

COUZENS OF MICHIGAN

BY FRANK R. KENT

IN AN unguarded moment, some twenty years ago, a great lawyer with a penetrating mind and long, intimate experience in the highest moneyed circles gave it as his profound conviction that there was in the world but one thing more timid than one million dollars and that was two million dollars.

The shot rang the bell. While the scale may have to be raised a bit to meet modern conditions, the idea is as sound now as then. In the main the fabulous figures of finance, the high bracket boys with their million-dollar incomes—some 280 of them, according to Treasury statistics—are a fearsome lot, restrained, restricted and weighted down by their wealth, apprehensive lest in some mysterious way it may melt away, worried over every tremble in the credit structure, painfully concerned about the strength of the social fabric, on guard as to what they say, cautious as to what they do, solemn and secretive, elusive and evasive, afraid of the Jews like Mr. Ford, of the journalists like Mr. Mellon, of ridicule like Mr. Morgan, of Hell's fire like Mr. Rockefeller. None of these whales, and few of the others who trail them closest in the matter of money, seem light of heart or free of spirit. The closeness with which they watch their step precludes any such state of being. Even those rare ones who absurdly call themselves Democrats are of an identical mold.

All of which makes it the more refreshing to find a man of many millions—not merely a millionaire, for mere millionaires are common enough these days, but one of the first string players who does not know whether he is worth ninety or a hundred

and sixty millions—it is refreshing to meet one of these Grade A money men who has got clear out from under the burden of his riches, who is neither afraid he is going to lose them nor has become denatured by their possession, who does not slink around full of suppressions, who is not watched over, guarded, protected and press-agented, who can—and does—say unwise and indiscreet things, who gets mad in the open and hits from the shoulder, who indulges his impulses and appetites, and kicks up his heels when he feels like it, and “acts natural.”

The interest in such a man is tremendously heightened when he is found in the United States Senate, where, without being in the least radical or erratic, despising the “damned Democrats” most cordially, considering himself a real Republican, thoroughly hard-headed and hard-boiled as to things in general, without the least trace of idealism and with no vestige of personal or political sympathy with the so-called Insurgents, he yet finds himself lined up with “those birds” most of the time simply because he revolts against the smug hypocrisy of the orthodox big money view and is too robust, mentally and physically, to stand the cant and bunk of an administration that is completely dominated by great wealth and in which cramped and puny figures like Coolidge and Kellogg stand out as heroes.

The extraordinary thing is that the burly virility of this man—James Couzens, Senator from Michigan—the amazing facts about his Senate career, the real drama of his blazing feud with the saintly Secretary of the Treasury, the awful blow he gave

the good Calvin in the Warren fight, his splendid isolation as the one multi-millionaire who opposed the first Mellon bill, his distinction as the only vastly rich man in the country who doesn't belong to the union—it is astonishing that these things, together with the present effort of Mr. Mellon, through the governmental machinery, to make him pay ten millions and more of alleged back taxes, have not kindled the spark of popular interest and made of him a really national figure. There is material here for a novel—everything save the love interest. The single incident of his putting \$1,000 cash—all he had, and \$100 of that borrowed—into Ford stock and getting a check for \$30,000,000 when he sold out twenty-one years later, after having divided honors with Henry as the business genius of the plant, would surely seem to be enough in itself. Those who ought to know say Jim Couzens carried that check around Detroit in his pocket for a solid week, showing it to his friends and having a good time until somebody figured out he was losing \$14 a minute in interest. Finally and reluctantly he put it in the bank.

