

THE NORTHWEST TAKES TO POESY

BY JAMES STEVENS

IN THE hardy old times of the great Northwest the sweet art of poetry was for ladies only. In those days the logger, the silver-lead miner, the cowpuncher, the jerkline freighter or the bartender caught in the act of composing verses was regarded with something of the hostility accorded mine-salters and horse-lifters. Whenever a Northwestern male of that lusty era felt the urge to twitter and sigh in print he fled to more congenial regions. Thus Edwin Markham and Joaquin Miller deserted Oregon.

Today, however, the situation is entirely changed. The poetry landslide of the last decade smote the Northwest with a tumult of song that still reverberates. In the deep and dark stopes of mines lyrics were murmured to the accompaniment of silver-lead ore clinking from steel shovels. Above the drone of saws and the ring of axes in the Douglas fir forests rose the sound of bully logger voices chanting sonnets. On the cattle ranges east of the Cascades cowboys no longer shrilled the ribald rhymes of "The Chisholm Trail" as they rode for the towns, and the Rabelaisian lines of "Mother Kelley" no longer boomed above the feed-yards; in their place correct ballads from the poetry books were sighed out in the most genteel tones, and the herds at night were lulled to rest by the recitation of soothing odes.

At last poetry had ravished the males of the He-Man Country. The Northwest was ripe for literary leadership. Hordes of poets were wasting their sweetness on the desert air. They yearned, of course, to perform in public. The urgent need for an impresario was proclaimed. The call sounded in vain

until 1923. Then Col. E. Hofer, one of Oregon's grand old men, offered his services. In January, 1923, the first issue of his famous magazine of poetry, the *Lariat*, appeared. It flew this banner, in colors of cream, black and red:

Western Poetry Magazine

THE LARIAT

A Monthly Roundup of Western Discussion and Criticism Devoted to Higher Standards of Literature on Broad Cultural Lines of Expression.

Later on the following was added:

The *Lariat* is a voice crying out in the wilderness, warning the reading world that Our Country has standards and ideals in national literary affairs that are well established in poetry, fiction and drama, and should not be crowded off the map by the slum products of Europe or even Our Own Country.

Still later this boast and appeal were flown:

Educators, Libraries, Club Women, Brain workers and Professional men and women—

Are Roped by the *Lariat* and like it—

Join in the Gang for the open air spaces who are strong for clean Western American standards—

Help keep Our Country sane, sound and sweet.

Here was the stuff. Soon the *Lariat* had penetrated to the remotest regions of the Northwest. It was read over branding fires; cowboys held it in their left hands and perused it ardently, while their right hands pressed hot irons into the flanks of bawling slickears. No longer were choker-setters and bull-cooks forlorn in their desire to see their lays in print; they now sat in their underclothes and read the *Lariat* all through the eventide, and proudly hoped. Lumber-pilers paused in their labors to haul the *Lariat* from their hip pockets and to derive from its pages a momentary inspiration be-

fore heaving up another two by twelve. It was in such a moment, no doubt, that P. E. Chance was first thrilled by the idea for his ode on the restriction of immigration:

Now our mothers and wives can go
And get themselves a seat
In our moving picture show
Without sitting next to a Greek.

A city has grown up from a few small shacks
Since the departure of that foreign band.
For they sent their money back
To their native land.

This sawmill has prospered beyond a doubt,
As can be plainly seen.
And if we can keep the foreigner out
We can keep the village clean.

II

Ere long the hopes kindled by Colonel Hofer in the hearts of the poetry-sick he-men began to be fulfilled. With such poseys as these the cream-colored pages of the *Lariat* smelled and shone:

OLD HORSE

Yes, I've seen the East in its glory,
And Broadway's twinkling lights,
But they can't compare in a single way
With our Western starlit nights. . . .

So here I am and here I'll stay.
Are you glad to see me, old horse?
If you answer with a rub of your nose,
I'll know you mean "of course."

Meanwhile, the *Lariat* rose steadily to loftier levels; the thunder of the poetry movement, striking at first among the hardy men of the woods, mines and cow camps, soon roared past the portals of high-toned Northwest homes. Daughters and wives of loggers and lumbermen welcomed the chance to horn in:

A PLACE TO SHARE

Brave *Lariat*—who doth aspire
To meet our wants and wishes too,
Who fain would have us all admire
Your worthiness in every hue;
We welcome you to our hearthstone rare,
We bespeak for you a hearty greeting.
We have found a place for you to share
Where "good fellows" are meeting.

