while we were soft and helpless. She defied gravity that we might not fall. She set aside hunger, sleep and fear that we might have plenty. She tamed her own spirit and crushed her own weakness that we might be strong. And when we passed down the laughing street of childhood and turned that corner that all must pass, it was her hand that waved good-bye. Then, smothering the ache, with one look into the secret corner where the old keepsakes lie hid, she set about waiting the day when the long-lost baby would come back anew. The grandchild—is he not her own boy returned to her arms?

Who can lean over a crib at night, marveling upon that infinite innocence and candor swathed in the silk cocoon of childish sleep, without guessing the throb of fierce gentleness that runs in maternal blood? The earth is none too rich in compassion these days: let us be grateful to the mothers for what remains. It was not they who filled the world with spies and quakings. It was not a cabal of mothers that met to decree blood and anguish for the races of men. They know that life is built at too dear a price to be so lathered in corruption and woe. Those who create life, who know its humility, its tender fabric and its infinite price, who have cherished and warmed and fed it, do not lightly cast it into the pit.

Mothers are great in the eyes of their sons because they are knit in our minds with all the littlenesses of life, the unspeakably dear trifles and odds of existence. The other day I found in my desk a little strip of tape on which my name was marked a dozen times in drawing ink, in my mother's familiar script. My mind ran back to the time when that little band of humble linen was a kind of passport into manhood. It was when I went away from home and she could no longer mark my garments with my name, for the confusion of rapacious laundries. I was to cut off the autographed sections of this tape and sew them on such new vestments as came my way. Of course I did not do so; what boy would be faithful to so feminine a trust? But now the little tape, soiled by a dozen years of wandering, lies in my desk drawer as a symbol and souvenir of that endless forethought and loving kindness.

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They love us not wisely but too well, it is sometimes said. Ah, in a world where so many love us not well but too wisely, how tremulously our hearts turn back to bathe in that running river of their love and ceaseless charm!

GREETING TO AMERICAN ANGLERS

From Master Isaak Walton

My Good Friends—As I have said afore time, sitting by a river's side is the quietest and fittest place for contemplation, and being out and along the bank of Styx with my tackle this sweet April morning, it came into my humor to send a word of greeting to you American anglers. Some of your fellows, who have come by this way these past years, tell me notable tales of the sport that may he had in your bright streams, whereof the name of Pocono lingers in my memory. Sad it is to me to recall that when writing my little book on the recreation of a contemplative man I had made no mention of your rivers as delightsome places where our noble art might be carried to a brave perfection, but indeed in that day when I wrote—more years ago than I like to think on—your far country was esteemed a wild and wanton land. Some worthy Pennsylvania anglers with whom I have fished this water of Styx have even told me of thirty and forty-inch trouts they have brought to basket in that same Pocono stream, from the which fables I know that the manners of our ancient sport have altered not a whit. I myself could tell you of a notable catch I had the other morning, when I took some half dozen brace of trouts before breakfast, not one less than twenty-two inches, with bellies as yellow as marigold and as white as a lily in parts. That I account quite excellent taking for these times, when this stream hath been so roiled and troubled by the passage of Master Charon's barges, he having been so pressed with traffic that he hath discarded his ancient vessel as incommodious and hasteneth to and fro with a fleet of ferryboats.

[Illustration]

My Good Friends, I wish you all the comely sport that may be found along those crystal rivers whereof your fellows have told me, and a good honest alehouse wherein to take your civil cup of barley wine when there ariseth too violent a shower of rain. I have ever believed that a pipe of tobacco sweeteneth sport, and I was never above hiding a bottle of somewhat in the hollow root of a sycamore against chilly seizures. But come, what is this I hear that you honest anglers shall no longer pledge fortune in a cup of mild beverage? Meseemeth this is an odd thing and contrary to our tradition. I look for some explanation of the matter. Mayhap I have been misled by some waggishness. In my days along my beloved little river Dove, where my friend Mr. Cotton erected his fishing house, we were wont to take our pleasure on the bowling green of an evening, with a cup of ale handy. And our sheets used to smell passing sweet of lavender, which is a pleasant fragrance, indeed.

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One matter lies somewhat heavy on my heart and damps my mirth, that in my little book I said of our noble fish the trout that his name was of a German offspring. I am happy to confess to you that I was at fault, for my good friend Master Charon (who doth sometimes lighten his labors with a little casting and trolling from the poop of his vessel) hath explained to me that the name trout deriveth from the antique Latin word *tructa*, signifying a gnawer. This is a gladsome thing for me to know, and moreover I am bounden to tell you that the house committee of our little angling club along Styx hath blackballed all German members henceforward. These riparian pleasures are justly to be reserved for gentles of the true sportsman blood, and not such as have defiled the fair rivers of France.

And so, good friends, my love and blessing upon all such as love quietness and go angling.

IZAAK WALTON.

MRS. IZAAK WALTON WRITES A LETTER TO HER MOTHER

CHANCERY LANE, LONDON, April 28, 1639.

My Dearest Mother: Matters indeed pass from badd to worse, and I fear mee that with Izaak spending all hys tyme angling along riversydes and neglecting the millinery shoppe (wych is our onlie supporte, for can bodye and soule be keppt in one by a few paltrie brace of trouts a weeke?) wee shall soone come to a sorrye ende. How many tymes, deare Mother, have I bewailed my follye in wedding this creature who seemeth to mee more a fysh than a man, not mearly by reason of hys madnesse for the gracelesse practice of water-dabbling, but eke for hys passion for swimming in barley wine, ale, malmsey and other infuriatyng liquours. What manner of companye doth this dotard keepe on his fyshing pastimes, God wot! Lo he is wonte to come home at some grievous houre of ye nyghte, bearing but a smalle catche but plentyful aroma of drinke, and ofttimes alsoe hys rybalde freinds do accompany hym. Nothing will serve but they must arouse our kytchen-maide and have some paltry chubb or gudgeon fryed in greese, filling ye house wyth nauseous odoures, and wyth their ill prattle of fyshing tackle, not to say the comely milke-maides they have seen along some wanton meadowside, soe that I am moste distraught. You knowe, my deare, I never colde abyde fyssche being colde clammy cretures, and loe onlye last nyghte this Monster dyd come to my beddside where I laye asleepyng and wake me fromm a sweet drowse by dangling a string of loathsome queasy trouts, still dryppinge, against my nose. Lo, says he, are these not beuties? And his reek of barley wine did fille the chamber. Worste of alle, deare Mother, this all-advised wretche doth spend alle his vacant houres in compiling a booke on the art (as he calleth it) of angling, surely a trifling petty wanton taske that will

[Illustration]

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make hym the laughing-stocke of all sober men. God forbidd that oure littel son sholde be brought uppe in this nastye squanderinge of tyme, wych doth breede nought (meseems) but ale-bibbing and ye disregarde of truth. Oure house, wych is but small as thou knowest, is all cluttered wyth his slimye tackle, and loe but yesterdaye I loste a customer fromm ye millinery shoppe, shee averring (and I trow ryghtly) that ye shoppe dyd stinke of fysshe. Ande soe if thys thyng do continue longer I shall ripp uppe and leave, for I thoght to wed a man and not a paddler of dytches. O howe I longe for those happy dayes with thee, before I ever knew such a thyng as a fysshe existed! Sad too it is that he doth justifye his vain idle wanton pasttyme by misquoting scriptures. Saint Peter, and soe on. Three kytchen maides have lefte us latelye for barbyng themselves upon hydden hookes that doe scatter our shelves and drawers.

Thy persecuted daughter, ANNE WALTON.

TRUTH

Our mind is dreadfully active sometimes, and the other day we began to speculate on Truth.

Our friends are still avoiding us.

Every man knows what Truth is, but it is impossible to utter it. The face of your listener, his eyes mirthful or sorry, his eager expectance or his churlish disdain insensibly distort your message. You find yourself saying what you know he expects you to say, or (more often) what he expects you not to say. You may not be aware of this, but that is what happens. In order that the world may go on and human beings thrive, nature has contrived that the Truth may not often be uttered.

And how is one to know what is Truth? He thinks one thing before lunch; after a stirring bout with corned beef and onions the shining vision is strangely altered. Which is Truth?

Truth can only be attained by those whose systems are untainted by secret influences, such as love, envy, ambition, food, college education and moonlight in spring.

If a man lived in a desert for six months without food, drink or companionship he would be reasonably free from prejudice and would be in a condition to enunciate great truths.

But even then his vision of reality would have been warped by so much sand and so many sunsets.

Even if he survived and brought us his Truth with all the gravity and long night-gown of a Hindu faker, as soon as any one listened to him his message would no longer be Truth.

The complexion of his audience, the very shape of their noses, would subtly undermine his magnificent aloofness.

Women have learned the secret. Truth must never be uttered, and never be listened to.

Truth is the ricochet of a prejudice bouncing off a fact.

Truth is what every man sees lurking at the bottom of his own soul, like the oyster shell housewives put in the kitchen kettle to collect the lime from the water. By and by each man's iridescent oyster shell of Truth becomes coated with the lime of prejudice and hearsay.

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All the above is probably untrue.

THE TRAGEDY OF WASHINGTON SQUARE

One of our favorite amusements at lunch-time is to walk down to Henry Rosa's pastry shop, and buy a slab of cinnamon bun. Then we walk round Washington Square, musing, and gradually walking round and engulfing the cinnamon bun at the same time. It is surprising what a large circumference those buns of Henry's have. By the time we have gnashed our way through one of those warm and mystic phenomena we don't want to eat again for a month.

The real reason for the cinnamon bun is to fortify us for the contemplation and onslaught upon a tragic problem that Washington Square presents to our pondering soul.

Washington Square is a delightful place. There are trees there, and publishing houses and warm green grass and a fire engine station. There are children playing about on the broad pavements that criss-cross the sward; there is a fine roof of blue sky, kept from falling down by the enormous building at the north side of the Square. But these things present no problems. To our simple philosophy a tree is a vegetable, a child is an animal, a building is a mineral and this classification needs no further scrutiny or analysis. But there is one thing in Washington Square that embodies an intellectual problem, a grappling of the soul, a matter for continual anguish and decision.

On the west side of the Square is the Swiss consulate, and, it is this that weighs upon our brooding spirit. How many times we have paused before that quiet little house and gazed upon the little red cross, a Maltese Cross, or a Cross of St. Hieronymus; or whatever the heraldic term is, that represents and symbolizes the diplomatic and spiritual presence of the Swiss republic. We have stood there and thought about William Tell and the Berne Convention and the St. Gothard Tunnel and St. Bernard dogs and winter sports and alpenstocks and edelweiss and the Jungfrau and all the other trappings and trappists that make Switzerland notable. We have mused upon the Swiss military system, which is so perfect that it has never had to be tested by war; and we have wondered what is the name of the President of Switzerland and how he keeps it out of the papers so successfully. One day we lugged an encyclopedia and the Statesman's Year Book out to the Square with us and sat down on a bench facing the consulate and read up about the Swiss cabinet and the national bank of Switzerland and her child labor problems. Accidentally we discovered the name of the Swiss President, but as he has kept it so dark we are not going to give away his secret.