By far the most interesting thing in connection with Mr. Couzens since he entered the Senate is his conflict with Mr. Mellon, which started two years ago, has grown increasingly bitter, is still going on, and promises to continue as long as these two implacable rich men, one of whom is high priest in the finance temple, the other of whom has been called the scab millionaire because he neither feels, thinks nor acts along the orthodox big money lines, have their health. It is a dramatic, colorful and vital fight, which has not been generally grasped nor properly pictured. Here they are, the two richest men in public life in this or any country, at this or any time, members of the same political faith, belonging to the same social clubs, visiting the same houses, and yet engaged in a personal war which can neither be arbitrated nor adjudicated and which has already affected the personal and political fortunes

of a score of other men. Between them they probably have more money than Mr. Coolidge, Mr. Dawes, the nine other members of the Cabinet, the nine Justices of the Supreme Court and the ninety-five other members of the Senate taken together—if you except T. Coleman Dupont, who is not enough of a Senator to count. It might be possible to throw in most of the members of the House and still be within the facts, but it is better to be on the safe side. Anyhow, they are staggeringly rich and their fight makes all other personal and political quarrels in Washington—and Washington is full of them—seem pale and sickly in comparison.

II

Its start was curiously trivial. A slight suppression of the smart Aleck impulse by certain second-class subordinates of Mr. Mellon might have preserved amicable relations and averted the break. That, at least, is the view of some who have the facts. But others who know Mr. Couzens best, who fully appreciate his fighting spirit and his inherent distaste for letting anybody get away with anything without a battle, but particularly a man of great wealth, think it would have come in any event. Here is the story: When, three years ago, the first Mellon tax bill was produced there arose from the newspapers all over the country a chorus of approval—in most cases before they had even seen the bill. It was then that the financially fortunate who pay taxes in the high brackets first put forth the quaint notion that Mr. Mellon is the "greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton." But when Senator Couzens got a copy of the original bill certain things about it did not seem to him clear or right. Thereupon, with Couzenish directness, he sat down and wrote a letter to Mr. Mellon about it.

Now, it is conceded that this first letter of Senator Couzens was a poor letter. It was badly expressed, had in it several half-baked criticisms and rather poor points.

It did not go to the root of the matter at all. Mr. Mellon, as is his custom, turned the letter over to the bright young men by whom he is surrounded. These snappy boys read the Couzens letter and snorted with delight. Their keen intellects saw at once all the openings it presented. "Here," they said, one to the other, "is a splendid chance to set one of these smart Senators down hard—to show him exactly where he gets off. This is our dish!" Thereupon, with great gusto, they sat down to prepare Mr. Mellon's reply, the idea of which was to make a monkey of Senator Couzens. No posted person thinks that Mr. Mellon, personally, wrote that reply any more than the well-informed think that either the first or second Mellon bill was really drawn by him. He leaves all that sort of thing—and most every other sort of thing—to the aforesaid bright young men. Usually they do not slip up, for they really are bright—at least some of them are—but this time they did. It is even probable that in addition to not having written the letter Mr. Mellon did not read it. All he did was to sign it. He relies to a much larger extent than is generally thought on his bright young men.

Well, when Senator Couzens received the letter he got genuinely angry, which was not surprising, for it was anything but complimentary to his intelligence. Pityingly, it pointed out his ignorance and commented on his crudity. He isn't a brilliant man, of course, and does not pretend to be. He did not go to college and says he was pretty poor at school except at mathematics. He is a direct fellow and not subtle. But he got all the subtle meanings in that Mellon letter all right and he didn't like them at all. First he swore for a while, and then he started to dig in and do some work. When next he wrote a letter to Mr. Mellon there was nothing half-baked about it. Also it *did* go to the root of the matter. Mr. Mellon turned it over to the same bright young men, but this time it took them considerable time to prepare his reply. They thought it would close the

controversy. Mr. Mellon signed it and mailed it, but strange to say, it produced no such effect. On the contrary, Senator Couzens soon made it plain that as a letter-writer he had just started. Presently the bright young men had their hands more than full and began to curse him in their sleep. The correspondence got hotter and hotter and finally Mr. Couzens jammed through the Senate, to the accompaniment of almost tearful protests from Senator David A. Reed of Pennsylvania, Mr. Mellon's Senatorial Spokesman, a resolution for a real probe of the Internal Revenue Bureau.

