A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL SATIRES OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF

ENGLISH AND THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF THE KANSAS STATE

TEACHERS COLLEGE OF EMPORIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

PAULINE ALLEN

July 1936

Approved for the Major Department

Theodore C. Owen

Approved for the Graduate Council

[illegible signature]

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge the help and guidance of Theodore C. Owen, Associate Professor of English, in preparing and writing this thesis.

Pauline Allen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

"The chief literary event of 1930 was the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to the American novelist, Sinclair Lewis."[1] According to the conditions of the prize, the recipient must have done work of an idealistic tendency.[2] The inscription on the award is as follows: "To Sinclair Lewis, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, for his powerful descriptive analysis, his gift for the creation of types, his keenness, his humor."[3]

When Mr. Lewis received this award, a storm of protest arose in America. Because Mr. Lewis wrote satires on American life, his countrymen felt that Europe had insulted America by giving him the famous prize. However, the fact remains that Sinclair Lewis has been the most widely-read and best-known living American author in Europe,[4] and that Sinclair Lewis's books have attained the ranks of the best-seller class in the years in which they were published.

For these reasons, because he is the only American winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, a novelist whose books are repeatedly best-

---

[1] William Lyon Phelps, "As I Like It," Scribner's, (March 1931,) p. 325.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Dorothy Thompson, (Mrs. Sinclair Lewis,) "At the Court of King Gustaf," The Pictorial Review, (April 1931,) p. 52.

[4] Harry Lorin Binsse and John L. Trounstine, "Europe Looks at Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, (January 1931,) p. 457.

sellers, and the most widely-read and best-known living American author in Europe, Sinclair Lewis must be regarded as one of the significant novelists of the twentieth century.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem. Since Sinclair Lewis is one of the important novelists of the twentieth century, the purpose of this study is (1) that of tracing the development of the novelist's skill in the creation of social satires; and (2) that of studying his attitudes toward the American life which is reflected in his writings.

Importance of the study. Because Mr. Lewis is the only American to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, the writer believes that an analytical, detailed study of Sinclair Lewis's satires may be useful in contributing to the knowledge of the work of one of America's foremost men of letters.

Furthermore, this survey will combine the essential opinions and viewpoints of the influential critics who have commented upon Mr. Lewis's style and his satires.

Therefore, the writer hopes that his thesis will be of use to students of current literature.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Social satire. According to the text of Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, satire is a literary composition, holding up abuses, errors,

vice, et cetera, to reprobation or ridicule. According to Webster, "social" pertains to relationship with others of one's kind, or pertains to society in general.

Therefore, a social satire is a literary composition which ridicules certain phases of the life of the people of a country.

Culture. Webster defines culture thus: "Cultivation, the product of cultivation. The art of improving or developing by education, discipline, et cetera. The enlightment and discipline acquired by mental and moral training. Refinement." Cultivate is defined thus: "To civilize; refine." Therefore, in this study, culture means the process of civilizing or the products of civilization; and the art of improving by education.

Attitude. In this study, attitude may be defined as position or bearing as indicating action, feeling, or mood.

Foible. Foible may be defined as a failing, or weak point.

Convention. In the discussion of "Convention and Standardization" in Chapter VII, the word may be defined as fixed custom or usage.

Standardization. In the chapter just cited, standardization means that which is established by authority, custom, or general consent, as a model or example.

Socialism. Webster gives the following definition for the word: "A political and economic theory or social reorganization, the essential feature of which is government control of economic activities, to the end that competition shall give way to cooperation and that the opportunities of life and the rewards of labor shall be equitably apportioned." In the

discussion of socialism in this thesis, the word means the policy in accordance with the socialistic theory.

Fascism. For fascism, society has historical and immanent ends of preservation, expansion, improvement. Individuals are merely the means by which society achieves its ends. The individual is subordinated to society, but not eliminated. He cannot lead an existence distinct from that of the state. He owes a duty to the state, and in the exercise of this duty may be called on to sacrifice everything, including his life. The form of government advocated by fascism rejects the conception of popular sovereignty. The governing class must be led and animated by a man who can give expression to its ideals.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Since this survey deals with the satires of Mr. Lewis, the subject matter has been divided into five topics, each dealing with a specific mental view. However, the first division comprises the earlier works or novels which Mr. Lewis wrote prior to 1920 when he published his first major satire, Main Street. These first novels may be said to be forerunners of the social satire. The four following divisions deal with Mr. Lewis's attitudes toward American Life and are entitled: The Pursuit of Culture, Foibles of the American Business Man, Religion, and The American Social Order. Each division or chapter treats of some particular phase of Materialist America.

In tracing the development of Mr. Lewis's skill in satire, the writer will point out in the discussion of the books in each chapter the successive steps and characteristics of the development. Thus, the two points of the problem will complement each other in the course of the survey.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History of the problem. Many eminent writers have criticized Sinclair Lewis's writings, but the criticisms have appeared mainly in popular literary magazines. Only one man, Carl Van Doren, has attempted a scholarly discussion of the novelist at book length; however, in his discourse, he has assumed a definitely biased attitude in justification of the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930 to Mr. Lewis.[1] This work is highly valuable for the bibliography of Mr. Lewis's writings, from his first poem to his last novel in 1935, when the bibliography was completed. This section, which comprises nearly half of the book, has been arranged by Harvey Taylor.

One is inclined to agree with Granville Hicks, literary editor of New Masses and a distinguished left-wing literary critic, who has observed, "Many things may be said about Sinclair Lewis and there are many points of view from which his work can be profitably examined."[2]

After a comprehensive study of his works, the writer has chosen to discuss Mr. Lewis's novels as social satires. A review of the other aspects of Mr. Lewis's work, however, may be valuable to the student of current literature, as well as clarifying to this survey. Therefore, the text of this chapter is concerned with a review of the literature.

---

[1] Carl Van Doren and Harvey Taylor, Sinclair Lewis, a Biographical Sketch, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1935.)

[2] Granville Hicks, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," The English Journal, (April 1936,) p. 265.

Carl Van Doren believes that Sinclair Lewis is the quintessence of the United States set off by a special genius. He terms him the "essential American of the twentieth century," just as Benjamin Franklin was of the eighteenth century, and Mark Twain of the nineteenth century.[1] Mr. Van Doren classifies him as a storyteller. He says:

> His craft has been, and is, only to be simply, originally himself and to tell the life stories of the men and women who, from time to time, laid hold on this driving driven imagist.[2]
>
> *
>
> He is not a critic taking his world apart, but a highly sensitized American telling stories.[3]

As a Journalist. William Rose Benet says that Sinclair Lewis is a journalist par excellence. "He has that absorbing curiosity about life without which no great writer was ever born," writes Mr. Benet in the Saturday Review of Literature.[4]

At one time, Mr. Benet and Mr. Lewis were companions at Carmel, California. "My brain, to use Henry Holt's expression, was sometimes thoroughly 'sandpapered'," continues Mr. Benet, "by the constant dissection of ideas, the questioning of every premise, the roving of Red's insatiable curiosity concerning preconceived notions, and the constant challenge of his argument."[5] This curiosity and his "nose for news" led Mr. Lewis

---

[1] Van Doren, op. cit., p. 29.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 47.

[4] William Rose Benet, "The Earlier Lewis," Saturday Review of Literature, (January 20, 1934,) pp. 421-22.

[5] Ibid.

between 1907-1916 to be a literary jack-of-all-trades, his activities ranging from newspaper reporting and manuscript reading to magazine editing.

One may see evidences of his journalistic experiences in the style and technique of his novels and short stories. Mr. Lewis observes the life about him, and writes of life as it is. Stuart Peter Brodie Mais says of Mr. Lewis's novels, "We get a full measure, all right. I suppose that is Lewis's chief merit. He is quite merciless; his object is to see and record."[1]

As a journalist strives to mirror the current interest, so Sinclair Lewis's books in the main treat of current questions. Henry Seidel Canby remarks that Sinclair Lewis has an uncanny sense for new significances in current living.[2]

As a Reformer. Most critics believe that Mr. Lewis's purpose in writing of current problems is that of reform. Walter Lippmann says of Mr. Lewis, "Mr. Lewis is a reformer. He wishes to destroy what he dislikes and to put something better in its place.[3] Mr. Lippmann continues by saying that Mr. Lewis is a practical man with a practical man's illusion that by bending truth to your purposes, you can make life better.[4]

Sinclair Lewis seems to have a genuine love for the common people.

---

[1] Stuart Peter Brodie Mais, "Sinclair Lewis," Some Modern Authors, (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1923,) p. 100.

[2] Henry Seidel Canby, "Sinclair Lewis's Art of Work," Saturday Review of Literature, (February 10, 1934,) p. 463.

[3] Walter Lippmann, "Sinclair Lewis," Men of Destiny, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928,) p. 76.

[4] Ibid.

William Lyon Phelps explains his works thus:

> Mr. Lewis is a warm-hearted, passionate, excitable, genial, friendly, affectionate man, who hates cruelty and injustice because he loves the inarticulate common people. His hatred for those in charge of prisons and prisoners blazes in this volume [Ann Vickers] in a consuming fire.[1]

Sherwood Anderson believes that in reading Sinclair Lewis, one is persuaded that the man desires to love American life, but cannot bring himself to do it. He says:

> One comes inevitably to the conclusion that here is a man writing who wanting passionately to love the life about him, cannot bring himself to do so, and who wanting perhaps to see beauty descend upon our lives like a rainstorm has become blind to the minor beauties our lives hold.[2]

He says that Sinclair Lewis is a man fighting terrifically and ineffectually for a thing about which he really does care. Mr. Anderson describes the man perhaps most accurately when he says, "There is a kind of fighter living inside Sinclair Lewis."[3]

Fred Lewis Pattee explains the sordidness of Mr. Lewis's novels thus: "He is exposing like all other muck-rakers, to the utter limits, ugliness, and inefficiency in order that it may be seen and deplored and remedied."[4]

Milton Waldman thinks that Mr. Lewis does not hate Main Street; rather he is indignant at it, as at a thing which one loves. He says:

---

[1] William Lyon Phelps, "As I Like It," Scribner's (April 1933,) p. 256.

[2] Sherwood Anderson, "Four American Impressions," New Republic, (April 1933,) p. 256.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature, 1890-1930, (New York: Century Co., 1930,) p. 342.

> He is indignant because of the beauty it wastes, the hills it denudes and covers with unsightly boards, the hearts it depresses and the minds it stultifies. Like Dr. Kennicott himself, he loves the prairies, he feels at home with the Sam Clarks when they shout welcome to the stranger who alights in their midst. But even more he loves the writers of the world which Main Street would annihilate, and it is as a protest that he perceives and cries out against its attacks on those of its possessions which mankind must always find enduringly valuable when it lifts its head beyond Main Street's confines.[1]

Granville Hicks believes that Sinclair Lewis is the pioneer of revolt. He characterizes Mr. Lewis as a man in search of the Good Life. In this sense, he terms Mr. Lewis a moralist. He classifies the novels as first, novels of rebellion, such as Main Street, and second, novels of conformity, such as Babbitt.[2]

Mr. Mais says that Mr. Lewis's revolt is against materialism, that he spends all his time in destructive criticism, and that the books are bound to take effect.[3]

As an Idealist. Mr. Phelps, who knew Sinclair Lewis at Yale when he was Harry Lewis, says that as a young man the author was almost fanatical in his "idealism and evangelism."[4]

Since the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, in the wording of the award, must write works of an idealistic tendency, one concludes

---

[1] J. C. Squire, editor, "Sinclair Lewis," by Milton Waldman, Contemporary American Authors, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1928,) pp. 79-80.

[2] Hicks, op. cit., p. 265.

[3] Mais, op. cit., p. 103.

[4] "Sinclair Lewis Struts His Stuff," Literary Digest, (December 24, 1930,) p. 13.

that there must have been some transfer of the idealism of his youth into the books of today.

Indeed, T. K. Whipple says that in Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, and Elmer Gantry, Sinclair Lewis has rendered in minute detail a vast panorama of an almost ideal practical society.[1]

However, Mr. Van Doren disagrees, for he believes that Mr. Lewis is not an idealist. If he were tested for idealism, his works would be found contradictory. Mr. Van Doren says:

> His work contains no tight scheme of doctrine, moral, social, political, or theological. Tested by any strict idealogogist, he would turn out to be full of contradictions. His strain of radicals is a strong, humane instinct towards the side of justice, freedom, decency, kindness, but it has never amounted to a system.[2]

As a Creator of Types. On the prize inscription are the words, "his gift for the creation of types."[3]

Several critics and many readers agree with the Nobel Prize committee in this respect. Mr. Lippmann says, "Mr. Lewis has an extraordinary talent for inventing stereotypes." These stereotypes he calls "useful devices" for seeing the American public. They are not emotional devices; rather they are wholly mechanical. He possesses the ability to photograph the details of groups of people who conform to set types. He then gives names to these types, such as "Babbitt" for the business man type; the church hypocrite

---

[1] T. K. Whipple, "Sinclair Lewis," Spokesman, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1928,) p. 219.

[2] VanDoren, op. cit., p. 47.

[3] Thompson, op. cit., p. 52.

becomes Elmer Gantry; the small town, Main Street./ Mr. Lippmann continues:

> Mr. Lewis has prospered by inventing and marketing useful devices for seeing the American scene quickly. His psychological inventions are being used by millions of Americans to perceive and express their new disillusioned sense of America. They are wholly mechanical and they are completely standardized now that they have passed into common use. A Babbitt is no longer a man he is a prejudice.
>
> The art of creating these prejudices consists, in Mr. Lewis's case, of an ability to assemble in one picture, a collection of extraordinarily neat imitations of life-like details. . . He has a photo-and phonographic memory with an irresistible gift of mimicry. But since his business is the creation of types rather than of living characters, he does not photograph and mimic individuals. Babbitt is not a man; he is assembled out of many actual Babbitts.
>
> . . . As with an almost perfect scarecrow the thing is so much like life that it nearly lives. Yet it is altogether dead. It is like an anatomical model of an average man, a purely theoretical concept which has no existence.[1]

F. L. Robbins says that Sinclair Lewis, in peopling his America with authentic types, is the cameraman and producer of the great American movie serial. He says:

> His unfailing observation and facility in minute reporting of characters have peopled his books with authentic types. Every situation is photographically clear. There is no subtlety and no irony. It is a mistake to think Sinclair Lewis is an ironist. He is the cameraman and producer of the great American movie serial.[2]

Mr. Whipple speaks of Sinclair Lewis as a "photographic realist."[3] Lewis Mumford writes that Mr. Lewis's novels are photographs. He says that

---

[1] Lippmann, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

[2] F.L. Robbins, Book Review in The Outlook, 151:466 (March 20, 1929) Book Review Digest. Vol. 24, 1929, p. 562.

[3] Whipple, op. cit., p. 208.

Lewis's mirror reflects accurately at the center the person, the clumsy gestures, the vague speech of the principal character; around the convex and converse sides it shows everything else in American life in vivid but distorted relationships.[1]

Regis Michaud confirms Mr. Lippmann's statement that Babbitt is the representative average American.[2] He says that Sinclair Lewis's characters suffer from high blood pressure.[3]

Mr. Phelps says in justification of the Nobel Prize award, that in Main Street and Babbitt, Mr. Lewis has created a type of small town and a type of business man known in all countries.[4]

In agreement with this statement, is Dorothy Thompson, (Mrs. Sinclair Lewis) who recounts the trip she and her husband made to Sweden to receive the Nobel Prize. She says that although she did not know what Dr. Karlfeldt was saying when he awarded the prize, she knew that he was talking about places and characters that nearly everyone in that vast audience knew. She says:

> . . .And I knew that they did not know George Babbitt as a caricature from a strange country, but as a very real person, rather ridiculous, very pathetic, and not at all unsympathetic, that Main Street was a small town in Sweden, even as it is in the United States, that they were sorry for Sam Dodsworth, that their hearts beat in sympathy with Martin Arrowsmith and Gottlieb, and "that Swedish titan Sondelius."[5]

---

[1] Lewis Mumford, "The America of Sinclair Lewis," Current History, (January 1931,) p. 531.

[2] Regis Michaud, "Sinclair Lewis and the Average Man," The American Novel of Today, (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1928,) p. 145.

[3] Loc. cit.

[4] Phelps, "As I Like It," Scribner's, (March 1931,) p. 627.

[5] Thompson, op. cit., p. 52.

As a Historian. Another classification of Sinclair Lewis is as a historian. Benjamin De Casseres says that Mr. Lewis has written the only authentic history extant of the twentieth century American.[1]

Critics have various opinions as to the reason why Main Street caught the fancy of the reading public in 1920. Carl and Mark Van Doren insist that the enormous success of Main Street showed that a new spirit had arisen in America. Mr. Lewis tells the story of Carol's rebellion as representing aspiration instead of snobbery. The reception of the book showed that the people of America had come to the same conclusion as had the heroine. They write:

> In that first book Sinclair Lewis, looking back from New York to the Minnesota in which he had been born, told an old story in an unfamiliar way. His heroine rebels, as many heroines had rebelled before her in fiction, against the dullness of her village. But whereas the usual story had represented such rebellion as a sign of snobbery in the rebel, this story represented it as an aspiration. If so humble a person as she had discovered that dullness is a vice, not a virtue, many other persons must have made the same discovery. And the reception of the book proved people had begun to resent the increasing tendency to standardize human beings as machines and machine products were standardized. They had begun to feel, no doubt dimly, that if it were wrong to expose the character to the contamination of vicious company, so was it wrong to expose the mind to the contamination of dull company. Instead of blaming Carol, they unexpectedly sided with her, or at least grew excited over her story. They suddenly showed themselves to be aware that there is a conflict between free intelligence and the meaningless conventions which cramp its movements.[2]

Again Carl Van Doren says, "Sinclair Lewis clearly has revenge to take upon the narrow community in which he grew up. Perhaps Sinclair Lewis

---

[1] Benjamin De Casseres, "Portraits in Brochette," The Bookman, (July 1931,) p. 488.

[2] Carl and Mark Van Doren, "Sinclair Lewis," American and British Literature Since 1890, (New York: the Century Co., 1925,) p. 87.

was nourished on the complacency native to such neighborhoods. He wrote Main Street because he was discontented himself. Mr. Van Doren adds:

> Main Street was written, not merely because Mr. Lewis saw it was time to take a new attitude toward the village, or because other writers just before him had been cuffing the rebel, but because he had registered in himself the stirring of a general discontent. He was one of the millions of Americans who had come to think of their world as dull in comparison with the more variegated worlds spread before them by newspapers, motion pictures, excursions in trains or automobiles. He was one of thousands who had left their villages and with more distaste than homesickness, remembered them with difficulty but exciting towns.[1]

Mr. Lippmann has another explanation for the success of Main Street. He says that by 1920 the American people were weary of their old faith that happiness could be found by public work, and very dubious about the wisdom of people. They were ready for an examination of themselves because they found that the problem of living was deeper and more complex than they had been accustomed to believe it was. "It so happened that the personal mood of Sinclair Lewis suited exactly the mood of a very large part of the American people."[2]

Paul Moraud has still another explanation. He points out that post-war America is seeking to find a satisfactory balance between the constraint of society and the freedom of the individual. Mr. Lewis is attempting the solution of this problem in his books, Mr. Moraud thinks. He says:

---

[1] Carl C. Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922,) p. 161.

[2] Lippmann, op. cit., p. 72.

> Post-war America is seeking to find a balance between the necessary constraints of society and the rise of the individual. Sinclair Lewis is aiding with all his strength and his characters do likewise, but fail. Babbitt is broken; he is a modest business man, not big enough to struggle against the sacred institutions to enjoy peace and prosperity. His defeat. . . is the defeat of a whole people.[1]

Since this survey deals particularly with the social satire, the literature concerning Sinclair Lewis as a satirist will be discussed briefly.

As a Satirist. Certain critics conceive Sinclair Lewis to be a satirist. They believe that he obtains his effects by ridiculing those things which he wished to reform. The most effective satirist our country has ever produced is Sinclair Lewis, according to Mr. Mumford.[2]

Mr. Whipple believes that although Mr. Lewis may be a photographic realist and something of a novelist, yet, primarily, he is a satirist. "His mimicry," says Mr. Whipple, "is all charged with hostile criticism and all edged with a satirical intent which little or nothing escapes."[3] One is convinced, Mr. Whipple thinks, that Mr. Lewis hates his environment with a cordial and malignant hatred. He says, "That detestation has made him a satirist, and has barbed his satire and tipped it with venom."

Comparing Mr. Lewis with Theodore Dreiser as a satirist, Mr. Michaud says that Lewis is more optimistic and ironic than Dreiser, yet he has devoted himself to the satire of American society with vengeance. He says:

---

[1] Paul Moraud, "Paul Moraud Looks At Sinclair Lewis," Living Age, (April 15, 1930,) p. 254.

[2] Mumford, op. cit., p. 529.

[3] Whipple, op. cit., pp. 208-209.

> The feeling of conflict between social and industrial ethics, between the state of mores in American and the real needs of the individual citizen, inspired his work. Let it not be said that the conflict between what the private man would like to do and what the social standards permit him to do is not peculiar to the United States. Doubtless there is nowhere a civilization without society, and a society without suppression of some sort. But if the criticism which I have attempted to interpret impartially in these strides are true, it seems evident that the conflict in question is more tragic in America than anywhere else. Of all current social systems, that of the United States puts the greatest check on the individual opposed to social expansion.[1]

Mr. Waldman agrees with the statement which Mr. Michaud makes about societies in other countries when he says the following concerning Sinclair Lewis as a satirist:

> The ostensible objects of ridicule in his literature are not American institutions, but American complacency, provincialism, narrowness of thought, unquestioning enthusiasm for the familiar and distrust of the unfamiliar, cultural ignorance, the reduction of all life's values to a materialistic basis. But of all these deficiencies in a greater or lesser degree exist in other societies, as Mr. Lewis himself is keenly aware. One finds them especially prominent in all the newer industrial cities of Western Europe, more marked perhaps than in some of the older American cities. . .
>
> But whereas such criticisms in Europe would be purely sectional, in America they are of almost universal application.[2]

The European press thoroughly approved the award of the Nobel Prize, according to Harry Lorin Binsse and John L. Trounstine. "They approved not only because of the author's literary achievement, but he explained America to Europe."[3] These men say that foreigners think

---

[1] Michaud, op. cit., p. 130.

[2] Waldman, op. cit., p. 72.

[3] Binsse and Trounstine, op. cit., p. 452.

