

# A TOWN IS BUILT

BY IDWAL JONES

TO THE left, the sierra offered a fine assortment of snowy crags, crystalline and aloof. I shivered, for I had been routed out at the inhuman hour of 5 A.M., and the cold was unbelievable. Both the chauffeur and myself were swathed like explorers bound for the inclement Pole. He was an oldish man, with a dewdrop at the end of his nose, yet he still had the adventurous spirit, for ever since dawn he had been sending the car at top speed over the dry lakes and up the steep canyon trail that ascended to this world of upheaved and jagged porphyry.

"What beats me," he shouted, "is how the news of the strike got around so. It happened only night before last, and already miners have come from Winnemucca and Death Valley. And here you come, a man from the papers. Goldfield was two years old before it got into the news. How did anybody know about Weepah?"

"There are such things as the telegraph," I said, "and the automobile that doesn't sleep like the burro, but travels all night. And there is the radio—yes, decidedly, the radio. Imagine what a radio announcer can do with a name like Weepah."

The next moment we were over the ridge, and on the plateau. "Only two miles more," he remarked, shifting the gears. "We made the run from Tonopah, fifty miles, in little better than an hour. Back in 1897 it took me three days, coming in with two mules and a buckboard."

Here was a region of appalling stillness, glistening with rime frost, as bleak as a dead planet silvered by the moon. We bumped steadily on, over clumps of sad-green sage-brush and mounds thrown up

by the gophers. At the foot of a hillock were an ancient cabin and three tents, and here we stopped.

"This is Weepah," announced the chauffeur, throwing out my traps upon the sand. "I hope you'll have a good time. There's nothing like a rub of soap on your nose to ward off pneumonia. If you feel it coming on, better grab the night train for Reno—or you'll pop out. And look out for the alkali water. If I was you, I wouldn't drink any water at all. The whiskey around here is pretty good."

He departed. I found myself the sole spectator of some handsome celestial effects. Nature, like some oblivious and gigantic scene shifter, was occupied busily in moving cycloramas overhead. The sky in the east paled from liver-color to isabel, then to variegated shades of coral, that gave way slowly to a protracted sulphur hue, against which the rhyolite peaks etched their black profiles. Even at this hour one knows what it is to be enamored of the spell of the desert. The altitude on this plateau was 6400 feet. There was no moisture, nor any sign of animal life. The land was bone-dry, inhospitable even to such hardy flora as the Joshua trees, which make whimsical the desert around Goldfield, thirty miles to the south.

But the sage-brush was everywhere. I threw a lighted match into a clump of it. The conflagration was spectacular. Frowsy heads emerged from the tents. Weepah was already awake. I set out on a preliminary survey, and climbed a ridge whence I could look to the east. Here, in the valley, seemed to be a large body of water, turquoise blue, strewn with islands that were

built up and wooded, as in Bœcklin's dream paintings. Over all hung a golden and palpitant morning haze. I unslung my binoculars—and saw that all was mirage. The lake resolved itself into a flat of white and poisonous alkali dust, and the islets were patches of black sand. The haze came from whirlwinds that meandered slowly and ghostily over the surface.

Equipped with a compass and map, I went northward to some forbidding hills, scrambled over igneous rocks, and after a heap of trouble found a weathered excavation ten feet deep. Spaniards in the days of the *conquistadores* had done some digging hereabouts, and pried out silver ore to make filigree ornaments of, and tunic buttons. Heat cracks radiated over the foot-wall. The *soldados* had sweated like Vulcans to build fires—doubtless in Summer when the air itself was like a flame—and, after the rock was glowing, had cracked it by dashing on water. No mules could have scaled that cliff. The waterskins and wood must have been carried up pick-a-back, and the ore brought down likewise. This was stimulating to contemplate. Those forgotten first delvers in Weepah had their heroic qualities.

The country below was as bleak as a tundra. The wind swept down from the Silver Peaks, picking up loads of grit en route, and swirled down in the hollow where the tents were pitched. Such owners as were busied outside walked backwards, like crabs, with arms shielding their faces. One detached himself and came up to meet me.