This nearly drove the bright young men wild and one of them—I don't know which one but I suspect—proceeded to do something for which the saintly Mr. Mellon should have taken him out on the South Lot, as the good Calvin so oddly calls it, and booted him around until the aged secretarial toe was tired. Certainly he deserved it, because he put the "greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton" in a position which shed neither lustre nor credit on him, and which, but for the extraordinary and unprecedented reverence in which he is held by the press, might easily have proved so uncomfortable that he would have been glad to go back to that curious Pittsburgh seclusion from which he emerged in 1920, the most alarmed-looking man who ever came to Washington.

What happened was this: At the time the minority Ford stockholders, chief of whom was Mr. Couzens, sold their stock to Mr. Ford, the Internal Revenue Bureau assessed the current value of the stock, and Couzens, with the others, paid income tax on the increment in value. Later, in 1922, Senator Jim Watson, of Indiana, who now says he remembers nothing at all about it, but who was, it is believed, inspired by a newspaper that wanted to crack at Mr. Ford, called attention to the case in a confidential letter, and asked that an investigation be made as to whether a sufficient valuation had been placed on the

stock. This was done and the verdict, later approved by Mr. Mapes, solicitor for the Bureau, was that the assessment was a proper one and that the government had got all that was coming to it. But in 1925, while the Couzens resolution was pending and the feud between Mr. Couzens and Mr. Mellon's bright young men was at its bitterest, somebody dusted off the old case, and one fair afternoon Mr. Couzens was called out of the Senate Chamber, told that a complaint had been received, and asked to sign a waiver of the time limitation on a new assessment. This was exactly four days before the time limitation expired.

It is easy to guess his answer. It seemed to him a direct effort to club him into submission. If he signed the waiver the Bureau could hold action over his head as a threat. He regarded the whole proceeding as a raw attempt to blackjack him into being good. So did many other Senators, and some went so far as to say so. Certainly Mr. Mellon, personally, had no such purpose, but just as certainly one of his bright young men did. In any case it is almost incredible that he should not have seen what the appearance of the thing would be, and it is even more incredible that he or anyone else should have thought Jim Couzens would sign a waiver under the circumstances. What he did was exactly what ought to have been expected. In none too polite terms he informed the abashed officials who brought the waiver that he would not sign it, and in reply to the intimation that if he did not the department would be forced to levy a jeopardy assessment, he told them to levy and be damned.

Then he walked across the Capitol corridor into the Senate Chamber, got the floor, and told the story three minutes after it happened, adding that the case had been investigated and closed three years before, and was brought up now only as a piece of political retaliation designed to make him call off his investigation. The next day a letter, signed by Mr. Mellon, came to the Senate and was put into the record by Senator Ernst, in which the Secretary em-

phatically denied all this, and said that the case had not been up in the department before, and that it was necessary to act now because of the time limitation. But Mr. Couzens again denounced the whole proceeding, and the Bureau then, after enormous labor, having served notice on all the other minority stockholders in three days, put on a jeopardy assessment of back taxes amounting to \$35,000,000. Of this huge amount \$10,000,000, plus interest, must be paid by Mr. Couzens if the government is successful in its suit.

However pure Mr. Mellon may be, it must be admitted that all this does not look very good. It really is amazing that it aroused almost no press criticism at the time. Perhaps the main reason was the fact that the original Mellon bill, stoutly opposed by Mr. Couzens, was then on its way through Congress, and there was in the larger newspaper offices so much concern lest it fail that not even the Democratic papers—with a few notable exceptions—could be got to speak save softly on any administration subject. If, as was the fact, most of them deplored the Teapot Dome and Daugherty investigations as in bad taste, it was hardly to be expected they would assail the revered Mr. Mellon for what appeared to be the use of the power of his office to check a Senator's effort to investigate that office. As a matter of fact, the attitude of most of them was that it served Couzens right. So, too, thought the other multi-millionaires of the country. They professed their complete inability to understand Couzens.