Our dilemma is quite simple. Where there is a consulate there must be a consul, and it seems to us a dreadful thing that inside that building there lurks a Swiss envoy who does not know that we, here, we who are walking round the Square with our mouth full

of Henry Rosa's bun, once spent a night in Switzerland. We want him to know that; we think he ought to know it; we think it is part of his diplomatic duty to know it. And yet how can we burst in on him and tell him that apparently irrelevant piece of information?

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We have thought of various ways of breaking it to him, or should we say breaking him to it?

Should we rush in and say the Swiss national debt is $——, or —— kopecks, and then lead on to other topics such as the comparative heights of mountain peaks, letting the consul gradually grasp the fact that we have been in Switzerland? Or should we call him up on the telephone and make a mysterious appointment with him, when we could blurt it out brutally?

We are a modest and diffident man, and this little problem, which would be so trifling to many, presents inscrutable hardships to us.

Another aspect of the matter is this. We think the consul ought to know that we spent one night in Switzerland once; we think he ought to know what we were doing that night; but we also think he ought to know just why it was that we spent only one night in his beautiful country. We don't want him to think we hurried away because we were annoyed by anything, or because the national debt was so many rupees or piasters, or because child labor in Switzerland is——. It is the thought that the consul and all his staff are in total ignorance of our existence that galls us. Here we are, walking round and round the Square, bursting with information and enthusiasm about Swiss republicanism, and the consul never heard of us. How can we summon up courage enough to tell him the truth? That is the tragedy of Washington Square.

It was a dark, rainy night when we bicycled into Basel. We hid been riding all day long, coming down from the dark clefts of the Black Forest, and we and our knapsack were wet through. We had been bicycling for six weeks with no more luggage than a rucksack could hold. We never saw such rain as fell that day we slithered and sloshed on the rugged slopes that tumble down to the Rhine at Basel. (The annual rainfall in Switzerland is——.) When we got to the little hotel at Basel we sat in the dining room with water running off us in trickles, until the head waiter glared. And so all we saw of Switzerland was the interior of the tobacconist's where we tried, unsuccessfully, to get some English baccy. Then he went to bed while our garments were dried. We stayed in bed for ten hours, reading, fairy tales and smoking and answering modestly through the transom when any one asked us questions.

The next morning we overhauled our wardrobe. We will not particularize, but we decided that one change of duds, after six weeks' bicycling, was not enough of a wardrobe to face the Jungfrau and the national debt and the child-labor problenm, not to speak of the anonymous President and the other sights that matter (such as the Matterhorn). Also, our stock of tobacco had run out, and German or French tobacco we simply cannot smoke. Even if we could get along on substitute fumigants the issue of garments was imperative. The nearest place where we could get any clothes of the kind that we are accustomed to, the kind of clothes that are familiarly symbolized

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by three well-known initials, was London. And the only way we had to get to London was on our bicycle. We thought we had better get busy. It's a long bike ride from Basel to London. So we just went as far as the Basel Cathedral, so as not to seem too unappreciative of all the treasures that Switzerland had been saving for us for countless centuries; then we got on board our patient steed and trundled off through Alsace.

That was in August, 1912, and we firmly intended to go back to Switzerland the next year to have another look at, the rainfall and the rest of the statistics and status quos. But the opportunity has not come.

So that is why we wander disconsolately about Washington Square, trying to make up our mind to unburden our bosom to the Swiss consul and tell him the worst. But how can one go and interrupt a consul to tell him that sort of thing? Perhaps he wouldn't understand it at all; he would misunderstand our pathetic little story and be angry that we took up his time. He wouldn't think that a shortage of tobacco and clothing was a sufficient excuse for slighting William Tell and the Jungfrau. He wouldn't appreciate the frustrated emotion and longing with which we watch the little red cross at his front door, and think of all it means to us and all it might have meant.

We took another turn around Washington Square, trying to embolden ourself enough to go in and tell the consul all this. And then our heart failed us. We decided to write a piece for the paper about it, and if the consul ever sees it he will be generous and understand. He will know why, behind the humble facade of his consulate on Washington Square, we see the heaven-piercing summits of Switzerland rising like a dream, blue and silvery and tantalizing.

P.S. Since the above we have definitely decided not to go to call on the Swiss consul. Suppose he were only a vice-consul, a Philadelphia Swiss, who had never been to Switzerland in his life!

IF MR. WILSON WERE THE WEATHER MAN

My Fellow Citizens: It is very delightful to be here, if I may be permitted to say so, and I consider it a distinguished privilege to open the discussion as to the probable weather to-morrow not only, but during the days to come. I can easily conceive that many of our forecasts will need subsequent reconsideration, for if I may judge by my own study of these matters, the climate is not susceptible of confident judgments at present.

An overwhelming majority of the American people is in favor of fine weather. This underlying community of purpose warms my heart. If we do not guarantee them fine weather, cannot you see the picture of what would come to pass? Your hearts have

instructed you where the rain falls. It falls upon senators and congressmen not only—-and for that we need not feel so much chagrin—it falls upon humble homes everywhere, upon plain men, and women, and children. If I were to disappoint the united expectation of my fellow citizens for fine weather to-morrow I would incur their merited scorn.

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I suppose no more delicate task is given any man than to interpret the feelings and purposes of a great climate. It is not a task in which any man can find much exhilaration, and I confess I have been puzzled by some of the criticisms leveled at my office. But they do not make any impression on me, because I know that the sentiment of the country at large will be more generous. I call my fellow countrymen to witness that at no stage of the recent period of low barometric pressure have I judged the purposes of the climate intemperately. I should be ashamed to use the weak language of vindictive protest.

I have tried once and again, my fellow citizens, to say to you in all frankness what seems to be the prospect of fine weather. There is a compulsion upon one in my position to exercise every effort to see that as little as possible of the hope of mankind is disappointed. Yet this is a hope which cannot, in the very nature of things, be realized in its perfection. The utmost that can be done by way of accommodation and compromise has been performed without stint or limit. I am sure it will not be necessary to remind you that you cannot throw off the habits of the climate immediately, any more than you can throw off the habits of the individual immediately. But however unpromising the immediate outlook may be, I am the more happy to offer my observations on the state of the weather for to-morrow because this is not a party issue. What a delightful thought that is! Whatever the condition of sunshine or precipitation vouchsafed to us, may I not hope that we shall all meet it with quickened temper and purpose, happy in the thought that it is our common fortune?

For to-morrow there is every prospect of heavy and continuous rain.

SYNTAX FOR CYNICS

A GRAMMAR OF THE FEMININE LANGUAGE

The feminine language consists of words placed one after another with extreme rapidity, with intervals for matinees. The purpose of this language is (1) to conceal, and (2) to induce, thought. Very often, after the use of a deal of language, a thought will appear in the speaker’s mind. This, while desirable, is by no means necessary.

[Illustration]

THOUGHT cannot be defined, but it is instinctively recognized even by those unaccustomed to it.

PARTS OF SPEECH: There are five parts of feminine speech—noun, pronoun, adjective, verb and interjection.

THE NOUN is the name of something to wear, or somebody who furnishes something to wear, or a place where something is to be worn. *E.g*., *hat, husband, opera*. Feminine nouns are always singular.

THE PRONOUN is *I*.

ADJECTIVES: There are only four feminine adjectives—*adorable, cute, sweet, horrid*. These are all modified on occasion by the adverb *perfectly*.

THE VERBS are of two kinds—active and passive. Active verbs express action; passive verbs express passion. All feminine verbs are irregular and imperative.

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INTERJECTIONS: There are two interjections—*Heavens*! and *Gracious*! The masculine language is much richer in interjections.

DECLENSION: There are three ways of feminine declining, (1) to say No; (2) to say Yes and mean No; (3) to say nothing.

CONJUGATION: This is what happens to a verb in the course of conversation or shopping. A verb begins the day quite innocently, as the verb *go* in the phrase *to go to town*. When it gets to the city this verb becomes *look*, as, for instance, to *look at the shop windows.* Thereafter its descent is rapid into the form *purchase* or *charge*. This conjugation is often assisted by the auxiliary expression *a bargain*. About the first of the following month the verb reappears in the masculine vocabulary in a parallel or perverted form, modified by an interjection.

CONVERSATION in the feminine language consists of language rapidly vibrating or oscillating between two persons. The object of any conversation is always accusative, *e.g*., "*Mrs. Edwards has no taste in hats*." Most conversations consist of an indeterminate number of sentences, but sometimes it is difficult to tell where one sentence ends and the next begins. It is even possible for two sentences to overlap. When this occurs the conversation is known as a dialogue. A sentence may be of any length, and is concluded only by the physiological necessity of taking breath.

SENTENCES: A sentence may be defined as a group of words, uttered in sequence, but without logical connection, to express an opinion or an emotion. A number of sentences if emitted without interruption becomes a conversation. A conversation prolonged over an hour or more becomes a gossip. A gossip, when shared by several persons, is known as a secret. A secret is anything known by a large and constantly increasing number of persons.

LETTERS: The feminine language, when committed to paper, with a stub pen and backhanded chirography, is known as a letter. A letter should if possible, be written on rose or lemon colored paper of a rough and flannely texture, with scalloped edges and initials embossed in gilt. It should be written with great rapidity, containing not less than ten exclamation points per page and three underlined adjectives per paragraph. The verb may be reserved until the postscript.

Generally speaking, students of the feminine language are agreed that rules of grammar and syntax are subject to individual caprice and whim, and it is very difficult to lay down fixed canons. The extreme rapidity with which the language is used and the charm and personal magnetism of its users have disconcerted even the most careful and scientific observers. A glossary of technical terms and idioms in the feminine language would be a work of great value to the whole husband world, but it is doubtful if any such volume will ever be published.

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THE TRUTH AT LAST

AN EXTRACT FROM MARTHA WASHINGTON'S DIARY

[Illustration]

Feb. 22, 1772. A grate Company of Guests assembled at Mt Vernon to celebrate Gen'l Washington's Birthdaye. In the Morning the Gentlemenn went a Fox hunting, but their Sport was marred by the Pertinacity of some Motion Picture menn who persewd them to take Fillums and catchd the General falling off his Horse at a Ditch. In the Evening some of the Companye tooke Occasion to rally the General upon the old Fable of the Cherrye Tree, w'ch hath ever been imputed an Evidence of hys exceeding Veracity, though to saye sooth I never did believe the legend my self. "Well," sayes the General with a Twinkle, "it wolde not be Politick to denye a Romance w'ch is soe profitable to my Reputation, but to be Candid, Gentlemenn, I have no certain recollection of the Affaire. My Brother Lawrence was wont to say that the Tree or Shrubb in question was no Cherrye but a Bitter Persimmon; moreover he told me that I stoutly denyed any Attacke upon it; but being caught with the Goods (as Tully saith) I was soundly Flogged, and walked stiffly for three dayes."

I was glad to heare the Truth in this matter as I have never seen any Corroboration of this surpassing Virtue in George's private Life. The evening broke up in some Disorder as Col Fairfax and others hadd Drunk too freely of the Cock's Taile as they dub the new and very biting Toddy introduced by the military. Wee hadd to call a chirurgeon to lett Blood for some of the Guests before they coulde be gott to Bedd, whither they were conveyed on stretchers.

FIXED IDEAS

It is said that a Fixed Idea is the beginning of madness.

Yet we are often worried because we have so few Fixed Ideas. We do not seem to have any really definite Theory about Life.