"In case you don't know," he said, "all that ground up there is located. You're late. There was five hundred people staking out claims in the blizzard six hours after news of the strike got to Weepah." He pointed to some vague place leagues off, and added, "If you like, I'll sell you a claim, only a half mile from Horton's prospect."

"Thanks, it's not in my line," I answered.

He looked embarrassed. "I thought you

was a native son, brought up on Alber's mush. Those Californians are placer men, and we sort of expect some claim jumping. In Nevada you file claims to do lode mining, but that don't cover surface rights, which go down to bed rock, and the same land can be filed on twice."

## II

Two flivvers, piled high with bedding and tools, drove in. Each held four passengers, bundled in great coats, and bore a Utah license plate. Soon more came—a dozen or so. Scattered along the trail from the opposite rim were a hundred, with rolls of canvas and poles lashed to the running boards, and the back seats laden with supplies and assaying apparatus. The rush to Weepah was on. Gold miners need no telegraph or radio. They may be digging in some blind canyon, a thousand miles away, and a highly specialized nerve in their heads informs them of a strike—and they are off before dawn.

The procedure of everyone on arriving was to walk up the hillock that was now black with spectators. Here was an excavation, much smaller than the Spaniards', and in it an elderly man with a beatific, flustered smile. He was the owner of the claim, Frank Horton. He looked less a miner than anybody else. With his shabby brown business suit, watch-chain and spectacles he had the appearance of someone in the delicatessen business. He spoke, and fifty visitors, looking into the hole, listened with deference. Whom the gods have favored, their words are oracular.

He had been talking for two days, and his eyes were almost ruined by reading telegrams, but he was still voluble and courteous. A motion picture camera man set up the tripod and began to turn the crank. The group fell into picturesque attitudes, facing the lens, and Horton obligingly went through the motions expected of a miner. He chipped at a ledge of yellow rock, pulverized some of it in a mortar with the butt end of a crowbar, and, wash-

ing it in a frying-pan full of muddy ice-water, showed two handfuls of gold.

"Break away, gents," shouted the camera man. "The theatres ain't goin' to pay to see your hats!"

A whirring sounded overhead. It was an airplane that circled like a condor, then alighted, to disgorge two Hollywood brokers arrayed in the very latest swank of golfing attire. Perhaps their cinema clients had wearied of dabbling in oil. Nobody turned a head to watch the visitors from the sky, who had thus risked their necks in the cause of *réclame*, and who now came hurrying up to the prospect. One of them seized the pan, appraised the residue, then scribbled on an envelope. He showed me the figures.

"Over \$78,000 to the ton," he said, "and possibly a hundred dollars' worth of silver. As rich as Old Breyfogle's find!"

A throaty, *vox humana* horn gnawed the air. The car, an under-slung desert cruiser, with its enamel scoured off by the sandblasts in Death Valley, testified to the advent of a person of importance. It was an Eminent Engineer. He waddled up to us, rolling a cigar between his lips, and keeping his gaze fixed on a mine gallows some two hundred feet higher up on the slope. It was above the old mine Horton had been toiling in without luck for fifteen years.

"How does the ledge lie?" he asked, without looking into the hole.

"North-east by south-west," said everyone at once.

He turned an absorbed eye upon the scenery. "Hear that?" he murmured. "That's the lay of every pay-shoot in Esmeralda county. I always said that in my reports. Ever read any of my reports?" he asked of me hopefully. "I'll send you a couple of volumes of them if you like."

There was nothing I could have liked less, but before I could say something non-committal, he had his coat off, and was down on his knees squinting at the ledge. He broke off chips, split them with his jack-knife into flakes, and jabbed the blade into the rock with the cold, morose de-

tachment of a scientist dissecting a bull-frog. Fifty men watched him intently. They would have given a good deal to know what was going on inside his head. It was believed by all right-minded desert rats that he possessed the *x-ray* eye, and could see fathoms deep into solid earth, even below the dense substratum of trachite. They watched his face as he arose, but it was blank, and the specimens fell from his hands, which he half opened as if with indifference.