To a good many other persons, perhaps, the whole thing seemed a laughing matter, though no one in Washington saw anything funny in it. There was no disguising there the bitterness of feeling between the two men. Their letters about this time were so rough that great fear was felt by all the third vice-presidents of trust companies in towns under a million that poor, pestered Mr. Mellon would get disgusted and retire, thus letting the country go completely to the dogs. An instinct

among those above the grade of third vice-president told them better.

It was at this juncture that an incident occurred in Washington of no significance at all except to show the thoroughbred strain in the Secretary, and, as it was told by Mr. Couzens, it proves also that even in the heat of battle he, on his part, does not lose his sense of humor. On the day when the roughest exchange between the two occurred, one of the best known hostesses in Washington awoke to the fact that she had invited both to dinner that night and that both had accepted. For a while she was in real trepidation. She rushed around to consult with friends, but finally concluded that it was too late to do anything. But she was alarmed lest a scene of some sort occur in her drawing-room. Her sufferings were intense. When Senator Couzens and his wife entered the room, Mr. Mellon, having already arrived, was at the far end. He at once excused himself from the persons to whom he was listening, walked the length of the room, shook hands cordially with Senator Couzens, and introduced himself to Mrs. Couzens. He then walked across the room, got his daughter, brought her over, introduced her to the Couzenses, and then for the rest of the evening proceeded to devote himself to Mrs. Couzens with such effect that the next morning that lady lamented to a friend that "I certainly do wish to Heaven Jim would not always have to have his worst fights with the people I like."

III

But neither the threat of the Internal Revenue Bureau nor the occasional inevitable social contact softened the fight. Mr. Couzens went ahead with his probe and Mr. Mellon with his suit. What the former uncovered is all set out in the *Congressional Record*. There are a good many things he does not understand, but figures are not one of them. He is himself an expert accountant, but he hired a lot of others to help him. By the time he had finished his in-

vestigation he had enough data to give Mr. Mellon and his bright young men many very miserable moments. He did not, it is true, reveal any actual crookedness in the department, but he did expose some very embarrassing situations, and, supported by much convincing evidence, he did make specific charges of favoritism in adjusting the tax claims of certain exceedingly rich newspaper publishers who were supporters of the administration, and of various large financial interests that had contributed to the Republican campaign. Also, he showed that in matters involving Mr. Mellon's own numerous interests almost invariably favorable decisions and adjustments were rendered. It was not charged and no one is silly enough to believe for a moment that Mr. Mellon, personally, intervened to get favorable treatment for himself or for interests favorable to the administration. It was not even charged that he knew about such treatment. Of course, he didn't, but it occurred just the same. As Mr. Couzens pointed out, it was unnecessary for anyone to pass the word along the line as to which were the Mellon concerns and which were the administration supporters. The bright young men knew without being told. If they did not, they were not very bright. Everybody else knew.

Senator Couzens dredged up a lot of good stuff. He made some real news, but he did not get anywhere with it. So far as the public was concerned it was as if his charges had never been made, his evidence never produced. No one remembers much about the business today. Nothing stuck. Yet he had a lot of awkward facts, enough to give Mr. Mellon and the bright young men a thundering bad time if he had had any real newspaper support or if the Democratic leadership in Congress at the time had not been dead from the neck up.

There were two main reasons for his failure. One was that Senator Couzens, while a very good business man, is a poor public speaker, if any. On the floor of the Senate he was unable to present his facts in a way to rivet interest in them and

make them seem important. The same tale in the eloquent mouth of Senator Reed of Missouri would have shaken the chandeliers and made a sensation. But from Mr. Couzens of Michigan it was only a dull and uninspiring record, difficult to follow and too full of figures to seem real news. The man simply lacks the publicity instinct. He has no flair for the effective presentation of such things. He did a really fine job in dredging up the facts against the most stubborn resistance, but when it came to making them public in a dramatic way he was at loss.