* * * * *

We find, on the other hand, that a great many of those we know have some Guiding Principle that excuses and explains all their conduct.

* * * * *

If you have some Theory about Life, and are thoroughly devoted to it, you may come to a bad end, but you will enjoy yourself heartily.

* * * * *

These theories may be of many different kinds. One of our friends rests his career and hope of salvation on the doctrine that eating plenty of fish and going without an overcoat whenever possible constitute supreme happiness.

* * * * *

Another prides himself on not being able to roll a cigarette. If he were forced, at the point of the bayonet, to roll a fag, it would wreck his life.

* * * * *

Another is convinced that the Lost and Found ads in the papers all contain anarchist code messages, and sits up late at night trying to unriddle them.

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* * * * *

How delightful it must be to be possessed by one of these Theories! All the experiences of the theorist's life tend to confirm his Theory. This is always so. Did you ever hear of a Theory being confuted?

* * * * *

Facts are quite helpless in the face of Theories. For after all, most Facts are insufficiently encouraged with applause. When a Fact comes along, the people in charge are generally looking the other way. This is what is meant by Not Facing the Facts.

* * * * *

Therefore all argument is quite useless, for it only results in stiffening your friend's belief in his (presumably wrong) Theory.

* * * * *

When any one tries to argue with you, say, "You are nothing if not accurate, and you are not accurate." Then escape from the room.

* * * * *

When we hear our friends diligently expounding the ideas which Explain Everything, we are wistful. We go off and say to ourself, We really must dig up some kind of Theory about Life.

* * * * *

We read once of a great man that he never said, "Well, possibly so." This gave us an uneasy pang.

* * * * *

It is a mistake to be Open to Conviction on so many topics, because all one's friends try to convince one. This is very painful.

* * * * *

And it is embarrassing if, for the sake of a quiet life, one pretends to be convinced. At the corner of Tenth and Chestnut we allowed ourself to agree with A.B., who said that the German colonies should be internationalized. Then we had to turn down Ninth Street because we saw C.D. coming, with whom we had previously agreed that Great

Britain should have German Africa. And in a moment we had to dodge into Sansom Street to avoid E.F., having already assented to his proposition that the German colonies should have self-determination. This kind of thing makes it impossible to see one's friends more than one at a time.

* * * * *

Perhaps our Fixed Idea is that we have no Fixed Ideas.

Well, possibly so.

TRIALS OF A PRESIDENT TRAVELING ABROAD

10 a.m.—Arrive at railway station. Welcomed by King and Queen. Hat on head. Umbrella left hand. Gloves on.

10:01—Right glove off (hastily) into left hand. Hat off (right hand). Umbrella hanging on left arm.

10:02—Right glove into left pocket. Hat to left hand. Shake hands with King.

10:03—Shake hands with Queen. Left glove off to receive flowers. Umbrella to right hand.

10:04—Shake hands with Prime Minister. Left glove in left hand. Umbrella back to left hand. Flowers in left hand. Hat in left hand.

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10:05—Enter King's carriage. Try to drop flowers under carriage unobserved. Foreign Minister picks them up with gallant remark.

10:06—Shake hands with Foreign Minister. In his emotional foreign manner he insists on taking both hands. Quick work: Umbrella to right elbow, gloves left pocket, hat under right arm, flowers to right pocket.

10:08—Received by Lord Mayor, who offers freedom of the city in golden casket. Casket in left hand, Lord Mayor in right hand Queen on left arm, umbrella on right arm flowers and gloves bursting from pockets hat (momentarily) on head.

10:10—Delegation of statesmen. Statesmen in right hand. Hat, umbrella, gloves, King, flowers, casket in left hand. Situation getting complicated.

10:15—Ceremonial reception by Queen Mother. Getting confused. Queen Mother in left pocket, umbrella on head, gloves on right hand, hat in left hand, King on head, flowers in trousers pocket. Casket under left arm.

10:17—Complete collapse. Failure of the League of Nations.

DIARY OF A PUBLISHER'S OFFICE BOY

Jan. 7, 1600. Thys daye ye Bosse bade mee remaine in ye Outer Office to keepe Callers from Hinderyng Hym in Hys affaires. There came an olde Bumme (ye same wch hath beene heare before) wth ye Scrypte of a Playe, dubbed Roumio ande Julia. Hys name was Shake a Speare or somethynge lyke thatt. Ye Bosse bade mee reade ye maunuscripp myselfe, as hee was Bussy. I dyd. Ande of alle foulishnesse, thys playe dyd beare away ye prize. Conceive ye Absuerditye of laying ye Sceane in Italy, it ys welle knowne that Awdiences will not abear nothyng that is not sett neare at Home. Butt woarse stille, thys fellowe presumes to kille offe Boath Heroe ande Heroine in ye Laste Acte, wch is Intolerabble toe ye Publicke. Suerley noe chaunce of Success in thys. Ye awthour dyd reappeare in ye aufternoone, and dyd seeke to borrowe a crowne from mee, but I sente hym packing. Ye Bosse hath heartilye given me Styx forr admitting such Vagabones to ye Office. I tolde maister Shake a Speare that unlesse hee colde learne to wryte Beste Sellers such as Master Spenser's Faerye Quene (wch wee have put through six editions) there was suerly noe Hope for hym. Hee tooke thys advyse in goode parte, and wente. Hys jerkin wolde have beene ye better for a patchinge.

THE DOG'S COMMANDMENTS

[Illustration]

From a witless puppy I brought thee up: gave thee fire and food, and taught thee the self-respect of an honest dog. Hear, then, my commandments:

I am thy master: thou shalt have no other masters before me. Where I go, shalt thou follow; where I abide, tarry thou also.

My house is thy castle; thou shalt honor it; guard it with thy life if need be.

By daylight, suffer all that approach peaceably to enter without protest. But after nightfall thou shalt give tongue when men draw near.

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Use not thy teeth on any man without good cause and intolerable provocation; and never on women or children.

Honor thy master and thy mistress, that thy days may be long in the land.

Thou shalt not consort with mongrels, nor with dogs that are common or unclean.

Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not feed upon refuse or stray bits: thy meat waits thee regularly in the kitchen.

Thou shalt not bury bones in the flower beds.

Cats are to be chased, but in sport only; seek not to devour them: their teeth and claws are deadly.

Thou shalt not snap at my neighbor, nor at his wife, nor his child, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor do harm to aught that is his.

The drawing-room rug is not for thee, nor the sofa, nor the best armchair. Thou hast the porch and thy own kennel. But for the love I bear thee, there is always a corner for thee by the winter fire.

Meditate on these commandments day and night; so shalt thou be a dog of good breeding and an honor to thy master.

THE VALUE OF CRITICISM

Our friend Dove Dulcet, the well-known sub-caliber poet, has recently issued a slender volume of verses called *Peanut Butter*. He thinks we may be interested to see the comment of the press on his book. We don't know why he should think so, but anyway here are some of the reviews:

Buffalo *Lens*: Mr. Dulcet is a sweet singer, and we could only wish there were twice as many of these delicately rhymed fancies. There is not a poem in the book that does not exhibit a tender grasp of the beautiful homely emotions. Perhaps the least successful, however, is that entitled "On Losing a Latchkey."

Syracuse *Hammer and Tongs*: This little book of savage satires will rather dismay the simple-minded reader. Into the acid vials of his song Mr. Dulcet has poured a bitter cynicism. He seems to us to be an irremediable pessimist, a man of brutal and embittered life. In one poem, however, he does soar to a very fine imaginative height. This is the ode "On Losing a Latchkey," which is worth all the rest of the pieces put together.

New York *Reaping Hook*: It is odd that Mr. Dove Dulcet, of Philadelphia we believe should have been able to find a publisher for this volume. These queer little doggerels have an instinctive affinity for oblivion, and they will soon coalesce with the driftwood of the literary Sargasso Sea. Among many bad things we can hardly remember ever to have seen anything worse than “On Losing a Latchkey.”

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Philadelphia *Prism*: Our gifted fellow townsman, Mr. Dove Dulcet, has once more demonstrated his ability to set humble themes in entrancing measures. He calls his book *Peanut Butter*. A title chosen with rare discernment, for the little volume has all the savor and nourishing properties of that palatable delicacy. We wish there were space to quote "On Losing a Latchkey," for it expresses a common human experience in language of haunting melody and witty brevity. How rare it is to find a poet with such metrical skill who is content to handle the minor themes of life in this mood of delicious pleasantry. The only failure in the book is the banal sonnet entitled "On Raiding the Ice Box." This we would be content to forego.

Pittsburgh *Cylinder*: It is a relief to meet one poet who deals with really exalted themes. We are profoundly weary of the myriad versifiers who strum the so-called lowly and domestic themes. Mr. Dulcet, however, in his superb free verse, has scaled olympian heights, disdaining the customary twaddling topics of the rhymesters. Such an amazing allegory as "On Raiding the Ice Box," which deals, of course, with the experience of a man who attempts to explore the mind of an elderly Boston spinster, marks this powerful poet as a man of unusual satirical and philosophical depth.

Boston *Penseroso*: We find Mr. Dove Dulcet's new book rather baffling. We take his poem "On Raiding the Ice Box" to be a paean in honor of the discovery of the North Pole; but such a poem as "On Losing a Latchkey," is quite inscrutable. Our guess is that it is an intricate psycho-analysis of a pathological case of amnesia. Our own taste is more for the verse that deals with the gentler emotions of every day, but there can be no doubt that Mr. Dulcet is an artist to be reckoned with.

A MARRIAGE SERVICE FOR COMMUTERS

(*Fill in railroad as required*)

[Illustration]

Wilt thou, Jack, have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together in so far as the —— Railroad will allow? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, take her to the movies, prevent the furnace from going out, and come home regularly on the 5:42 train?"

"I will."

"Wilt thou, Jill, have this commuter to thy wedded husband, bearing in mind snowdrifts, washouts, lack of servants and all other penalties of suburban life? Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honor and keep him, and let him smoke a corncob pipe in the house?"

"I will."

“I, Jack, take thee, Jill, to my wedded wife, from 6 P.M. until 8 A.M., as far as permitted by the —— Railroad, schedule subject to change without notice, for better, for worse, for later, for earlier, to love and to cherish, and I promise to telephone you when I miss the train.”

“I, Jill, take thee, Jack, to my wedded husband, subject to the mutability of the suburban service, changing trains at——, to have and to hold, save when the card club meets on Wednesday evenings, and thereto I give thee my troth.”

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THE SUNNY SIDE OF GRUB STREET

[Illustration]

I often wonder how many present-day writers keep diaries. I wish *The Bookman* would conduct a questionnaire on the subject. I have a suspicion that Charley Towne keeps one—probably a grim, tragic parchment wherein that waggish soul sets down its secret musings. I dare say Louis Untermeyer has one (morocco, tooled and goffered, with gilt edges), and looks over its nipping paragraphs now and then with a certain relish. It undoubtedly has a large portmanteau pocket with it, to contain clippings of Mr. Untermeyer's letters to the papers taking issue with the reviews of his books. There is no way for the reviewer to escape that backfire. I knew one critic who was determined to review one of Louis's books in such a way that the author would have no excuse for writing to the *Times* about it. He was overwhelmingly complimentary. But along came the usual letter by return of post. Mr. Untermeyer asked for enough space to "diverge from the critique at one point." He said the review was too fulsome.