Mr. Lewis is a great realist as well as a satirist. He had judged his materialist native country and found it lacking. Sinclair Lewis's America to Europe is the real America.[1] For this reason Americans objected to Lewis's receiving the prize. Babbitt is to contemporary Europeans the symbol of America, the typical American, everything unpleasant and American.[2] Mr. Mumford says:

> As a satirist he has created a picture of America that corresponds in a remarkable degree with the native caricature of America that all but the most enlightend and perceptive Europeans carry in their heads.[3]

This statement seems to be in direct contrast to Mrs. Lewis's conception of what Europe thinks of the Lewis characters.[4]

Babbitt is a satire on American middle-class life in a good sized city, says Rebecca West.[5] Burton Rascoe says that it is one of the finest social satires in the English language.[6]

As a reviewer in The Booklist, "The satire in The Man Who Knew Coolidge is so perfect and complete that it is almost mirthless."[7]

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Mumford, op. cit., p. 535.

[3] Loc. cit.

[4] Thompson, cf. ante.

[5] Rebecca West, Book Review in The New Statesman, 20:780 Book Review Digest, 19-22.

[6] Burton Rascoe, Book Review in The New York Tribune. (September 17, 1922,) p. 8. Book Review Digest, 1922, p. 301.

[7] Booklist, 24:404. (July 1928,) Book Review Digest, 1928, p. 458.

CHAPTER III

FORERUNNERS OF THE SOCIAL SATIRE

Although the first three novels which Sinclair Lewis wrote are not generally known to the reading public, they are extremely important if one would understand the man and his later novels. In Main Street and the books after 1920, he has not changed at all in essentials, but some of his characteristics are disclosed more plainly in his early books than in his later novels, according to T. K. Whipple.[1]

Fred Lewis Pattee believes that the first book of an author always lays bare the soul of its creator; he reveals himself first of all. Mr. Pattee says, "There is no more intimate autobiography."[2] If one concedes that Mr. Pattee's belief be true, one is inclined to agree with Sinclair Lewis when he sums up his early years as "the eternal aching comedy of expectant youth."[3]

Certainly, it is "the eternal aching comedy of expectant youth" which one finds in reading these first three novels, Our Mr. Wrenn, The Trail of the Hawk, and The Job. In these, as in the later works, one finds the same general ideas. One discovers illusions shattered by life, eager attempts

---

[1] T. K. Whipple, "Sinclair Lewis," Spokesmen, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1928,) p. 220.

[2] Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature, 1890-1930, (New York: Century Co., 1930,) p. 339.

[3] Ibid., p. 338.

at escape, golden dreams that end in hideous awakenings. In all of the books, one sees the attempts of people to escape from their surroundings. In Our Mr. Wrenn, a lonely clerk dreams of Europe. In The Trail of the Hawk, a boy of the prairies dreams of flying. In The Job, a small-town girl dreams of a job in the big city. All of them accomplish their escape, but they pay a price not expected in their early dreams. For this reason, Mr. Pattee believes that Sinclair Lewis, the young prairie dreamer, turned pessimistic; the spark flamed into rebellion and adolescent cynicism.[1]

Our Mr. Wrenn is the forerunner of Sinclair Lewis's social satire on "the pursuit of culture." Mr. Wrenn is a lonely, meek little bachelor of thirty-four who is sales-entry clerk of the Souvenir and Arts Company. He yearns to travel in the far-off beautiful countries which he sees in the travel-pictures at the movies. Mr. Lewis says of him:

> He was a connoisseur of travel-pictures, for all his life he had been planning a great journey. Though he had done Staten Island and patronized an excursion to Bound Brook, neither of these was his grand tour. It was yet to be taken. In Mr. Wrenn, apparently fastened to New York like a domestic-minded barnacle, lay the possibilities of heroic roaming. He knew it. He, too, like the man who had taken the Gaumont pictures, would saunter among dusky Javan natives in "markets with tiles on the roofs and temples and--and--uh, well--places!" The scent of Oriental spices was in his broadened nostrils as he scampered out of the Nickelodian. . . and headed for "home"--for his third-floor front on West Sixteenth Street.[2]

Shortly after this visit to the picture show, he inherits nine hundred and forty dollars and immediately decides to go on the grand

---

[1] Pattee, op. cit., p. 540.

[2] Sinclair Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1914,) p. 3.

journey. Being an economical little soul, he gets a job on a cattleboat sailing for Liverpool. The men on the boat are a rough lot, but he makes a friend of a man named Morton. Arriving in England, Morton and Mr. Wrenn start "bumming around," as Mr. Wrenn says, until Morton, who is penniless and who is definitely not a parasite, deserts Mr. Wrenn one night. Forlornly, Mr. Wrenn departs for Oxford to see some of the wonderful things of which he has dreamed. But to his dismay, he is somehow unable to appreciate this culture he has come so far to seek. He gradually begins to perceive his lack of appreciation of the finer things of life during his conversations with a learned American "tripper." In the following conversation, Mr. Wrenn learns of his colossal ignorance in some matters:

> "Those, sir, are the windows of the apartment once occupied by Walter Pater," said the cultured American after whom he was trailing. Mr. Wrenn viewed them attentively, and with shame remembered that he didn't know who Walter Pater was. But--oh yes, now he remembered; Walter was the guy that'd murdered his whole family. So aloud, "Well, I guess Oxford's sorry Walt ever come here, all right."
>
> "My dear sir, Mr. Pater was the most immaculate genius of the nineteenth century," lectured Dr. Mittyford, the cultured American severely.[1]

Dr. Mittyford grudgingly shows Mr. Wrenn around, trying to teach him what he should enjoy and what he should not, but Mr. Wrenn always exasperates this learned man, especially in such cases as the following:

> Standing before a case in which was an exquisite book in a queer wrigglesome language, bearing the legend that from this

---

[1] Ibid., p. 70.

volume Fitzgerald had translated the Rubaiyat, Dr. Mittyford waved his hand and looked for thanks.

"Pretty book," said Mr. Wrenn.

"And did you note who used it?"

"Uh--yes." He hastily glanced at the placard. "Mr. Fitzgerald. Say, I think I read some of that Rubaiyat. It was something about a Persian kitten--I don't remember exactly."[1]

Then Mr. Wrenn meets an American girl studying art abroad, Istra Nash, a rather Bohemian type of person. Istra feels sorry for the shy little man and attempts to teach him how to play. She takes him for a walking tour through England. He falls in love with her, but she is not in love with him and steals away from him one night. One month and seventeen days after he landed in England, he sets sail for home. After another month of weary waiting he is employed in his old job again. Presently he moves to a boarding club where he becomes acquainted with a pretty girl named Nelly. Eventually he marries her, moves to a Harlem flat, and is much happier than he has ever been in his life.

Milton Waldman, in his essay, "Sinclair Lewis," declares that in Our Mr. Wrenn Mr. Lewis shows alert appreciation of the ridiculous in the life about him and a fondness for the character with the ache to be free of its narrowness.[2] This type of character is a common one in the Lewis books. Una Golden, the heroine of The Job, longs to go to the city. Martin Arrowsmith aches to be free from the hypocrisies of the medical profession. Ann Vickers aches to be free from the old traditions of penology. Carol

---

[1] Ibid., p. 71.

[2] J. C. Squire, editor, "Sinclair Lewis" by Milton Waldman, Contemporary American Authors, (New York: Henry Hall and Co., 1928,) p. 79.

Kennicott aches to be free of the narrowness of life in Gopher Prairie. Thus, one sees that the idea of desiring to be released from the narrowness of life, exhibited in the first novel Sinclair Lewis wrote, persists in his major novels.

Because he seeks to prove that a clerk's life in a Harlem flat is more romantic than travel in a foreign land, Mr. Lewis is more of a romanticist than a satirist, according to Mr. Whipple. When one considers the fact that Sinclair Lewis is primarily the satirist in his later books, this statement of Mr. Whipple's is perhaps significant. That the young Lewis, a romanticist, should become the mature Lewis, the satirist, suggests that the author's expectant youth was crushed by disillusionment, and that his discontent and disappointment gradually deepened into scathing satire. Certainly, Mr. Pattee would agree with this line of reasoning, because he believes that the young prairie dreamer, Sinclair Lewis, turned pessimistic.[1] In the study of Mr. Lewis's development of skill in satire and his attitudes toward life, this premise is one which might be valuable, could it only be proved true. Until then, the supposition must remain a theory.

Mr. Lewis's next book, The Trail of the Hawk, is not a satire on aeronautics, but it is the forerunner of the novels which Mr. Lewis wrote later mirroring popular institutions and practices. By 1915, aviation was catching the popular fancy. This book is significant in the present survey, because several incidents and characters in the novel are definite forerunners of characters and incidents in the books Sinclair Lewis wrote after 1920.

---

[1] Whipple, op. cit., p. 222.

[2] Pattee, cf. ante, p. 23.

First, the story opens with Carl Ericsen as a small boy, and continues throughout his adolescent love affairs, his college days, and his professional career. Mr. Lewis follows this style in several of his major works, notably in Ann Vickers, Work of Art, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and to a certain extent in Dodsworth and in Main Street.

Second, Bone Stillman, the man who does not believe in God, is the socialist of Lewis's later books and a definite forerunner of Miles Bjornstam of Main Street. Mr. Lewis describes him thus:

> Bone Stillman, the man who didn't believe in God, read Robert G. Ingersoll, and said what he thought. Otherwise he was not dangerous to the public peace; a lone old bachelor farmer.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The one-room shack was lined with tarpaper, on which were pinned lithographs of Robert G. Ingersoll, Karl Marx, and Napoleon. Under a gun rack made of deer antlers was a cupboard half filled with dingy books, shot gun shells and fishing tackle.[1]

Bone believes that lawyers are like priests. They decide what is holy and punish you if you do not guess right. He says that lawyers live in calf-bound books, and implores the boy Carl to live in life.

Carl decides to go to Plato College, a small denominational college in the state. He tells Bone of his decision. Carl says he is going there for the refining influences of the college. Bone explodes verbally and calls Plato college a "freshwater sewing-circle;" he advises Carl to go to a big school where he will really learn something about refining influences.

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1915,) pp. 22-23.

Bone's theory of life is one which he seeks to explain to Carl. He couches this philosophy in picturesque phrases. He advises Carl to work for that big beautiful something that will always be just ahead of him. Bone says:

> Life is just a little old checker game played by the alfalfa contingent at the country store, unless you've got an ambition that's too big to ever quite lasso it. You want to know that there's something ahead that's bigger and more beautiful than anything you've ever seen, and never stop til--well, til you can't follow the road anymore. And anything or anybody that doesn't pack any surprises for you, is dead and you want to slough it like a snake does its skin. You want to keep on remembering that Chicago's beyond Joralemon, and Paris beyond Chicago, and beyond Paris--well, maybe there's some big peak of the Himalayas.[1]

Miles Bjornstam is the social outcast of Gopher Prairie, because he has socialistic "notions." He is persecuted to the extent that his wife and child suffer death, because he is refused a supply of good water. Just as Bone talks to the hero of The Trail of the Hawk, so Miles finds a sympathetic cohort in Carol Kennicott.

Third, the ladies of the Civic Improvement Club of Joralemon, wanting to improve their city, build a rest room for the weary farmer wives, just as the ladies' club does in Main Street.

Fourth, Carl leaves Plato College because the faculty dismisses one of the instructors for explaining socialism. This loyalty of student to instructor is similar to the loyalty of Martin Arrowsmith to Max Gottlieb. Martin admired, respected, and loved Gottlieb, the man and scientist. He would defend the old man's principles at all times and came to believe in

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

them himself. Now, Carl admired Professor Frazier and respected the man's knowledge of literature. He appreciated the professor's open-mindedness and desire to explain the relationship of history, economic-sociology, and life to literature. Professor Frazier comes to grief at Plato College by giving a brief lecture on socialism, so that his students might understand and appreciate the plays of Shaw.

In 1905, the explanation which he gave seemed quite radical to the members of the faculty, students of the college, and the citizens of the community, so much so that the President requested publicly Professor Frazier's resignation. When the President asks the students to stand who believe that the instructor has been criticized unjustly, Carl and an older man stand up. The President takes the students' standing as a personal insult, and suspends Carl because the boy will not apologize for the action which he took.

This incident is the forerunner of the manner in which Sinclair Lewis contrives to introduce in his books socialism and the reaction of various types of people to the socialistic theory. Mr. Lewis does not ridicule aviation, which is presumably the subject of the book, The Trail of the Hawk; he ridicules the colleges and persons who oust, socially, economically, and professionally, anyone who dares to utter a new idea.

Fifth, the same argument over servants that arises between Carol and her friends in Gopher Prairie in Main Street, arises between Carl and Ruth, his fiancee, in The Trail of the Hawk.

Ruth condescends toward the people whom she employs. She says they are common. Carl insists that servants are not common, that they merely

have not had an opportunity to better themselves. He intends to treat them as equals.

In Main Street, Carol regards her cook and housekeeper as one of her best friends. The housewives in Gopher Prairie quarrel with Carol, because she pays her cook more than the rest of them pay their servants. Carol insists that Bea is worth every bit she pays her and that Bea needs the money. Her opponents say that servants are common, and that they waste their money anyway; that Carol is making it extremely difficult for them to deal with their servants. Carol voices the cry of Carl, but the housewives of Gopher Prairie and Carol cannot agree.

The plot of The Trail of the Hawk is brief but characteristic of Mr. Lewis. Carl is a small-town boy who attends college, and leaves the college because of its narrow-mindedness. Wanderlust seizes him, and he wanders from job to job; working as a packer in a warehouse, a mechanic, a chauffeur, an actor in a tent show company, a porter in a saloon, a junior bartender, an employee on the Panama Canal, a miner in Mexico, a garage owner in California, and finally as an air pilot.

On his first solo flight, a reporter calls him, "The New Hawk of Birdmen;" he is nicknamed "Hawk" Ericsen. He finds a friend in Lieutenant Forrest Haviland, a young army officer detailed to learn aviation. He and Forrest become life-long friends. After graduation, Carl flies for county fairs and in all the big air meets. He is victorious in most of the air races; he is feted by the crowds and is the hero of the hour. With Haviland he decides to go exploring aerially the next summer. One by one, he sees his aeronautic pals "crack-up." But when Haviland is killed, Carl sells his own

plane and goes to Europe. When he returns from Europe, he has definitely given up flying. He enters an automobile factory and invents a tourist's car with all the conveniences of home, which he calls the Touricar. He becomes interested in a charming girl named Ruth, whom he marries. Just before the World War, Carl is appointed the Argentine manager for the Van Zile Motor Corporation. He and his wife sail for Buenos Ayres.

The Job is the forerunner of the novel of the woman in business. It is the story of the new woman making a career in the business world. Its heroine is a young woman named Una Golden. Mr. Lewis sees in Una Golden the intelligent and purposeful feminine will emerging from the respectable helplessness and hopelessness of girls who have married at their first chance and settled down.

The plot is simple, yet it manages to embrace all the hardships endured by a girl in business. Capt. Lew Golden dies and leaves his frail little wife and his daughter with a few hundred dollars. At the suggestion of friends, the girl and her mother move to New York, where Una takes a business course and obtains a position. At first, she works for a weekly trade magazine for eight dollars a week. Here she meets and falls in love with Walter Babson, an erratic young man. When their love affair is nipped in the bud by Una's demanding mother, Walter goes away. After Una's mother dies, Una meets and marries a Mr. Schwirtz, a salesman of about forty-five. Una regrets that she married him when she discovers that they are of different temperaments and tastes. When Schwirtz loses his job, Una is forced to go back to work again. Through one of her friends, she obtains a position with a real-estate firm, where, by diligence and a good business sense, she

advances from secretary to the executive managership of the saleswomen. She has a secret ambition to run a hotel chain. Therefore, she makes a thorough study of hotels, carefully works out plans for a unique type of hotel, lays these plans before a man who has chains of hotels, and secures a position at $4,000 a year to manage the chain of hotels which she has planned. Then she meets Walter Babson again. In the meantime, she has divorced her husband, and is free to marry again. Walter and she are married with the provision that each will continue in his own profession.

It is in this book especially, that one notices Mr. Lewis's ability in description. In The Job, he exhibits a flair for that type of description which the literary critics later called "photographic realism." His ability to paint accurately the details which build a clear word-picture can be noticed particularly well in the following description of a large building in New York. Mr. Lewis describes the neighboring buildings, the type of offices, the occupants of these offices, and the habits of the occupants. He writes:

> The Septimus Building is typical of at least one half of a large city. It was "run up" by a speculative builder for a "quick turnover." It is semi-fire-proof. It stands on Nassau Street, between two portly stone buildings that try to squeeze this lanky impostor to death, but there is more cheerful whistling in its hallways than in the halls of its disapproving neighbors. Near it is City Hall Park and Newspaper Row, Wall Street and the lordly Stock Exchange, but aside from a few dull and honest tenants like Mr. Troy Wilkins, the Septimus Building is filled with offices of fly-by-night-companies--shifty promoters, mining-concerns, beauty parlors for petty brokers, sample-shoe shops, discreet lawyers, and advertising dentists. Seven desks in one large room make up the entire headquarters of eleven international corporations, which possess, as capital, eleven hundred and thirty dollars, much embossed stationary--and seven desks. These modest capitalists do not lease their quarters by the year. They are doing very well if they pay rent for each of four successive months. But also they do not

> complain about repairs; they are not fussy about demanding certificates of moral perfection from the janitor. They speak cheerily to elevator-boys and slink off into saloons. Not all of them keep Yom Kippur; they all talk of being "broadminded."[1]

Mr. Lewis's picture of the Average Young Woman on the Job is somewhat psychological in its concept. His picture shows an intimacy with office life. He says:

> She was an Average Young Woman on a Job; she thought in terms of money and offices; yet she was one with all the men and women, young and old, who were creating a new age. She was nothing in herself, yet as the molecule of water belongs to the ocean so Una Golden humbly belonged to the leaven who, however confusedly, were beginning to demand, "Why, since we have machinery, science, courage, need we go on tolerating war and poverty and caste and uncouthness, and all that sheer clumsiness?"[2]

In The Job and his later works, Mr. Lewis frequently inserts a paragraph or two in which he analyzes coldly and critically the particular phase of life with which he is dealing. One cannot say that he moralizes or preaches, but in some cases he advises and prophesies. This characteristic of Mr. Lewis's is perhaps overworked in The Job. For instance, he analyzes Big Business as the theory of efficiency. He describes the independence of business, the equality of business with the other professions. With this new concept business is reforming its machinery. Then he prophesies that Big Business as master of the world will fail if it does not humanize itself. Mr. Lewis says:

> And now, in this fumbling school, she (Una Golden) was beginning to feel the theory of efficiency, the ideal of Big Business.
>
> For "business," that one necessary field of activity to which the egotistic arts and sciences and theologies and military puer-

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, The Job, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1917,) pp. 111-112.

[2] Ibid., pp. 120-121.

> ilities are but servants, that long-despised and always valiant effort to unify the labor of the world, is at last beginning to be something more than dirty smithing. No longer does the business man thank the better classes for permitting him to make and distribute bread and motor-cars and books. No longer does he crawl to the church to buy pardon for usury. Business is being recognized--and is recognizing itself--as ruler of the world.
>
> With this consciousness of power it is reforming its old, petty half-hearted ways; its idea of manufacture as a filthy sort of tinkering; of distribution as choice peddling and squalid shopkeeping; it is feverishly seeking efficiency. . . But, like all monarchies, it must fail unless it becomes noble of heart. So long as capital and labor are divided, so long as the making of munitions or injurious food is regarded as business, so long as Big Business believes that it exists merely to enrich a few of the luckier, the well born or the nervously active it will not be efficient, but deficient. But the vision of an efficiency so broad that it can be kindly and sure, is growing--is discernible at once in the scientific business man and the courageous labor-unionist.[1]

In discussing The Trail of the Hawk, the writer has pointed out the fact that Mr. Lewis inevitably makes an opportunity in his novels to introduce socialism. In The Job, the novelist chooses to make Mamie Magen, a crippled Jewish girl, a sincere socialist. He explains that Mamie is a socialist who believes that the capitalists with their profit-sharing and search for improved methods of production are as sincere in desiring the scientific era as are the most burning socialists. Mamie loves and understands the most oratorical young long-haired socialist as well as the "clean little college boys" who come into business with a desire to make business not a war, but a crusade. She is a socialist who is determined to control and glorify business.

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

Then Mr. Lewis ridicules the man who does not approve of socialism. He points out that this type of man confuses socialists with agitators. He implies that the average man believes that most socialists are "Just a lazy bunch of bums that try and see how much trouble they can stir up."[1]

Sinclair Lewis does not flatter the intelligence of the reader of The Job. In two separate places he points out the purpose of the book and the purpose of the heroine. In one sentence he says that the purpose of the book is to regard commonplace women on a job. Then the author announces that the heroine represents the commonplace woman on the job. He writes thus:

> And our heroine is important not because she is an Amazon or a Romola, but because she is representative of some millions of women in business, and because, in a vague but undiscouraged way, she keeps inquiring what women in business can do to make human their existence of loveless routine.[3]

Sinclair Lewis has not changed in essentials since he wrote his first three books. He has improved and become surer in his writing technique. One agrees with Mr. Whipple who says that Mr. Lewis betrays his defensive attitudes in his first three books. The novelist takes extraordinary precautions so that the reader will not misjudge him. Mr. Whipple says:

> He writes as if always conscious of a hostile audience. He takes needless pains to make clear that he is more sophisticated than his characters, as if there were danger of our identifying him with them.[4]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 208.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

[3] Ibid., p. 47.

[4] Whipple, op. cit., p. 220.

The point of which Mr. Whipple speaks is noticeable particularly in Our Mr. Wrenn. In one instance, Mr. Lewis makes the following statement: "You see, Mr. Wrenn didn't know he was commonplace."[1]

In the following passage Mr. Wrenn has just made a social faux pas. Mr. Lewis, in order to disengage his identity from that of poor Mr. Wrenn observes:

> Do you see them? Mr. Wrenn, self-conscious and ready to turn into a blind belligerent Bill Wrenn at the first disrespect; the talkers sitting about and assassinating all the princes and proprieties and, poor things, taking Mr. Wrenn quite seriously because he had uncovered the great truth that the important thing in sightseeing is not to see the sights. He was most unhappy, Mr. Wrenn was, and wanted to be away from there.[2]

When Mr. Wrenn joins the boarding club, he becomes quite a socialite. Mr. Lewis seems contemptuous of him when he says: "Mr. Wrenn, the society light, was Our Mr. Wrenn of the Souvenir Company all this time."[3]

These first novels show that early in his writing career Sinclair Lewis discovered that social satire was his particular vein of literary effort, that he consciously developed a writing style by seeking to describe people and life in authentic details, and that early he tried to fictionize and satirize current problems in the United States.

---

[1] Lewis, Our Mr. Wrenn, p. 91.

[2] Ibid., p. 137.

[3] Ibid., p. 199.