Ere long the editor was modestly printing this lilted tribute from Ellen Irene Lang:

TOAST TO THE LARIAT

Hail! Hail! oh *Lariat*!
Your length unfurl
With dashing twirl,
With snappy curl,
And lo! Off comes our hat!

Sing! Sing! oh *Lariat*!
Now here, now there,
Humming in air
A song so fair,
A song so rare
That lo! Heart follows hat!

The colonel, being conveniently a millionaire, began shipping bales of his magazine to all parts of the country. Editors of Eastern magazines devoted to the new poetry sniffed solemnly and at length in paragraphs designed to set the upstart in its place. True Westerners never turn the other cheek. Soon such counter blasts as these began to boom and smoke from the pages of the *Lariat*:

BLURBS

Anybody can make rhymes; but if they're easily understood
And have a meaning, why, they're no good.

To be a poet, you must write sonnets to ashcans
and to bricks
Like Sandburg and Lindsay; those are their tricks. . . .

Critics will hail you as a genius and marvel at your imagery.
But somehow, I don't know why, it's all bunk to me.

Even the colonel himself, usually the most genial and benign of men, lost his temper:

It is considered *de trop* for a Westerner to ever pose as a literary critic, and he is supposed to be a better judge of jerked beef and kippered salmon than he is of masterpieces in art. Let me say this for the West: when they do a thing *it has some bigness about it*. The poetry may not be masterpieceing, but it is given with a whole heart and not by mere pen-shysters who follow the camp and pick up the bits. The Eastern market is crowded with verse-smiths. In the West—well, they can just go out into the spaces and pick up the stuff dreams and songs are made of, so why agonize at effects—just revelling in the great nature magazine of verse.

But the colonel, alas, eventually surrendered. Perhaps it was from his greatest weakness, his tender heart. The logging camp waitresses and sawmill stenographers, among other business girls of independent

mind, were reading the Eastern poetry magazines. And they were succumbing. The proof of it was in the free verse which began to flood the editorial desk of the *Lariat*. At last, reluctantly, the colonel started to print poems with lines such as this one:

You

There is something about you
Like a caterpillar.
A soft, woosy little caterpillar.
You cling to my hand and refuse
To go where I will you to.
If you should spit on me
I should throw you against that tree,
Then watch you curl and uncurl,
Curl and uncurl, and die.

The colonel's belated hospitality to the new poetry was a great step forward. The *Lariat* continued to flourish. Hard-headed captains of industry were drawn, blushing, into its singing company. In 1924 the colonel triumphantly published the following poem, composed by Claudius Thayer, a leading banker of Tillamook, capital of the Oregon cheese industry:

THE LITTLE SPIDER

He puzzles me, that little mite,
That from the ceiling often drifts
And with my breath swings back and forth
Between me and the window-light.
He must, I think, have some intent,
This rover from his lofty home,
Some purpose in his tiny brain,
He's not on merely swinging bent.

III

His triumph only urged Colonel Hofer on to loftier goals. There were still three groups in the Northwest who either ignored the *Lariat*, or sneered. One of these groups was composed of the literary professors in the State universities. The second was made up of the hard-boiled fictioneers, the free lances who thought of literature only in terms of cents per word. The third group bristled with those cynical, cold-eyed folk, the newspaper boys and girls. The professors and the fictioneers, once the colonel went after them, were roped and led into his corral with no more difficulty than had been experienced in gathering up

poetic loggers, cowpunchers, salmon fishermen, steamboat firemen, silver-lead miners, homestead wives, logging camp waitresses, sawmill stenographers, bankers and lumber salesmen.

The professors, indeed, were easy. They had only to read through a file of the *Lariat*, and they were lost. That reading was certain to inflame their instinct to instruct, uplift and reform, and the colonel had only to wait for them. In time the pages of the *Lariat* were dignified with poems from their hands, designed to serve as models to the plain poets.

Thus Professor Glenn Hughes, instructor of bardlings at the University of Washington, contributor to the *Bookman*, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and other illustrious Eastern magazines, editor of those productions so typical of the Northwest, the University of Washington Chapbooks, in covers of pink, lemon, mauve and apple-leaf green—Professor Hughes appeared in the *Lariat* with "Arizona Night," a sonnet wherein the sun "flaunted its crimson banners" and was succeeded by "the thrill of vibrant night." It was accompanied by a sonnet on the city, which inexorably specified the following items: traffic roar, raucous blare, turmoil, throbs, and symphony cacophonous. Thus the professors were fetched.