I wish Don Marquis kept a diary, but I am quite sure he doesn't. Don is too—well, I was going to say he is too—but after all he has a perfect right to be that way.

It's rather an important thing. Every one knows the fascination exerted by personal details of authors' lives. Every one has hustled to the Cafe de la Source in Paris because R.L.S. once frequented it, or to Allaire's in New York because O. Henry wrote it up in one of his tales, and that sort of thing. People like to know all the minutiae concerning their favorite author. It is not sufficient to know (let us say) that Murray Hill or some one of that sort, once belonged to the Porrier's Corner Club. One wants to know where the Porrier's Corner Club was, and who were the members, and how he got there, and what he got there, and so forth. One wants to know where Murray Hill (I take his name only as a symbol) buys his cigars, and where he eats lunch, and what he eats, whether pigeon potpie with iced tea or hamburg steak and "coffee with plenty." It is all these intimate details that the public has thirst for.

Now the point I want to make is this. Here, all around us, is fine doings (as Murray Hill would put it), the jolliest literary hullabaloo going. Some of the writers round about—-Arthur Guiterman or Tom Masson or Witter Bynner or Tom Daly, or some of these chaps now sitting down to combination-plate luncheons and getting off all manner of merry quips and confidential matters—some of these chaps may be famous some day (posterity is so undiscriminating) and all that savory personal stuff will have evaporated from our memories. The world of bookmen is in great need of a new crop of intimists, or whatever you call them. Barbellion chaps. Henry Ryecrofts. We need a chiel taking notes somewhere.

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Now if you really jot down the merry gossip, and make bright little pen portraits, and tell just what happens, it will not only afford you a deal of discreet amusement, but the diary you keep will reciprocate. In your older years it will keep you. *Harper's Magazine* will undoubtedly want to publish it, forty years from now. If that is too late to keep you, it will help to keep your descendants. So I wish some of the authors would confess and let us know which of them are doing it. It would be jolly to know to whom we might confide the genial little items of what-not and don't-let-this-go-farther that come the rounds. The inside story of the literature of any epoch is best told in the diaries. I'll bet Brander Matthews kept one, and James Huneker. It's a pity Professor Matthews's was a bit tedious. Crabb Robinson was the man for my money.

The diarists I would choose for the present generation on Grub Street would be Heywood Broun, Franklin Adams, Bob Holliday, William McFee, and maybe Ben De Casseres (if he would promise not to mention Don Marquis and Walt Whitman more than once per page). McFee might be let off the job by reason of his ambrosial letters. But it just occurs to me that of course one must not know who is keeping the diary. If it were known, he would be deluged with letters from people wanting to get their names into it. And the really worthwhile folks would be on their guard.

But if all the writers wait until they are eighty years old and can write their memoirs with the beautifully gnarled and chalky old hands Joyce Kilmer loved to contemplate, they will have forgotten the comical pith of a lot of it. If you want to reproduce the colors and collisions along the sunny side of Grub Street, you've got to jot down your data before they fade. I wish I had time to be diarist of such matters. How candid I'd be! I'd put down all about the two young novelists who used to meet every day in City Hall Park to compare notes while they were hunting for jobs, and make wagers as to whose pair of trousers would last longer. (Quite a desirable essay could he written, by the way, on the influence of trousers on the fortunes of Grub Street, with the three stages of the Grub Street trouser, *viz*.: 1, baggy; 2, shiny; 3, trousers that must not be stooped in on any account.) There is an uproarious tale about a pair of trousers and a very well-known writer and a lecture at Vassar College, but these things have to be reserved for posterity, the legatee of all really amusing matters.

But then there are other topics, too, such as the question whether Ibanez always wears a polo shirt, as the photos lead one to believe. The secret Philip Gibbs told me about the kind of typewriter he used on the western front. I would be enormously candid (if I were a diarist). I'd put down that I never can remember whether Vida Scudder is a man or a woman. I'd tell what A. Edward Newton said when he came rushing into the office to

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show me the Severn death-bed portrait of Keats, which he had just bought from Rosenbach. I'd tell the story of the unpublished letter of R.L.S. which a young man sold to buy a wedding present, which has since vanished (the R.L.S. letter). I'd tell the amazing story of how a piece of Walt Whitman manuscript was lost in Philadelphia on the memorable night of June 30, 1919. I'd tell just how Vachel Lindsay behaves when he's off duty. I'd even forsake everything to travel over to England with Vachel on his forthcoming lecture tour, as I'm convinced that England's comments on Vachel will be worth listening to.

The ideal man to keep the sort of diary I have in mind would be Hilaire Belloc. It was an ancestor of Mr. Belloc, Dr. Joseph Priestley (who died in Pennsylvania, by the way) who discovered oxygen; and it is Mr. Belloc himself who has discovered how to put oxygen into the modern English essay. The gift, together with his love of good eating, probably came to him from his mother, Bessie Rayner Parkes, who once partook of Samuel Rogers's famous literary breakfasts. And this brings us back to our old friend Crabb Robinson, another of the Rogers breakfast clan. Robinson is never wildly exciting, but he gives a perfect panorama of his day. It is not often that one finds a man who associated with such figures as Goethe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, and Lamb. He had the true gift for diarizing. What could be better, for instance, than this little miniature picture of the rise and fall of teetotalism in one well-loved person?—

Mary Lamb, I am glad to say, is just now very comfortable. She has put herself under Doctor Tuthill, who has prescribed water. Charles, in consequence, resolved to accommodate himself to her, and since Lord-Mayor's day has abstained from all other liquor, as well as from smoking. We shall all rejoice if this experiment succeeds.... His change of habit, though it, on the whole, improves his health, yet when he is low-spirited, leaves him without a remedy or relief.

—LETTER OF HENRY CRABB ROBINSON To Miss WORDSWORTH, December 23,
1810.

Spent part of the evening with Charles Lamb (unwell) and his sister.

—ROBINSON'S DIARY, January 8, 1811.

Late in the evening Lamb called, to sit with me while he smoked his pipe.

—ROBINSON'S DIARY, December 20, 1814.

Lamb was in a happy frame, and I can still recall to my mind the look and tone with which he addressed Moore, when he could not articulate very distinctly: “Mister Moore, will you drink a glass of wine with me?”—suiting the action to the word, and hobnobbing.

—ROBINSON’S DIARY, April 4, 1823.

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Now that, I maintain, is just the kind of stuff we need in a diary of today. How fascinating that old book Peyrat's "Pastors of the Desert" became when we learned that R.L.S. had a copy of the second volume of it in his sleeping sack when he camped out with Modestine. Even so it may be a matter of delicious interest to our grandsons to know what book Joe Hergesheimer was reading when he came in town on the local from West Chester recently, and who taught him to shoot craps. It is interesting to know what Will and Stephen Benet (those skiey fraternals) eat when they visit a Hartford Lunch; to know whether Gilbert Chesterton is really fond of dogs (as "The Flying Inn" implies, if you remember Quoodle), and whether Edwin Meade Robinson and Edwin Arlington Robinson, *arcades ambo*, ever write to each other. It would be interesting—-indeed it would be highly entertaining—to compile a list of the free meals Vachel Lindsay has received, and to ascertain the number of times Harry Kemp has been "discovered." It would be interesting to know how many people shudder with faint nausea (as I do) when they pick up a Dowson playlet and find it beginning with a list of characters including "A Moon Maiden" and "Pierrot," scene set in "a glade in the Parc du Petit Trianon—a statue of Cupid—Pierrot enters with his hands full of lilies." It would be interesting to resume the number of brazen imitations of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields"—here is the most striking, put out on a highly illuminated card by a New York publishing firm:

Rest in peace, ye Flanders's dead,
The poppies still blow overhead,
  The larks ye heard, still singing fly.
  They sing of the cause which made thee die.

And they are heard far down below,
Our fight is ended with the foe.
  The fight for right, which ye begun
  And which ye died for, we have won.
    Rest in peace.

The man who wrote that ought to be the first man mobilized for the next war.

All such matters, with a plentiful bastinado for stupidity and swank, are the privilege of the diarist. He may indulge himself in the delightful luxury of making post-mortem enemies. He may wonder what the average reviewer thinks he means by always referring to single publishers in the plural. A note which we often see in the papers runs like this: "Soon to be issued by the Dorans (or Knopfs or Huebsches)," *etc*., *etc*. This is an echo of the old custom when there really were two or more Harpers. But as long as there is only one Doran, one Huebsch, one Knopf, it is simply idiotic.

Well, as we go sauntering along the sunny side of Grub Street, meditating an essay on the Mustache in Literature (we have shaved off our own since that man Murray Hill referred to it in the public prints as "a young hay-wagon"), we are wondering whether

any of the writing men are keeping the kind of diary we should like our son to read, say in 1950. Perhaps Miss Daisy Ashford is keeping one. She has the seeing eye. Alas that Miss Daisy at nine years old was a *puella unius libri*.

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BURIAL SERVICE FOR A NEWSPAPER JOKE

After the remains have been decently interred, the following remarks shall be uttered by the presiding humorist:

This joke has been our refuge from one generation to another:

Before the mountains were brought forth this joke was lusty and of good repute:

In the life of this joke a thousand years are but as yesterday.

Blessed, therefore, is this joke, which now resteth from its labors.

But most of our jokes are of little continuance: though there be some so strong that they come to fourscore years, yet is their humor then but labor and sorrow:

For a joke that is born of a humorist hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. It cometh up and is cut down like a flower. It fleeth as if it were a shadow and abideth but one edition.

It is sown in quotation, it is raised in misquotation: We therefore commit this joke to the files of the country newspapers, where it shall circulate forever, world without end.

ADVICE TO THOSE VISITING A BABY

Interview the baby alone if possible. If, however, both parents are present, say, “It looks like its mother.” And, as an afterthought, “I think it has its father’s elbows.”

If uncertain as to the infant’s sex, try some such formula as, “He looks like her grandparents,” or “She has his aunt’s sweet disposition.”

When the mother only is present, your situation is critical. Sigh deeply and admiringly, to imply that you wish *you* had a child like that. Don’t commit yourself at all until she gives a lead.

When the father only is present, you may be a little reckless. Give the father a cigar and venture, “Good luck, old man; it looks like your mother-in-law.”

If possible, find out beforehand how old the child is. Call up the Bureau of Vital Statistics. If it is two months old, say to the mother, “Rather large for six months, isn’t he?”

If the worst has happened and the child really does look like its father, the most tactful thing is to say, “Children change as they grow older.” Or you may suggest that some mistake has been made at the hospital and they have brought home the wrong baby.

If left alone in the room with the baby, throw a sound-proof rug over it and escape.

ABOU BEN WOODROW

(IN PARIS)

[Illustration]

Abou Ben Woodrow (may his tribe increase!) Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace, And saw, among the gifts piled on the floor (Making the room look like a department store), An Angel writing in a book of gold. Now much applause had made Ben Woodrow bold And to the Presence in the room said he, “*Qu’est-ce que c’est que ca que tu ecris?"* Or, in plain

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English, “May I not inquire What writest thou?” The Angel did not tire But kept on scribing. Then it turned its head (All Europe could not turn Ben Woodrow’s head!) And with a voice almost as sweet as Creel’s Answered: “The names of those who grease the wheels Of progress and have never, never blundered.” Ben Woodrow lay quite still, and sadly wondered. “And is mine one?” he queried. “Nay, not so,” Replied the Angel. Woodrow spoke more low But cheerly still, and in his May I notting Fashion he said: “Of course you may be rotting, But even if you are, may I not then Be writ as one that loves his fellow men? Do that for me, old chap; just that; that merely And I am yours, cordially and sincerely.” The Angel wrote, and vanished like a mouse. Next night returned (accompanied by House) And showed the names whom love of Peace had blest. And lo! Ben Woodrow’s name led all the rest!