CHAPTER IV

THE PURSUIT OF CULTURE

The first thing Sinclair Lewis attacked in his scathing satires of American life was the pursuit of culture. When the forefathers of the United States came to the new continent called America, their first thoughts were for the necessities of life--food and shelter. They were engaged in clearing the wilderness, building homes of native lumber, and tilling the soil for the cultivation of food products.

In the various sections of the colonies, these same general functions were in progress, but variations of living conditions occurred because of the differences in climate, the allegiance of the colonists to their mother countries, and the loyalty of the peoples to different churches. For example, New England hewed to the village type of settlement and government, which included the union of church and state, the democratic town hall meetings, and a centralized form of education. On the other hand, the Southern colonies were developed on the large-scale plantation idea, in which homes were distantly located, town government practically impossible, and education a matter of one's individual policy. Most of the wealthy planters employed tutors for their children and sent their sons abroad or back to England for higher learning. As in the mother country, education was not considered the business of the State, nor did the Church give any great attention to it. The Middle Colonies were composed of small communities of perhaps a dozen types of European countries. Each settlement was a replica of its mother country. However, these peoples all believed in the parochial

school plan. The educational differences are emphasized in the present study only as an example of the heterogeneous aspects of the early America.

A large percentage of the population of the colonists were college graduates, especially in New England. And while they lived frugally and plainly, most of the intellectual growth of the nation was fostered in this section of the land. One sees the transplantation of European culture in the Middle Colonies, but most of these peoples were unaware that by a process of assimilation they were developing an American culture.

Hand-labor characterized the industry of the colonies, and while the poorer classes of people wove the cloth which they made into clothing, the wealthier families eagerly awaited the coming of the vessels from Europe which supplied them with clothing, shoes, books, and like conveniences.

Then, the heterogeneity of the colonists was unified by hate of England, and the colonists were victorious in their war for independence. The war stimulated American invention and American industry, because heretofore, the colonists had relied on England for factory-made products. When they were thrown on their own resources, Americans assumed the initiative, and so the industrial revolution had its beginnings in the United States. Because of the embryonic industrialism in the new republic, the populace felt no need to turn to England for factory-made products when the war was over. The country was profoundly anti-British in its attitudes, and determined to be independent industrially as well as politically.

The new nation became absorbed in the adoption of a national constitution, in the reconstruction of the agricultural and professional order, and

in the expansion of industry. Gradually, the frontier began to move westward, as exploring and pioneering aroused the interest of the more adventurous colonists. Thus, active occupation in the affairs of life tended to make the American people forget the cultural aspects of living, both of their own country and of other countries.

However, even twenty-five years or so after the Revolutionary War, young men again went abroad to finish their educations, principally to Germany and France. Although, most of the people of the nation were busy chasing and overtaking the elusive dollars, the intellectual constituency were insidiously attacking the complacency of the American mind. This persistence of the intellectualists and idealists finally penetrated the thick, practical skins of the business men, and in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, the American people seemed suddenly to become aware that something was lacking in this "perfect" civilization which they had miraculously wrought with their own hands.

As the cook suddenly realizes she has left the seasoning out of the broth, so the American people became conscious that they had omitted the salt in their creation of a social order. In the characteristic forthright American manner, they compared their country with the many European countries and decided the land across the Atlantic was superior only in the "culture" which it possessed. By this time the antagonistic attitude toward England had vanished. The United States citizenry determined to imitate and to import this thing called "culture" from Europe, just as merchants imported coffee, wine, and Parisian styles. Although they had heard the maxim, "A

silk purse cannot be made from a sow's ear," it meant nothing to the "go-getters" of America.

By culture, Americans meant famous paintings, styles of architecture, cathedrals, symphony orchestras, art galleries, museums, theaters--the evidences of culture. They failed to realize that these objects are useless unless one recognizes and feels the beauty of the paintings in the art gallery, unless one understands the history and evolution of the ideas which were back of the displays in the museums, unless one enjoys the classical music played by the symphony orchestras. That they might have a native culture did not occur to the moneyspenders.

Once having acquired the idea of transplanting European culture, the business men set out to accomplish it in the American way of doing things--through organization. Men's clubs, such as the Rotarians, the Lions, the Elks, the commercial clubs, made it their business to buy paintings and to start art galleries, to sponsor symphony orchestras, and to promote the opera and the theater. Along with this wholesale acceptance of "culture," came the American activity known as "improving the mind." Women organized study clubs and imported well-known lecturers. Whether or not one participated in the study club soon became a mark of social distinction in the town. If one were a good "worker" in the club, she was a well-bred woman. If, on the other hand, a woman refused membership, she was looked upon askance, socially.

However good the motive was at first, Americans became involved in the routine of accomplishing the project, rather than in acquiring any constructive knowledge concerning the masterpieces of the culture of the world.

Then the cities became jealous of each other. Each city organized a booster club, or its equivalent, to boost and boast about the libraries, museums, and parks which it possessed. It is this reckless pursuit of culture which Sinclair Lewis ridicules.

Sinclair Lewis desires to reform his country. Most critics agree that this is the real motive behind his merciless satire. As Sherwood Anderson says of him, ". . . He is a man fighting terrifically. . . for a thing about which he really does care. There is a kind of fighter living inside Sinclair Lewis."[1]

Mr. Lewis reasons, shrewdly perhaps, that pointing the finger of scorn at a people and their practices will anger, no doubt, but will cure a society of its social ills. Everyone hates to be ridiculed, but each is ashamed to appear foolish in the eyes of the world. So, in turn, a nation which is apparently successful economically and politically, is chagrined to find it is the object of ridicule culturally. The logical solution of this problem is to re-direct the channels of American thought. This process is exactly what Sinclair Lewis is trying to do. One may say that Sinclair Lewis's books stimulate social thinking. Perhaps this is the reason the American public does read his books--to see what he will criticize next.

Mr. Lewis indicts the pursuit of culture in America on five counts: first, the average American man cannot truly appreciate European culture because of the lack of the proper educational and environmental influences. Second, small towns tend to be incapable of comprehending the meaning of culture. Third, cities have a tendency to capitalize culture. Fourth,

---

[1] Sherwood Anderson, "Four American Impressions," New Republic, (October 1, 1922,) p. 172.

Americans have a tendency to improve their minds in a superficial manner. Fifth, Americans underestimate and ignore the indigenous culture of their own land.

In Our Mr. Wrenn, he points out that the common man is incapable of sharing in or understanding the products of European cultivation. Mr. Lewis endeavours to show that Mr. Wrenn, as representative of the American common man, does not have the mental and moral training of a European environment; therefore, not possessing such a background, he is not prepared to be delighted by the European treasures. Mr. Lewis says, in fact, that Mr. Wrenn, who is a misfit in England, is not a misfit in his own country because he understands the products of the American environment and understands the American manner of living.

In 1920, Sinclair Lewis published Main Street. Primarily, the book was an attack on the dullness of the village. As one noted writer has said, the book was permeated with the scorn, rage, and rebellion which had accumulated throughout the author's youth and middle years.[1] Mr. Lewis stopped writing what he thought the people wanted, and started writing what he really thought. Instead of dwelling on one theme, in his rage, Mr. Lewis manages to bring into this book many things, the dullness of the villagers, the scorn of the villagers toward socialism, satire on characters of the village, an attack on the prevailing method of church members in giving charity, the visitation of boresome relatives, the unfair treatment of teachers in the community, et cetera.

---

[1] Grant Overton, "The Salvation of Sinclair Lewis," (Quotation from Charles Baldwin, Men Who Make Our Novels,) Bookman, (April 1925,)

Just as in 1914, when he was provoked that Mr. Wrenn should long for European culture, so in 1920 he was disgusted with the villagers who self-satisfiedly did not open their minds to new ideas nor even appreciate the products of their own civilization. He hated their smugness, their cheapness, and their utter lack of desire to know anything except the price of potatoes. He said villagers were impervious to knowledge, self-centered, and wilfully ignorant of the culture of their own civilization or the cultures of other countries.

He brought his accusation against the village in the name of Carol Kennicott, the heroine of Main Street. Carol loved beauty, knowledge, and truth. She came to Gopher Prairie with a lilting enthusiasm to be an inspiration to the town, to make the village aware it could be an attractive small-town if it would make the effort. She believed a small town could be lovely as well as useful. But she found Gopher Prairie was not aware it was unlovely. She tried to show them their faults and how to correct them, but she was met with hostile unfriendliness by the townspeople. Whatever she suggested, they did not want to do it.

She went to one of their study club programs and found it shallow and inefficient. In one afternoon's program, the women discussed ten or more eminent poets briefly, and considered themselves well-educated. It was merely a gesture to show they were "cultured"--refined. Carol thought this club offered a splendid foundation on which to start her crusade. She suggested they had an excellent introduction to the field of English literature and it would be worth while to study, say, Swinburne for a while. They considered Swinburne too bold; however, the ladies thought her suggestion

was a good one, and promptly voted to study Furnishings and China for the following year. The pastor's wife decided for the club. She expressed her opinion as follows:

> . . . ."Of course I have never read Swinburne, but years ago, when he was in vogue, I remember Mr. Warren saying that Swinburne (or was it Oscar Wilde? but anyway:) he said that though many so-called intellectual people posed and pretended to find beauty in Swinburne, there can never be genuine beauty without the message from the heart. But at the same time I do think you have an excellent idea, and though we have talked about Furnishings and China as the probable subject for next year, I believe that it would be nice if the program committee could try to work in another day entirely devoted to English poetry! In fact, Madame Chairman, I so move you."[1]

Carol longed to be a part of them, but she could not resign herself to their principles of living. She thought she could interest the young people in good literature by organizing a dramatic society, in which the members would read and produce good drama. She selected a few plays by accepted playwrights, but the members of the dramatic society rejected Shaw because he was indecent. Instead, they voted to produce "The Girl from Kankakee." This play narrated the story of a farm girl in clearing her brother of a charge of forgery. She became the secretary of a New York millionaire and social advisor to his wife; then married their son. But as usual, the play was a failure because the cast would not expend the effort to make it a success. They were lazily indifferent.

Then Carol turned to the Chautauqua as she had turned to the dramatic association. She hoped that it would bring to the village the enlightenment which she had attempted. But the company which came to the town seemed quite

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, Main Street, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1920,) p. 128.

as provincial as the townspeople of Gopher Prairie. Carol was disappointed when she saw the program. It seemed to be a combination of vaudeville performance, Y. M. C. A. lecture, and the graduation exercises of an elocution class."[1]

This small town, asleep in its intellectual faculty, dead to new ideas, active in its prejudices, is only one of thousands of towns which angered Sinclair Lewis. One might say that Gopher Prairie is representative of small towns everywhere.

Zenith, in Babbitt, is a town which is in direct contrast to Gopher Prairie. Zenith will have "Culture" at any price, whether it enjoys it or not. Chum Frink, the literary man of the town, in making a speech at a meeting of the Booster Club, phrases this idea perfectly. He proposes a symphony orchestra for Zenith. He admits he really does not care for classical music, but adds that culture has become necessary today for a city. In fact, it is good for business, because it will bring visitors to town, and they will inevitably spend money in the city. He says Zenith must capitalize culture:

> Some of you may feel that it's out of place here to talk on a strictly highbrow and artistic subject, but I want to come out flatfooted and ask you boys to O. K. the proposition of a Symphony Orchestra for Zenith. Now, where a lot of you make your mistake is in assuming that if you don't like classical music and all that junk, you ought to oppose it. Now, I want to confess that, though I'm a literary guy by profession, I don't care a snap for all this long-haired music. I'd rather listen to a good jazz band any time than to some piece by Beethoven that hasn't any more tune to it than

---

[1] Ibid., p. 237.

> a bunch of fighting cats, and you couldn't whistle it to save your life! But that isn't the point. Culture has become a necessary adornment and advertisement for a city to-day as pavements or bank clearances. It's Culture, in theaters and art-galleries and so on, that brings thousands of visitors to New York and, to be frank, for all our splendid attainments we haven't yet got the Culture of a New York or Chicago or Boston--or at least we don't get the credit for it. The thing to do then, as a live bunch of go-getters, is to capitalize Culture; to go right out and grab it.[1]

T. Jefferson of the story entitled "Go East, Young Man," which Sinclair Lewis wrote in 1930, agrees with Chum Frink's ideas of grabbing culture. T. Jefferson is a wealthy manufacturer of Zenith, who, no doubt, belongs to the Boosters Club. He believes in buying "Culture" for the town at any price. The following paragraph expresses his feeling toward culture:

> Away from the office, he announced at every club and committee where he could wriggle into the chairman's seat that America was the best country in the world, by heaven, and Zenith the best city in America, and how were we going to prove it? Not by any vulgar boasting and boosting! No sir! By showing more culture than any other burg of equal size in the world! Give him ten years! He'd see that Zenith had more square feet of old masters, more fiddles in the symphony orchestra, and more marble statues per square mile than Munich![2]

In Zenith, one sees the dollar-chasers spending their dollars to make their town a better place in which to live, and incidentally, of course, a better place in which to make more money.

In addition to Mr. Lewis's indictment of the American people's lack

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922,) pp. 260-261.

[2] Sinclair Lewis, "Go East, Young Man," Selected Short Stories, (New York: The Literary Guild, 1935,) p. 398.

of a correct comprehension of the meaning of the term "culture," as exemplified by the beliefs of Mrs. Warren, Chum Frink, and T. Jefferson, Mr. Lowell Schmaltz, the narrator of the sketches in The Man Who Knew Coolidge, is the mouthpiece for another of Sinclair Lewis's attacks on the pursuit of culture. Mr. Schmaltz says that improving the mind is an American institution. In his rambling discourse in the smoking-car, Mr. Schmaltz, constructive Nordic citizen, remarks:

> I remember reading the Reverend Dr. Sieffer in his remarkable book--and say, there's a book that I want to recommend to you boys. It's all right to read a lot of fiction, and I guess I appreciate a rattling good-story, say like a western novel where the hero prevents this fellow from running off his boss's stock, as much as anybody; but if you're going to improve your mind--and what is after all more characteristic of American life than improving our minds?--and if you're going to improve your mind, what a fellow needs is real constructive and historical stuff.[1]

For an example of an ardent pursuant of "culture," one needs only to regard Mrs. Sam Dodsworth, in Dodsworth. Mrs. Dodsworth is not unlike Mr. Wrenn, except in one particular. She longs to live in Europe and to soak herself in European culture. She is like Mr. Wrenn in this respect, but is totally unlike him in another. Mrs. Dodsworth was educated in Europe for one year, and therefore cannot see anything worthwhile in America. Now, Sam Dodsworth is the typical American business man. He loves his country and is sincerely proud of the fruits of American civilization. He admits that he should like to retire from active business and go for a world cruise. But like Mr. Wrenn, Sam Dodsworth is uncomfortable in

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, "The Story by Mack McMack," The Man Who Knew Coolidge, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1928,) p. 98.

Europe. Sam can appreciate only in part the treasures of Europe. He realizes that he cannot share in the ancient beauty of the cathedrals because he is ignorant of the history and ideals of the people who built them. Yet perhaps he appreciates them more than does Fran, his wife, who claims to be the cultured one of the family. Fran dismisses the cathedrals with a wave of the hand, while Sam sinks reverently down on the stone benches and tries to analyze and to understand in some way the beauty contained therein.

Fran, in Europe, mistakes the glitter of social life for Europe. She likes to do things, not for enjoyment, but because it is proper to do them. Sam, on the other hand, does not care whether it is sophisticated or not; He wants to see the Tower, the Houses of Parliament, Kew Gardens, to go to Stratford, and to visit Canterbury, although he has not read Shakespeare or Chaucer for twenty-five years.

The differences in the attitudes of Sam and his wife are expressed neatly in the following conversation between them:

> But Fran made him uncomfortable by complaining, "Oh, good Heavens, Sam, we're not trippers! I hate these post-card places. Nobody who really belongs ever goes to them. I'll bet Clyde Lockert has never been inside the Tower. Of course galleries and cathedrals are different--sophisticated people do study them. But to sit at the Cheshire Cheese with a lot of people from Iowa and Oklahoma, exclaiming over Dr. Johnson--atrocious!"
>
> "I must say I don't get you. What's the idea of coming to a famous city and then not seeing the places that made it famous? You don't have to send souvenir cards about 'em if you don't want to! And I don't believe the people from Iowa will bite you unless you attack 'em first!"[1]

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1929,) p. 87.

Sam was amused and a little perplexed that it should matter to Fran that she should keep herself fashionable in the eyes of the choice people who did not know that she existed. He could understand that back in Zenith, she might have satisfaction in being more snobbish than the matron across the street, but here in Paris where she knew no one, her persistence in sophistication annoyed him.

Sam could not understand Frenchmen. The reader likes and respects Sam much more when he discovers that Sam honestly wants to understand the new things which he meets. Mr. Lewis says of Sam Dodsworth:

> He saw little enough of Frenchmen outside of hotel-servants, waiters, shopmen, but when he did see them, what he saw of the surface of French life puzzled him. Many travelers in like case take out their confusion in resentment, and damn the whole nation as trivial and mad. But there was in Sam a stubborn wish to get in behind any situation that he came across. He was not one to amuse himself by novelties, by making scenes, by collection curious people, even overmuch by travel, but once he was dragged into something new he wanted to understand it, and he had a touch of humility, a deep and steady recognition of his own ignorance, whenever he could not understand.

And he could not understand these Frenchmen.

Sam was immensely relieved when he met a truly cultured gentlewoman, a Mrs. Cortright. She taught him it was not wrong to appreciate the culture of his native country. Fran had been enraged when he had not liked Europe, but Mrs. Cortright was lazily indifferent to whether he liked it or not. He learned to appreciate European life through his association with her. Mr. Lewis says: "With her, he let his mind loaf, and slowly some sense of the real Italy came to him, some feeling that it was not a picturesque show but a normal and eager life."[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 121.

[2] Ibid., p. 358.

The conception of the current American practice of the pursuit of culture as reflected in the works of Sinclair Lewis seems to be divided into four definite ideas. First, the American common man, devoid of European environment and education, cannot truly appreciate European culture. Second, small towns have a tendency to be impervious to any kind of culture, European or American. Third, big towns have a tendency to capitalize culture. Fourth, the "improvement of one's mind" is a typically American aspiration. Fifth, the American people have a tendency to underestimate the fruits of their own civilization, or culture.

CHAPTER V

FOIBLES OF THE AMERICAN BUSINESS MAN

The American business man has long been one of the chief subjects of Sinclair Lewis's ridicule. Mr. Lewis sees him as a man who prides himself on being able to sell to his fellow men things which they do not want, a man who is quite ridiculous in his obvious efforts to be a good sport, a man who is a bit uncomfortable in his attempts to rival Casanova, and a man who is pompously proud of being a "one hundred per cent American."

In the course of his books, Mr. Lewis has described the business man in several characteristic situations. In 1922, he drew a picture of a typical business man, his home life, his business associations, and his petty amusements in the person of George F. Babbitt, the hero of Babbitt. Four years later, he wrote a humorous account of two over-tired business men who went to Canada on a conventional holiday. This book was called Mantrap. In 1928, Mr. Lewis further satirized the business man, by collecting several monologues of an office-supply salesman which he gathered into a volume, and called The Man Who Knew Coolidge. A year later, in 1929, he wrote Dodsworth, portraying a Zenith business man who, retiring from active life, seeks culture and relaxation in Europe. From these four books, the writer will try to reconstruct the Lewis attitudes toward the great group of men who day by day are building Materialist America.

George Babbitt, a smug, dull realtor, lives in Zenith, a booming

city in the state of Winnemac. If one would understand Babbitt, he must first perceive that Zenith is an overgrown Main Street; and vice versa, if one would comprehend the vastness of Zenith, he must know the men who have constructed and built this city. Babbitt is representative of these builders. At the age of forty-six, he has "made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay."[1] He is not fat, but he is exceedingly well-fed; he is extremely prosperous, definitely married, and quite unromantic. His family consists of Myra, his wife, a mature, nondescript person; his daughter, Verona, a dumpy, brown-haired girl of twenty-two; Ted, his son, a boy of seventeen; and Tinka, his radiant, red-haired, ten-year-old daughter.

Business to Babbitt is not an occupation; it is a lyric poem. When he views the city of Zenith from his bedroom window of a morning, he feels as refreshed as if he had seen a vision, and indeed it is a vision to him:

> Its shining walls rose against April sky to a simple cornice like a streak of white fire. Integrity was in the tower, and decision. It bore its strength lightly as a tall soldier. As Babbitt stared, the nervousness was soothed from his face, his slack chin lifted in reverence. All he articulated was "That's one lovely sight!" but he was inspired by the rhythm of the city; his love of it renewed. He beheld the tower as a temple-spire of the religion of business, a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men; and as he clumped down to breakfast he whistled the ballad "Oh, by gee, by gosh, by jingo" as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble.[2]

---

[1] Lewis, Babbitt, p. 2.

[2] Ibid., p. 13.

His morning is not sharply marked into divisions of time for doing specific tasks. He attends to a hundred details which are interwoven with the dictation of letters to his stenographer and conferences with his advertising manager. Although he is a successful realtor, he is ignorant of all architecture, except the type of houses turned out by speculative builders; he knows nothing of landscape gardening, save the use of curving roads, grass, and six ordinary shrubs; he serenely believes the one purpose of the real-estate business is to make money for George F. Babbitt. He considers it good advertising to belong to all the clubs one can and to make speeches on "The Ideal Citizen," "Public Service," and "Ethics." In an address at the Boosters Club he admits that it is the duty and the privilege of the realtor to know everything about his own city and its "environs." Although he sings eloquently of the advantages of the proximity of school-building to the rentable home, he is uninformed as to whether or not the schoolrooms are properly ventilated, heated, and furnished, or how the teachers are chosen; and even though he boasts that Zenith pays its teachers adequately, he cannot name the average salary of the teachers in the Zenith school system. He preaches sanitation, and when he lays out plans for the Glen Oriole acreage development, he righteously puts in a sewage system, but overlooks the fact that Glen Oriole sewers have insufficient outlets.