One of the brokers ended the silence. "What do you think—a pocket, maybe?"

The Eminent Engineer put on his horn-rim spectacles, and bowed his head in heavy thought. "There may be successive pockets below. I will go so far as to affirm that," he said, with an air of finality.

He had put the seal on the camp. The holy words were repeated with unction and hilarity. A decayed flivver-nomad gave a shout: "I ain't never saw the like! And I seen some fancy ores took out of the old Yellow Jacket, up to the Comstock, and the January claims down in Goldfield!"

The great man turned to me and said, "Mining has gone to Hell the last ten years. Do you know what's the matter? The confounded automobiles! They have damned near ruined Nevada. Nobody's finding mines any more. These fancy ore scouts stick close to the highways so as to spare their tires. Over two-thirds of the big mines in Nevada were found by burros hunting for grass, or by their masters who spent half their lives hunting for the strayed burros."

Fancy scouts! Well, the prospectors had changed, certainly. Here were a score of them surging about this pit. All were dressed in semi-military style, with leggings and mackinaws—with not a single beard amongst them. Most of them had gone through the School of Mines. Not one but could perform a "cupellation" with the finesse of a Cripple Creek assayer. Gone are the rule-of-thumb old timers who prodded the burro, cursing meanwhile every tooth out of their heads, and brav-

ing heat-waves that would have daunted Abednego.

Nor was there a burro in sight. This mild, stubborn and interesting animal is almost as extinct as the Great Auk. The economic justification for his being is gone. In a rush—and all prospectors live in expectation of a rush coming with the dawn—the fleetest-footed of him is a thousand times more expensive than a flivver. The modern ore-scout, who cruises three hundred miles between sun-up and dusk, with antennæ out to catch the faintest rumor of a strike, invests in a powerful motor just as a foraying Arab lays it out on a Bishr camel.

### III

The sun appeared, and it was a bright Sunday. Automobiles were still winding upwards through the grim defile of Paymaster Canyon, full of citizens of Tonopah and Goldfield coming out for an outing. The newcomers, merchants and their families, youths and flappers out sparking, climbed up to the prospect, carrying lunch-boxes and kodaks. A guard was now posted at the hole to vouchsafe all the information required, and to prevent enthusiasts taking away nuggets. Horton had already given away five thousand dollars' worth.

"Oh—is that it?" exclaimed a stout boarding-house mistress. She had two pudgy little boys with her, dressed in one-piece knitted suits, and was quite out of breath. "It looks like chalk rubbed with mustard." She was manifestly disappointed. "Lord-a-mercy, I don't see nothin' to get excited about."

The guard was crestfallen. "Well, ma'am," he explained, "they's some rock that does look prettier. But the way this was found sort of makes up for it. Horton had been diggin' around here since you was a girl—and so has lots of men for forty years. Then along comes Horton's kid and digs a hole right here by this path where his dad had walked for fifteen years—right

by the path from the cook-house to the mine, mind you, where nobody but a kid would think of looking—and strikes it rich."

Which was perfectly true. Horton had stayed on, whilst others had rushed from one camp to another. It was they, returned once more to their abandoned locations, who were swinging their picks all over the surrounding hills.

In a flint-strewn gully I ran into a pink-cheeked promoter, whistling to himself, who was turning over rocks with his boot.

"What started it?" he began. "I was just about ready to boom Jarbridge and Gilbert, and I dropped them both when everybody said Weepah. Got it on the radio down in Arizona. This camp has had more publicity in two days than Goldfield, poor old Goldfield, got in two years. What's the psychology?"

"Human interest, I suppose. Horton was just signing a quit-claim in a banker's office in Los Angeles when he got the telegram saying that his boy had struck it rich the night before."

"Was he busted?"

"Quite. The sheriff had plastered the shack, and there were the new twins, and Mrs. Horton in sheer desperation had grubstaked the oldest boy. So the family fortune was saved, as in the movies. That broke into the front pages. Besides, there hasn't been a gold rush in ten years. Found any values?"