MY MAGNIFICENT SYSTEM

In these days when the streets are so perilous, every man who goes about the city ought to be sure that his pockets are in good order, so that when he is run down by a roaring motor-truck the police will have no trouble in identifying him and communicating with his creditors.

I have always been very proud of my pocket system. As others may wish to install it, I will describe it briefly. If I am found prostrate and lifeless on the paving, I can quickly be identified by the following arrangement of my private affairs:

In my right-hand trouser leg is a large hole, partially surrounded by pocket.

In my left-hand trouser pocket is a complicated bunch of keys. I am not quite sure what they all belong to, as I rarely lock anything. They are very useful, however, as when I walk rapidly they evolve a shrill jingling which often conveys the impression of minted coinage. One of them, I think, unlocks the coffer where I secretly preserve the pair of spats I bought when I became engaged.

My right-hand hip pocket is used, in summer, for the handkerchief reserves (hayfever sufferers, please notice); and, in winter, for stamps. It is tapestried with a sheet of three-cent engravings that got in there by mistake last July, and adhered.

My left-hand hip pocket holds my memorandum book, which contains only one entry: *Remember not to forget anything*.

The left-hand upper waistcoat pocket holds a pencil, a commutation ticket and a pipe cleaner.

The left-hand lower waistcoat pocket contains what the ignorant will esteem scraps of paper. This, however, is the hub and nerve center of my mnemonic system. When I

want to remember anything I write it down on a small slip of paper and stick it in that pocket. Before going to bed I clean out the pocket and see how many things I have forgotten during the day. This promotes tranquil rest.

The right-hand upper waistcoat pocket is used for wall-paper samples. Here I keep clippings of all the wallpapers at home, so that when buying shirts, ties, socks or books I can be sure to get something that will harmonize. My taste in these matters has sometimes been aspersed, so I am playing safe.

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The right-hand lower waistcoat pocket is used for small change. This is a one-way pocket; exit only.

The inner pocket of my coat is used for railroad timetables, most of which have since been changed. Also a selected assortment of unanswered letters and slips of paper saying, “Call Mr. So-and-so before noon.” The first thing to be done by my heirs after collecting the remains must be to communicate with the writers of those letters, to assure them that I was struck down in the fullness of my powers while on the way to the post office to mail an answer.

My right-hand coat pocket is for pipes.

Left-hand coat pocket for tobacco and matches.

The little tin cup strapped in my left armpit is for Swedish matches that failed to ignite. It is an invention of my own.

I once intended to allocate a pocket especially for greenbacks, but found it unnecessary.

LETTERS TO CYNTHIA

I. IN PRAISE OF BOOBS

> *Dear Sir—What is a Boob? Will you please discuss the subject a little? Perhaps I’m a boob for asking—but I’d like to know*.
>
> CYNTHIA.

[Illustration]

BE FRIENDLY WITH BOOBS

The Boob, my dear Cynthia, is Nature’s device for mitigating the quaintly blended infelicities of existence. Never be too bitter about the Boob. The Boob is you and me and the man in the elevator.

THE BOOB IS HUMANITY’S HOPE

As long as the Boob ratio remains high, humanity is safe. The Boob is the last repository of the stalwart virtues. The Boob is faith, hope and charity. The Boob is the hope of conservatives, the terror of radicals and the meal check of cynics. If you are run over on Market Street and left groaning under the mailed fist of a flivver, the

Bolsheviki and I.W.W. will be watching the shop windows. It will be the Boob who will come to your aid, even before the cop gets there.

1653 BOOBS

If you were to dig a deep and terrible pit in the middle of Chestnut Street, and illuminate it with signs and red lights and placards reading, *DO NOT WALK INTO THIS PIT*, 1653 Boobs would tumble into it during the course of the day. Boobs have faith. They are eager to plunge in where an angel wouldn't even show his periscope.

THE BOOB RATIO

But that does not prove anything creditable to human nature. For though 1653 people would fall into our pit (which any Rapid Transit Company will dig for us free of charge) 26,448 would cautiously and suspiciously and contemptuously avoid it. The Boob ratio is just about 1 to 16.

HE LOOKS FOR ANGELS

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It does not pay to make fun of the Boob. There is no malice in him, no insolence, no passion to thrive at the expense of his fellows. If he sees some one on a street corner gazing open-mouthed at the sky, he will do likewise, and stand there for half hour with his apple of Adam expectantly vibrating. But is that a shameful trait? May not a Boob expect to see angels in the shimmering blue of heaven? Is he more disreputable than the knave who frisks his watch meanwhile? And suppose he does see an angel, or even only a blue acre of sky—is that not worth as much as the dial in his poke?

HE SEES THEM

It is the Boob who is always willing to look hopefully for angels who will see them ultimately. And the man who is only looking for the Boob's timepiece will do time of his own by and by.

HE BEARS NO MALICE

The Boob is convinced that the world is conducted on genteel and friendly principles. He feels in his heart that even the law of gravity will do him no harm. That is why he steps unabashed into our pit on Chestnut Street; and finding himself sprawling in the bottom of it, he bears no ill will to Sir Isaac Newton. He simply knows that the law of gravity took him for some one else—a street-cleaning contractor, perhaps.

A DEFINITION

A small boy once defined a Boob as one who always treats other people better than he does himself.

HE IS UNSUSPICIOUS

The Boob is hopeful, cheery, more concerned over other people's troubles than his own. He goes serenely unsuspicious of the brick under the silk hat, even when the silk hat is on the head of a Mayor or City Councilman. He will pull every trigger he meets, regardless that the whole world is loaded and aimed at him. He will keep on running for the 5:42 train, even though the timetable was changed the day before yesterday. He goes through the revolving doors the wrong way. He forgets that the banks close at noon on Saturdays. He asks for oysters on the first of June. He will wait for hours at the Chestnut Street door, even though his wife told him to meet her at the ribbon counter.

HIS WIFE

Yes, he has a wife. But if he was not a Boob before marriage he will never become so after. Women are the natural antidotes of Boobs.

RECEPTIVE

The Boob is not quarrelsome. He is willing to believe that you know more about it than he does. He is always at home for ideas.

HE IS HAPPY

Of course, what bothers other people is that the Boob is so happy. He enjoys himself. He falls into that Rapid Transit pit of ours and has more fun out of the tumble than the sneering 26,448 who stand above untumbled. The happy simp prefers a 4 per cent that pays to a 15 per cent investment that returns only engraved prospectuses. He stands on that street corner looking for an imaginary angel parachuting down, and enjoys himself more than the Mephistopheles who is laughing up his sleeve.

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NATURE'S DARLING

Nature must love the Boob, because she is a good deal of a Boob herself. How she has squandered herself upon mountain peaks that are useless except for the Alpenstock Trust; upon violets that can't be eaten; upon giraffes whose backs slope too steeply to carry a pack! Can it be that the Boob is Nature's darling, that she intends him to outlive all the rest?

A BRIEF MAXIM

Be sure you're a Boob, and then go ahead.

IN CONCLUSION

But never, dear Cynthia, confuse the Boob with the Poor Fish. The Poor Fish, as an Emersonian thinker has observed, is the Boob gone wrong. The Poor Fish is the cynical, sneering simpleton who, if he did see an angel, would think it was only some one dressed up for the movies. The Poor Fish is Why Boobs Leave Home.

II. SIMPLIFICATION

Dear Sir—How can life be simplified? In the office where I work the pressure of affairs is very exacting. Often I do not have a moment to think over my own affairs before 4 p.m. There are a great many matters that puzzle me, and I am afraid that if I go on working so hard the sweetest hours of my youth may pass before I have given them proper consideration. It is very irassible. Can you help me?

CYNTHIA.

SALUTATION TO CYNTHIA

Cynthia, my child: How are you? It is very delightful to hear from you again. During the recent months I have been very lonely indeed without your comradeship and counsel with regard to the great matters which were under consideration.

THINKING IT OVER

Well, Cynthia, when your inquiry reached me I propped my feet on the desk, got out the corncob pipe and thought things over. How to simplify life? How, indeed! It is a subject that interests me strangely. Of course, the easiest method is to let one's ancestors do it

for one. If you have been lucky enough to choose a simple-minded, quiet-natured quartet of grandparents, frugal, thrifty and foresighted, who had the good sense to buy property in an improving neighborhood and keep their money compounding at a fair rate of interest, the problem is greatly clarified. If they have hung on to the old farmstead, with its huckleberry pasture and cowbells tankling homeward at sunset and a bright brown brook cascading down over ledges of rock into a swimming hole, then again your problem has possible solutions. Just go out to the farm, with a copy of Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gipsy" (you remember the poem, in which he praises the guy who had sense enough to leave town and live in the suburbs where the Bolsheviki wouldn't bother him), and don't leave any forwarding address with the postoffice. But if, as I fear from an examination of your pink-scalloped notepaper with its exhalation of lilac essence, the vortex of modern jazz life has swept you in, the crisis is far more intricate.

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TAKE THE MATTER IN YOUR OWN HANDS

Of course, my dear Cynthia, it is better to simplify your own life than to have some one else do it for you. The Kaiser, for instance, has had his career greatly simplified, but hardly in a way he himself would have chosen. The first thing to do is to come to a clear understanding of (and to let your employer know you understand) the two principles that underlie modern business. There are only two kinds of affairs that are attended to in an office. First, things that absolutely must be done. These are often numerous; but remember, that since they *have* to be done, if you don't do them some one else will. Second, things that don't have to be done. And since they don't have to be done, why do them? This will simplify matters a great deal.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

The next thing to do is to stop answering letters. Even the firm's most persistent customers will cease troubling you by and bye if you persist. Then, stop answering the telephone. A pair of office shears can sever a telephone wire much faster than any mechanician can keep it repaired. If the matter is really urgent, let the other people telegraph. While you are perfecting this scheme look about, in a dignified way, for another job. Don't take the first thing that offers itself, but wait until something really congenial appears. It is a good thing to choose some occupation that will keep you a great deal in the open air, preferably something that involves looking at shop windows and frequent visits to the receiving teller at the bank. It is nice to have a job in a tall building overlooking the sea, with office hours from 3 to 5 p.m.

HOW EASY, AFTER ALL!

Many people, dear Cynthia, are harassed because they do not realize how easy it is to get out of a job which involves severe and concentrated effort. My child, you must not allow yourself to become discouraged. Almost any job can be shaken off in time and with perseverance. Looking out of the window is a great help. There are very few businesses where what goes on in the office is half as interesting as what is happening on the street outside. If your desk does not happen to be near a window, so much the better. You can watch the sunset admirably from the window of the advertising manager's office. Call his attention to the rosy tints in the afterglow or the glorious pallor of the clouds. Advertising managers are apt to be insufficiently appreciative of these things. Sometimes, when they are closeted with the Boss in conference, open the ground-glass door and say, "I think it is going to rain shortly." Carry your love of the beautiful into your office life. This will inevitably pave the way to simplification.