The fetching of the fictioneers at first seemed hopeless. One and all, they failed to respond in 1924 to the following appeal, calling for the amalgamation of all the literary organizations of the Northwest into one gigantic and powerful league:

It is not inconceivable that such a worthy movement may spread ultimately until each State has its Writers' League, Poet Laureate and Annual Week in honor of literary work. . . . Perhaps a star will come out of the West reversing things and lead us to some creative source, some manger clothed in the vestments that might be lifted and proved the sacred spark. Are we willing to rest in the foothills forever and never see the superplanes where the peaks throw their challenge to the sun?

But where eloquence failed, filthy lucre and gaudy flattery succeeded. The colonel traveled and gave banquets. The wood pulp

lads were invited to sit at his right hand. They were permitted to stand up in their dress suits and tell how they had attained a position which permitted them to join expensive bridge and golf clubs, the Shriners, the Elks, and the Republican party. Thus the hard-boiled contributors to the popular magazines were herded into the colonel's League of Western Writers, and roped, and branded.

In his seventy-fifth year the colonel achieved the greatest triumph of his life. For in August, 1928, the League of Western Writers held a convention at Portland, Ore. All of the writers' organizations of the West were at last banded together in an amalgamation ruled by an executive board glittering with eminent names. Under Col. E. Hofer, president, was listed this blinding galaxy of educational and literary stars:

Canada: Charles G. D. Roberts, M.A., LL.D., F.R.S.C.

Alaska: Barrett Willoughby

Mexico: Dr. Levi B. Salmans

Arizona: Dr. D. Maitland Bushby

California: Kathleen Norris

Colorado: Katherine L. Craig, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Idaho: Reginald C. Barker

Montana: Howard S. Tool

New Mexico: Witter Bynner

Oregon: Anne Shannon Monroe

Utah: T. Earl Pardoe, M.D.L.A.

Washington: Vernon McKenzie, Dean of Journalism, University of Washington

Wyoming: Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, University of Wyoming

Even the Free Lances of Seattle, an organization of strictly professional writers including a former exalted cyclops of the Klan, had its dress-suited representatives at the board. As the colonel arose to address the seething assemblage of literary and university grantees there was no doubt a moment when he remembered his old battle-calls in the heat of the fray. He might have reminded his lordly listeners that there was a time when he was supported in his ceaseless warfare only by poets from the logging and cow camps, when only coarse ears heard and heeded such a plea as this one:

The *Lariat* might well be called a volunteer captain in the lists of literary militancy. . . .

The weary world is looking to America to replenish its lost idealism. Let it know that in the West are the prophets and leaders and the following millions who still have this vision and this aim and this goal. Be one of them, you reader of the *Lariat*, you in your circle out in Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, and out in the more favored circles where the ripple has already grown to its stream. Be a Literary Scout and throw out some blazing line today, get your local papers warmed up to the torch-bearing job. . . .

Let such a group brush aside the trash that is swamping the West from the East. . . . Ask all your churches and editors to talk on the idea, and make a jolly plan to carry out together.

Till each circle does this the insidious printed word of the syndicated slush factories has a wide market and the harvest we already rue.

Be a *Lariat* yourself and go out and rope your neck of the woods for militant literature reform.

The clarion call had been answered. At last the West's best in literature, in convention assembled, was the colonel's to command. Small wonder that his smile was triumphant as well as benign when he arose from his president's chair to face salutes and cheers.

IV

Like all great human leaders, the colonel began life in poverty. His father, a refugee from the German revolution of 1848, was a pioneer manufacturer of vinegar in Iowa. The son, the future dictator of Western letters, was forced into hard labor at an early age. His first job was piling barrel staves. Next he peeled poplar poles for fence building. At the age of fourteen he cut cordwood at fifty cents a cord. Later on he shaved barrel hoops, built flour barrels, and hauled flour. For a time he was a blacksmith's apprentice; then he served in a surveying gang. Eventually he became a country printer and editor. Moving to Oregon at the height of his powers, his shrewd understanding of the bucolic mind soon made him a strong political influence in the State. He became the most successful lobbyist in Salem, the State capital, and a colonel.

