

# THE MAYOR OF MIDDLETOWN

BY W. A. S. DOUGLAS

UNDER the title of "Middletown" a team of writers have evolved a book which, I am told, sets out to depict life in the urban midlands of these United States. The city which was selected is, I am also informed, the second-class municipality of Muncie, Indiana. I have not read the volume and in view of this essay I have decided to forego that pleasure for the present. A man who gets paid for criticising books gave me his view of "Middletown."

"It's stark," he observed.

If that is the impression which has been conveyed by Muncie I'd like to promulgate a little spot news as my recital meanders along. I well remember this Indiana city when it weltered in starkness; when it tucked its tail between its legs and ran from the sound and the smell of cowshed-perfumed klansmen; when it crawled, fawning, to the knee of the Anti-Saloon League to do the bidding of a Shoemaker, sweating in its haste and thereby further provoking the already strong reek of cheap moonshine liquor with which its very soul then seemed permeated; when it licked the boots of that amiable but pompous four-flusher, Jim Watson; when it took a part in dealing an almost mortal blow to Indiana's reputation for being civilized by helping send the two-bit-minded Arthur Robinson to the Senate of the United States.

That was Muncie as its scene flashed by me in late-Coolidge and early-Hoover days. I went there frequently in the interests of the inquisitive-minded American public. I wrote many stories, not so much about its starkness, which somehow then

seemed the logical accompaniment to an Indiana complex, but about a white-haired little man, well into his sixties and with the seat worn out of his pants—a man who had become a joke all over the State because, alone, broke and kicked from pillar to post, he dared to fight this very starkness.

I first met George Dale during the murder trial of D. C. Stephenson, once Grand Dragon of the Indiana Ku Klux Klan and at the same time overseer of the klan realms of Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia. Steve is now rotting, presumably for life, in the State penitentiary. He took a young stenographer on a joy-party and as a result of what occurred during the drunk the girl committed suicide. Thus this ruthless, booze-soaked printer tumbled in a few days from the estate of a candidate for the presidency of the United States—and that is not to be laughed off, either—to that of a convict, in for the rest of his days.

For almost a week the blond-haired ruddy-faced defendant had sat at the counsel-table seemingly without a care. While it was true that he had quarreled with Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans, the Texas prairie tooth-puller, all Midland klansmen still referred to him as the Old Man. Senators, Congressmen, Governors, city and county officials had all leaned on him in the past, and he had helped them while helping himself, so what had he to fear?

There were klansmen all around him—at the counsel-table, in the jury-box, in the audience, and guarding the doors of the courtroom. All were brothers in the sacred bond. A man who had spent the major part of his life in perfecting the art of the

double-cross couldn't conceive that it might ever be applied to himself.

What the hell, grinned Steve as he stared about him, contemptuously at the score of out-of-town newspaper men, pleasantly at the occupants of the jury-box slowly filling with what he considered were the right sort of people, familiarly at the bailiffs and deputy sheriffs, frankly and unashamedly at the judge. Let His Honor just *try* anything!

Into this sense of security and well-being there suddenly catapulted the vision of a shabby little old man, a pencil in one hand, a wad of paper in the other, eternally scribbling while a pair of piercing black eyes under shaggy white hair seemed to be boring their way right through Steve's brain. Impatiently the Grand Dragon passed his hand over his face to brush away the phantasma. Why, that rat had been trampled into the ground long ago!

Funny that the ghost of old George Dale should intrude itself upon this embarrassing but nevertheless adequately protected situation. The klansman grinned as he thought back into the old days. Just like a mosquito, that pesky old man. But just as easy to slap into nothingness, once you got hold of him. And Steve had seen to it that the klan had got hold of George Dale and his Muncie *Post-Democrat*.

Yes, sir, that had been a job well done. Some trouble at the start, but that had been speedily got rid of.

Twice George Dale had been shot at, but the sawed-off little nuisance was built so close to the ground that the gunmen had only succeeded in puncturing an already thoroughly punctured hat. Noble Kamelias, those sweet ladies of the Invisible Empire, had been ordered to spit on him whenever he appeared on the streets of Muncie. And they had spat till they had no spit left.

Ha, ha, laughed the man on trial, and the judge, surprised, rapped his desk for order. So this was a joke to Steve?

Three times emissaries of the klan had waylaid Dale and thrashed him thor-

oughly. Once they included his young son in the castigation. Roughnecks had patrolled the Muncie streets all day for the sole purpose of shouldering him off the sidewalks whenever he should appear. But still the caustic editorials had dripped from his pen and still his news columns; pitifully few, exposed the reign of terror throughout Indiana. Alone among the State's three hundred editors he fought—and fought tooth and nail.

What a fool, mumbled the man on trial for murder.