He hoisted his shoulders. "I've got some parcels of ground, five locations, all filed proper." He tossed pebbles in various directions. "Over there is Pussywillow Annex. Over here, Pussywillow Annex Extension—Number One, Two, Three, Four. The certificates are on the press now, and tomorrow they'll be listed on the Exchange. I'll give you a cut-in of a thousand shares. Don't mention it. Give them to the baby, or use them for cigar-lighters."

"Looks like a hand-picked Goldfield crowd at the camp," I said.

He bit a cigar-end, and grunted, "Hand-plucked, you mean."

Weepah had increased by five tents and twenty more cars when we got back. An aged photographer in furs had set up a camera, and swains lined up to get snapped in manly attitudes. Behind a plank, set on two barrels, a withered Chinaman with three hairs on his chin dispensed hot coffee and frankfurters. It was noon, and a thousand visitors were milling back and forth on the sand between the two long rows of parked cars. The United States was represented by a marquee that bore the sign: Federal Minerals Surveyor. At intervals the dignitary came out, and was besieged by nervous women in khaki, who pleaded with him to certify that their boundary lines were right. Two Indians, under cowboy hats, with scarlet kerchiefs about their necks and wearing sky-blue overalls washed for Sunday, strolled up and down wonderingly. A newsboy walked around, piping, "Pay-pers, get your Sunday pay-pers! All 'bout the great gold rush to Wee-paw!"

Who could withstand this appeal to civic pride? He sold six armfuls. A dusty Ford nosed into an open space, and there descended two stoutish and formidable females from Los Angeles. They shook out a carpet, erected a tent, a portable kerosene stove, put on it water to boil for tea, then, with arms folded, sat on a folding bench and gazed with complacency on the throng.

I watched them with a dreadful fascination. One of them began to knit, and the other to munch hermit cakes out of a black reticule. They gave a settled air to the desert. From the adjoining tent a benevolent gentleman came out with a handful of boards and tools. He wore a Prince Albert and top-boots, and my conjecture was that he had come to serve Weepah in some ministerial capacity. The least I could do, in deference to his years, was to assist him as he contrived a sort of pulpit, which he covered neatly with green baize. Then he produced, quite magically, a leather cup and dice.

"Step right up this way, gents!" he

called. "All ready for the first game in camp, all ready—ready—ready!"

Two Jewish merchants opened the first store. That is, they displayed for sale quantities of colored blankets and flowered cotton quilts, very pretty. But everybody, it seemed, was stocked up, so they flitted to try their luck at Beatty, two hundred miles away. Distances mean nothing on the Nevada desert. Three trucks rumbled in, and left piles of lumber and a lurching water-tank, with a sign: "One Cent a Gal," fetched up, but since nobody wanted the fluid in such wholesale lots, the driver filled up a number of canteens and dish-pans gratis. A Salvation Army lassie dismounted from a Ford and began to hawk the *War Cry*.

The ensemble reminded me of a sale of subdivision lots—with nobody buying. So far, Weepah had not contributed a spoonful of gold to the general weal. The initiative rested with the gentlemen of the Stock Exchange. There was great talk at the open-air bourse in the lee of the cook-house, where I gathered that nothing much would be done until one entitled George Thatcher came down—then, sir, the camp will "crack open." Already his engineer, endowed with full powers, was on the ground. Nobody would be surprised in the least if this George Thatcher himself should arrive in the morning and take things in hand. Of course, everything depended on the report the engineer turned in.

Meantime, there was a twiddling of numb fingers. The sky became dark, and the wind, spitting snow from the Silver Peaks, smote the tents with a noise like pistol shots. The desert was having its little joke, and all hands made for shelter. All except a man in a fur coat, who was squinting through a theodolite, and making notes in a book. He followed the incredible calling of desert realtor, and made a specialty of boom camps. As always, he was in a hurry to forestall pioneers who might otherwise claim squatters' rights in the middle of his precious Main street.