In those days his main concern was with material things. He was one of the first men in America to realize the potentialities of the backdoor publicity which has of

late become a scandal through the revelations of its services to the public utilities corporations. The colonel's experience as a country editor had given him an acute knowledge of the wants of his overworked tribe. He established a news service designed to minister to its chief wants. The canned editorials that he sent out each week were received with gratitude by country editors all over the Northwest. Each one contained propaganda for one of the corporations subscribing to the service. It was the only means by which big business could answer the demagogic attacks of Bryan, Roosevelt, Wilson and LaFollette in the rural press. In 1927, according to testimony before the Federal Trade Commission, American gas and electric companies alone paid \$84,820.80 to the E. Hofer & Sons' News Service.

The colonel prospered. But material success did not satisfy him. He devoted himself to humanitarian labors and in time became president of the Oregon Humane Society. Yet his spirit soared on. Age only added new pinions to its wings. In 1915, when he was approaching seventy, he published a novel, "Jack Norton." Of crabbed and passionless age the pages of this confection reveal nothing. The lines surge with rapture and fury. Certain paragraphs might have been written by Ben Hecht; others are charged with a pale fire of idealism as luminous and hot as that in the works of Upton Sinclair and Harold Bell Wright; again, the reader encounters passages which anticipated the sly, feline naughtiness of Carl Van Vechten; in short, the work has everything.

But the life of a literary creator is necessarily a cloistered one. For a man habituated to the gregarious existence of a lobbyist, novel writing could not suffice. The colonel's countenance is best described as rubicund and smiling. It is the outward sign of his yearning to serve his fellow men and women. When the poetry movement struck the Northwest and the plaintive voices of leaderless bards began to sound from its wilderness, he was inspired. He

abandoned the cloister, strode forth with his gilded staff, smote the rock, and the *Lariat* gushed forth.

I myself must confess that the new Western Poetry Magazine provided me with much refreshment, if not nourishment. In 1923 I was among the vast company of loggers, cow hands, silver-lead miners, salmon fishermen, sheep-herders and lumber-pilers who were experiencing the delicious tremors of a literary awakening.

My first encounter with the *Lariat* occurred when I was laboring on the green chain of the sawmill at Westport, Ore. I was on the night shift, which ended at three in the morning. At the end of one night of labor, when a wet wind hammering up from the Columbia river bar had made work under the open shed of the green chain an infernal misery, I discovered a copy of the *Lariat* in a chair of the hotel lobby, where I had paused to rest. The magazine looked too pretty to sit on or to throw on the floor, so I held it in my lap when I sank wearily down. As I gnawed my plug for a heartening chew I idly turned the pages of the pretty publication. At that perilous moment the following lines, composed by Col. E. Hofer himself, gripped my attention:

MADONNA OF THE POOR

(Dedicated to Social Settlement Workers)

"She never heard the song of love . . ."

*Oh, woman, I would woo thee
And cause thy life to bloom,
As some rank rose in season
Sends forth its rare perfume.*

*She ne'er beheld the birth of day,
Or saw the infant morn born softly forth
On noiseless pinions of the air,
Laid in the pearly shell of dawn
And carried joyous on the shoulders of the sun.
She ne'er lived through a radiant day,
When all the earth with feeling thrills
Beneath caresses of her lover bold. . . .*

I quit there, partly because I felt myself blushing, but mainly because I had swallowed my chew. Staggering in a half-swoon up to my room, it was not until the next day that I discovered I had brought the *Lariat* along. Irresistibly it drew me to its pages. I had taken the first drink.

For hours I was immersed in the froth and sparkle of its poetry and in the soldier liquids of the colonel's editorial prose. Such lines as these caused the first ferment of discontent with a lumber hand's life in my heart:

How little of genuine genius fire there seems nowadays to flicker through the waste spaces of literature! . . . Like a group of wandering bees with latent honey-gathering power possessing a gaping, yawning, hollow tree, so the wild germs of genius rush into the waiting burnished vault of the ready heart.

The colonel's definite critical judgements also impressed me mightily. My pitch-stained fingers trembled when they turned to this treasure:

He [Emerson Hough] was one of a small group who had decided that as for themselves they would not descend into the murky regions of sex psychology, nor add to the stream of fiction revolving around social experiments in jazz, neurotics, or the *laissez faire* of more or less degenerate adolescent psychopathy.