ENVELOPES WITH LOOP HOLES

And never open envelopes with little transparent panes of isinglass in their fronts. Never keep copies of your correspondence. For, if your letters are correct, no copy will be necessary. And, if incorrect, it is far better not to have a copy. If you were to tell me the exact nature of your work I could offer many more specific hints.

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YOUR INQUIRY, CHILD, TOUCHES MY HEART

I am intimately interested in your problem, my child, for I am a great believer in simplification. It is hard to follow out one's own precepts; but the root of happiness is never to contradict any one and never agree with any one. For if you contradict people, they will try to convince you; and if you agree with them, they will enlarge upon their views until they say something you will feel bound to contradict. Let me hear from you again.

TO AN UNKNOWN DAMSEL

On Fifth Street, in a small cafe,
  Upstairs (our tables were adjacent),
I saw you lunching yesterday,
  And felt a secret thrill complacent.

You sat, and, waiting for your meal,
  You read a book. As I was eating,
Dear me, how keen you made me feel
  To give you just a word of greeting!

And as your hand the pages turned,
  I watched you, dumbly contemplating—
O how exceedingly I yearned
  To ask the girl to keep you waiting.

I wished that I could be the maid
  To serve your meal or crumb your cloth, or
Beguile some hazard to my aid
  To know your verdict on that author!

And still you read. You dropped your purse,
  And yet, adorably unheeding,
You turned the pages, verse by verse,—
  I watched, and worshiped you for reading!

You know not what restraint it took
  To mind my etiquette, nor flout it
By telling you I know that book,
  And asking what you thought about it.

I cursed myself for being shy—
  I longed to make polite advances;

Alas! I let the time go by,
  And Fortune gives no second chances.

You read, but still your face was calm—
  (I scanned it closely, wretched sinner!)
You showed no sign——I felt a qualm—
  And then the waitress brought your dinner.

Those modest rhymes, you thought them fair?
  And will you sometimes praise or quote them?
And do you ask why I should care?
  Oh, Lady, it was I who wrote them!

THOUGHTS ON SETTING AN ALARM CLOCK

Mark the monitory dial,
  Set the gong for six a.m.—
Then, until the hour of trial,
  Clock a little sleep, pro tem.

As I crank the dread alarum
  Stern resolve I try to fix:
My ideals, shall I mar ’em
  When the awful moment ticks?

Heaven strengthen my intention,
  Grant me grace my vow to keep:
Would the law enforced Prevention
  Of such Cruelty to Sleep!

SONGS IN A SHOWER BATH

[Illustration]

HOT WATER

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Gently, while the drenching dribble
  Courses down my sweltered form,
I am basking like a sybil,
  Lazy, languorous and warm.
I am unambitious, flaccid,
  Well content to drowse and dream:
How I hate life's bitter acid—
  Leave me here to stew and steam.
Underneath this jet so torrid
  I forget the world's sad wrath:
O activity is horrid!
  Leave me in my shower-bath!

COLD WATER

But when I turn the crank
O Zeus!
A silver ecstasy thrills me!
I caper and slap my chilled thighs,
I plan to make a card index of all my ideas
And feel like an efficiency expert.
I tweak Fate by the nose
And know I could succeed in *anything*.
I throw up my head
And glut myself with icy splatter...
To-day I will really
Begin my career!

ON DEDICATING A NEW TEAPOT

Boiling water now is poured,
  Pouches filled with fresh tobacco,
Round the hospitable board
  Fragrant steams Ceylon or Pekoe.

Bread and butter is cut thin,
  Cream and sugar, yes, bring them on;
Ginger cookies in their tin,
  And the dainty slice of lemon.

Let the marmalade be brought,
  Buns of cinnamon adhesive;

And, to catch the leaves, you ought
  To be sure to have the tea-sieve.

But, before the cups be filled—
  Cups that cause no ebriation—
Let a genial wish be willed
  Just by way of dedication.

Here's your fortune, gentle pot:
  To our thirst you offer slakeage;
Bright blue china, may I not
  Hope no maid will cause you breakage.

Kindest ministrant to man,
  Long be jocund years before you,
And no meaner fortune than
  Helen's gracious hand to pour you!

THE UNFORGIVABLE SYNTAX

A certain young man never knew
Just when to say *whom* and when *who*;
  "The question of choosing,"
  He said, "is confusing;
I wonder if *which* wouldn't do?"

Nothing is so illegitimate
As a noun when his verbs do not fit him; it
  Makes him disturbed
  If not properly verbed—
If he asks for the plural, why git him it!

Lie and *lay* offer slips to the pen
That have bothered most excellent men:
  You can say that you lay
  In bed—yesterday;
If you do it to-day, you're a hen!

A person we met at a play
Was cruel to pronouns all day:
  She would frequently cry
  "Between you and I,
If only us girls had our way—!"

VISITING POETS

We were giving a young English poet a taste of Philadelphia, trying to show him one or two of the simple beauties that make life agreeable to us. Having just been photographed, he was in high good humor.

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“What a pity,” he said, “that you in America have no literature that reflects the amazing energy, the humor, the raciness of your life! I woke up last night at the hotel and heard a motor fire engine thunder by. There’s a symbol of the extraordinary vitality of America! My, if I could only live over here a couple of years, how I’d like to try my hand at it. It’s a pity that no one over here is putting down the humor of your life.”

“Have you read O. Henry?” we suggested.

“Extraordinary country,” he went on. “Somebody turned me loose on Mr. Morgan’s library in New York. There was a librarian there, but I didn’t let her bother me. I wanted to see that manuscript of ‘Endymion’ they have there. I supposed they would take me up to a glass case and let me gaze at it. Not at all. They put it right in my hands and I spent three quarters of an hour over it. Wonderful stuff. You know, the first edition of my book is selling at a double premium in London. It’s been out only eighteen months.”

“How do you fellows get away with it?” we asked humbly.

“I hope Pond isn’t going to book me up for too many lectures,” he said. “I’ve got to get back to England in the spring. There’s a painter over there waiting to do my portrait. But there are so many places I’ve got to lecture—everybody seems to want to hear about the young English poets.”

“I hear Philip Gibbs is just arriving in New York,” we said.

“Is that so? Dear me, he’ll quite take the wind out of my sails, won’t he? Nice chap, Gibbs. He sent me an awfully cheery note when I went out to the front as a war correspondent. Said he liked my stuff about the sodgers. He’ll make a pot of money over here, won’t he?”

We skipped across City Hall Square abreast of some trolley cars.

“I say, these trams keep one moving, don’t they?” he said. “You know, I was tremendously bucked by that department store you took me to see. That’s the sort of place one has to go to see the real art of America. Those paintings in there, by the elevators, they were done by a young English girl. Friend of mine—in fact, she did the pictures for my first book. Pity you have so few poets over here. You mustn’t make me lose my train; I’ve got a date with Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters in New York to-night. Vachel’s an amusing bird. I must get him over to England and get him started. I’ve written to Edmund Gosse about him, and I’m going to write again. What a pity Irvin Cobb doesn’t write poetry! He’s a great writer. What vivacity, what a rich vocabulary!”

“Have you read Mark Twain?” we quavered.

“Oh, Mark’s grand when he’s serious; but when he tries to be funny, you know, it’s too obvious. I can always see him feeling for the joke. No, it doesn’t come off. You know an artist simply doesn’t exist for me unless he has something to say. That’s what makes me so annoyed with R.L.S. In ‘Weir of Hermiston’ and the ‘New Arabian Nights’ he really had something to say; the rest of the time he was playing the fool on some one else’s instrument. You know style isn’t something you can borrow from some one else; it’s the unconscious revelation of a man’s own personality.”

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We agreed.

“I wonder if there aren’t some clubs around here that would like to hear me talk?” he said. “You know, I’d like to come back to Philadelphia if I could get some dates of that sort. Just put me wise, old man, if you hear of anything. I was telling some of your poets in New York about the lectures I’ve been giving. Those chaps are fearfully rough with one. You know, they’ll just ride over one roughshod if you give them a chance. They hate to see a fellow a success. Awful tripe some of them are writing. They don’t seem to be expressing the spirit, the fine exhilaration, of American life at all. If I had my way, I’d make every one in America read Rabelais and Madame Bovary. Then they ought to study some of the old English poets, like Marvell, to give them precision. It’s lots of fun telling them these things. They respond famously. Now over in my country we poets are all so reserved, so shy, so taciturn.

“You know Pond, the lecture man in New York, was telling me a quaint story about Masefield. Great friend of mine, old Jan Masefield. He turned up in New York to talk at some show Pond was running. Had on some horrible old trench boots. There was only about twenty minutes before the show began. ‘Well,’ says Pond, hoping Jan was going to change his clothes, ‘are you all ready?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ says Jan. Pond was graveled; didn’t know just what to do. So he says, hoping to give Jan a hint, ‘Well, I’ve just got to get my boots polished.’ Of course, they didn’t need it—Americans’ boots never do—but Pond sits down on a boot-polishing stand and the boy begins to polish for dear life. Jan sits down by him, deep in some little book or other, paying no attention. Pond whispers to the boy, ’Quick, polish his boots while he’s reading.’ Jan was deep in his book, never knew what was going on. Then they went off to the lecture, Jan in his jolly old sack suit.”

We went up to a private gallery on Walnut Street, where some of the most remarkable literary treasures in the world are stored, such as the original copy of Elia given by Charles Lamb to the lady he wanted to marry, Fanny Kelly. There we also saw some remarkable first editions of Shelley.

“You know,” he said, “Mrs. L—— in New York—I had an introduction to her from Jan—-wanted to give me a first edition of Shelley, but I wouldn’t let her.”

“How do you fellows get away with it?” we said again humbly.

“Well, old man,” he said, “I must be going. Mustn’t keep Vachel waiting. Is this where I train? What a ripping station! Some day I must write a poem about all this. What a pity you have so few poets ...”

A GOOD HOME IN THE SUBURBS

There are a number of empty apartments in the suburbs of our mind that we shall be glad to rent to any well-behaved ideas.

These apartments (unfurnished) all have southern exposure and are reasonably well lighted. They have emergency exits.

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We prefer middle-aged, reasonable ideas that have outgrown the diseases of infancy. No ideas need apply that will lie awake at night and disturb the neighbors, or will come home very late and wake the other tenants. This is an orderly mind, and no gambling, loud laughter and carnival or Pomeranian dogs will be admitted.

If necessary, the premises can be improved to suit high-class tenants.

No lease longer than six months can be given to any one idea, unless it can furnish positive guarantees of good conduct, no bolshevik affiliations and no children.

We have an orphanage annex where homeless juvenile ideas may be accommodated until they grow up.

The southwestern section of our mind, where these apartments are available, is some distance from the bustle and traffic, but all the central points can be reached without difficulty. Middle-aged, unsophisticated ideas of domestic tastes will find the surroundings almost ideal.

For terms and blue prints apply janitor on the premises.