## IV

The prominent citizens, one by one, vanished into the largest tent. Evidently it was the social center, for it bulged with inmates. A square of tar-paper, scrawled with chalk, proclaimed it to be the Weepah Club. It was a cave of harmony, for a mechanical piano with snarled inners emitted a cataclysmic sound, in which a thread of melody was recognizable, faintly, as "Waltz Me Around Again, Willy." Here I found the Eminent Engineer, a couple of Senators, a judge or two, and, later, the town-site man. Most of the patrons were miners, who sat on the ground, leaning against the canvas. A bar-keep with a spit curl and a snowy apron presided at the counter and dispensed whiskey at forty cents "a slug" from a catsup bottle. The heat was overpowering, for the sheet-iron stove, packed with sagebrush, was white hot.

Two ladies, a phthisical blonde and a chunky Mexican belle with an incipient moustache, danced indefatigably with the patrons, their fee for entertaining being the purchase of two drinks at the bar for a dollar. The soul of the party was the gentleman I had mistaken for a cleric. He danced with the hostesses, he danced with the members of the bourse, and he danced by himself, leaping into the air and clicking the heels of his top-boots, emitting the while loud, un-evangelical whoops. He was Terpsichore gone rampant. Had not the chauffeur that morning said the whiskey was good?

The desert rats warmly applauded the show. They gave forth an odor that was a blend of cooking-grease, perspiration and briar pipes, and the comfortable feeling that they had æons of leisure before them. The Eminent Engineer, recumbent, with legs crossed, introduced me to them. He knew them all. He knew everybody in Nevada, though he spends most of his time in a deep leather armchair in a San Francisco club, smokes fifty-cent cigars, being villainously rich, buys etchings, scrapes

the fiddle a bit, and is a patron of the Hertz Symphony.

"What's become of Indian Pinenut Jimmy?" he demanded. He blew out luxuriously a whiff of cigarette smoke. "His Barrel Spring location is close by here, and I thought that prospect pretty good, what with values in the silicas of the altered granite."

"There's tungsten in that plot," answered one miner. "I seen stringers of it in the glory hole."

"Heard 'at Pinenut deeded over his claims and is working for Death Valley Scotty," said another.

"Well, I've got two claims that I just refused \$50,000 for, only yesterday," remarked an old hard-rock man with muscle-bound shoulders and a frowsy moustache.

This was true to the extent that he had been offered fifty dollars in cash and a vague promise of the rest in certificates not yet printed. One stranger got up and inveighed loudly against the injustice done Winnemucca. It was impossible, he said, to get a line into the papers even if steam shovels at that camp turned up gold eagles by the trainload. Weepah was hogging all the publicity. But since he was from Northern Nevada his lament was listened to unfeelingly.

"Goldfield Con. has gone up so many points since last week," said the Eminent Engineer. "Down at the five-thousand-foot level they struck snow-white rock banded with pure gold. It made a buzz on Wall Street, but not a single boomer got dragged back to Goldfield. It isn't figures, or production, that makes a camp. It's the virgin field, the excitement, the sense of adventure—the big gamble and the fun of it. People can't shake off the idea that old Goldfield is played out. Anyway, the land is all patented, and it's only the chance of owning some that brings out the enterprising."

"What I don't get," exclaimed the dice-and-pulpit gentleman, who entered again, "is why you sour-doughs don't go out and pan gold—if there's so much of it in Wee-

pah. Or are you waiting for George Thatcher to give you permission?"

The sarcasm told. Obviously, he had drifted in from California, where rills and springs abound, and the vicinity of a gold strike, in the foothills, say, swarms with newcomers who work the Long Tom or cradle on their own account. As for Weepah, the nearest supply of water is in some gully ten miles off.

"And another thing I'd like to know is," he said, "who is George Thatcher?"

A miner got up and tapped him on the shoulder. "It ain't your fault that you are a native son," he said, delicately. "But now that you are here you might as well learn to be respectful to a big fellow that has grubstaked better men than you, and never asked questions. He's Senator George Wingfield, but there's no call to go shouting it aloud."

With the approach of dusk the noise of hammering and the clatter of trucks had abated, and we emerged to behold two long lines of tents and wooden shacks. The town-site man had resumed his surveying.

"Inside of a week you won't know the place," he said. "There'll be a post-office and a couple of dance halls and a chiropractor office—perhaps moved over from Manhattan on skids."