Babbitt's business hustle is familiar to the countless business men in America:

> As he approached the office he walked faster and faster, muttering, "Guess better hustle." All about him the city was hustling, for hustling's sake. Men in motors were hustling to pass one another in the hustling traffic. Men were hustling to

> catch trolleys, with another trolley a minute behind, and to leap from the trolleys, to gallop across the sidewalk, to hurl themselves into buildings, into hustling express elevators. Men in dairy lunches were hustling to gulp down the food which cooks had hustled to fry. Men in barber shops were snapping "Jus' shave me once over. Gotta hustle." Men were feverishly getting rid of visitors in offices adorned with the signs, "This is My Busy Day" and "The Lord Created the World in Six Days--You Can Spiel All You Got to Say in Six Minutes." Men who had made five thousand, year before last, and ten thousand last year, were urging on nerve-yelping bodies and parched brains so that they might make twenty thousand this year; and the men who had broken down immediately after making their twenty thousand dollars were hustling to catch trains, to hustle through the vacations which the hustling doctors had ordered.
>
> Among them Babbitt hustled back to his office, to sit down with nothing much to do except see that the staff looked as though they were hustling.[1]

In his address, "Our Ideal Citizen," Babbitt pictures him as a busy man who puts "zip" into his profession, is a model father and husband, reads good literature--the newspaper and a good lively Western novel--and "then goes happily to bed, his conscience clear, having contributed his mite to the prosperity of the city, and to his own bank account."[2]

Thus, one sees Babbitt as an <u>average American</u> citizen in an <u>average American</u> town, Zenith, doing everything in the <u>usual American</u> manner, conforming to <u>every American</u> custom and standardization, and reading a <u>typical American</u> newspaper, the <u>Zenith Advocate-Times</u>.

His closest friend is Paul Reisling, whom he knew in college as a promising violinist. Paul's musical career was ended by an unfortunate marriage to a flighty blonde. The greatest event in the spring of the year

---

[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 145-155.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 181-182.

for Babbitt is the secret buying of a real-estate option in Lindon for certain street-traction officials before the public announcement of the extension of the Lindon Avenue Car Line. When Paul unsuccessfully attempts to murder his wife and is sentenced to serve a three-year term in prison, Babbitt's little world crumbles.

While his wife is away visiting relatives, Babbitt has a wild flirtation with Mrs. Tanis Judique, who introduces staid Mr. Babbitt to the night-life of the town. He excites social disfavor by his actions, and his business dividends dwindle. He is jolted back to sameness by the sudden illness of his wife and the marriage of his eldest daughter to the Sunday School press-agent. When young Ted elopes with the girl next-door, all the members of both families, save Babbitt, become angry and assert that the marriage must be annulled. They appeal to Babbitt, as Ted's father, to talk "some sense" into the boy. He escorts his son to an adjoining room, closes the door, and, laying an affectionate arm around his son's shoulders, gives him the following advice:

> . . .Now, for heaven's sake, don't repeat this to your mother, or she'd remove what little hair I've got left, but practically, I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I've made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundred rods. Well, maybe you'll carry things on further. I don't know. But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell 'em to go to the devil! I'll back you. Take your factory job, if you want to. Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been. Go ahead, old man! The world is yours!"[1]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 401.

James Branch Cabell says that Babbitt has passed from the pages of books into the racial consciousness of mankind, because "there is something of a Babbitt in every one of us."[1] If Babbitt has become a synonym for the average American business man, Zenith has likewise become a synonym for the average American city. An amusing incident occurred shortly after Babbitt was published. Newspapers of five cities in the United States announced that their respective cities recognized themselves as the Zenith of Babbitt, and were angry that Sinclair Lewis should ridicule them publically. They were Cincinnati, Duluth, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee. When they learned Zenith was not meant to portray any of them, they were slightly chagrined.[2]

From the multiplicity of details which Mr. Lowell Schmaltz, the narrator of The Man Who Knew Coolidge, tells his acquaintances of the smoking car, one gathers that he is a second but more voluble Babbitt. He, too, is an orator, and in his account of a speech which he once made on the subject "The Basic and Fundamental Ideals of Christian American Citizenship," he says there are two principles peculiarly common to America today: service and "practicalness." He defines service as imagination:

> . . . Service is something extra, aside from mere buying, stocking and delivery of goods, that so tickles the comfort and self-esteem of a customer that he will feel friendly and come back again for more. Service is, in fact, the poetry, the swell manners, the high adventure of business.[3]

---

[1] James Branch Cabell, "A Note as to Sinclair Lewis," American Mercury, (August, 1930,) p. 397.

[2] Maurice, op. cit., p. 42.

[3] Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, p. 245.

Schmaltz illustrates his definition of service by telling of the "service" his company gives a customer. He says the operation of an adding-machine is quite simple, but whenever he makes the sale of such a machine, he gives a free course of lessons to the person who is going to operate it. Once a week for a month after the sale, he sends a man around to adjust the machine and keep it in good condition. He admits the fellow he sends does not understand the mechanism of an adding-machine, but that is beside the point; as he has thus secured the good will of his customer, Schmaltz reasons that the man will naturally turn to him again when he needs office supplies. "That's service!" Schmaltz says only a low and sordid commercialist would look on it as a device to sell more goods. Service, he says, promotes "friendliness, good fellowship, brother-hood, and this makes for the millenial day when all the world shall be one happy Christian fellowship."[1]

The second peculiarly modern American ideal is practicality. Schmaltz says Europe has its art and beauty, but America has gone a step farther and made things useful as well as beautiful, as, for instance, in the case of a gas stove. When Americans erect a beautiful statue in a public park, they raise up a likeness of Dante, in order to get the naturalized Italian's votes. "That's practicalness!"

In the motto of Lowell Schmaltz, one finds the philosophy of the American business man, according to Sinclair Lewis: "Read widely, think scientifically, speak briefly, and sell the goods!"[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 261.

[2] Ibid., p. 275.

Sinclair Lewis indulges in another snicker at the business men of America, when he writes of the unfortunate experiences of two New Yorkers on a fishing and hunting holiday in the north woods. Wes Woodbury, a silk-stocking manufacturer, and Ralph Prescott, a lawyer, depart for a "he-man" holiday. Prescott is an avowed tenderfoot, but Woodbury modestly admits he knows all about "roughing it." Their first discomfiture comes when they spend the night sleeping on the hard ground. Gradually, they become so irritated with each other that they are quarrelling constantly over trifles. Woodbury is angry because Prescott does not conform to the former's notions of "living in the wilds." Prescott is provoked by Woodbury's constant chatter and insinuations. Finally, Prescott deserts Woodbury and continues his trip with the owner of a trading post, Joe Easter.

Then, Prescott's vacation is further spoiled by his falling in love with Joe's wife, Alverna, a flirtatious ex-manicurist. Prescott regards Joe as one of the finest men he has ever met, and it nettles him to have fallen in love with this man's wife. To put temptation behind him, he decides to leave and to rejoin Woodbury. But to his dismay, Alverna overtakes him and coaxes him to take her back to the United States, because she says she is going mad with the dullness and loneliness of life in Mantrap. After they have undergone dire misfortunes on their trip, Joe overtakes them, and says he has come to keep Alverna from ruining Prescott's life. The Indians have burned Joe's store because he has refused them an extension of credit, and he presents a forlorn figure. He admits he would like to see New York, but declares that Prescott cannot take both Alverna and himself.

The New Yorker sees Alverna as a cheap little flirt and chooses Joe. Arriving in Winnipeg, the men put Alverna on the train for St. Paul. Joe senses he would be a social misfit in New York and deliberately makes himself ridiculous in the eyes of Prescott and some of the New Yorker's friends whom they meet in Winnipeg. Joe intentionally fails to board the train, and Prescott returns home alone, somewhat chagrined to have had such a hectic experience when he originally went North for rest and relaxation. This brief resume merely shows the framework and not the subtlety of the satire with which the situations and characters of the book are treated. Although this is not one of Lewis's major satires, it is indicative of his ability to write in a playful mood.

In Dodsworth, Sinclair Lewis raises several questions which were uppermost in the minds of many people before the advent of the depression, and are perhaps current in some circles today. What are successful business men going to do with their leisure time when they have made their millions and retire? Will they have forgotten how to play? Are business men so engrossed in making money that they have become unskilled in holding the affections of their wives? Are men and women aiming at the achievement of different values? These are some of the questions which provoke thought in the book.

When the story opens, Sam Dodsworth has just sold out his automobile business to a great motor-trust and now has money to go after the things which he feels he has missed and which his wife desires. They close their home in Zenith and go abroad for an indefinite stay. The book is of these two and how they get along together in their new surroundings.

On the steamer going over to England, they meet a charming Englishman, named Lockert, who seems to fascinate Fran Dodsworth, Sam's youthful-appearing, gay, vivacious wife. She attracts many suitors, and Sam becomes not her husband, but merely another escort. In England, championed by Lockert, they are invited everywhere. Fran is in the height of her glory, but Sam is lonely, because he does not "belong." Fran snubs his only friend in London, an American salesman of his former company, and Sam has to sneak away to visit the man. When he goes to a stag dinner given in his honor by the American salesman, Fran goes to dinner with Lockert and is much astonished when he makes love to her. Sam finds her in tears on his return from the dinner. She is further infuriated when he agrees with Lockert's statement that Fran has "led him on."

Sam cannot get used to the idea that English people expect him to be ashamed he is an American. At an English dinner, when his hostess is ridiculing America, he becomes suddenly and thoroughly angry. He informs his hostess that he is certainly not ashamed of America or of being an American. He is afraid to look at Fran, because he realizes he has probably ruined the Dodsworth social prestige in England. But incredibly Fran, herself, attacks Lady Ouston by telling her that although America may have a few rotten politicians, not every member of Parliament is a perfect gentleman, and that America must work out her problems unassisted by generous foreigners.

The Dodsworths depart for Paris the next day. Sam wants to go sight-seeing, but Fran objects because that form of diversion is "so American." Fran revels in Parisian life, but Sam again is lonely and bored;

he has nothing to do but to go to the bank and get his mail and to drink cocktails. The Dodsworth are quarrelling continually, because they now have time to get acquainted, and find they are fundamentally at cross-purposes. Sam returns to America alone for his college class reunion, and "runs" out to Zenith for awhile. He finds himself "out" of things at home; his children do not need him, and he has no work. He starts looking over a building project, but is recalled to Europe because he thinks, from Fran's letters, that she may be getting herself into trouble by a flirtation. He arrives in time to disentangle her from a disgraceful affair.

Immediately the two depart for Berlin, where Fran has relatives. She fancies herself in love with Kurt von Obersdorf and wishes Sam to give her a divorce so she can marry him. Sam assents with the stipulation that she wait a month before beginning the divorce proceedings. Broken-hearted, Sam departs for the south of Europe, where he meets a true gentlewoman, Edith Cortright, makes a confidante of her, and the two become friends. He feels so peaceful and contented with Edith that he tenders her a tentative proposal of marriage; but before she can accept, he receives an S.O.S. call from Fran saying that Kurt's mother has objected to the proposed marriage and asking Sam to rejoin her. Thinking himself still in love with her, and still obedient to her commands, he departs for America with Fran. But his wife has become unbearable to him after his friendship with Edith, and he takes the next boat back with the avowed purpose of marrying his new love.

The reader pities Sam Dodsworth, as Sinclair Lewis, no doubt does, but after reading the book, one is no nearer a solution of Sam's problem than poor Sam is himself.

Lewis Mumford says that not since Henry James has anyone well portrayed the dilemma of the untutored American in Europe.[1]

Evidently, Mr. Lewis thinks the foibles of the American business man are many and varied, because he has ridiculed him unmercifully in four specific novels, and has flayed him with passing criticism in other novels. The reader instinctively realizes that Babbitt, who has been characterized by Stuart Peter Brodie Mais as "Everyman in business"[2] cuts a rather sorry figure in the eyes of the novelist. One feels that Sinclair Lewis regards Babbitt as a pompous dollar-chaser, ignorant where he should be wise, inclined to substitute bluffing for an adequate business knowledge, and willing to conform to accepted standards rather than think for himself. The novelist perceives Lowell Schmaltz as an ignorant hypocrite, as full of inconsistencies as a sieve is full of holes, with his silly ideals of service and practicality as ridiculous as the man himself. Then, Mr. Lewis smiles as he realizes the vanities of the human race are humourous at times, and so with his tongue in his cheek, he wrote a rollicking comedy about two business men who unwittingly exploded that myth known in American business circles as a "restful vacation in the Northwoods." A year later, he realized that a business man's vacation of another sort would illustrate the illuminating truth, that an American dollar-chaser may find the sweets of success bitter, when he discovers he has forgotten the essentials of the art of enjoying his money after he has made it.

---

[1] Mumford, op. cit., p. 532.

[2] Mais, op. cit.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION

In building the picture of Materialist America, Sinclair Lewis adds a venomous stroke by his attack on religion. In order to show the decline of religious thinking in America, Mr. Lewis attacks the problem by presenting the religious conceptions of representative Americans.

He assails the Christian faith and practices through an analysis of the business man's devotion to these principles. The two business men whom the writer has chosen as representative of this view are Mr. George F. Babbitt, the realtor of Babbitt, and Mr. Lowell Schmaltz, the office-supply manager of The Man Who Knew Coolidge.

In addition to representing the business man in religion, Mr. Lewis attacks religion through the minister's conception of the worship of God. Elmer Gantry, of course, is the outstanding example of hypocrisy in religion, with the exception of Moliere's Tartuffe. But there are other ministers in the Lewis books who are not hypocrites. One of these is Philip McGarry in Elmer Gantry, who is a foil to the principal character in the book. Other Methodist ministers, rivals of Elmer Gantry, have varied conceptions of religion also. Then, too, in this category, one must consider Babbitt's minister, who believes that the church should be a community center.

As Mr. Lewis sees it, the travelling evangelist has a different comprehension of religion and its purpose in the world, from that held by the minister with a church of his own. Two characters, Sharon Falconer,

the woman evangelist in Elmer Gantry, and Mr. Mike Monday, the evangelist in Babbitt, are representative of this philosophy.

Mr. Lewis satirizes the place of religion in politics, using the Reverend Paul Peter Prang in It Can't Happen Here as an example of a preacher in politics. Father Coughlin, of present day fame, is the prototype of the Reverend Prang.

An intensely practical man is George F. Babbitt, as Mr. Lewis portrays him. Just as Babbitt is practical about business, about amusement, so is he practical about religion. Even as he and his cohorts wish to capitalize culture, so does he wish to capitalize religion. Babbitt believes it is beneficial to one's business to be seen going to church. He thinks that going to church and listening to the preacher's sermon has a distinct moral value, and that the preacher has a magical power to do one good. Mr. Lewis says of Babbitt's practicality in religion:

> . . . The kernel of his practical religion was that it was respectable and beneficial to one's business, to be seen going to services; that the church kept the Worst Elements from being still worse; and that the pastor's sermons, however dull they might seem at the time of taking, yet had a voodooistic power which "did a fellow good--kept him in touch with Higher Things."[1]

Even though Babbitt's religion is principally one of usefulness, he has a theology of sorts. He believes that there is a supreme Being who has tried to make us perfect, but presumably has failed; Babbitt accepts Heaven, but is uncertain about Hell.[2]

When the church to which Babbitt belongs begins to decrease in Sunday School attendance, the pastor calls in several of the men of the church for

---

[1] Lewis, Babbitt, p. 207.

[2] Ibid.

consultation. Babbitt has always achieved results in his real estate business by organizing and advertising; he reasons that if these methods prove effective in gaining patronage for the real-estate business, they should prove equally effective in building up attendance at Sunday School. He hits upon a plan which is received with enthusiasm by the members of the Attendance Committee and the pastor. The plan is this: first, he divides the Sunday School into four armies, depending upon age. The pastor and the superintendents rank as generals, and everyone is given a military rank in his own army according to the number of members he brings to Sunday School. As a second feature of the plan, a press-agent is hired for the Sunday School.

After the Sunday School adopts Babbitt's system of military ranking, it has a boom, thus enlivened by this spiritual refreshment.

Mr. Lowell Schmaltz's religion is similar to that of Babbitt. Mr. Schmaltz, because of the great leaders of this church, says he is a Congregationalist, but he cannot recall who these leaders were. However, Mr. Schmaltz is not denominationally prejudiced; he thinks that all the denominations are working together to make a purer and greater America. Like Babbitt he believes that religion is constructive and that it keeps one on "the straight and narrow path." Mr. Schmaltz says:

> Our generation, I guess we still got a lot of the Old Harry in us. Me, I admit, I smoke and sometimes I take a drink--but never to excess; if there's anything I despise it's a man that can't hold his liquor--and I do like a nice drive on Sunday, and sometimes I cuss a little, and I guess I ain't above looking at a pretty ankle even yet. But it's my firm belief--maybe you gentlemen never thought about it this way--if we'll just support the churches and give the preachers a chance, a generation will come which won't even want to do those things, and then America

> will stand forth before the world such a nation as has never been seen, yes sir, and I'm mighty glad to fellowship with Methodists or--[1]

Mr. Schmaltz is firm in his belief that agnostics cannot think or they would know that they are wrong. He wishes that he might see an agnostic:

> "Look here," I'd tell him. "In the first place it stands to reason, don't it, that fellows specially trained in theology, like the preachers, know more than us laymen, don't it? And in the second, if the Christian religion has lasted two thousand years and is today stronger than ever--just look for instance, at that skyscraper church they're building in New York--is it likely that a little handful of you smart galoots are going to be able to change it?
>
> I guess they never thought of that. Trouble with fellows like agnostics is that you simply can't get 'em to stop and think and use their minds!
>
> And what have they got to put in the place of religion? Know what the trouble with those fellows is? They're destructive and not constructive.[2]

Thus, one sees that Mr. Lewis believes the business man's emphasis in religion is on its practical assets. He is persuaded that this type of man uses religion merely as a gesture and as a measuring stick for his morals.

At first glance, one would think that Mr. Lewis has only contempt for the minister's conception of religion. The fact that he painted that sordid preacher, Elmer Gantry, in all his vileness and hypocrisy, is perhaps the basis of this contention. Truly, Elmer Gantry is a blackguard. He is hypocrisy incarnate in religion.

---

[1] Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, p. 85.

[2] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

In Chapter III, the writer has pointed out that the plot of The Trail of the Hawk is similar to that of Elmer Gantry in that both start with the boys at an early age, and carry them throughout their careers. When Elmer Gantry opens, Elmer is "Hell-cat" Gantry, at Terwillinger College, which is located on the outskirts of Gritzmacher Springs, Kansas. At Terwillinger College, he was supposed to be the most popular man in college; everyone believes that everyone else adores him; and none of them want to be with him. He is always demanding, defying all the rules to get what he wants.

Elmer is converted one night by "high-powered" evangelism. He did not want to be converted, but an athletic evangelist whom he admires plays on his emotions until he finally succumbs. It is not until he gives a speech in the church about his conversion, that Elmer is interested in religion. When he experiences the power of influencing others from the pulpit, he suddenly becomes fond of religion, or, one should say, fond of his role.

The president of the college thinks Elmer ought to be a preacher, but somehow the poor boy can never receive the Call. Elmer has repented a dozen times that he was ever converted, but always marshalls his feeling back to the path of righteousness. Finally, the president and some of the good brethern meet to pray with Elmer, so that he may receive the Call. Elmer becomes nauseated at the prayer meeting, and tells the brethern that the spirit is working, and he thinks he will go for a walk by himself. On his walk he meets one of his old friends, and they proceed to get gloriously

drunk. While he is drunk, Elmer feels happy and thinks he has received the Call at last. He races back to the president's house to tell everyone.

Elmer goes to Mizpah Theological Seminary. At the end of two years, he comes home to be ordained by his own council of Baptist churches. He feels even now more power in his oratory. At his ordination Elmer prays, not as an exhibition, but sincerely, for God to help him to quit showing off and get down to God's business.

While Elmer is at Mizpah, Dean Trosper gives him an appointment at Schonesheim, a country church, where he can earn ten dollars a Sunday. Down at the church he seduces a daughter of one of the deacons and lays the blame on a young man in the parish who is in love with her. Elmer's religion at this stage of his career is aptly described by Mr. Lewis in the following paragraph:

> Nobody could ever say he was unkind to girls or despised 'em, the way Jim Lefferts used to. He'd taught Lulu an awful lot; got her over her hick ideas; showed her how a person could be religious and still have a good time, if you just looked at it right and saw that while you ought to teach the highest ideals, nobody could be expected to always and exactly live up to 'em every day. Especially when you were young. And hadn't he given her a bracelet that cost five good bucks?[1]

Elmer is dismissed from Mizpah Seminary, because he becomes intoxicated and fails to appear at a church to preach in a neighboring city.

For a while he travels for a hardware company, but he still feels the urge to sway people by his oratory. He finally manages to join the

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1927,) p. 127.

corps of a travelling woman evangelist, and thus becomes an assistant to Sharon Falconer, the evangelist. In time, he grows very intimate with Sharon and the intimacy grows into a love affair. Mr. Lewis describes in detail an evangelical campaign. Sharon Falconer's advance man is a retired reporter. After the advance man has the contract signed, he remembers his former newspaper labors and becomes friendly with all of the reporters. He gives them a "line" about Sharon Falconer, so that when Sharon and the troupe arrive, the newspapers are eager, the walls and shop windows are scarlet with placards, and the town is breathless. Frequently, there is quite a crowd at the station to meet her. Sinclair Lewis says:

> There were always a few infidels, particularly among the reporters, who had doubted her talents, but when they saw her in the train vestibule, in a long white coat, when she had stood there a second with her eyes closed, lost in prayer for this new community, when slowly she held out her white nervous hands in greeting--then the advance agent's work was two-thirds done here and he could go on to whiten new fields for the harvest.[1]

Sharon was one of the first evangelists to depend for all her profit on one offering, a "thank-offering" for her and her crew alone. The logic of this plan can be seen in the following paragraph:

> . . . It sounded unselfish and it brought in more; every devotee saved up for that occasion; and it proved easier to get one fifty-dollar donation than a dozen of a dollar each. But to work up this lone offering to suitable thankful proportions, a great deal of loving and efficient preparation was needed--reminders given by the chief pastors, bankers, and other holy persons of the town, the distribution of envelopes over which devotees were supposed to brood for the whole six weeks of the meetings, and innumerable newspaper paragraphs about the self-sacrifice and heavy expenses of the evangelists.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 192.

[2] Ibid., p. 193.

On the first evening in the new tabernacle which Sharon had built, the place catches fire and Elmer, like the coward he is, flees for his life and leaves Sharon to die, because she firmly believes that in God's temple, no one can come to harm.

After this disaster, Elmer joins the New Thought movement, and in turn, joins the Methodist ministry, because he can make a better living and can more easily become a man of power in religion. In the Methodist Ministerial Conference, he makes great progress. He stays for a year in Rudd Center, a town of 4,100 people. From Rudd Center, he goes to Vulcan, a city of 47,000 people, where he remains three years. His next move is to Sparta, a city of 129,000, where he preaches two years, and then he goes to Zenith. He finds the Zenith church in a rundown condition, but finally makes it into an "efficient" church. During his ministerial progress from town to town, he has acquired a wife whom he does not love but who is a perfect preacher's wife. After he has been in Zenith for a time, he discovers that Lulu belongs to his congregation. He begins his love affair just where he left off. Soon his attractive secretary fascinates him. Just at the peak of his career, when he is about to obtain a fashionable church in New York and the executive secretaryship of a powerful church organization, the secretary blackmails him. But one of his influential church members frees him from the entanglement, and he looks forward to accomplishing his ends after all. He feels that he has learned his lesson, and that he will never look at a girl again. Despite all his resolutions and vows, the next Sunday morning when he kneels to

pray, he catches sight of a new girl in the choir and mentally decides that he will have to get acquainted with her because she has good ankles.