WALT WHITMAN MINIATURES

I

A decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that one should have some excuse for being away from the office on a working afternoon. September sunshine and trembling blue air are not sufficient reasons, it seems. Therefore, if any one should brutally ask what I was doing the other day dangling down Chestnut Street toward the river, I should have to reply, “Looking for the *Wenonah*.” The *Wenonah*, you will immediately conclude, is a moving picture theater. But be patient a moment.

Lower Chestnut Street is a delightful place for one who does not get down there very often. The face of wholesale trade, dingier than the glitter of uptown shops, is far more exciting and romantic. Pavements are cumbered with vast packing cases; whiffs of tea and spice well up from cool cellars. Below Second Street I found a row of enormous sacks across the curb, with bright red and green wool pushing through holes in the burlap. Such signs as WOOL, NOILS AND WASTE are frequent. I wonder what noils are? A big sign on Front Street proclaims TEA CADDIES, which has a pleasant grandmotherly flavor. A little brass plate, gleamingly polished, says HONORARY CONSULATE OF JAPAN. Beside immense motor trucks stood a shabby little horse and buggy, restored to service, perhaps, by the war-time shortage of gasoline. It was a typical one-horse shay of thirty years ago.

I crossed over to Camden on the ferryboat *Wildwood*, observing in the course of the voyage her sisters, *Bridgeton, Camden, Salem* and *Hammonton*. It is curious that no matter where one goes, one will always meet people who are traveling there for the first time. A small boy next to me was gazing in awe at the stalwart tower of the Victor Company, and snuffing with pleasure the fragrance of cooking tomatoes that makes Camden savory at this time of year. Wagonloads of ripe Jersey tomatoes making their way to the soup factory are a jocund sight across the river just now.

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Every ferry passenger is familiar with the rapid tinkling of the ratchet wheel that warps the landing stage up to the level of the boat's deck. I asked the man who was running the wheel where I would find the *Wenonah*. "She lays over in the old Market Street slip," he replied, and cheerfully showed me just where to find her. "Is she still used?" I asked. "Mostly on Saturday nights and holidays," he said, "when there's a big crowd going across."

The *Wenonah*, as all Camden seafarers know, is a ferryboat, one of the old-timers, and I was interested in her because she and her sister, the *Beverly*, were Walt Whitman's favorite ferries. He crossed back and forth on them hundreds of times and has celebrated them in several paragraphs in *Specimen Days*. Perhaps this is the place to quote his memorandum dated January 12, 1882, which ought to interest all lovers of the Camden ferry:

"Such a show as the Delaware presented an hour before sundown yesterday evening, all along between Philadelphia and Camden, is worth weaving into an item. It was full tide, a fair breeze from the southwest, the water of a pale tawny color, and just enough motion to make things frolicsome and lively. Add to these an approaching sunset of unusual splendor, a broad tumble of clouds, with much golden haze and profusion of beaming shaft and dazzle. In the midst of all, in the clear drab of the afternoon light, there steamed up the river the large new boat, the *Wenonah*, as pretty an object as you could wish to see, lightly and swiftly skimming along, all trim and white, covered with flags, transparent red and blue streaming out in the breeze. Only a new ferryboat, and yet in its fitness comparable with the prettiest product of Nature's cunning, and rivaling it. High up in the transparent ether gracefully balanced and circled four or five great sea hawks, while here below, mid the pomp and picturesqueness of sky and river, swam this creature of artificial beauty and motion and power, in its way no less perfect."

You will notice that Walt Whitman describes the *Wenonah* as being white. The Pennsylvania ferryboats, as we know them, are all the brick-red color that is familiar to the present generation. Perhaps older navigators of the Camden crossing can tell us whether the boats were all painted white in a less smoky era?

The *Wenonah* and the *Beverly* were lying in the now unused ferry slip at the foot of Market Street, alongside the great Victor Talking Machine works. Picking my way through an empty yard where some carpentering was going on, I found a deserted pier that overlooked the two old vessels and gave a fair prospect on to the river and the profile of Philadelphia. Sitting there on a pile of pebbles, I lit a pipe and watched the busy panorama of the river. I made no effort to disturb the normal and congenial lassitude that is the highest function of the human being: no Hindoo philosopher could

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have been more pleasantly at ease. (O. Henry, one remembers, used to insist that what some of his friends called laziness was really “dignified repose.”) Two elderly colored men were loading gravel onto a cart not far away. I was a little worried as to what I could say if they asked what I was doing. In these days casual loungers along docksides may be suspected of depth bombs and high treason. The only truthful reply to any question would have been that I was thinking about Walt Whitman. Such a remark, if uttered in Philadelphia, would undoubtedly have been answered by a direction to the chocolate factory on Race Street. But in Camden every one knows about Walt. Still, the colored men said nothing beyond returning my greeting. Their race, wise in simplicity, knows that loafing needs no explanation and is its own excuse.

If Walt could revisit the ferries he loved so well, in New York and Philadelphia, he would find the former strangely altered in aspect. The New York skyline wears a very different silhouette against the sky, with its marvelous peaks and summits drawing the eye aloft. But Philadelphia’s profile is (I imagine) not much changed. I do not know just when the City Hall tower was finished: Walt speaks of it as “three-fifths built” in 1879. That, of course, is the dominant unit in the view from Camden. Otherwise there are few outstanding elements. The gradual rise in height of the buildings, from Front Street gently ascending up to Broad, gives no startling contrast of elevation to catch the gaze. The spires of the older churches stand up like soft blue pencils, and the massive cornices of the Curtis and Drexel buildings catch the sunlight. Otherwise the outline is even and well-massed in a smooth ascending curve.

It is curious how a man can stamp his personality upon earthly things. There will always be pilgrims to whom Camden and the Delaware ferries are full of excitement and meaning because of Walt Whitman. Just as Stratford is Shakespeare, so is Camden Whitman. Some supercilious observers, flashing through on the way to Atlantic City, may only see a town in which there is no delirious and seizing beauty. Let us remind them of Walt’s own words:

> A great city is that which has the greatest men and women,
> If it be a few ragged huts it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

And as I came back across the river, and an airplane hovered over us at a great height, I thought how much we need a Whitman to-day, a poet who can catch the heart and meaning of these grievous bitter years, who can make plain the surging hopes that throb in the breasts of men. The world has not flung itself into agony without some unexpressed vision that lights the sacrifice. If Walt Whitman were here he would look on this new world of moving pictures and gasoline engines and U-boats and tell us what it means. His great heart, which with all its garrulous fumbling had caught the deep music of human service and fellowship, would have had true and fine words for us. And

yet he would have found it a hard world for one of his strolling meditative observancy. A speeding motor truck would have run him down long ago!

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As I left the ferry at Market Street I saw that the Norwegian steamer *Taunton* was unloading bananas at the Ericsson pier. Less than a month ago she picked up the survivors of the schooner *Madrugada*, torpedoed by a U-boat off Winter Bottom Shoal. On the *Madrugada* was a young friend of mine, a Dutch sailor, who told me of the disaster after he was landed in New York. To come unexpectedly on the ship that had rescued him seemed a great adventure. What a poem Walt Whitman could have made of it!

II

It is a weakness of mine—not a sinful one, I hope—that whenever I see any one reading a book in public I am agog to find out what it is. Crossing over to Camden this morning a young woman on the ferry was absorbed in a volume, and I couldn't resist peeping over her shoulder. It was "Hans Brinker." On the same boat were several schoolboys carrying copies of Myers' "History of Greece." Quaint, isn't it, how our schools keep up the same old bunk! What earthly use will a smattering of Greek history be to those boys? Surely to our citizens of the coming generation the battles of the Marne will be more important than the scuffle at Salamis.

My errand in Camden was to visit the house on Mickle Street where Walt Whitman lived his last years. It is now occupied by Mrs. Thomas Skymer, a friendly Italian woman, and her family. Mrs. Skymer graciously allowed me to go through the downstairs rooms.

I don't suppose any literary shrine on earth is of more humble and disregarded aspect than Mickle Street. It is a little cobbled byway, grimed with drifting smoke from the railway yards, littered with wind-blown papers and lined with small wooden and brick houses sooted almost to blackness. It is curious to think, as one walks along that bumpy brick pavement, that many pilgrims from afar have looked forward to visiting Mickle Street as one of the world's most significant altars. As Chesterton wrote once, "We have not yet begun to get to the beginning of Whitman." But the wayfarer of to-day will find Mickle Street far from impressive.

The little house, a two-story frame cottage, painted dark brown, is numbered 330. (In Whitman's day it was 328.) On the pavement in front stands a white marble stepping-block with the carved initials W.W.—given to the poet, I dare say, by the same friends who bought him a horse and carriage. A small sign, in English and Italian, says: *Thomas A. Skymer, Automobiles to Hire on Occasions*. It was with something of a thrill that I entered the little front parlor where Walt used to sit, surrounded by his litter of papers and holding forth to faithful listeners. One may safely say that his was a happy old age, for there were those who never jibbed at protracted audience.

A description of that room as it was in the last days of Whitman's life may not be uninteresting. I quote from the article published by the Philadelphia *Press* of March 27, 1892, the day after the poet's death:

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> Below the windowsill a four-inch pine shelf is swung, on which rests
> a bottle of ink, two or three pens and a much-rubbed spectacle case.

(The shelf, I am sorry to say, is no longer there.)

The table—between which and the wall is the poet's rocker covered with a worsted afghan, presented to him one Christmas by a bevy of college girls who admired his work—is so thickly piled with books and magazines, letters and the raffle of a literary desk that there is scarcely an inch of room upon which he may rest his paper as he writes. A volume of Shakespeare lies on top of a heaping full waste basket that was once used to bring peaches to market, and an ancient copy of Worcester's Dictionary shares places in an adjacent chair with the poet's old and familiar soft gray hat, a newly darned blue woolen sock and a shoe-blacking brush. There is a paste bottle and brush on the table and a pair of scissors, much used by the poet, who writes, for the most part, on small bits of paper and parts of old envelopes and pastes them together in patchwork fashion.

In spite of a careful examination, I could find nothing in the parlor at all reminiscent of Whitman's tenancy, except the hole for the stovepipe under the mantel. One of Mrs. Skymer's small boys told me that "He" died in that room. Evidently small Louis Skymer didn't in the least know who "He" was, but realized that his home was in some vague way connected with a mysterious person whose memory occasionally attracts inquirers to the house.

Behind the parlor is a dark little bedroom, and then the kitchen. In a corner of the back yard is a curious thing: a large stone or terra cotta bust of a bearded man, very much like Whitman himself, but the face is battered and the nose broken so it would be hard to assert this definitely. One of the boys told me that it was in the yard when they moved in a year or so ago. The house is a little dark, standing between two taller brick neighbors. At the head of the stairs I noticed a window with colored panes, which lets in spots of red, blue and yellow light. I imagine that this patch of vivid color was a keen satisfaction to Walt's acute senses. Such is the simple cottage that one associates with America's literary declaration of independence.