The day's work had been done. The town, a collaboration by adventurers who had met through chance that morning on the desert, was built. Before the club, the phthisical blonde puffed her cigarette and gazed over the landscape, now tinted with a faint wash of orange.

"Take you back to Tonopah, Flossie?" invited the Eminent Engineer, as we got into his car.

"I reckon not," she said. "I been there long enough to git tired of city life. I always liked the desert—and besides I've got to hang on to these three claims I staked out on the hill until somebody buys them off me. G'night, pefessor. Give my love to the old crowd over at the Harem Café. And wave good-bye to Laughing Ole for me. He's going home."

Dogs yapped. Somebody sang to an accordion. An old miner with a pipe in his mouth was tying a piece of green ribbon to his tent flap in observance of St. Patrick's Day. The stoutish and efficient ladies from Los Angeles were frying bacon outside their temporary canvas home.

"It has all the earmarks of a permanent camp," said the Eminent Engineer.

## V

We returned at top speed to Tonopah, hurtling down through the canyon, going at eighty miles an hour over the smooth dry lake, and climbing the desert slope in the direction of Lone Mountain. My companion pointed to the chain of hills known as the Divide, and the line of dead mine workings, and singled out one hoist just barely visible.

"Right there they found gold," he said. "But not a single one of the others produced a pennyworth. Keeley Motors and the Mississippi Bubble weren't in it with the Divide. People were Hell-bent on buying stocks, so the promoters obliged by sinking a few holes. A psychological boom, you understand. They couldn't gamble during the war, and got loaded up with Liberty Bonds, and in 1918, when they were below par, promoters exchanged them at face value for stock. Shocking? Well, I don't know. People will always gamble, and stocks are no dearer than a chance on the ponies. You can sell out—if you are clever enough. I don't buy any myself, because I get enough stimulus out of my profession as it is."

We dropped on to a plain that, for a hundred acres, was of a strange beauty. The area might have been strewn ankle deep with stones that sparkled and reflected iridescent tints in the evening light. I thought of Sinbad's adventures with the roc and the jewels. Then there were deeper tone, ochre-like patches, reminiscent of corroded tins and old stove-tops. So they were, and the jewels turned out to be shards of glass.

"Well, we're coming to Tonopah," said my companion. "This is the city dump. I suppose there must be fifty million champagne bottles broken up around here. I know I drank my share, in 1903 and in the days of the Divide boom."

From a fifth-story window in an unexpectedly good hotel, the Engineer and myself leaned out to observe the panorama. The town, gray and gaunt, straddled on a heavy slope hemmed in with conical mountains, like dervish hats, and glittering with rime frost. The cross-roads seemed to end up suddenly at abandoned mines, topped with gallows-frames and motionless wheels. The place had a moribund air, deriving also from the rows of vacant stores down the main street. But there was no gainsaying a certain unwonted bustle. At least a hundred automobiles were nosed against the curbs. From the station walked pink-cheeked gentlemen in fur coats, carrying hand luggage and brief cases: a procession unwatched by the citizens, who were busily loading their cars with supplies, and one by one zipping, with great snorts of exhaust gas, up the hill for the desert. Here was a sense of adventure.

The Engineer, with his silvery head out of the window, was on his knees. Though he puffed at his pipe, and spat out occasionally, there was something rapt and ecstatic in his attitude, which was like that of a devotee at prayer. By chance, I wheeled about in the room, and my hand touched the brass bed-post, and I got an electrical shock. It was my first encounter with static at these dry altitudes. He did not heed my remarks.

"Old town's keeping up!" he cried lovingly. "Time and again we thought nothing could save it—then along came the Divide boom, then the Gilbert strike, then Manhattan, and Jarbridge—and now Weepah. By God, it'll live forever, and is still the second biggest town in Nevada. I was here when Frank Ish built the first wooden building back in naught-two. Goldfield

took the edge off us in naught-seven. Where is Goldfield now? Gone like Hans Breitman's 'barty.'"

The dinner hour came, then night, but from our point of vantage we saw that one quarter of the town remained dark.