One feels that Walter Lippmann is right when he says that Elmer Gantry is written with compulsion to malice, as if the author could scarcely hold himself.[1] Regis Michaud says that Elmer Gantry marks a new progress toward satire and a deepening of Lewis's social pessimism. He believes it is still more bitter and acrimonious than Arrowsmith. It is decidedly not written to please. Michaud says, "The book is one of the mightiest strokes ever hit at hypocrisy."[2] He calls Elmer Gantry a Barnum of religion.

Several Methodist ministers are in the book Elmer Gantry. One of them is Chester Brown, the ritualist, whom Elmer thinks too literary and dramatic. Elmer is most envious of the Rev. Mr. Brown, because this good man manages to publish articles in the Advocate, the Christian Century, and the New Republic. Elmer is vehement in his belief that the Rev. Mr. Brown is too frank about the Church's sloth, wealth, and blindness.

Dr. Otto Hickenlooper, however, is another type of minister. He has an active institutional church. He has manual training, gymnastics, pageants, and classes in painting, French and batik making, besides clubs for railroad men, stenographers, and bell-boys. Dr. Hickenlooper is interested in social service work, too.

Most parishioners like Dr. Mahlon Potts, of the First Methodist

---

[1] Lippmann, op. cit., p. 91.

[2] Michaud, op. cit., p. 151.

Church, because he is safe. Mr. Lewis says:

> He never doubted nor let anyone else doubt that by attending the Methodist Church regularly, and observing the rules of repentance, salvation, baptism, communion, and liberal giving, everyone would have a minimum of cancer and tuberculosis and sin, and unquestionably arrive in heaven.[1]

Dr. Philip McGarry, of the Arbor Methodist Church, is the one minister whom Elmer Gantry detested. "Phil," as almost everyone called him, was accused of every known heresy. His only dogma was the leadership of Jesus. Elmer hated him because he criticized everything; nothing was sacred. McGarry is the foil for Elmer Gantry. He is the true Christian as Sinclair Lewis sees Christianity. When someone asks McGarry what the church is accomplishing, he answers confidently:

> "It has this, Frank: It has the unique personality and teaching of Jesus Christ, and there is something in the feeling of a man when he suddenly has the inexpressible experience of knowing the Master and his presence, which makes the church of Jesus different from any other merely human institution or instrument whatsoever. Jesus is not simply greater and wiser than Socrates or Voltaire; he is entirely different. Anybody can interpret the personality and teaching of Socrates or Voltaire--in schools or books or conversation. But to interpret the personality and teachings of Jesus requires an especially called, chosen, trained, consecrated body of men, united in an especial institution--the church."[2]

Another preacher, whom one feels he must mention in discussing this phase of Sinclair Lewis's works, is Babbitt's preacher. This good man's idea of a church coincides with that of Dr. Hickenlooper. He conceives the Church to be a community center. His church contains everything but a bar. In it he has a nursery, a gymnasium, a picture

---

[1] Lewis, Elmer Gantry, p. 25.

[2] Ibid., p. 378.

show, a library of technical books for young workmen, which, incidentally, they do not use, and also a sewing circle, and a Thursday evening supper club.

Sinclair Lewis's attack on religion through the evangelist's conception has already been touched upon in the discussion of Elmer Gantry. Sinclair Lewis is consciously ridiculing evangelistic work when he says:

> The gospel crew could never consider their converts as human beings, like waiters or manicurists or brakemen, but they had in them such a professional interest as surgeons take in patients, critics in an author, fishermen in trout.[1]

In one town, the crew could not get a single convert, so Elmer went out and hired enough men to act as a good showing of converts for five dollars apiece. Elmer could not consider the unpaid persons converts either. Mr. Lewis says:

> . . . Sometimes when he was out in the audience, playing the bullying hero that Judson Roberts had once played with him, he looked up at the platform, where a row of men under conviction knelt with their arms in chairs and their broad butts toward the crowd, and he wanted to snicker and wield a small plank. But five minutes after he would be up there, kneeling with a sewing-machine agent with the day after shakes, his arm around the client's shoulder pleading in the tones of a mother cow, "Can't you surrender to Christ, Brother? Don't you want to give up all the dreadful habits that are ruining you--keeping you back from success? Listen! God'll help you make good! And when you're lonely, old man, remember he's there, waiting to talk to you!"[2]

One of Sharon's chief troubles was getting her crew to bed. Sinclair Lewis implies that they were actors who were too high strung to sleep after

---

[1] Ibid., p. 198.

[2] Ibid., p. 199.

the show. Despite the fact that they had preached against rum, some of the "performers" had to brace their nerves with an occasional quart of whisky, and afterwards there was dancing and assorted glee. Some of the crew were sincere Christians, such as little Lily Anderson, the pale pianist. She protested, in the name of the Lord, against their actions.

In Babbitt, one meets that distinguished evangelist, Mike Monday. Mr. Monday had once been a prize-fighter. "As a prize-fighter," says Mr. Lewis, "he gained nothing but his crooked nose, his celebrated vocabulary, and his stage-presence."[1] The service of the Lord proved more profitable. He was about to retire with a fortune. Mr. Monday called the Episcopalian and Congregationalist ministers who had opposed his coming to Zenith "a bunch of gospel-pushers with dish-water instead of blood, a gang of squealers that need more dust on the knees of their pants and more hair on their skinny old chests."[2] However, the Chamber of Commerce quenched this opposition when it reported to a committee of manufacturers that in every city where he had appeared, Mr. Monday had averted strikes by turning the minds of the workmen from wages and hours to higher things. He was immediately invited, and there was no trouble in filling the subscriptions for the expense fund of forty thousand dollars.

Sinclair Lewis discusses religion in politics through the medium of the Rev. Paul Peter Prang, a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the book It Can't Happen Here. Reverend Prang took a hand in politics

---

[1] Lewis, Babbitt, pp. 98-99.

[2] Ibid.

by broadcasting over the radio. His radio address was to millions the very word of God. His power before the advent of the Windrip dynasty was unlimited. H organized the League of Forgotten Men. Prang told them to elect Windrip to the presidency. Windrip, the senator who brought Fascism and terror to America, used Prang as a tool. Lewis says of Prang:

> The rival to Senator Windrip in public reverence was a political titan who seemed not to have the itch for office--the Reverend Paul Peter Prang, of Persepolis, Indiana, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a man perhaps ten years older than Windrip. His weekly radio address, at 2 p. m. every Saturday was to millions the very oracle of God. So supernatural was this voice from the air that for it men delayed their golf, and women even postponed their Saturday afternoon contract bridge.
>
> It was Father Charles Coughlin, of Detroit, who had first thought out the device of freeing himself from any censorship of his political sermons on the Mount by "buying his own time on the air. . .
>
> But to the pioneer Father Coughlin, Bishop Paul Peter Prang was as the V-8 to the Model A.
>
> Prang was more sentimental than Coughlin; he shouted more; he agonized more; he reviled more enemies by name, and rather scandalously, he told more funny stories, and ever so many more tragic stories about the repentant death-beds of bankers, atheists, and Communists. His voice was more nasally native, and he was pure Middle West, with a New England Protestant Scotch-English ancestry, where Coughlin was always a little suspect, in the Sears-Roebuck regions, as a Roman Catholic with an agreeable Irish accent.[1]

It was this Bishop Prang who helped to bring terrorism into the United States, as described in It Can't Happen Here. And for his pains, he was put into an insane asylum.

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1935,) p. 40.

One is forced to conclude that Sinclair Lewis believes that Materialist America has no scruples about capitalizing religion as it capitalizes culture. One must believe that Mr. Lewis thinks that most traveling evangelists are frauds, that they use religion as means to an end, that of making a living. And yet this novelist who condemns religion as it is practiced by Elmer Gantry, admires and respects the religion which Philip McGarry preaches, which he believes is the true conception of God and his principles of living.

CHAPTER VII

THE AMERICAN SOCIAL ORDER

The diversity of the subject matter which comprises the satires of Sinclair Lewis tends to make it difficult for one to classify the Lewis attitudes. In the previous chapters of this study, the writer has discussed one attitude or characteristic of Lewis in each chapter. However, the four classifications of attitudes contained in the present chapter are so closely connected in thought that the writer has deemed it necessary to combine them into one chapter, "The American Social Order."

At first glance at the titles of each division, the reader will not at once perceive the correlation. Individually considered, they seem to concern specific professions, but collectively viewed, they apply to society as a whole. "Medical Science" is a profession, and yet humanity benefits from the practices of medicine and science. True, "Social Service and Penology" are generally considered the business of trained individuals, and yet Society is responsible for the care of the unfortunate and for the prevention and correction of crime. "Convention and Standardization" are particularly characteristic of Americans. "Politics" interests the governing as well as the governed of every nation. Thus, the divisions of this chapter are discussed in the light of social thought.

MEDICAL SCIENCE

In his discussion, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," Granville Hicks says that Sinclair Lewis had no doubt in his mind that rebellion was good, as he expressed it in Main Street and Babbitt, but Mr. Lewis felt rebellion ought to be for some higher end, for the sake of definite values. With this in mind, he wrote Arrowsmith.[1]

In Arrowsmith, Mr. Lewis says that integrity demands sacrifice and is worth it. This statement is applicable to any line of endeavour, but Mr. Lewis chooses to apply it particularly to the panorama of modern medicine, in which he includes the lives of the pre-medical students, the medical student, the interne, the general practitioner, the public health official, the independent scientist, the curer of plagues, and other types of occupations in the medical profession.

As Martin Arrowsmith journeys through life, striving for integrity, he meets many physicians and scientists who have varied conceptions of professional honesty. These men may be classified conveniently into two groups, namely, the commercialists and the non-commercialists.

The insincere scientists, Martin Arrowsmith calls "men of measured merriment." To this category belong Rippleton Holabird, who used Martin as the prize exhibit of the McGurk Institute, and Dr. A. Dewitt Tubbs, the smiling, gracious director of McGurk Institute, who can talk on any subject with authority. Angus Duer, the "Brilliant Young Surgeon," who never read or said anything which did not contribute to his success, is a perfect

---

[1] Hicks, op. cit., p. 266.

example of this type of scientist.

Other commercialists in the book are Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, the bubbling head of the Department of Health in Nautilus, who believes that he can achieve perfect health by advertising it in the community. Dr. Irve Watters believes medicine is a useless profession, if one cannot make a good living by it.

Of course, the supreme examples of sincerity and non-commercialism in this book are Max Gottlieb, the ideal scientist, and Martin Arrowsmith, the hero. Other men in this group, who gain the admiration of the reader, are Dr. Silva, the kindly dean of the medical faculty at the University of Winnemac; Gustaf Sondelius, the jolly lecturer on public health; Terry Wickett, the wiry little scientist who retires from the world to indulge in independent research; and Dr. Stokes, a wry, humorless medical missionary, who saves Martin's plague experiment. Other doctors in the Lewis books who excite respect are Dr. Will Kennicott, the general practitioner in Main Street and Dr. Malvina Wormser, a woman of remarkable common sense in Ann Vickers.

In order to deal with this phase of the problem, the writer has chosen to discuss the life of Martin Arrowsmith in detail. By the discussion, he hopes to show the inconsistencies of medical science as revealed by Sinclair Lewis's vitriolic pen.

In the story of Martin Arrowsmith, Mr. Lewis reaches his greatest achievement in the portrayal of human character. Martin is the most nearly life-like person in the Lewis books. He is not so much a type as an

individual, his reactions to events are extremely natural, and his affection for his wife, Leora, is touching. Mr. Lewis shows a tender sympathy for this character which is lacking in the other Lewis books.

When the book opens, the reader sees Martin Arrowsmith, then a small boy, reading Gray's Anatomy in the dingy office of Doc Vickerson. The doctor advises Martin to go to medical college and to study. He says that some day Martin will be a leading physician, maybe a surgeon. He admonishes the boy to set a high goal and not to let things slide. This admonition is vaguely reminiscent of the advice Bone Stillman gives to Carl Ericsen in an earlier work.[1]

The next picture the reader gets is Martin Arrowsmith as an arts and science junior preparing for medical school at the University of Winnemac. Winnemac is an imaginary state bounded by Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, and like them it is half Eastern and half Mid-western.

For Martin at twenty-one, the University has become his world. He looks forward to chemistry and physics and the prospect of biology next year.

On his first day in medical school, Martin goes to the offices of Max Gottlieb, professor of bacteriology. Martin wishes to enroll in bacteriology before taking physical chemistry. To do so, he must obtain the permission of Professor Gottlieb. The old scientist refuses and tells him he is not ready yet. Martin persists in his argument, and then Gottlieb says that he has two types of students, the potatoes who never learn any-

---

[1] Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk, pp. 49-50.

thing but how to kill patients, and the boys who wish a little bit to become scientists. Of the latter type he demands everything. He says:

> . . . Those, ah, those, I seize them, I denounce them, I teach them right away the ultimate lesson of science, which is to wait and doubt. Of the potatoes, I demand nothing; of the foolish ones like you, who think I could teach them something, I demand everything. No, you are too young. Come back next year."[1]

Professor Gottlieb is the mystery of the university. He is a German Jew, born in Saxony, in 1850. Although he took his medical degree at Heidelberg, he was never interested in practicing medicine. From his youth he was always the careful worker, the maker of long rows of figures, always realizing the presence of uncontrolled variables, and a vicious assailant of what he calls slackness. He became interested in a series of experiments, important, undramatic sounding, long, and exceedingly unappreciated. At forty, he went sadly off to the America which could never become militaristic or anti-Semitic. His dearest dream during years of racking research and at present is the artificial production of anti-toxin. In 1889, he was called to the University of Winnemac, as professor of bacteriology of the medical school. Mr. Lewis says of him:

> While medical quacks, manufacturers of patent medicines, chewing-gum salesmen, and high priests of advertising lived in large houses, attended by servants, and took their sacred persons abroad in limousines, Max Gottlieb dwelt in a cramped cottage whose paint was peeling, and rode to his laboratory on an ancient and squeaky bicycle. Gottlieb himself protested rarely. He was not so unreasonable--usually--as to demand both freedom and the fruits of popular slavery. "Why," he once said to Martin, "should the world pay me for doing what I want and what they do not want?"

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1923,) p.12.

> If in his house there was but one comfortable chair, on his desk were letters, long, intimate, and respectful, from the great ones of France and Germany, Italy and Denmark, and from scientists whom Great Britain so much valued that she gave them titles almost as high as those with which she rewarded distillers, cigarette-manufacturers, and the owners of obscene newspapers.
>
> But poverty kept him from fulfilment of his summer longing to sit beneath the poplars by the Rhine or the tranquil Seine, at a table on whose checkered cloth were bread and cheese and wine and dusky cherries, those ancient and holy simplicities of all the world.[1]

Max Gottlieb says a scientist is intensely religious; he will not accept quarter truths, because they are an insult to his faith. Scientists want everything to be subject to inexorable laws. He hates pseudo-scientists such as psycho-analysts. The scientist must be heartless, Gottlieb believes. "He lives in a cold, clear light," says Gottlieb. In talking to Martin, he warns:

> "But once again always remember that not all the men who work at science are scientists. So few! The rest--secretaries, press-agents, camp-followers! To be a scientist is like being a Goethe: it is born in you. If you haf, there is only one t'ing--no there is two t'ings you must do: work twice as hard as you can, and keep people from using you. I will try to protect you from Success. . ."[2]

All through the first years of medical school Martin is restlessly doubtful. He does not believe in commercialized medicine, and he is disturbed because his fraternity brothers have the opposite view.

His junior year is a whirlwind of attending lectures, visiting hospital demonstrations, instructing freshman classes, and seeing his girl constantly. But during this hectic year, he makes time for his first

---

[1] Ibid., p. 126.

[2] Ibid., pp. 279-80.

independent research, which Sinclair Lewis calls his "first lyric, his first ascent of unexplored mountains."[1] He has the craftsmanship of science and he has become the favorite pupil of Max Gottlieb.

A bit of humor is introduced into the book by a curious predicament in which Martin finds himself at one time. He becomes engaged to two girls at the same time. One of them is a beautifully-poised society girl who is working on a Ph.D. in English, while the other is a companionable little probationer at the Zenith General Hospital. When he is intoxicated, Martin invites both girls to lunch with him at the same time. Painfully sober the next day, he is compelled to fulfill his duties as host. During the meal, he blurts out the unvarnished truth. The reactions of the girls to this announcement are interesting. The society girl is furiously angry, but she kisses the probationer, expresses her sympathy, and sweeps magnificiently out of the dining room. Leora, the little nurse, smiles possessively and tells Martin that she is never going to give him up.

In the middle of the winter, Leora is summoned home by her parents. In his loneliness, Martin starts drinking, becomes irritable, is impertinent to Gottlieb, and is suspended by Dean Silva. Martin obtains a hundred dollar loan from one of his friends and departs for the West. Drinking steadily, and only half-conscious of where he is going, he flits from city to city. Finally he stops drinking, and begins to feel not like a bum, but like himself. He determines to go back to the University and finish his course. But to return to the University before he has seen Leora is impossible. He dislikes her family intensely, so he elopes with her. But

---

[1] Ibid., p. 52.

when they go back to Leora's home, her father refuses to let her go back to the University with Martin. He demands that Martin be able to support Leora first, and advises the boy to finish his education.

Martin is admitted to the University again, but finds life without Leora intolerable, so at Easter, he goes back to get her. He issues the ultimatum that Leora's father will have to support Leora by sending her enough money to live with her husband, until Martin can support her himself, or he will take her away so that her parents may never see her again. To obtain Mr. Tozer's consent to such a proposition, Martin promises that as soon as he graduates, he will come back to Leora's home-town and start in general practice.

After his internship at the Zenith General Hospital, true to his promise, he and Leora set out for Wheatsylvania. He finds that the Tozer family expect him to set up his office in the barn, but Leora finally persuades her father to lend the young couple a thousand dollars to spend as they will. Martin is quite tactless. He is extremely honest and he expects everyone else to be likewise. If he drinks and plays poker, he does it openly, and he cannot understand why the villagers object. He stumbles into respectability by saving the life of a baby who has swallowed a thimble, operating on its throat with his pocket knife, when the frantic mother accosts him while he is on a fishing trip. But he immediately loses the respect he has gained when he experiments with a cure for the blackleg which has broken out among the cattle in the neighborhood. He discovers that the vaccine sent out by the pharmaceutical company does not contain enough living organisms. He sets up a small laboratory in his office and

produces some vaccine which suits him. He injects the vaccine into a stricken herd and stops the epidemic. This is both the end and the reward for Martin, and he turns over his notes and a supply of the vaccine to the state veterinarian. However, despite the good he has done, the veterinarians of the county denounce him, because he has intruded on their right to save or kill cattle, and the physicians are angered because he has ruined the "dignity" of the profession.

After hearing a lecture by a noted public health authority, Martin races home and begs permission to act as county health officer. The permission granted, he becomes an earnest, but extremely tactless health officer. He does not explain to the villagers the cause of his campaign, but annoys them by garbage pail spying and shocks them by saying that a harmless itinerant seamstress is a chronic carrier of typhoid germs. He orders her segregated in the county jail. Surprisingly enough, the doctor from the neighboring county agrees with him. Leora saves him from being thrown out of town by suggesting that the townspeople take up a collection and have the poor woman removed to a sanitarium for treatment. This is done, and gradually his recent enemies begin to think he is a wideawake young man. After so successfully removing the menace of typhoid, Martin assumes "the king can do no wrong" attitude, and bounds after another new epidemic which he sees looming in the neighborhood. He is unfortunate in this campaign, because he mistakes chicken pox for small pox. He is virtually laughed out of town.

Through Gustaf Sondelius, the public health authority, he obtains a position as a bacteriologist in the Public Health Department of Nautilus, which is under the direction of Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh. Dr. Pickerbaugh is a man who never merely talks; he either bubbles or makes orations. He believes in popularized health. As Elmer Gantry is the sensationalist in religion, so Dr. Pickerbaugh is the sensationalist in the public health movement. He prints verses such as the following one and places them in prominent showwindows and on the walls of frequented shops:

> You can't get health
> By pussyfoot stealth,
> So let's every health-booster
> Crow just like a rooster.[1]

And here is another tidbit:

> Boil the milk bottles or by gum
> You better buy your ticket to Kingdom Come.[2]

Dr. Pickerbaugh believes that his jingles serve to jazz up the cause of health. He confides to Martin, that although he knows he is not a poet, he is certain he is just a plain scientist in an office. Martin marvels at the madhouse in which he finds himself and at the jackanapes who is the head of the Public Health Department. He wonders if the citizens of Nautilus are hoodwinked by Dr. Pickerbaugh, or if they recognize him as an inefficient publicity hound. Out of curiosity, he accosts a man and asks his opinion of Dr. Pickerbaugh. The man says that Pickerbaugh "hollers a lot," but that he "sure is one brainy man!"

Martin is not entirely passive under the reign of Pickerbaugh. When

---

[1] Ibid., p. 195.

[2] Ibid., p. 196.

he hints to Pickerbaugh that pasteurizing all the milk and burning the tuberculosis-breeding tenements would save more lives than ten years of parades and shouting, then Pickerbaugh says, "No, no, Martin, don't think we could do that. Get so much opposition from the dairymen and the landlords. Can't accomplish anything in this work unless you keep from offending people."[1]

When Pickerbaugh is elected to Congress by the grateful citizens, Martin succeeds him as the head of the Public Health Department. Martin accomplishes many things in the few months he is head of the department, but he disregards Pickerbaugh's advice and offends everyone of influence in the town at some time or other. He antagonizes the doctors by establishing free clinics; he angers the lawyers and policemen by burning the McCandless tenements without the proper authority. Clay Tredgold, an influential factory-owner, backs Martin in this amateur arson. But Martin displeases Tredgold by ordering the slightly-intoxicated man out of the laboratory when he is conducting an experiment. Opposition develops against Martin all at once, and he is forced to resign.

The reader finds him next as a pathologist in the Roumcefield Clinic in Chicago. The clinic has faith in the assumption that any portions of the body without which people can conceivably get along should certainly be removed at once. Martin admires Angus Duer, an old classmate who is the director of the clinic. He is the precise, well-dressed, perfectly poised young physician. Mr. Lewis describes him thus:

---

[1] Ibid., p. 227.