The other Whitman shrine in Camden is the tomb in Harleigh Cemetery, reached by the Haddonfield trolley. Doctor Oberholtzer, in his "Literary History of Philadelphia," calls it "tawdry," to which I fear I must demur. Built into a quiet hillside in that beautiful cemetery, of enormous slabs of rough-hewn granite with a vast stone door standing symbolically ajar, it seemed to me grotesque, but greatly impressive. It is a weird pagan cromlech, with a huge triangular boulder above the door bearing only the words WALT WHITMAN. Palms and rubber plants grow in pots on the little curved path leading up to the tomb; above it is an uncombed hillside and trees flickering in the air. At this tomb, designed (it is said) by Whitman himself, was held that remarkable funeral ceremony on March 30, 1892, when a circus tent was not large enough to roof the crowd, and peanut

venders did business on the outskirts of the gathering. Perhaps it is not amiss to recall what Bob Ingersoll said on that occasion:

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“He walked among verbal varnishers and veneerers, among literary milliners and tailors, with the unconscious dignity of an antique god. He was the poet of that divine democracy that gives equal rights to all the sons and daughters of men. He uttered the great American voice.”

And though one finds in the words of the naive Ingersoll the squeaking timber of the soapbox, yet even a soapbox does lift a man a few inches above the level of the clay.

Well, the Whitman battle is not over yet, nor ever will be. Though neither Philadelphia nor Camden has recognized 330 Mickle Street as one of the authentic shrines of our history (Lord, how trimly dight it would be if it were in New England!), Camden has made a certain amend in putting Walt into the gay mosaic that adorns the portico of the new public library in Cooper Park. There, absurdly represented in an austere black cassock, he stands in the following frieze of great figures: Dante, Whitman, Moliere, Gutenberg, Tyndale, Washington, Penn, Columbus, Moses, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, Longfellow and Palestrina. I believe that there was some rumpus as to whether Walt should be included; but, anyway, there he is.

You will make a great mistake if you don’t ramble over to Camden some day and fleet the golden hours in an observant stroll. Himself the prince of loafers, Walt taught the town to loaf. When they built the new postoffice over there they put round it a ledge for philosophic lounging, one of the most delightful architectural features I have ever seen. And on Third Street, just around the corner from 330 Mickle Street, is the oddest plumber’s shop in the world. Mr. George F. Hammond, a Civil War veteran, who knew Whitman and also Lincoln, came to Camden in ’69. In 1888 he determined to build a shop that would be different from anything on earth, and well he succeeded. Perhaps it is symbolic of the shy and harassed soul of the plumber, fleeing from the unreasonable demands of his customers, for it is a kind of Gothic fortress. Leaded windows, gargoyles, masculine medusa heads, a sallyport, loopholes and a little spire. I stopped in to talk to Mr. Hammond, and he greeted me graciously. He says that people have come all the way from California to see his shop, and I can believe it. It is the work of a delightful and original spirit who does not care to live in a demure hutch like all the rest of us, and has really had some fun out of his whimsical little castle. He says he would rather live in Camden than in Philadelphia, and I daresay he’s right.

III

Something in his aspect as he leaned over the railing near me drew me on to speak to him. I don’t know just how to describe it except by saying that he had an understanding look. He gave me the impression of a man who had spent his life in thinking and would understand me, whatever I might say. He looked like the kind of man to whom one would find one’s self saying wise and thoughtful things. There are some people, you know, to whom it is impossible to speak wisdom even if you should wish to. No spirit of

kindly philosophy speaks out of their eyes. You find yourself automatically saying peevish or futile things that you do not in the least believe.

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The mood and the place were irresistible for communion. The sun was warm along the river front and my pipe was trailing a thin whiff of blue vapor out over the gently fluctuating water, which clucked and sagged along the slimy pilings. Behind us the crash and banging of heavy traffic died away into a dreamy undertone in the mild golden shimmer of the noon hour.

The old man was apparently lost in revery, looking out over the river toward Camden. He was plainly dressed in coat and trousers of some coarse weave. His shirt, partly unbuttoned under the great white sweep of his beard, was of gray flannel. His boots were those of a man much accustomed to walking. A weather-stained sombrero was on his head. Beneath it his thick white hair and whiskers wavered in the soft breeze. Just then a boy came out from the near-by ferry house carrying a big crate of daffodils, perhaps on their way from some Jersey farm to an uptown florist. We watched them shining and trembling across the street, where he loaded them onto a truck. The old gentleman's eyes, which were a keen gray blue, caught mine as we both turned from admiring the flowers.

I don't know just why I said it, but they were the first words that popped into my head. "And then my heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils," I quoted.

He looked at me a little quizzically.

"You imported those words on a ship," he said. "Why don't you use some of your own instead?"

I was considerably taken aback. "Why, I don't know," I hesitated. "They just came into my head."

"Well, I call that bad luck," he said, "when some one else's words come into a man's head instead of words of his own."

He looked about him, watching the scene with rich satisfaction. "It's good to see all this again," he said. "I haven't loafed around here for going on thirty years."

"You've been out of town?" I asked.

He looked at me with a steady blue eye in which there was something of humor and something of sadness.

"Yes, a long way out. I've just come back to see how the Great Idea is getting along. I thought maybe I could help a little."

"The Great Idea?" I queried, puzzled.

“The value of the individual,” he said. “The necessity for every human being to be able to live, think, act, dream, pray for himself. Nowadays I believe you call it the League of Nations. It’s the same thing. Are men to be free to decide their fate for themselves or are they to be in the grasp of irresponsible tyrants, the hell of war, the cruelties of creeds, executive deeds just or unjust, the power of personality just or unjust? What are your poets, your young Libertads, doing to bring About the Great Idea of perfect and free individuals?”

I was rather at a loss, but happily he did not stay for an answer. Above us an American flag was fluttering on a staff, showing its bright ribs of scarlet clear and vivid against the sky.

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“You see that flag of stars,” he said, “that thick-sprinkled bunting? I have seen that flag stagger in the agony of threatened dissolution, in years that trembled and reeled beneath us. You have only seen it in the days of its easy, sure triumphs. I tell you, now is the day for America to show herself, to prove her dreams for the race. But who is chanting the poem that comes from the soul of America, the carol of victory? Who strikes up the marches of Libertad that shall free this tortured ship of earth? Democracy is the destined conqueror, yet I see treacherous lip-smiles everywhere and death and infidelity at every step. I tell you, now is the time of battle, now the time of striving. I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations, crying, ’Leap from your seats and contend for your lives!’ I tell you, produce great Persons; the rest follows.”

“What do you think about the covenant of the League of Nations?” I asked. He looked out over the river for some moments before replying and then spoke slowly, with halting utterance that seemed to suffer anguish in putting itself into words.

“America will be great only if she builds for all mankind,” he said. “This plan of the great Libertad leads the present with friendly hand toward the future. But to hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account. That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle, as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibers of plants. Does this plan answer universal needs? Can it face the open fields and the seaside? Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear again in my strength, gait, face? Have real employments contributed to it—original makers, not mere amanuenses? I think so, and therefore I say to you, now is the day to fight for it.”

“Well,” he said, checking himself, “there’s the ferry coming in. I’m going over to Camden to have a look around on my way back to Harleigh.”

“I’m afraid you’ll find Mickle street somewhat changed,” I said, for by this time I knew him.

“I love changes,” he said.

“Your centennial comes on May 31,” I said, “I hope you won’t be annoyed if Philadelphia doesn’t pay much attention to it. You know how things are around here.”

“My dear boy,” he said, “I am patient. The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferred till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it. I have sung the songs of the Great Idea and that is reward in itself. I have loved the earth, sun, animals, I have despised riches, I have given alms to every one that asked, stood up for the stupid and crazy, devoted my income and labor to others, hated tyrants, argued not concerning God, had patience and indulgence toward the people, taken off my hat to nothing known or unknown, gone freely with powerful uneducated persons and I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things—”

“All aboard!” cried the man at the gate of the ferry house.

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He waved his hand with a benign patriarchal gesture and was gone.

ON DOORS

The opening and closing of doors are the most significant actions of man's life. What a mystery lies in doors!

No man knows what awaits him when he opens a door. Even the most familiar room, where the clock ticks and the hearth glows red at dusk, may harbor surprises. The plumber may actually have called (while you were out) and fixed that leaking faucet. The cook may have had a fit of the vapors and demanded her passports. The wise man opens his front door with humility and a spirit of acceptance.

Which one of us has not sat in some ante-room and watched the inscrutable panels of a door that was full of meaning? Perhaps you were waiting to apply for a job; perhaps you had some "deal" you were ambitious to put over. You watched the confidential stenographer flit in and out, carelessly turning that mystic portal which, to you, revolved on hinges of fate. And then the young woman said, "Mr. Cranberry will see you now." As you grasped the knob the thought flashed, "When I open this door again, what will have happened?"

There are many kinds of doors. Revolving doors for hotels, shops and public buildings. These are typical of the brisk, bustling ways of modern life. Can you imagine John Milton or William Penn skipping through a revolving door? Then there are the curious little slatted doors that still swing outside denatured bar-rooms and extend only from shoulder to knee. There are trapdoors, sliding doors, double doors, stage doors, prison doors, glass doors. But the symbol and mystery of a door resides in its quality of concealment. A glass door is not a door at all, but a window. The meaning of a door is to hide what lies inside; to keep the heart in suspense.

Also, there are many ways of opening doors. There is the cheery push of elbow with which the waiter shoves open the kitchen door when he bears in your tray of supper. There is the suspicious and tentative withdrawal of a door before the unhappy book agent or peddler. There is the genteel and carefully modulated recession with which footmen swing wide the oaken barriers of the great. There is the sympathetic and awful silence of the dentist's maid who opens the door into the operating room and, without speaking, implies that the doctor is ready for you. There is the brisk cataclysmic opening of a door when the nurse comes in, very early in the morning—"It's a boy!"

Doors are the symbol of privacy, of retreat, of the mind's escape into blissful quietude or sad secret struggle. A room without doors is not a room, but a hallway. No matter where he is, a man can make himself at home behind a closed door. The mind works best behind closed doors. Men are not horses to be herded together. Dogs know the

meaning and anguish of doors. Have you ever noticed a puppy yearning at a shut portal? It is a symbol of human life.

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The opening of doors is a mystic act: it has in it some flavor of the unknown, some sense of moving into a new moment, a new pattern of the human rigmarole. It includes the highest glimpses of mortal gladness: reunions, reconciliations, the bliss of lovers long parted. Even in sadness, the opening of a door may bring relief: it changes and redistributes human forces. But the closing of doors is far more terrible. It is a confession of finality. Every door closed brings something to an end. And there are degrees of sadness in the closing of doors. A door slammed is a confession of weakness. A door gently shut is often the most tragic gesture in life. Every one knows the seizure of anguish that comes just after the closing of a door, when the loved one is still near, within sound of voice, and yet already far away.

The opening and closing of doors is a part of the stern fluency of life. Life will not stay still and let us alone. We are continually opening doors with hope, closing them with despair. Life lasts not much longer than a pipe of tobacco, and destiny knocks us out like the ashes.

The closing of a door is irrevocable. It snaps the packthread of the heart. It is no avail to reopen, to go back. Pinero spoke nonsense when he made Paula Tanqueray say, “The future is only the past entered through another gate.” Alas, there is no other gate. When the door is shut, it is shut forever. There is no other entrance to that vanished pulse of time. “The moving finger writes, and having writ”—

There is a certain kind of door-shutting that will come to us all. The kind of door-shutting that is done very quietly, with the sharp click of the latch to break the stillness. They will think then, one hopes, of our unfulfilled decencies rather than of our pluperfected misdemeanors. Then they will go out and close the door.

[Illustration]