The other reason was the unprecedentedly impregnable position of Mr. Mellon. In the memory of the oldest observer in Washington, there has been nothing like his journalistic and business support. It dates from the introduction of the first Mellon tax bill and has continued to the present day. So Senator Couzens found the press largely uninterested in his facts and mostly unsympathetic toward his attack. By a considerable section of it he got himself abused as a blatherskite, and news was spread about that there was grave concern in business and banking circles lest such efforts on the part of "cheap" Senators to annoy Mr. Mellon and handicap him in his efforts to "lighten the burdens of the people" (by reducing first and most the taxes of the very rich) might lead to his becoming so disgusted that he would resign.

The facts that there was not the slightest danger of Mr. Mellon giving up a job he enjoyed more than any other he ever had, that Senator Couzens was anything but a cheap Senator and that he really had a pretty strong case backed by real evidence—these facts never got home to the public. To most readers it probably seemed a pity that the good and great Secretary should be worried in this way. The idea that, under his administration of the Treasury, questionable practices could be indulged in, or that in matters wherein he had a personal interest it would not be a point of honor with him to see that his department

leaned backward rather than forward—no such idea ever caught hold. Senator Couzens' facts made no more impression than did the facts about the Aluminum Corporation, brought out by Senator Walsh. Such was—and such is—the political state of mind produced in the American people by their long-continued prosperity that it was impossible to dent the armor of Mr. Mellon. To many it seemed and seems almost treasonable to intimate that a man with so much money could be anything but noble.

The combination was too much for Mr. Couzens. But he made some pretty points, and anyone who thinks he has given up the fight does not know him. He is the sort of fellow who gets quiet and purrs when the battle grows thick, and is at that time most dangerous. The tax suit, which might have cost him ten millions or more, probably worried him less than it worried any of the other defendants. To a friend he said, "I don't give a damn about the ten millions, but I don't want to lose." With almost any other man that would have been buncombe, but not with Couzens. If you really know the man, you know that there isn't anyone who could say that sort of thing and grade higher in sincerity. As a matter of fact, he does not expect to lose the suit. He expects to win in the long run, but even if he loses it will be almost worth the money to him to have proved, as he has, by photostat copies of the Internal Revenue Bureau's own records that the case was investigated and closed in 1922, and that Mr. Mellon, in stating it had not, was badly misinformed—which is not, however, exactly the way Senator Couzens puts it.

The first trial may not end until June or later. No matter how it goes, the case will be appealed ultimately to the Supreme Court. If Mr. Couzens wins it will be a smashing defeat for Mr. Mellon, but that fact will be hard to gather from the daily press, which seems by now to have lost sight of the start and the point of the whole business.

IV

In the meantime Mr. Couzens is about as free from care as a man well can be. One reason is that he is one of the few vastly rich men who, in full health and strength—and only 55 years old—have really retired. His great fortune is managed for him by his secretary, Morgan, who lives out in Detroit, and is highly paid, but is not allowed to consult with the Senator on any matter whatever. If bonds are called, Morgan makes the reinvestment. If the Senator overdraws his account at a bank, the bank calls on Morgan, not on him. Once a year he puts a firm of auditors on Morgan's accounts and has them checked up. He does go over their report, but that is all. When he said that he intended to retire he meant it. When he said that he intended to devote himself to being Senator he meant that, too. He has become a strong and a useful one, and, except with the most blindly orthodox, a popular one.

Of course, politically he is hard to classify. He cannot be coupled with Mr. Borah, because Mr. Borah is at bottom much more in tune with the traditional Jeffersonian principles than most Senators who call themselves Democrats. Mr. Couzens is inherently a Republican, a firm believer in the basic Republican principles and policies. What he can't stand are the Republican practices. To Senators of the type of Messrs. Fess and Bingham, and even to more august and important party personages, whatever is Republican is right. But that doesn't go with Jim Couzens. He hasn't that kind of mind, and he hasn't that kind of character. His sense of right and wrong is not in the least atrophied by his partisanship. He would like to go along with his party, but his self-respect seldom lets him. He is one of the few Republican Senators handicapped in that way.