> Angus had a swim or a fencing lesson daily; he swam easily and fenced like a still-faced demon. He was in bed before eleven-thirty; he never took more than one drink a day; and he never read anything or said anything which would not contribute to his progress as a Brilliant Young Surgeon. His underlings knew that Dr. Duer would not fail to arrive precisely on time, precisely well-dressed, absolutely sober, very cool, and appallingly unpleasant to any nurse who made a mistake or looked for a smile.[1]

Martin is unhappy at the clinic, because heretofore, he has fought his environment and now there is nothing to fight. Soon Martin has a desire to tie up a few loose knots in his streptolysin research. Dr. Duer tactfully reminds him that although the clinic is glad he is keeping up his research, it does not want him to waste too much time out of mere curiosity. He should do something practical; then perhaps he could bring a little glory to the Rouncefield Clinic. This advice has the effect of extinguishing Martin's desire to do any research whatever. He resolves never to try to do anything original again. It is at this time, when Martin has been with the clinic a year, that his streptolysin paper is published in the Journal of Infectious Diseases. He sends a reprint to Max Gottlieb, at the McGurk Institute of Biology. Gottlieb and Dr. Tubbs, the director, invite him to come to McGurk.

At McGurk, he is given a small, efficient laboratory. No Pickerbaugh or Rouncefield can burst in here and drag him away to be explanatory, plausible, and public. He prays the prayer of a scientist:

> "God give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste. God give me a quiet and relentless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work and all work left slack and unfinished. God give me a restlessness whereby I may neither

---

[1] Ibid., p. 270.

sleep nor accept praise till my observed results equal my calculated results or in pious glee I discover and assault my error. God give me strength not to trust to God!"[1]

The next day, Martin begins meeting the men in the Institute. He is greeted by the head of the Department of Physiology, Dr. Rippleton Holabird. Although Martin has found Holabird's name starred in physiological journals, he seems too young and too handsome to be the head of a department. Dr. Tubbs, the director of the McGurk Institute, is as cordial to Martin as he would be to a visiting senator. Martin realizes, before he has talked to him for ten minutes, that here is one of the few leaders who can talk on any branch of knowledge, yet can control practical affairs. During his life, he had graduated from Harvard, studied on the Continent, been professor of pathology in the University of Minnesota, president of Hartford University, minister to Venezuela, editor of the Weekly Statesman, president of the Sanity League, and finally director of McGurk. Mr. Lewis characterizes him as one of the "Distinguished Men" to whom the newspapers turn for authoritative interviews on all subjects.

Terry Wickett is the terror of the Institute. He is a hard-faced, red-headed man of thirty-six, a chemist under Gottlieb, and very disrespectful: he calls Dr. Holabird, the Holy Wren; the McGurk Institute, the menagerie; the magnificient dining-room, the Bonanza Hall. After he has been at McGurk a little while, Wickett and Gottlieb tell Martin that he has to learn mathematics before he will ever be worth anything as a scientist. Wickett offers to tutor Martin, and so the friendship of a life

---

[1] Ibid., p. 281.

time begins between these two men. At the end of his first nine months at McGurk, Martin has reviewed trigonometry and analytic geometry, and he is finding differential calculus romantic. Leora is the perfect wife for a scientist. She sits quietly by, or she naps inoffensively while he works, and she politely awakes to let him worry at her, or she makes sandwiches and coffee for him.

By accident, Martin stumbles upon a problem which forms the basis for a new experiment, the unknown process of which he calls the "X" Principle. He has placed a bit of pus in broth and incubated it. In eight hours, a good growth of bacteria has appeared. Before going home, he returns the flask to the incubator. When he returns, he finds that where there should be a cloudy growth, there is nothing. Martin's attack on this problem shows that he is a true scientist. He does not go his way, merely thinking that he has made some mistake, but he sits down to find out just why the bacteria have disappeared. Mr. Lewis says of him:

> Now in Martin Arrowsmith there was no decorative heroisms, no genius for amours, no exotic wit, no edifyingly borne misfortunes. He presented neither picturesque elegance nor a moral message. He is full of hasty faults and of perverse honesty; a young man often unkindly, often impolite. But he possessed one gift: a curiosity whereby he saw nothing as ordinary. Had he been an acceptable hero, like Major Eippleton Holabird, he would have chucked the contents of the flask into the sink, avowed with petty modesty, "Silly! I've made some error!" and gone his ways. But Martin, being Martin, walked prosaically up and down his laboratory, snarling, "Now there was some cause for that, and I'm going to find out what it was."[1]

He works out his principle, but will not publish the results until

---

[1] Ibid., p. 308.

he has everything checked and re-checked. In the meantime, someone else makes the same discovery and publishes his results. Dr. Tubbs is piqued, but he suggests that Martin try to cure something with this phage he has discovered--say, the plague. This chance suggestion leads Martin into a work which is the turning point of his life. Gustaf Sondelius comes to McGurk as a guest scientist, and the two collaborate in trying to find a cure for the plague.

Just at the time when they are sure they have found a preventive and cure for this dread disease, the Institute receives a call from a plague-stricken island in the Lesser Antilles. Gottlieb, who is now head of McGurk Institute, gives Martin permission to go to the rescue of the islanders, if he will promise to conduct a scientific experiment with the phage. Martin promises that he will observe conditions; he will determine the value of the phage by treating one group of patients and not treating another group. In fact, he promises to harden his heart and to keep clear his eyes. Sondelius goes with him to kill the rats which are breeding the plague. Leora will not be left behind, so the three of them form the commission from McGurk Institute.

Martin will not give the phage to anyone, until he has received permission to perform his experiment. The authorities on the island are reluctant to grant him such permission, because they feel his experiment will cost too many lives. Eventually, the commission obtains the proper consent, but Martin is the only one of the expedition left to tell the story. When Leora dies of the plague, Martin goes temporarily insane.

He forgets about his experiment and gives the phage to everybody. Only Dr. Stokes, the medical missionary, is left to keep tab on Martin's experiment.

Six months after Martin's coming, the plague has almost vanished and the quarantine is lifted. He receives a letter from Dr. Holabird, who has become director of McGurk after Gottlieb's retirement. Holabird writes that because of Martin's sensational success, the Board of Trustees has created a separate department with Martin as the head of it. After reading the letter, Martin reflects that he has not established the value of anything, that he has forgotten Gottlieb and all that Gottlieb represents by giving the phage to everyone. He muses that he will now have ten thousand dollars a year--and no Leora to help him spend it.

Martin returns to find himself a hero in the eyes of the world; Rippleton Holabird seeks to use Martin as the prize exhibit of the Institute. Holabird has run wild, making absurd statements about the experiment, which are absolutely untrue. Martin says he will publish the conclusion that he has not proved anything, but Holabird refuses to allow him to do this, because that would mean Holabird would have to retract his statements. He suggests that Martin suppress the real statistical results and issue the report with an ambiguous summary. Martin is furious, but he is restrained from doing anything rash by Terry Wickett.

Martin eventually marries Joyce Lanyon, a society woman who was marooned on the plague-ridden island at the time Martin was conducting his experiment. Joyce trys to arrange his life, to make him a well-bred, well-

dressed gentleman. They are incompatible, because she can never understand that primarily, he is a scientist. She will not let him be free to work. After Martin's marriage, Terry retires to his Vermont shack to do independent research. At the complete break-down of his second marriage, Martin moves in with Terry, giving up wife and child for scientific work. He determines to find the essential nature of phage. He becomes happy.

Martin Arrowsmith is not a super-man. He is an individual often beaten by the vicissitudes and insincerities in the life about him, a man who tries to follow the ideal of professional honesty. The worldly people do not understand him; they dub him queer and a failure. Yet, he is a man who plods steadily onward with the light of integrity guiding his way. In fact, Martin Arroswmith is a man whom one can love, pity, and above all, respect. Perhaps, Mr. Lewis's satirical power is nowhere more keenly manifested than in this volume. Martin Arrowsmith, Mr. Lewis would have his readers believe, did not fail in his mission, he failed only in the eyes of a "lopsided" world.

R. M. Lovett believes that Arrowsmith is an important step in the campaign to "de-bamboozle" the American public and to relieve its institutions of "bunk." He says:

> . . . Mr. Lewis has attacked his old enemy in one of its highest places. In all phases of medicine--education, private and public practices, and finally research--he has revealed its pretensions and exposed its perpetrators. If he has sacrificed the reality of fiction, it is in the interest of the reality of a public cause which gives largeness of view and significance to Arrowsmith.[1]

---

[1] Lovett, op. cit., p. 515.

Here again one sees that this critic agrees with the idea that Arrowsmith is rebellion with a purpose. Stuart P. Sherman says, "Arrowsmith is hot with the authentic fire with which art and science are purified."[1]

A German writer says Arrowsmith represents one of the bitterest human struggles of the present day. He says that this is the conflict between the pure scientist and modern life, between the disinterested investigator and a society organized around special interests, between pure reason and the practical intelligence of the capitalistic world. The writer continues:

> . . . The struggle is fought out not merely between the two opposing forces: Martin Arrowsmith's worst enemy is in his own breast. Again and again he betrays his ideal of pure science for the sake of ambition, comfort and a longing for wealth and position--but only of course, to come back to that ideal as often as he asserts it, so that in the end it triumphs over every other motive.[2]

However, Edwin Muir is not so sure that the medical profession is a subject for satire. He says:

> Science can hardly be made a social problem and one feels that Mr. Lewis's reforming zeal has misled him. There is, however, some very effective satire in the book on all sorts of shams and illiberalties.[3]

Two other doctors in the Lewis books should be discussed in connection with Mr. Lewis's attitude toward the medical profession. Dr. Will Kennicott, in Main Street, would be classified properly under the

---

[1] Stuart P. Sherman, New York Tribune, (March 8, 1925, p. 2,) Book Review Digest. (Vol. 21.)

[2] The Living Age, "Life, Arts, the Letters," (May 15, 1925, p. 2,) Book Review Digest. (Vol. 21.)

[3] Edwin Muir, Nation and Athletics, (May 15, 1925,) Book Review Digest, (Vol. 21.)

non-commercialists. One catches a few glimpses of this steady cool surgeon operating on the kitchen tables in various farmhouses, the surgeon who is more at home in an improvised operating room than in a modern excellently-equipped hospital surgery.

Often the country doctor is a hero, but no one knows it but himself, and even he considers his pluck merely routine work. One night, accompanied by his wife on a call, he finds that he must amputate a man's leg. He telephones the druggest to send him some chloroform. His wife is drafted as a nurse to sit at the man's head and keep the ether dripping, while the injured man's wife holds the lamp for the doctor to see to operate. After the operation, Carol praises her husband. He remarks that the only thing which worried him was that the ether fumes might explode. He explains that the druggest who sent the anesthetic sent ether instead of chloroform, and that ether fumes are highly inflammable. Carol marvels, as does the reader, that Dr. Kennicott, knowing this, should not have lost his nerve in operating.

Dr. Kennicott unromantically gets up in the middle of the night to make a cold drive ten miles in the country in order to relieve the pain of one of his patients. Often he comes in at six in the morning after operating in a Dutch kitchen; he lies down and is instantly asleep. He is not a hero to his community; he is simply "the doctor."

It is in Ann Vickers, that one finds Sinclair Lewis expressing himself as to the place of women in medicine. He says that women are naturally physicians, because they have been doctors all their lives, doctoring the

baby's injuries and planning its diet. It is the women who have patience and endurance, and yet men have the effrontery to proclaim that woman have no place in medicine. He cites Dr. Malvina Wormser as an example of all that is fine in a woman doctor. She is tender, yet firm, kind, yet judicial, a good friend and a worthy confidante.

After a study of Lewis's treatment of the medical profession, one inevitably comes to the conclusion, that Sinclair Lewis has some definite ideas concerning medicine as it is practiced today.

First, he believes integrity in the profession of medicine and science is an admirable quality. Second, in order to gain material success, a doctor or scientist working under present conditions must sacrifice integrity. Third, science is a cold, clear light shining in the cause of truth. Fourth, true scientists are born not made. Fifth, the country doctor is one of the most unappreciated and yet one of the finest types in the medical profession. Sixth, medicine is the rightful profession of women, and they should not be barred from it.

SOCIAL SERVICE AND PHENOLOGY

In 1933, Mr. Lewis harkened back to one of his earlier books, when he raised the question in Ann Vickers, "Can a woman give herself to her profession as a man gives himself to his?" One will recall that in 1917, when he wrote of a commonplace woman in business in the book, The Job, Mr. Lewis answered the question in the affirmative. Sixteen years later he reaffirmed this positive statement.

But whereas Una Golden entered the business world, Ann Vickers chooses to uplift the dregs of humanity as her profession. And through her career as a social worker and penologist, Sinclair Lewis stabs at the false standards with which society judges and governs settlement houses and prisons. He points out the faults of such systems and suggests the remedies.

Bernardo de Voto says that Ann Vickers is a sister of Martin Arrowsmith, ". . . simple-minded and single-minded, dogged, undeluded, honest with herself, capable of the tumultuous activity that gets things done in the world."[1] After reading the book, one believes that de Voto has given an accurate description of the woman. Certainly, Ann is not conventional, but neither is she radical. She believes, as does Martin Arrowsmith, in professional integrity, but she accomplishes more of her objectives than does Martin, because she is more tactful. A reviewer in the Boston Transcript says, "The biography of Ann Vickers becomes the symbol of woman's triumph over the customs of an older world."[2]

A brief resume of the plot, including the thoughts of its heroine, will show the design of the work, Ann Vickers. After the usual childhood experiences, and college life of a character familiar in the Lewis books, Ann plunges into a wild medley of jobs. She is groping for a type of work which will enable her to fulfill an ambition which she formulated in college, namely, to better the world by helping "to make this race of fat-

---

[1] Literary Digest, "Lewis Travels Far," (March 4, 1933,) p. 18.

[2] Ibid.

heads and grouches something more like the angels."[1] She works for a time in a factory and later in a hospital to learn something of the agonized people with whom she will have to deal.

With the campaign for women's suffrage booming, she becomes an organizer. It is here that she comes in contact for the first time with the vileness of jails. Four organizers, including Ann, are incarcerated for resisting a policeman who attempts to break up a women's suffrage meeting. The girls are shocked at the condition of the jail and begin to reform the prisoners, as well as to clean the jail. During the two weeks she is in jail, Ann has time to meditate. She does not resent the cruelty of the whole system of laws and courts and prisons, so much as its futility. Ann reasons as follows:

> "Let's assume that the court is right and that I am a criminal. . . All right. What does the state accomplish by shutting me up here for two weeks? The theory is that I am a violent rowdy who injures the little policemen and threatens the mayor. What is there about sitting idle for a fortnight among professional prostitutes that is going to make me so gentle, that is going to teach me so much self-restraint, that when I come out the policemen and mayor will be safe?"
>
> She saw that war was stupid, that conducting business for the profit of a few owners was insane, that thrones and crowns and titles and degrees were as childish as playing with tin soldiers, but that in the entire range of human imbecility, there was nothing quite so senseless as imprisonment as a cure for crime. . . and that the worse the crimes become, the more serious it was that there should be only so barbaric an effort to cure."[2]

In 1916, Ann finds a job with an investigation committee in the

---

[1] Karl Schriftguesser, Boston Transcript (January 28, 1953, p.1.) Book Review Digest, (Vol. 29.)

[2] Sinclair Lewis, Ann Vickers, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1933,) pp. 151-152.

textile and garment industries, a position which offers board and room at the Corlears Hook Settlement House, New York City, in return for teaching classes of foreigners. In 1917, when America enters the war, she has risen from the rank of ordinary resident to that of assistant head-resident. Ann falls in love with a Jewish army captain, and participates in an illicit love affair with him which ends unfortunately. For two years, Ann is head-resident of a settlement house in Rochester. At twenty-nine, she is granted an honorary degree by the University of Rochester. Although she is actually engaged in settlement work, Ann questions the value of such effort. She believes the settlement house is nothing but a playground, much less well managed than a city playground. It smells too strongly of charity. She believes the volunteer teachers have good intentions, but are much too ignorant to teach the foreigners anything of lasting worth to them. She feels the only foreign-born who are worth the trouble are the ambitious youngsters who will educate themselves, anyway. Sinclair Lewis, speaking through his mouthpiece, Ann Vickers, says the only virtue of settlement houses is that they have given birth to impersonal and trained organizations, such as the Visiting Nurses' Association and modern organized charity. He says settlement houses are tools for exhibitionism by the charity-givers who wish to feel superior to the unfortunate.

Later, Ann becomes assistant-director of the Organized Charities Institute of New York City. She has much to do with discharged and paroled women convicts. The ex-convicts whom she meets do not seem reformed; they come out of prisons with a desire for revenge on Society. This experience

leads her into the profession of penology, the science of torture. The following paragraph reveals that Mr. Lewis does not sympathize with modern prison methods:

> Penology! The science of torture! The art of locking the stable-door after the horse is stolen! The touching faith that neurotics who hate social regulation can be made to love it by confining them in stinking dens, giving them bad food and dull work, and compelling them to associate with precisely the persons for associating with whom they have first been arrested. The credo, based on the premise that God created human beings for the purpose of burning most of them, that it is sinful for an individual to commit murder, but virtuous in the State to murder murderers. The theory that men chosen for their ability to maul unruly convicts will, if they be shut up in darkness, away from any public knowledge of what they do, be inspired to pray and love these convicts into virtue. The science of penology![1]

Consequently, she goes as educational director to the Green Valley Refuge for Women, where she stays for a year. Even though the Refuge is overcrowded, the officers seek to make the prison a vocational training school instead of a place in which to punish the prisoners. The paroled prisoners and women who have served their time, do not go out with revenge in their hearts, but rather with an eager desire "to go straight."

Becoming interested in penology, Ann goes to the Columbia graduate school to study criminology. Dr. Julius Jelke, one of the instructors, gives his class a formula for testing the intelligence of all prison officials. He says, "Any prison official who is intelligent believes secretly, no matter what he says or writes, that all prisons of every kind, good or bad, must be abolished."[2] He says society cannot immediately turn

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 267-268.

[2] Ibid., p. 272.

all prisoners loose, although it is now letting them out on the installment plan, by letting them go at the end of their sentences. Society, however, can make prisons as sanitary and as well-lighted as possible, so that victims may live out their living death more comfortably.

Dr. Jelke believes there is no more reason for punishing the ethically sick than the physically sick. If a man is incurably rotten, he will not be better after five years in prison. He concludes that since crime increases, obviously the prison system has proved a failure.

After she receives the master's degree, Ann asks one of the instructors to get her a position in the worst penal institution he can find in the United States. He recommends Copperhead Gap. By the pulling of a few political strings, Ann is appointed educational director and chief clerk of the Women's Division of Copperhead Gap, "in a state whose patron saint was William Jennings Bryan."[1]

Capt. Waldo Dringoole, the right hand man of the warden, tells Ann that a prison is no place for a sociological theorist like herself, because an official has to treat the prisoners with extreme severity. Convicts, he holds, are not even human, and the only way one can handle them is to put the fear of God into them so they will behave themselves. He says criminals are criminals because they think they are too good to obey the laws. Therefore, to show them their error in this respect, they must be made in prison to obey <u>all</u> the rules, even "to making up fool rules that don't mean nothing just so they will learn to do what they're told, no matter what it is!"[2]

---

[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 276.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>

And if they will not obey, Capt. Waldo advocates severe punishment, such as lashing them naked, putting them in the dungeon for two months, naked and with no light and just enough water so that they are always thirsty, or putting them in a straight jacket until they nearly die. He says discipline is the greatest word in the English language! Capt. Waldo's theory is not mere idle talk; he really practices this doctrine.

Ann sees horrors enough during her fifteen months at Copperhead Gap. A few such horrors are described in the following paragraph:

> . . . Cells with vile air, cockroaches, rats, lice, fleas, mosquitoes. Punishment in the dungeon, lying on cold cement with neither a blanket nor any clothes save a nightgown, with two slices of bread every twenty-four hours. A dining-room filthy with flies, which left their hieroglyphics bountifully on the oilcloth. Food tasting like slop and filled with maggots and beetles. Undergarments coarse as sailcloth, stiff with sweat after work in the shirt-shop. The fact that Mrs. Windelskate's handsome gymnasium was kept locked, was never used, except when Cap'n Waldo found it convenient for conferences with the prostitutes among the women prisoners. The shirt shop with antiquated and dangerous machinery and a dimness that ruined the eyes. Silence for twenty-three hours a day--speech permitted only for an hour after supper, in the exercise yard--though naturally the rule was broken by tapping the walls at night and grunting out of the corner of one's mouth all day long, since it is the duty, pride, and pleasure of all convicts to break all prison rules, exactly as it is the duty, pride, and pleasure of the keepers to enforce them. The only difference is that the keepers celebrate their triumphs, not quietly and decently, like the convicts, but with clubs, straps, and taking away the privileges of letter-writing and walking in the cinders of the courtyard, whereupon the convicts, with natural bitterness at this unfairness, break the rules all the more proudly. The more punishment there is, the more things there are to be punished, and the general philosophy of the whole business is that of an idiot chasing flies.[1]

---

[1] Ibid.

A riot develops among the women prisoners, and the officials blame Ann for having been friendly with the "cons." To punish the women, the keepers stop the recreation hour for a month, feed the victims on only bread and water for two days, whip six of the women, and shut four of the six in the "hole" for fifteen days. Ann's classes are taken away from her; she is permitted to talk to no prisoners, and cannot leave the prison. Secretly, Ann visits the four women in the "hole." Dr. Sorella, a prisoner who acts as physician, warns Ann to be careful, because the officials are trying to force her to resign. One day, she is duped into going to Dr. Sorella's room by being told he is very ill and is calling for her. She finds him in a drunken stupor with a high fever, half-lurched off the bed. As she strives to put him back on the bed, Capt. Waldo snaps a flashlight picture of her in this compromising position. She resigns.

When she gets back to the city, she is eager to publish her experiences, but the editors are uninterested because, they say, the articles have no news value.

Then, she is made superintendent of the Stuyvesant Industrial Home for Women in New York City. In the administration of the home, Ann puts into practice her theories of penology, and, incidentally, of course, those of Sinclair Lewis. It is an entirely modern prison:

> . . . There was no room for gardens, but there was a central court, with a fountain, a not very extensive bed of flowers, handball courts, and standards for basketball; and on the roof, nine stories up, there was room for all two hundred of the prisoners to walk in the sun at once, with no sense of jail about it save a high wire necessitated by notions of suicide.