Never to be forgotten is the awe with which I regarded a man who could launch upon the reading of a dictionary with such gay abandon as this:

The editor of the *Lariat* has so far disdained to wear any kind of goggles, green, blue, or other color or colorless. He has said that when deprived of vision he would employ a reader, blonde or brunette (no preference expressed), and he has set for himself the task (in this delightful way) of reading through the new Webster's International Dictionary (7½ pages per day).

Then the burning lines of a truly virile Northwestern poem smote my already throbbing eyes:

WANT ADS

By Earl MacTowner, Portlatch, Washington

To read the ads,
However simple they may be,
They are the source of boundless joy to me.
I delve into each compact, cryptic line,
And probe the hidden mystery to find.

"Lost, strayed or stole, pure white collie,
That answers to the name of Mollie,
A good reward for her return."
They might have added:
"Sad hearts yearn."

Like hundreds of other laborers in the Northwest, I ended my first reading of the

Lariat with the conviction that I could write poetry as good as that myself. So it wasn't long until I was sweating out a few lines at odd times. But I was too shy to submit them to the colonel. My writing was unmistakably coarse and plain. No matter how I tried, I could not make it glad and fine. Beside, certain of Colonel Hofer's admonitions were discouraging. For example:

The industrious versifier who bombards the Eastern magazines continually is finally admitted to the class of well-paid poets. It takes about two years. But it takes that long to establish a grocery business.

I did not care, however, about taking two years to establish either a poetry or a grocery business. The itch to write which I had caught from the *Lariat* demanded immediate satisfaction. So, like Albert Richard Wetjen, the hop yards laborer, Victor Shawe, the silver-lead miner, Stewart Holbrook, the logger, and others who were inspired by the colonel but could not stand the wear and tear of poetry writing, I took the easiest way and began writing coarse prose for the Eastern magazines.

V

The most popular department in the *Lariat* in the colonel's hey-day was its column of personals. The talent which he had developed for writing homey items in his practice as a country editor was on display in every issue of the magazine. Loggers and cow hands might scratch their heads in vain over his more erudite editorials, but such items as these reached their hearts:

The noted writer and illustrator, Wallace Smith and wife, are enjoying life at Cannon Beach. Mr. Smith's story, "Love or Hate," appeared in a recent number of *Collier's* and is said to be one of the strongest of the year.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is another thrifty Englishman who has been overworked in Our Country—a case of too much Johnson.

Helen Way Crawford, well-known and loved Oregon poet, has become a resident of Berkeley.

The Poison Gas Squad are trying to pump oxygen into James Joyce. No use.

In 1843 Virginia put a tax of thirty dollars a

year on bath tubs, and in 1845 a Boston municipal ordinance made such bathing unlawful except on medical advice.

Miss Sheila Kay-Smith, known in the literary world as a popular novelist, was married recently to Rev. Theodore Fry, eldest son of Sir John and Lady Fry, Sussex, England.

We search the Winter magazines in vain for any lines of good verse. Is there no Winter literary cauliflower? It is a Pacific Coast crop.

There is really nothing the matter with Western literature. To begin with, there is very little.

Give the West time and it will be the hub of the literary world, what with its silver drama.

Wilodyne D. Hack has sold an article to *Western Spotalogue* and a story to *Girls' Weekly*.

Chas. F. Lummis has made musical history in his "Spanish Songs of Old California."

Alas, *Dial*, I loved thee once, long ago.—Ed. *Lariat*.

Gilbert K. Chesterton seems to keep up his lick.

With his brigades of poets and his glittering staff of professors the colonel had an easy march to literary leadership in the Northwest. In the end he had opposition from only two sources. The newspaper folk of Portland and Seattle would yield to neither threats or blandishments. And H. L. Davis, named by Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers and Harriet Monroe as the chief poet of the Northwest, went his way among the Slickear Bills, Appetite Toms and John Silvertooths of the Antelope cattle country in Eastern Oregon, with no more than a casual sneer for the loyal *Lariat* band. In so far as Davis is concerned the colonel no doubt consoles himself with the reflection that since 1918 this poet's work has been identified with that of the Chicago school. Once, in defense of a poem on desert rats, the colonel plainly expressed his opinion of the Chicago poets:

The Chicago School of Poetry does not hesitate to give us poems about slaughter houses, tanneries and soap factories. . . . We should be thankful for poems about clean, sweet-smelling desert rats.