The result is that almost from the start he has found himself forced into an anti-administration attitude toward Republican

Presidents. He was that way under Mr. Harding and he is even more that way under Mr. Coolidge. He is about the only Republican Senator who is not regularly invited to the White House breakfasts, which does not grieve him at all, but is indicative of his standing. The way he got in wrong with the Harding administration was typical. Soon after he took his seat Mr. Harding named a man to a high place who seemed off-color to Mr. Couzens. He had no particular interest in the man or the place, but he made an investigation and became convinced that off-color was much too mild a phrase—that the man was genuinely bad. It seemed to him outrageous to give such a fellow a high position in the government and he started out to stop it. What he did was to go to Republican Senators and say, "Look here, if I come to your office will you listen to me?" They said they would and they did. One Senator with whom he talked was later sent for by the late Secretary of War, John W. Weeks, and asked to stand by the President.

"Well," said the Senator, "I'll vote for him if you insist, but I don't want to, and do you know the facts?"

"No," said Mr. Weeks, "I don't. What are they?"

When his friend got through Mr. Weeks said, "I don't blame you for not wanting to vote for him. I wouldn't do it either."

The upshot was that the Harding appointee was overwhelmingly rejected in spite of Presidential insistence, and Senator Couzens was responsible.

What lost him the favor of Mr. Coolidge was a somewhat similar incident. Mr. Coolidge badly wanted to have Charles Beecher Warren as Attorney-General. He comes from Senator Couzens' State and Senator Couzens knows him very well and thinks very poorly of him. He went to the White House and told Mr. Coolidge exactly the sort of man he thought Mr. Warren was, and said he would oppose his confirmation if his name were sent in. The name was sent in and Mr. Couzens cer-

tainly made good. He not only opposed confirmation, but, aided by the happy nap of the Vice-President, prevented it. The fight was a soul-stirring one and Mr. Couzens greatly enjoyed it. Mr. Warren, with his reputation badly battered, was rejected. The irritation of Mr. Coolidge was intense and it was while he was still in a pained and peevish state that he named John Garibaldi Sargent.

The mere mention of Senator Couzens' name since that time makes him fretful and querulous, although outwardly he preserves an appearance of placidity when he has to consult Mr. Couzens on local appointments, which is not often, because Mr. Couzens regularly refuses to make recommendations unless asked, never has candidates of his own, and in general declines to handle patronage. This attitude alone makes him all but unique among Senators—Mr. Norris of Nebraska being the only other of a similar habit. Mr. Couzens' course in opposing the confirmation of Cyrus E. Woods was not calculated to improve his relations with the White House or with the Secretary of the Treasury. It is also probable that, in addition to voting to throw out Smith of Illinois in January, he will vote next Winter to throw out Vare too, which will break the brave young heart of Senator Dave Reed and disarrange all the Pennsylvania plans of the Mellon machine.

But that's the way things break for Senator Couzens. Every time a question of right or wrong comes up in the Senate he finds himself against the Republican position. It is, some think, a pity he can't take the regulation narrow, smug and partisan view of these matters. But he can't. That's all there is to it—he just can't—and he doesn't want to either. Before his Internal Revenue Bureau investigation ended he made a striking and pregnant remark often quoted in Washington. "Give me control," he said, "of the Internal Revenue Bureau

and I will run the politics of the country." What he meant by that, he said, was that this Bureau has not only the power to reward, but also the power to punish. A large proportion of the big financial interests, the rich newspapers, and wealthy corporations and individuals come to it to get adjustments on their taxes. Millions are often involved in a single case. It is not necessary to do anything crooked. Mr. Couzens does not charge that. What he points out is that every claim for adjustment can be decided in any one of at least three ways, all entirely legal and defensible. One way can save the claimant much money, the second can give him an even break, and the third can take his shirt. "Give me," he says, "this unlimited power to reward and punish, and I will run the country. I won't even have to use it either—at least not much or often. All I need is to have it generally known that I have it."