> The assembly-hall had none of the damp garish stoniness of chapel at Copperhead Gap. There were theater seats, subdued decorations in crimson and dull gold, a stage with curtain and scenery.
>
> There were no cells. Each prisoner had, at least when the prison opened and was not overcrowded, a room to herself, with wire-glass windows but without bars. The rooms were ten feet by eight--not large, yet luxurious by comparison with other jails; each with a bed, a chair, a table, a wardrobe, book-shelves, such pictures as the prisoner cared to bring, running water, and, on the linoleum floor, a rug. Each dwelling-story had a sitting room with books and magazines, open from after supper till bedtime to all inmates not undergoing punishment, and on each floor were shower baths and toilets. . . They were clean. . . The plumbers regarded Ann as a holy terror.[1]

The inmates wear blue Indianhead uniforms during the week, but are allowed to wear their own clothes on Sunday. No rule of silence is enforced. There is a small modern knitting works in which the workers receive from thirty to seventy cents a day. Ann's pride is the vocational classes taught by capable teachers. A psychiatrist is employed to study not the crime committed, but the individual who has committed it, and to examine her emotional and environmental background in order to discover why she committed the crime. A full-time general practitioner receives seven thousand dollars a year, as does the psychiatrist. There are no executions.

While she is superintendent of Stuyvesant, Ann marries a social worker, Russell Spaulding, in order to spite a former sweetheart. Ann is more successful than Russell, and he both resents and envies her success. He envies her professional and social prestige as a progressive penologist, because he is simply one social worker in a thousand. Finally, she separates from him. She is now thirty-seven, and wants to have a child; but she does

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 390-391.

not want Russell to be its father. At a party she meets Barney Dophin, a judge, who is unhappily married. They discover their love for each other. She chooses Barney to be her child's father; and when she is sure she is going to be a mother, she returns to live with Russell in order that the baby may have a legal father. Because she is honest, she tells Russell he is not the child's father. Not long after the birth of the boy, Barney is arrested and imprisoned for accepting bribes on court decisions.

Ann leaves Russell and settles down to the earnest business of making money and trying to secure a pardon for Barney. After two years of imprisonment, he is released by the governor. Ann and Barney decide to try to divorce their mates, but in the meantime they determine to live together, scandal or no scandal. Barney plans to go into the real estate business, and Ann continues her work. In the closing paragraphs of the book, Ann says to Barney, "You, you and Mat [the child] have brought me out of the prison of Russell Spaulding, the prison of ambition, the prison of desire for praise, the prison of myself. We're out of prison!"[1]

Henry Hazlett, in reviewing Ann Vickers, says the book is honest, socially significant, and likely to start up another healthy row about the subject with which it deals.[2] It did start a row. William Lyon Phelps said that foreigners would believe that all prisons in the United States are like Copperhead Gap, since Europeans tend to accept Lewis's characters and situations as characteristic of America.[3] J. C. Squire said they would

---

[1] Ibid., p. 562.

[2] Henry Hazlett, Nation, (February 1, 1933, p. 125,) Book Review Digest, (Vol. 29.)

[3] William Lyon Phelps, "As I Like It," Scribners, (April 1, 1933, p. 356.)

not,[1] and so the critics argued. Whether or not foreigners believe everything in the book, the Literary Digest asserts in the issue of March 4, 1933, that Ann Vickers, which was released in January 1933, had been translated into twelve languages, and at that time was on sale in sixteen countries three months after its publication.[2]

Mr. Phelps compares Dickens's attitude toward prisons in "Pickwick Papers" with Lewis's attitude in Ann Vickers. He says that Dickens stirs his readers to pity and indignation by his sympathy for the prisoners, while Lewis arouses the readers by his hatred for prison keepers, whom he hates more than he loves their victims. Mr. Phelps shrewdly suspects that some of Lewis's hatred comes from his restless impatience with all discipline. "Restraint, repression, respectability--the three R's make him see red!"[3]

This comparison is interesting from a sociological viewpoint, because the two writers compared lived in different centuries and in widely different periods, yet both were fighting for prison reform. History has proved Dickens's writings were not in vain. What will the future bring for prisons in America as a result of Lewis's satire?

Here again, one sees rebellion as an inciting force in the novels of Sinclair Lewis. In Arrowsmith, the novelist advocates escape from the problems of a baffling world. Eight years later, in Ann Vickers, he urges combat, and even suggests a partial remedy to relieve the tension. This suggestion seems to show a distinct progress in the social thinking of Sinclair Lewis. Previously, he has been content to ridicule and to rebel,

---

[1] Literary Digest, op. cit.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Phelps, op. cit.

while now, in addition to satirizing, he suggests remedial action.

One may safely assume that Sinclair Lewis holds the following opinions of social service and penology: First, most settlement house work is mere exhibitionism of the unfortunate by the fortunate. Second, organized and impersonal charity is infinitely preferable to social service by well-meaning but ignorant settlement workers. Third, crime cannot be dealt with effectively by the prison system now in use. Fourth, most prisons in the United States are poorly managed and use antique methods of correcting crime. Fifth, as yet Society has not found a method to end crime, but it can adopt a more humane method in treating its criminals. By treating criminals as individuals rather than as cattle, perhaps American penal institutions may hope to effect some cure for the ethically ill.

CONVENTION AND STANDARDIZATION

"Down with convention and standardization" was the theme song of Sinclair Lewis in the early 1920's. He phrased his protest in two of his major novels, Main Street, 1920, and Babbitt, 1922. The writer agrees with Granville Hicks who says the first is a study of rebellion and the second a study of conformity. The critic writes:

> * * * Carol Kennicott's rebellion and chief virtue is her refusal to accept the standards of Gopher Prairie, and George F. Babbitt's principal fault is his submission to the standards of Zenith. Compare Carol's valedictory with Babbitt's. "I may not have fought the good fight," she says, "but I have kept the faith," whereas Babbitt confesses to his son, "I've never done a single thing I wanted in my whole life."
>
> Lewis is so candid in exposing Carol's faults and so adroit in revealing Babbitt's virtues that rebellion comes to seem all that is right with the

latter. The tragedy of Babbitt's life is, of course, that he tried to rebel and failed. Lewis makes us realize, however, that the desire for rebellion is not peculiar to George F. Babbitt; dissatisfaction rankles in the heart of Paul Riesling and Chum Frink, and perhaps it once stirred in Virgil Gunch. But these men have all surrendered, whereas Carol, not particularly intelligent and certainly not very successful, sticks to her guns.[1]

The middle-class citizens of towns from coast to coast and border to border of the United States have developed certain mores which they hold sacred. If anyone violates these laws, he is punished as a heretic. In Main Street, Sinclair Lewis strives to bring out the idea that one small town is not essentially different from another small town a thousand miles distant. The foreword of Main Street states this idea clearly:

> This is America--a town of a few thousand in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves.
>
> The town is, in our tale, called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota." But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina hills.
>
> Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters. What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.
>
> Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture. Sam Clark's annual hardware turnover is the envy of the four counties which constitute God's Country. In the sensitive art of the Rosebud Movie Palace there is a Message, and humor strictly moral.
>
> Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main

---

[1] Hicks, op. cit., p. 265.

Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?[1]

The writer in discussing "The Pursuit of Culture," related the tale of Carol Kennicott, who tried to reform and to awaken the interests of the slumbering populace of Gopher Prairie, and of her rebuff by the indifference and criticism of the citizens of the town. Carol tries to analyze the surface ugliness of the Gopher Prairies of the world. She sees in them a universal similarity:

> . . . The universal similarity--that is the physical expression of the philosophy of dull safety. Nine-tenths of the American towns are so alike that it is the completest boredom to wander from one to another. Always, west of Pittsburg, and often, east of it, there is the same lumber yard, the same railroad station, the same Ford garage, the same creamery, the same box-like houses, and two-story shops. The new, more conscious houses are alike in their very attempts at diversity: the same bungalows, the same square houses of stucco or tapestry brick. The shops show the same standardized, nationally advertised wares; the newspapers of sections three thousand miles apart have the same "syndicated features"; the boy in Arkansas displays just such a flamboyant ready-made suit as is found on just such a boy in Delaware, both of them iterate the same slang phrases from the same sporting-pages, and if one of them is in college and the other is a barber, no one may surmise which is which.[2]

Guy Pollack explains to Carol that sooner or later she will be attacked by the Village Virus which infects ambitious people who stay too long in the provinces. It is especially prevalent among lawyers, doctors, ministers, and college-bred people who have had a glimpse of the thinking, laughing world, but have returned to their swamp. Guy holds himself to be

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, Foreword, Main Street, (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1920.)

[2] Ibid., p. 268.

a perfect example of a man whom the Village Virus has infected. He was born and reared in a small town, educated in New York, where he lived a noisy, breathless, and expensive and thrilling life--attending symphonies, seeing plays of the finest types, and reading everything--then he came to Gopher Prairie to enter the practice of the law. When he came, he determined to keep up his interests, but the Village Virus bit him, and he found himself reading four copies of cheap fiction-magazines to one poem. He decided to leave Gopher Prairie to grasp the world, but he was afraid to go--to face new streets and younger men and keener competition--the Village Virus had him absolutely. He says his is the biography of a living dead man.

Here, again, is conformity to accepted standards, not intentionally but inevitably. Sinclair Lewis strives to show that Guy Pollock is only one of many cultured persons who have slipped backward into the mire of senseless provincialism. Guy is different in one respect from the rest, because he realizes that he has deteriorated. Convention and standardisation are widespread in Gopher Prairie, but the town is unaware that it is conforming.

Yet Zenith flaunts her conformity with a seeming pride. Babbitt is proud that his home in Floral Heights is exactly like every other house in the block. Every second house in Floral Heights has a bedroom precisely like Babbitt's:

> The room displayed a modest and pleasant color-scheme after one of the best standard designs of the decorator who "did the interiors" for most of the speculative builders' houses in Zenith. The walls were gray, the woodwork white, the rug a serene blue; and very much like mahogany was the furniture--the bureau with its great clear mirror, Mrs. Babbitt's dressing-table with toilet-

> articles of almost solid silver, the plain twin beds, between them a small table holding a standard electric bedside lamp, a glass for water, and a standard bedside book with colored illustrations--what particular book it was cannot be ascertained, since no one had ever opened it. The mattresses were firm but not hard, triumphant modern mattresses which had cost a great deal of money; the hot-water radiator was of exactly the proper scientific surface for the cubic contents of the room. The windows were large and easily opened, with the best catches and cords, and Holland roller-shades guaranteed not to crack. It was a masterpiece among bedrooms, right out of Cheerful Modern Houses for Medium Incomes. Only it had nothing to do with the Babbitts, nor with any one else. If people had ever lived and loved there, read thrillers at midnight and lain in beautiful indolence on a Sunday morning, there were no signs of it. It had the air of being a very good room in a very good hotel. One expected the chambermaid to come in and make it ready for people who would stay but one night, go without looking back, and never think of it again.[1]

One does not know whether Babbitt enjoys his sleeping-porch because it is cool or because it is the accepted thing to have a sleeping-porch. Mr. Lewis says:

> Just as he was an Elk, a Booster, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce, just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief and the senators who controlled the Republican Party decided in little smokey rooms in Washington what he should think about disarmament, tariff, and Germany, so did the large national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares--toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters--were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom.
>
> But none of these advertised tokens of financial and social success was more significant than a sleeping-porch with a sun-parlor below.[2]

That inimitable poet of Zenith, Chum Frink, who advocates the capitalization of culture, also has a word to say about standardization.

---

[1] Lewis, Babbitt, pp. 14-15.

[2] Ibid., p. 95.

He has even been stirred to the point of writing a so-called "prose poem" about it. He writes in part:

> And when I get that lonely spell, I simply seek the best hotel, no matter in what town I be--St. Paul, Toledo, or K. C., in Washington, Schenectady, in Louisville or Albany. And at that inn it hits my dome that I again am right at home. If I should stand a lengthy spell in front of that first-class hotel, that to the drummers loves to cater, across from some big film theayter; if I should look around and buzz, and wonder in what town I was, I swear that I could never tell! For all the crowd would be so swell, in just the same fine sort of jeans they wear at home, and all the queens with spiffy bonnets on their beans, and all the fellows standing around a-talkin' always, I'll be bound, the same jolly kind of guff, 'bout autos, politic and stuff and base-ball players of renown that Nice Guys talk in my home town!
>
> Then when I entered that hotel, I'd look around and say, "Well, well!" For there would be the same news-stand, same magazines and candies grand, same smokes of famous standard brand, I'd find at home, I'd tell! And when I saw the jolly bunch come waltzing in for eats at lunch, and squaring up in natty duds to platters large of French Fried spuds, why then I'd stand right up and bawl, "I've never left my home at all!" And all replete I'd sit me down beside some guy in derby brown upon a lobby chair of plush, and murmer to him in a rush, "Hello, Bill, tell me, good old scout, how is your stock-a-holdin' out?" Then we'd be off, two solid pals, a-chatterin' like giddy gals of flivvers, weather, home, and wives, lodge-brothers then for all our lives! So when Sam Satan makes you blue, good friend, that's what I'd up and do, for in these States where'er you roam, you never leave your home sweet home.[1]

This eulogy is a reiteration of the forsword of Main Street.

Seneca Doan, a radical lawyer in Z nith, is roused into defense of standardization by the criticism of a visiting alien. Doane says that standardization is not peculiar to the United States alone. In England, every house has muffins for tea at the same tea-hour, and every golfer attired in Harris tweeds says "Right you are!" to every other golfer in Harris tweeds. He cites the side-walk cafes in France and the love-making

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 185-186.

in Italy as additional examples of complying with criteria of behavior in other countries. He says one can buy better products for less money when products are standardized. Material conformity does not worry him half so much as the mental conformity in Zenith. He says:

> . . . what I fight in Zenith is standardization of thought, and, of course, the traditions of competition. The real villains of the piece are the clean, kind, industrious Family Men who use every brand of trickery and cruelty to insure the prosperity of their cubs. The worst thing about these fellows is that they're so good and, in their work at least, so intelligent. You can't hate them properly, and yet their standardized minds are the enemy.[1]

The pursuit of culture and convention and standardization are closely allied in a pathetic little story which Sinclair Lewis wrote in 1919, entitled "Things."[2] It concerned a happy family who suddenly acquired wealth and became very unhappy. The family feels that it must become the conventional rich family, that it must buy a mansion in which to live, and there assemble the symbols of respectability, such as a collection of cloisonne, a London travelling bag with silver fittings, rugs, books, hand-painted pictures, and a glass window from Nuremberg. Having acquired these things, the Dukes sit down to watch them and to grow increasingly miserable. "The accumulation of things to make other people envious is nothing beside their accumulation because it's the thing to do," writes Mr. Lewis.[3] The elder daughter, Janet, discovers life is unendurable without an evening cloak,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 101.

[2] Lewis, "Things," Selected Short Stories.

[3] Ibid., p. 239.

though no one ever wears such cloaks to parties in Vernon. The Dukes cannot entertain their old friends with any satisfaction, because it just is not being done. Mr. Duke grows lonesome for his old job and wants to go back to work, but he cannot. The family is afraid to leave home because some one might steal its art treasures. Thus, the Dukes are shackled to the things they own.

Janet makes a "brilliant" marriage, but Theo, the younger daughter, is singularly unappreciative of her sister's good fortune. Father and Theo are beginning to perceive that the acquisition of "things," and the conforming to social standards are the causes of their dissatisfaction. Mr. Duke wishes he could lose all his money and the mansion in which he lives. In desperation, he lets his fire insurance run out so he will not be robbing the insurance company and covertly sets fire to his own house. He wants to free his family from this terrible curse of "things" so that they may enjoy life again. Theo is glad, because she is now free to marry a poor boy whom she loved when the Dukes were likewise poor, but Mama Duke must be comforted.

Americanization is just another name for standardization, one finds after listening to Lowell Schmaltz, the narrator of The Man Who Knew Coolidge. He relates an incident which happened in Zenith, in order to prove the excellence of the method which his townsmen employed in solving the problem created by a group of foreigners who did not conform to the accepted standards. The foreigners, who worked for the Zenith Steel and Machinery Works, lived in Shantytown. They kept up the "ridiculous and uncivilized" customs which they had observed in their native country,

instead of immediately taking on the customs of America.

The ringleader of this group was one Scabo, whose home was the center for the social gatherings of the group. The committee of Zenith townspeople objected because "they'd meet there and drink beer, and talk their own language, and dance a lot of fool foreign dances" and because Scabo's wife was organizing a dramatic society to put on a group of plays by foreign playwrights.

The good Zenith one-hundred-per cent Americans made short work of this colony. They had Scabo discharged, saw that the police picked him up on a vagrancy charge when he was broke, and ran him out of town. His wife got a job as a hired girl and "got over all her damned nonsense." When Scabo was killed in a steel mill, she married "a real upstanding American named Harry Kahn." Schmaltz concludes:

> And say, inside six months, once we removed this Bolshevik influence, those Hunks were dancing the Charleston just like you and I would, and they were reading the tabloid papers--maybe we may prefer more highbrow newspapers, but for them cattle, the pictures put over a message of Americanization they couldn't get no other way--and a couple of 'em had bought radios, and they were going to the movies, and in general getting so their grandchildren won't hardly be distinguishable even from yours and mine.[1]

Thus, one sees Sinclair Lewis holds the opinion that although standardization and adherence to convention may save Americans money, in the long run, it saves them nothing, because it warps their minds. Convention and standardization he believes to be the bane of America.

---

[1] Lewis, "The Story by Mack McMack," The Man Who Knew Coolidge, p. 123.

POLITICS

Until 1936, strangely enough, Sinclair Lewis had not leveled his satire at the political mechanism of America to any marked degree. Then, however, he wrote *It Can't Happen Here*, a novel which does not ridicule the present form of government in the United States, but rather predicts the state of affairs in a futuristic Fascist regime in "the land of the free and the brave."

His only political satire in the books prior to 1936, has been the ridiculing of the apparent misconception of socialism by Americans. Early in his career, Mr. Lewis threw in his fortunes with Upton Sinclair's "Helicon Hall," a sort of Utopian socialist colony in New Jersey, where he stoked a socialistic furnace and wrote poems. He caused quite a flurry at Yale by espousing the socialist cause, according to William Rose Benet.[1]

In the early part of this study, the writer pointed out the fact that, by "hook or crook," Lewis manages to introduce some form of socialism or socialistic theory into many of his books. Quite often, he shows the fallacious thinking of the narrow-minded Americans, who publically oust the man who believes in socialism.

The earliest book in which one finds Mr. Lewis using these tactics is *The Trail of the Hawk*. In this novel, Professor Frazier, in 1905, seeks to explain to his literature class the meaning of the word "socialism" as Shaw and Wells use it. Frazier, himself, believes in this type of socialism and waxes eloquent on the subject. He says socialism is striving to show

---

[1] Benet, *op. cit.*

the complete relation of all the races of the world, with all their interests--food, ambition, and the desire to play--absolutely in common; so that if all the races thought and worked together, the world would be perfect. He says there are many branches of socialism, because various groups believe the goal may be achieved by different methods. One group believes the goal may be attained by the solution of the labor problem. It believes that by increasing safety and decreasing hours of toil, a way out may be found for the unhappy consumer who is ground between labor and capital. He describes their ideal thus:

> ". . . a real democracy and the love of work that shall come when work is not relegated to wage slaves, but joyously shared in a community inclusive of the living beings of all nations."[1]

Then, Mr. Lewis shows how the president of Plato College interprets socialism. President Wood believes Frazier is a heretic, who is seeking to ruin the traditions and teachings of Plato College. Therefore, he preaches a sermon in chapel on the asininity of evolution and socialism, which he evidently thinks synonymous. He says socialism is another form of atheism, that the socialist wants to destroy the Constitution and to set up a state in which all American citizens who are honest enough to do a day's work shall support the lazy rascals who do not believe in work. He says Satan invented socialism and has been advocating just such a lazy doctrine ever since he stirred up rebellion and discontent in the Garden of Eden.[2]

When the novelist wishes to portray ignorance and stupidity in some

---

[1] Lewis, The Trail of the Hawk, p. 82.

[2] Ibid., pp. 109-111.

character, one finds such a person espousing this selfsame philosophy, that socialism means the honest workers support the lazy man. Una Golden's husband in The Job, and Lowell Schmaltz in The Man Who Knew Coolidge both interpret socialism thus, and both, Mr. Lewis would have his reader believe, are ignorant philosophers.

In Main Street, one meets Miles Bjornstam, "The Red Swede," who, by his own admission, is the pariah of Gopher Prairie. He says the citizens of Gopher Prairie think he is the bad man of the town, an atheist, and an anarchist, because he does not hold the village gods in reverence. He says, "Everybody who doesn't love the bankers and the Grand Old Republican Party is an anarchist."[1] In The Trail of the Hawk, the reader observed Bone Stillman, the prototype of Miles Bjornstam, how his room was furnished, and what he read. It is interesting to note these details in the life of Bjornstam:

> He had but one room: bare pine floor, small work-bench, wall bunk with amazingly neat bed, frying-pan and ash-stippled coffee-pot on the shelf behind the pot-bellied cannonball stove, backwood chairs--one constructed from half a barrel, one from a tilted plank--and a row of books incredibly assorted; Byron and Tennyson and Stevenson, a manual of gas-engines, a book by Thorstein Veblen, and a spotty treatise on "The Care, Feeding, Diseases, and Breeding of Poultry and Cattle."
>
> There was but one picture--a magazine colorplate of a steep-roofed village in the Harz Mountains which suggested kobolds and maidens with golden hair.[2]

But Miles paid the penalty for his scoffing, when his wife and child die from the persecution of the "one-hundred percent" Americans who live in Gopher Prairie.

---

[1] Lewis, Main Street, p. 116.

[2] Ibid., p. 117.

Babbitt thinks it disgraceful to be seen sitting in the same seat in the Pullman with a man who is an avowed sympathizer with socialism. He is amazed to find that Seneca Doane is, after all, a rather harmless, well-educated, and even interesting person.

After twenty-five years of business activity, Samuel Dodsworth still thinks socialism means the dividing up of the wealth, and he is still confident the millionaires would get it all back within ten years.

Ann Vickers's college days are not complete, of course, without her participation in socialistic activities of various kinds. It seems to be an abiding idea with Sinclair Lewis that at college students are exposed to socialism. Ann organizes the Point Royalist Socialist Club, a rather mild and ineffectual gathering. Mr. Lewis says:

> The average attendance was six, and they sat on the floor in one of the girls' rooms and said excitedly that it wasn't fair that certain men should have millions while others starved, and that they should read Karl Marx just as soon as they could get around to it.[1]

He says the girls were living in the era known as Christian Socialism which he describes as follows:

> . . . It was the era of windy optimism, of a pre-war "idealism" which was satisfied with faith in place of statistics, of a certainty on one hand that Capitalism was divinely appointed to last forever, and on the other that Capitalism would be soon and bloodlessly replaced by an international Utopian commonwealth rather like the home-life of Louisa M. Alcott. It was from this era that everyone who in 1930 was from thirty-five to fifty-five years old imbibed those buoyant, Shavian, liberal, faintly clownish notions which he was to see regarded by his sons and daughters as on a par with Baptist ethics and the cosmogony of Moses.[2]

---

[1] Lewis, Ann Vickers, p. 58.