"There must be something wrong," he said. "The arc-lights over at the Harem and the Casino dance-halls are out for the first time in years. Wonder what's happened?"

We descended, and, wrapped in fur coats—for it had come on to snow—we walked to the station, whence came on the wind lugubrious strains of music. A Salvation Army officer joined us.

"There is a lot of smouldering sentiment in a mining camp, sirs," he said, "hidden though it may be by a rough exterior, and when touched by the right chord it bursts forth in effulgent fervency. The girls are giving Laughing Ole of the Casino a funeral. He broke his neck yesterday."

On the platform were children of the desert, grouped about a coffin on a truck. Bareheaded were the miners, the prospectors, the faro-dealers and habitués of the clubs. The dance-hall women, with the rouge wiped off their faces, making them ghastly pale under the lamps, were singing "That Old Gang of Mine." Jazz had routed even from this desert town every horn and instrument of grave voice, but the few musicians made a brave sound with saxophones, guitars and trap-drums.

The strident air of "Good-Bye, Everybody" was the farewell. A girl pressed forward, kissed a wreath of sage-brush, and laid it tearfully on the coffin as it was wheeled into the baggage-car.

"He was the best spender in the desert region," said a miner, "and he never left the camp since 1905."

"That's the desert," said the Eminent Engineer, lighting a cigar. "All it gives you is a Hell of a good time, and Laughing Ole will be sorry to learn he missed Weepah by a day."

# A CURE FOR AUTHORS

BY LOUIS SHERWIN

SCENE: *A street outside a studio not far from Gramercy Park. SAM and GEORGE emerge in a hurry and a gust of alcohol and tobacco fumes.*

SAM—Ouf! I hope to the good Lord Jehovah I don't see another painting for six months—and I don't care if I never see another painter.

GEORGE—Why, Sam? I like painters. I'd a damned sight sooner associate with them than with writers. They're so much better informed, and on a much wider range of subjects.

SAM—I don't think so. All they ever seem to talk about is their own rotten trade, and I'm sick to death of it.

GEORGE—My good fool, everybody talks shop. Even bartenders, who are unusually catholic in their conversation. But writers are impossible. They can't talk anything *but* shop. And always their own miserable little corner of the *bodega*. Besides, they're always jabbering about themselves when I want to discourse about me.

SAM—Well, I'll be fried in goose-grease if your painter friends are any better. You'd think civilization began and ended on their messy palettes.

GEORGE—On the contrary, I've found them singularly free from the egocentric absorption of us quill-driving gentry. Musicians are the only folk who equal our occupational monomania.

SAM—How about actors?

GEORGE—Don't be flippant—I'm discussing people. Most, no, I think *all* the painters of my acquaintance are not only articulate about their own craft—with a pretty good insight into sculpture and architecture as well—but can also converse

intelligently about music, languages, literature, baseball, dancing, box-fighting, the theatre and, above all, the one topic on which all men are fluent, women. You remember what Horace Walpole said: "At my table we always talk bawdy so that everybody can join in."

SAM—I've never seen a painter get a girl away from *me* yet. And I've seen several of them try.

GEORGE—Mm, yes, maybe. I've noticed you getting gosh-awful nervous whenever one of them asks a gal of yours to pose for him. Be that as it may, it stands to reason that painters should have a wider range than writers. Personally I consider them more literate. They are certainly more traveled. Oh, I know that since scribbling has become better paid many of us take an occasional dash abroad. That isn't traveling. The majority of painters have had to *live* abroad in order to learn their trade.

SAM—That's an exploded myth. There are good schools and teachers here now.

GEORGE—Even so, the man who hasn't studied the best canvases in Paris, Florence, Munich, Rome, Amsterdam, to say nothing of Madrid and London, must feel incomplete. You'll consequently find more of them able to talk at least one foreign tongue than you will among the ink-slingers.

SAM—I admit most writers don't even know English.

GEORGE—I'm not discussing newspaper men. For myself, as an erstwhile Englishman, I prefer the racy idiom of these United States. But that's not the question. The point is that the narrowness of most writers is as scandalous as the hats of