A great many stories of Mr. Couzens' fights in former days in Detroit, as a candidate for mayor, as mayor, and in his Senatorial campaigns, are told. It is interesting that the fellows he picks out to fight are nearly always rich men. At times around the Detroit Club he is as popular as the measles, but he never cares, and never stops speaking his mind. In the old days, if the fights did not find him he found them. He is not as tense now as he was when he first came to Washington. Socially he is thrown, not with the Progressives of the Borah or Norris type, who don't function much socially, but with the reactionaries of the Longworth type, who do. They haven't changed him much—but some. The old fighting spirit is still there, but it does not blaze all the time as it did. He still remains, however, the most absolutely fearless and outspoken man in Washington public life, the only multimillionaire who does not belong to the union—and will not join.

THE OLD LADIES' MAN

BY FERNER NUHN

THE dining-room table, bared of the supper cloth, had always been the center of the Walkers' evening life. It was a comfortable old piece of furniture, square with rounded corners, sagging slightly in the middle, its top scratched and revarnished badly, so that flakes of the old coat showed dark under the new. This evening the children spread their lessons on it, or played noisy games over it: flinch, crokinole, caroms, dominoes. Mrs. Walker reserved a corner for her wicker work-basket, and Mr. Walker sat beside it in the great leather rocker, which he was in the habit of dragging every evening from the parlor. The big, "semi-indirect" light-bowl above, like a friendly household sun, flooded the room with a warm, even light.

Mrs. Walker sensed that something was worrying her husband. She could tell by the way he frowned at the *Evening Gazette*. Perhaps he would talk it over with her sometime. Perhaps not. Inscrutable man! He was not secretive, exactly, but so self-dependent, so self-sustaining. She glanced at him again as she bit off a strand of darning cotton from the stocking she was mending.

Evelyn, glad for any distraction from her high-school home-work, said roguishly, "Now mamma! There you go biting thread again. Don't you know it ruins your teeth!"

"That's *right*, Evelyn," said Mrs. Walker, elevating her eye-brows in an arch-admission of guilt.

Frederick Jr., monopolizing the doorway between the dining-room and the parlor, was completely abstracted in the

construction of an esoteric something of card-board, string, glue and small sticks. He sat painfully on one leg, the other outstretched at an impossible angle to balance himself as he leaned forward: a taut sprawl of concentration. Through his teeth he whistled over and over again a single bar from a popular song, making the sounds now with inhaled breath, now with exhaled breath, as it happened to come.

"Oh, Frederick," wailed his mother, "can't you get another tune?"

Frederick, looking up bewildered, blushed as he came back to consciousness. The whistling stopped, but in a few minutes it started again of itself.

The older son, Elmer, high-school junior, was out. "With the boys, mother," he had said. "I'll be back by ten."

Evelyn whined, "Mamma, you know all about Civic Beauty. Help me think of something for this darn theme."

Mrs. Walker scowled at the ceiling. "Well . . .," she began with rising inflection, and ended by suggesting some points Evelyn might make, most of which Evelyn rejected abruptly and scornfully.

At ten o'clock Mr. Walker yawned and looked at his watch. "Ten o'clock!" he said as if astonished. "Time to go to bed." Though he never went to bed before that time, he was always astonished whenever ten o'clock came and found him not yet in bed.

He went over and stood above Frederick Jr., looking down at him with amused paternal benignity. "Well, sonny," he said after a moment, "what's it going to be?"

Self-conscious under this attention Frederick gave up cutting a circle out of a piece