[2] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

From these few glimpses of Socialism in the Lewis books, one gathers the author believes that socialists are trying to create a perfect world by devious methods, and most important of all, that most Americans have no conception of the meaning of the word, and in their characteristic narrow-minded manner, are opposing it because they do not comprehend.

Before Mr. Lewis was shocked by the possibility of Fascism in America, he was protesting the illiberalities of Materialist America, but suddenly, with his keen journalistic sense for the undercurrents seething in the world, he realized that the Fascism in practice in Germany could "happen" in America, the land of the free. He realized that the American common man and the American upper-class would scoff at the idea if presented to their view, but that, nevertheless a clever politician could hoodwink his gullible countrymen if he designed some crazy scheme and advertised it. With the full realization of what a Fascist regime would mean to the traditional freedom of America, the novelist sat down in a blind fury and hurriedly dashed off in six weeks' time a book which he called, It Can't Happen Here.

The central character of the book is an old-fashioned liberal, Doremus Jessup, who does well a minor job, the editing of a small-town newspaper. Doremus perceives the danger in having Windrip for the presidency; he sees the reign of terror which will follow, and he tries to warn his fellow townsmen through the circulation of his newspaper. They read his editorials and scoff: "He's crazy! It can't happen here!"

Doremus tries to tell his friends, when they fling this answer at him, that a Fascist regime is feasible in America, for there is no country

in the world quite so susceptible to hysteria as America. He cites examples of its hysteria in the past: Huey Long's absolute monarchy in Louisiana, the Ku Klux Klan, the war-madness, the war-time censorship of honest papers, the devotion to Billy Sunday and Aimee McPherson, the obedience of a certain legislature to William Jennings Bryan--why there was never in all history a people so ripe for dictatorship as America, he declares.

Senator Windrip, the man who becomes dictator of America is a man of the people, a warm handshaker, an inspired guesser at what political doctrines the people will like. Within twenty years, he had become an absolute ruler of his state. He had never been governor, because he had shrewdly seen that his immoral life might cause his defeat by the church people, but he was the sole boss of the governor. He had introduced many fantastic schemes into his native state, and he had completely won the militia by rewarding the best soldiers with training in agriculture, aviation, radio, and automotive engineering. It considered itself his private army. He is elected to the United States Senate, and in his campaign for the presidency preaches the "comforting gospel" of so redistributing wealth that every person in the country will have several thousand dollars a year. All the rich men are, however, to be allowed enough to get along on with a maximum of $500,000 a year. As a result, every one is happy in the prospect of Windrip's becoming president.[1]

Lee Sarason is Windrip's secretary in his official capacity, but

---

[1] Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1936,) p. 35.

he is really much more--"bodyguard, ghost-writer, press-agent and economic advisor."[1]

In the chapter on "Religion" the writer has discussed the third dignitary in the Windrip campaign for the presidency, the Rev. Paul Peter Prang.

Doremeus was heart-sick all through the hectic campaign and following the inauguration of Windrip. In the Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Man, which is the platform, he sees the end of democracy for America. In brief, the points are as follows:

1. The government shall own all finance, natural resources, public utilities, transportation, and communication agencies.

2. The government shall control all labor-unions.

3. The government shall guarantee all private property rights.

4. The government shall guarantee absolute freedom of worship except for agnostics, Jews, or any persons who shall not swear allegiance to the government. Such persons shall be barred from holding any kind of public office.

5. The government shall limit all annual net incomes to $500,000 per person. No person shall retain an inheritance exceeding $2,000,000.

6. The government shall take the profit out of war, by seizing all dividends of over six per cent from the sale of munitions.

7. The government shall increase military and naval establishments until they shall equal those of any other country.

8. Congress shall have the sole right to issue money, and immediately upon the inauguration, it shall double the present supply of currency in order to facilitate the fluidity of credit.

9. Every Jew shall swear allegiance to the government.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 37.

10. All negroes shall be prohibited from taking part in the government or public life.

11. Everybody shall have $5,000 a year.

12. Women shall not be allowed to take part in business or public life.

13. Any person advocating Communism, Socialism, or Anarchism shall be punished.

14. Bonuses promised to soldiers shall be paid at once.

15. Immediately upon inauguration of Windrip, Congress shall add amendments to the Constitution providing that

    a. The president may be given the power to institute and execute any legislation he sees fit.

    b. Congress shall serve only in an advisory capacity.

    c. The Supreme Court will have removed from its jurisdiction the power to negate or declare unconstitutional any oral or written acts of the president.

Buzz Windrip found his supporters among the following classes of people: mortgaged farmers, the unemployed white-collar workers, people on relief rolls and wanting more relief, the suburbanites who could not meet their installment payments, the veterans of wars, the remnants of the Ku Klux Klan, those who wanted government jobs, the Anti-Saloon league, and like groups.

The next day after he has been inaugurated, Windrip sends a message to Congress demanding the instant passage of a bill embodying point fifteen of his election platform. The House refuses. Before six o'clock the same day, the President proclaims a state of martial law, to continue during the

"present crisis," and more than a hundred Congressmen are arrested by the Minute Men, Windrip's private army. Those who resist are charged with "inciting riot" and put in jail. That night riots take place all over America. In the District, the mutinous crowd, who had so blandly voted for Windrip, march toward the jail, but are met with bayonets and machine gun fire by the Minute Men. Many citizens are killed and injured. The next day the bills are passed by a depleted house.

The President abruptly ends the separate existence of the different states, by dividing them into provinces, and subdividing them into districts, counties, and townships. Incompetent men, men of the class who voted for the President, are appointed to fill the position of commissioner in the townships. In the township in which Doremus lives, Shad Ledue, an illiterate brute, who used to be the Jessup janitor until he was fired, is appointed commissioner. The country breaks loose in pandemonium, but the rebellion is quelled by the wholesale slaughter of citizens and the shutting of others into concentration camps. Any one who is in power can take revenge on his enemies, and Shad Ledue sees that Doremus is sent to a concentration camp, that Doremus's son-in-law, Dr. Greenhill, is shot for protesting his father-in-law's arrest, and that the government confiscates Mrs. Greenhill's property and money. As similar treatment of families takes place all over the United States, people become afraid to say what they think and live in mortal terror of what will happen to them next. The Corporate Party, as the Windrip party is now called, burn the literary treasures, beat anyone who dissents, smash clubrooms of literary and dramatic societies, and, in general, wreck havoc.

The men in the concentration camps lead a horrible life. When Doremus is arrested, he is given twenty-five lashes and a pint of castor oil, and is beaten twice during the night because he will not admit he is a Communist. He is given a job as sweeper of cells and corridors, cleaner of lavatories and scrubber of toilets. He sees his cousin killed and his friends tortured. In the meantime, his younger daughter secures the arrest and sentence of Shad Ledue to the concentration camp in which Doremus is held. After he has been there a short time, the men, whom he had himself committed to that living hell, murder Ledue in cold blood.

The Jessup family is scattered. Mrs. Jessup goes to live with her eldest son who has turned a Corpo. The younger daughter and Lorinda Pike, a friend of the family, go into secret service work for the democracy. The younger daughter's fiance is killed in a concentration camp. The eldest daughter, Mrs. Greenhill, goes into aviation for the sole purpose of killing the man who ordered her husband's death and accomplishes her purpose, but loses her own life in so doing.

Lorinda bribes one of the guards at the concentration camp, who helps Doremus escape to Canada. Doremus also goes into the secret service to try to undermine the Windrip dynasty. The United States goes from bad to worse. But in the closing paragraph of the book, one finds a note of hope. Mr. Lewis says, "And still Doremus goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die."[1]

The writer is inclined to agree with Granville Hick's description

---

[1] Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, p. 536.

of Doremus Jessup when he says:

> . . . Doremus Jessup, though perhaps the least completely individualized of all Lewis heroes, embodies better than any other of his characters the qualities he admires. Jessup does well a minor but respectable job. He maintains his independence without losing his sanity. He has the common sense, the good taste, and the humor that Lewis so often finds lacking in rebels. He is neither a warped, fanatical hermit nor a good fellow at the mercy of his associates. He is a civilized human being, and he is precisely the kind of human being Fascism seeks to wipe out.[1]

Sinclair Lewis does not lay the blame for the dictatorship on Big Business nor upon demagogues, but on the common man. At one time Doremus Jessup says:

> "The tyranny of this dictatorship isn't primarily the fault of Big Business, nor of the demagogues who do their dirty work. It's the fault of Doremus Jessup! Of all the conscientious, respectable, lazy-minded Doremus Jessups who have let the demagogues wriggle in, without fierce enough protest.
>
> "A few months ago I thought the slaughter of the Civil War, and the agitation of the violent Abolitionists who helped bring it on, were evil. But possibly they had to be violent, because easy-going citizens like me couldn't be stirred up otherwise. If our grandfathers had had the alertness and courage to see the evils of slavery and of a government conducted by gentlemen for gentlemen only, there wouldn't have been any need of agitators and war and blood.
>
> "It's my sort, the Responsible Citizens who've felt ourselves superior because we've been well-to-do and what we thought was 'educated,' who brought on the Civil War, the French Revolution, and now the Fascist Dictatorship. It's I who murdered Rabbi de Verez. It's I who persecuted the Jews and the Negroes. I can blame no Aras Dilley, no Shad Ledue, no Buzz Windrip, but only my own timid soul and browsy mind. Forgive, O Lord!
>
> "It it too late?"[2]

---

[1] Hicks, op. cit., p. 273.

[2] Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, p. 224.

In this last question, one sees Sinclair Lewis's appeal to thinking America. One is inclined to conclude the author does not think it too late if Americans will become alert to their social responsibilities. Granville Hicks says that to save the country from Fascism, something more than a fierce protest is needed. He suggests the building of a decent social order. Perhaps that is what Sinclair Lewis is suggesting. Certainly, study of his attitudes exhibited in his previous books leads one to the conclusion that the creation of a new social order is the ideal solution for the ills which beset America.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Restatement of the problem. Because Sinclair Lewis is the only American to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, the purpose of this study is (1) that of tracing the development of the novelist's skill in the creation of social satires; and (2) that of studying his attitudes toward the American life which is reflected in his writings.

Summary of the findings. A subtle change in the mental thinking of Sinclair Lewis is discernible when one analyzes Mr. Lewis's works, which have appeared over a period of approximately twenty years. One sees the exuberance of optimistic aspirations in the youthful Lewis gradually deepening into cynicism in the maturing Lewis, until, suddenly, he becomes discontented with the whole social order and flares into open rebellion in Main Street and Babbitt. Then, Mr. Lewis seems to realize that while rebellion in itself is good, rebellion for a purpose is decidedly better. Henceforth, the Lewis books exhibit a specific aim: Arrowsmith pleads for professional integrity; Elmer Gantry decries sensationalism in religion and advocates a quiet faith in God; Dodsworth censures the "all work and no play" policy of many business men as detrimental to their ultimate happiness; Ann Vickers challenges Society to reconstruct an adequate program for dealing with crime and the prevention of crime; and It Can't Happen Here warns that a dictatorship is entirely

possible in America, and suggests that each citizen should awaken to his political responsibilities.

Mr. Lewis seeks to accomplish reform by ridiculing present-day America and Americans. He uses a type of description which the critics have termed "photographic realism." He achieves such realism by assembling in one character, for example, details and characteristics of many individuals of a similar nature. The result appears to be an authentic type. His similies and metaphors often resolve themselves into comparisons with commonplace objects, animals, vegetables, fruits, et cetera, and his descriptions are consequently so simple that a child can comprehend them readily. For instance, he describes life as a game of checkers, a certain woman as resembling two apples placed one upon the other, or Dr. Tubbs's facial expression as that of a whiskered terrier. He achieves his effects by incorporating into his books the language of the man on the street, in short, the American language, in all of its idiomatic vigor. The contexture of his creation of types, his descriptive analysis, and his use of the vernacular of America form the style of Sinclair Lewis's writings, namely, "photographic realism."

A summary of the attitudes of Mr. Lewis toward Materialist America as revealed in his works includes the following points:

1. The average American man does not have a true comprehension of the meaning of culture; nevertheless, he is in mad pursuit of the evidences of culture.

2. The American business man is a ridiculous individual in his obvious efforts to conform to accepted standards.

3. The average American minister and layman are more preoccupied with the routine of church work and showmanship, than they are with the true conception of the leadership of Christ.

4. Professional integrity in medicine and science demands sacrifice from a physician or scientist in Materialist America, but it is worth the relinquishing of wealth, social and professional position, and the fickle admiration of the multitudes.

5. Impersonal and organized charity is preferable to personal and inefficient effort in social service.

6. Prisons are in a deplorable condition in America; prison officials should be trained to cure criminals of an ethical illness.

7. A too rigid observance of convention and standardization is warping the minds of the American people.

8. A Fascist regime in the United States is not an impossibility, or even an improbability.

Conclusions. The writer believes Sinclair Lewis to be a man who sincerely wishes to correct the evils and weaknesses of the present American social order. Therefore, he concludes that the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930 to Sinclair Lewis is entirely justifiable and commendable, inasmuch as the recipient of the prize must have done work of an idealistic tendency. The writer further contends that Mr. Lewis's novels are significant, because they tend to stimulate social thinking.

Limitations of the study. A work of this kind is necessarily more subjective than objective, and for this reason some of the conclusions are

not susceptible of complete objective proof. However, by logical reasoning and substantiation by authorities whenever such were available, the writer has endeavored to make this study as reliable as possible.

Suggestions for further study. Sinclair Lewis's writings are ever open to destructive and constructive criticism. Therefore, a defense of, or critical attack upon, any of the aspects of his work would provide interesting studies. The following topics are suggestive of further possibilities:

1. The evangelism and idealism of Sinclair Lewis.
2. Sinclair Lewis, the cameraman of America.
3. Sinclair Lewis, historian of the twentieth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANNOTATED SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

Lewis, Sinclair, Our Mr. Wrenn. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1914. 253 pp.

The story of a mild little clerk seeking culture in foreign travel. Representative as the first novel.

. . . ., The Trail of the Hawk. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1915. n. p.

The story of an aviator which carries the message of the mission of America in aviation.

. . . ., The Job. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1917. 325 pp.

The story of the new woman making a career in business.

. . . ., Main Street. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. 451 pp.

The story of Carol Kennicott, an idealist, who finds the small town intellectually dead and dull.

. . . ., Babbitt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1922. 401 pp.

American middle class life in a good sized city symbolized by an average American business man, George F. Babbitt.

. . . ., Arrowsmith. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1925. 415 pp.

Saterizes the medical profession, both private and public practice. Martin Arrowsmith, a medical student is the hero of the book.

. . . ., Mantrap. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1926. 308 pp.

A light hearted but excellent novel which shows that the author can tell a story when he chooses to put sociology and satire aside. Even this humorous romance is not without satire the sting of which is directed against the American masculine convention of a hunting holiday.

* * * *, Elmer Gantry. New York: Harcourt, 1927. 432 pp.

Points out all that is most grotesque and vulgar in sectarian religion.

* * * *, The Man Who Knew Coolidge. New York: Harcourt, 1928. 275 pp.

Monologues put into the mouth of Lowell Schmaltz. You Know How Women Are-You Know How Relatives Are-Travel Is So Broadening-The Basis and Fundamental Ideas of Christian American Citizenship.

* * * *, Dodsworth. New York: Harcourt, 1929. 377 pp.

Satirizes the American business man abroad seeking culture in foreign travel.

* * * *, Ann Vickers. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1933. 562 pp.

The story of woman's triumph over the customs of an older world. Its keen satire completely bares the truth about the social worker and the penologist.

* * * *, Work of Art. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1934. 452 pp.

A revelation of the intricacies of the modern hotel system. Myron Weagle, the plodder, seeks to build the ideal hotel.

* * * *, Selected Short Stories. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1935. 462 pp.

This book contains representative short stories taken from various popular magazines in the last ten years. The stories are as follows: "Let's Play King," pp. 5-95; "The Willow Walk," pp. 99-140; "The Cat of Stars," pp. 143-158; "Land," pp. 161-188; "A Letter From the Queen," pp. 191-212; "The Ghost Patrol," pp. 215-231; "Things," pp. 235-277; "Young Man Axelbrod," pp. 281-298; "Speed," pp. 301-318; "The Kidnapped Memorial," pp. 321-337; "Moth in the Arc-Light," pp. 341-382; "The Hack Driver," pp. 385-393; "Go East, Young Man," pp. 397-425.

* * * *, It Can't Happen Here. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1935. 458 pp.

A novel of the future, the quite near future, in which the author pictures what will happen to America when a dictator comes to power.

Van Doren, Carl and Harvey Taylor, Sinclair Lewis, A Biographical Sketch. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1933. 205 pp.

A brief biographical and critical sketch of Sinclair Lewis followed by a bibliography which takes up more than half the book and an index to the bibliography.

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

I. PERIODICALS

Anderson, Sherwood, "Four American Impressions," New Republic, 32:172-73, October 11, 1922.

An excellent critical evaluation of the purposes back of Sinclair Lewis's satires.

Benet, William Rose, "The Earlier Lewis," Saturday Review of Literature, 10: 421-2, January 30, 1934.

An account of life with Lewis at Yale, Carmel, Cal., and in New York. Interesting insight into the character and characteristics of the novelist.

Bensee, Harry Lorin, and John R. Troumstine, "Europe Looks at Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, 72: 455-57, January, 1931.

Explains Europe's approval of the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, not only because of the author's literary achievement, but because he explained America to Europe.

Book Review Digest, 31 vols. New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1915-1935.

Gives concise critical comments taken from leading magazines and papers on all books published.

Cabell, James Branch, "A Note As to Sinclair Lewis," American Mercury, 20:394-97, August, 1930.

Interprets the questions uppermost in Lewis's mind when writing his satires and explains the meaning of Babbitt.

Canby, Henry Seidel, "Sinclair Lewis's Art of Work," Saturday Review of Literature, 10:465, February 10, 1934.

An excellent analysis of the method Lewis employs when writing a novel. Describes Lewis's notebook, diagrams, and blueprints of his fictitious villages.

De Casseres, Benjamin, "Portraits in Brochette," Bookman, 73:488, July, 1931.

Brief portrait of the novelist and comment on his work as the only authentic historian of the twentieth century America.

Hicks, Granville, "Sinclair Lewis and the Good Life," The English Journal, 265-273, April, 1936.

Treats Sinclair Lewis as a moralist, as a man striving to learn what is good in life.

Lewis, Sinclair, "Is America a Paradise for Women? Yes," Pictorial Review, 30:14-14, 56, 58, 60, June, 1929.

A good discussion of why the novelist believes American women are more fortunate than European women.

"Lewis Travels Far," Literary Digest, 115:18-19, March 4, 1933.

Reports how many languages the Lewis books are translated into and adds an excellent review of Ann Vickers.

"Life, Letters, the Arts, 'Arrowsmith in Germany,'" 529:381, Living Age, May 15, 1936.

An excellent book review of Arrowsmith showing how it was received in Germany.

Lynam, Hazel Palmer, "Sinclair Lewis as a Young Man," Saturday Review of Literature, 10:628, April 14, 1934.

A brief but interesting description of Lewis as a boy in Sauk Center.

Maurice, Arthur Bartlett, "The History of Their Books," Bookman, 69:52-53, March 1929.

Amusing account of the numbers of cities which recognized themselves as the Zenith of Babbitt and of the ministers who thought they were the original Elmer Gantrys. Explains the original plans of Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, and Dodsworth.

Moraud, Paul, "Paul Moraud Looks At Sinclair Lewis," Living Age, 338-253-4, April 15, 1930.

An appraisal of Sinclair Lewis's attitude toward American problems. Praises Sinclair Lewis's attack on America.

Mumford, Lewis, "The America of Sinclair Lewis," Current History, 33:529-535, January, 1931.

An excellent review of the satire contained in Lewis's major novels.

Overton, Grant, "The Salvation of Sinclair Lewis," Bookman, 61:170-85, April, 1925.

A good discussion of the personal characteristics of the novelist as well as of the influence of H. G. Wells on him.

Phelps, William Lyon, "As I Like It," Scribner's, April 1933, pp. 256.

An interesting comparison of Dickens's attitude toward prisons and that of Sinclair Lewis.

. . . ., "As I Like It," Scribner's, March, 1931, pp. 325-8.

Defends the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Lewis. Gives a valuable list of all other persons receiving this award.

"Sinclair Lewis Struts His Stuff," Literary Digest, 107:13-15, December 27, 1930.

Review of current opinions of the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Sinclair Lewis.

II. ESSAYS

Baldwin, Charles Crittenden, "Sinclair Lewis," Men Who Make Our Novels New York: Moffat, Yard, and Co., 1919. pp. 223-27.

A brief biography of Sinclair Lewis written in part by Lewis himself.

Lippmann, Walter, "Sinclair Lewis," Men of Destiny, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928. pp. 71-92.

Explains the timeliness of Lewis's novels, his talent for inventing stereotypes, and considers Lewis as a reformer. Presents also a criticism of his writing.

Mais, Stuart Peter Brodie, "Sinclair Lewis," Some Modern Authors, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1923. pp. 98-103.

Discusses the merits and faults of Sinclair Lewis's work with special emphasis upon Babbitt.

Michaud, Regis, "Sinclair Lewis and the Average Man," The American Novel To-Day. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1928. pp. 128-153.

A clear, logical, and interesting discussion of the sociology and psychology of Sinclair Lewis's novels.

Pattee, Fred Lewis, "Sinclair Lewis," The New American Literature, 1890-1930. New York: Century Co., 1930. pp. 32, 338-342.

Explains the importance of understanding Lewis's first three novels in order to understand those that follow.

Sherman, Stuart P., "The Significance of Sinclair Lewis," pam. 28 pp.

Gives an interesting sketch of his life. Explains that his books are not representative of the highest American standards but neither were Huckleberry Finn, Vanity Fair or David Copperfield.

Squire, J. C., "Sinclair Lewis" by Milton Waldman, Contemporary American Authors. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1928. pp. 70-94.

Gives an excellent discussion of the major novels of Lewis emphasizing the fact that it is not American institutions which Lewis ridicules, but American complacency, provincialism, narrowness of thought, and the reduction of all life's values to a material basis.

Van Doren, Carl and Mark, "Sinclair Lewis," American and British Literature Since 1890. New York: The Century Co., pp. 81-83.

Shows that because Main Street and Babbitt were timely they were extremely popular. They reflected the new spirit which had arisen in America.

Whipple, T. K., "Sinclair Lewis," The Spokesman. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1928. pp. 208-229.

An adequate and interesting discussion of the satire in the works of Lewis; he also discusses the romanticism in Sinclair Lewis.