But all this opposition became feeble or passive, and by means of banquets, radio addresses, conventions and the expenditure of sums estimated at from ten to twenty thousand a year, the colonel reached his

goal in 1927. Delegates from all the writers' organizations in the West met in a Parliament of Western Letters in that year, formed the League of Western Writers, and elected the grand old man president. The second convention of 1928 in Portland made him president emeritus.

His great work is now accomplished. He can rest on his laurels and enjoy his honors. And that is exactly what he is doing. The *Lariat* has been turned over to younger hands. The colonel's literary activities are now confined to speech-making at writers' banquets, which have succeeded all over the Northwest the roundups of the cattle ranges and the blow-ins of the lumber towns. His orations still ring with challenges to those who decry clean Western stories. He still shouts his winning slogan:

The veribest in the West
Shall be the test for the rest.

By veribest the colonel means literary works which surpass those of New England in the avoidance of raw sex. With the help of his henchmen, and under God, he vows that Western literature shall never be polluted by writings like those of Dreiser, Cabell, Anderson and Lewis. The professors bow their heads in agreement. The Free Lances shake the Fiery Cross.

And while murmurs arise from the ranks of the plain poets who were the colonel's first faithful followers, the murmurs are faint. The glittering eminence of the peerage that now surrounds the throne astounds the *skalds* from the woods, the bards from the camps and the lady lyricists from humble homes. They meekly gather at the banquet board and sit below the salt. And even as the liege lord and the peerage blanched with horror, so did the yeomanry blanch during an autumnal literary love feast in 1928, when a leather-lunged bell-hop, hired by some ribald scornor of authority, bellowed through the banquet hall:

"Call for Maxwell Bodenheim! Call for Maxwell Bodenheim!"

THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Journalism

MOVIE CRITICS

BY LEDA V. BAUER

I WAS having dinner with a young woman movie critic in a restaurant some time ago when one of her middle-aged confrères entered and seated herself at a nearby table. The newcomer seemed to me to be rather festively arrayed for the hour and the occasion and I called my companion's attention to her.

"Yes," said she, enviously. "It's a little young for her, but isn't it lovely? It is one of Dolores Costello's prettiest evening dresses. Miss X. admired it so much that Dolores just had to take it off and give it to her."

And when I wondered why my companion had been so remiss in her own behalf, "Oh, I could never have got into it," she explained. "It is much too small for me."

Evening dresses, it appears, are only one of the perquisites of lady movie critics. Breakfasts, luncheons, teas and dinners, cigarettes and taxi-rides, Christmas presents and birthday presents, and souvenirs on the opening night of a new picture and on the star's return from Paris with the news that she is going to divorce her new husband—all these things are hers. Last Christmas, one reviewer went from the office of picture company to picture company in a taxi, calmly collecting her loot. Unfortunately for this Lorelei, when the chauffeur considered enough had been gathered together for one year, he took the opportunity, at one of the stops, to drive off with the collection and was never seen again. The lady was loud in her lamentations for some time, but it is not on record that the gifts were duplicated. The gentlemen of the craft are perhaps more

subtly rewarded—but many of them just as surely.

Screen criticism in the daily press and in the magazines is, approximately, where theatrical criticism was twenty years ago, except, of course, from the point of view of good writing. The screen has never produced any William Winters or Percival Pollards—certainly no Hunekers or Shaws. It attracts neither the cynical, clever young fellows who, according to fable, form a waiting-list of thirty thousand to display themselves in the theatrical columns of the *New York Times*, nor the earnest, scholarly young men who want, through the medium of the Little Theatre, to shed the light of truth in shadowed corners.

Twenty years ago, perhaps not so long ago as that, a dramatic critic regarded an invitation to lunch with David Belasco either as an enormous honor or as a bribe to be accepted or resented. A great number always accepted. Today, the integrity of the average dramatic critic is taken for granted, though of course his intelligence may yet be questioned. But, so far, the intelligence of the motion-picture critic has not entered into the question, and the dinner with the picture counterpart of Belasco is neither an honor nor a bribe: it is a perquisite and, without it, the picture is apt to suffer.

There are, to be sure, exceptions. I speak of the average. The occasional impeccable critic is usually of the slanderer type. A handsome liaison officer, employed by a picture company for just such work, once tackled one of these incorruptible reviewers in his own subtle fashion. He invited her to have luncheon with him to discuss the motion-picture art. The lady cannily chose the Colony Club, ordered champagne with her meal, and listened carefully to all