Finally, Steve remembered, they'd got Dale down to where he couldn't pick up a single advertisement to help out revenue; down to where he was arrested by the police on manufactured charges, fingerprinted and jailed; down to where the grocer and butcher had orders to give him no more credit; down to where George Dale, his wife and his six children lacked coal, food and clothing.

In spite of this, Steve had heard, the mutt was still getting out his paper. Must be a hell of a sheet by this time, grinned the prisoner.

It was good to think of all those things, the precautions that had been taken in the past. The klansman stretched himself and turned halfway round in his seat till he was looking directly at the press table. A pair of black unwavering eyes were staring into his own. A little old man in a patched coat sat among the score of other newspaper men. A reporter from New York was eagerly scribbling as, from behind his hand and from the corner of his mouth, Outcast Dale was pouring forth the inside story of Indiana's shame and the Grand Dragon's part in it.

The guardians of the door were supposed to be Steve's friends, tried and true. And yet this rat had been allowed to slip past! For the first time during the progress of the mess, doubt perched itself on the klansman's shoulder. Later doubt would give way to uncertainty and still later uncertainty would step down in favor of despair.

A bailiff passed a twisted piece of paper to the prisoner. Opening it he read:

"Though the mills of the gods grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

Steve wiped sweat from his forehead. He glanced back at the press table. From behind George Dale's hand Indiana's klan story was being run through to the far corners of the world.

## II

When I set out on this recital I promised spot news. But, so far, I've been sort of retrospective and for a while must remain so. That's due to my desire to thoroughly establish my friend George Dale in the picture. Up till about a year ago he was figured as about the lowest sort of pariah dog in Indiana. Now he's the mayor of Muncie, whose citizens not so long ago practically and forcibly invited him to shake its dust from his feet.

From under the ground the swing came to the other side much as it is doing now on the bigger and more important question of Prohibition. George Dale and his kind flicker over the scenario of the ages every now and again—far, far too seldom, but often enough to revive faith in the common sense of humanity about the time that faith gets down to a fearfully low ebb. Publius Vergilius Maro had the Dales of his day in mind when he struck his lyre and bellowed, "Arma virumque cano."

Even after they had tucked Grand Dragon Stephenson more or less safely away in the State penitentiary, klan terrorism still burned far from weakly throughout Indiana. True, there failed to arise another robed and hooded despot big enough to fill Steve's shoes and to crack his whip over the State's political leaders. This drunken Oklahoma type-setter certainly drew blood when he laid his thong across the rumps of all of them—from the generously proportioned rear-end of Jim Watson to the slender flanks of Vivienne Wheatcraft. But the Thing was breaking—slowly, and the politicians were taking the oppor-

tunity to de-louse themselves in the eyes of the public—outside of Indiana. At home it didn't seem to matter so much.

At least it didn't seem to matter so much except to George Dale and his Muncie *Post-Democrat*. A little later he was to see his battle waged by bigger newspapers, taking their cue from him and profiting by the holes he had scratched in the ram-parts. Frank Prince, a brilliant journalist, as fearless as Dale, half his age and with the advantage of adequate financing, finally laid the monster low—for the time being—but only to see the credit in the eyes of national newspaperdom taken from him. But that, as Mr. Kipling was so fond of repeating, is another story. The territory was tightened on Dale and from then on he battled on his home grounds.

Ignored, shabby and hungry, he in some miraculous manner continued to get out his paper. Persons in power and in touch with power advised him to take the easiest way. City, county and State advertising would be his if only he would let up on the boys. They ought to have known him better, for such advice only stirred him to a more bitter wrath and furnished fresh fuel for his already blazing editorials. Finally he was cited for contempt following an attack on the court methods of Circuit Judge Clarence Dearth and after the judge had ordered the *Post-Democrat* off the streets of Muncie.

Dale was sentenced to prison for ninety days. The story of his battle to keep out of jail is an epic of courage with frequent humorous flashes. He carried it through every court to the Supreme Court of the United States—which characteristically refused jurisdiction. But by this time—which is getting just a little ahead of the story—the other bigger Indiana newspapers had followed in his trail and Dale was beginning to come into his own in the public eye. Political Indiana begged off and his sentence was canceled, but not before Counsellor Tom Miller of Muncie had gazed on the majesty of the highest tribunal of this supposedly free country—and

had fled from it as the startled deer races from the guns of cruel hunters.

The New York *World*, then under the editorship of Herbert Bayard Swope, and indebted to Dale for a good many sprightly stories about Indiana, started a dollar fund for him. It came in the nick of time. The little game-cock's comb was drooping. The hitherto square shoulders had a noticeable sag. Remember, he had passed his sixtieth birthday. At home there were eight empty stomachs clamoring for sustenance.

There was no question of surrender—but you can't print a newspaper when they won't credit you with any more pulp on which to print it, and you can't at the same time fight a prison sentence up to the Supreme Court, all without a dime in your pocket.

Swope rushed the first receipts of the *World* fund to Muncie. On the afternoon that the check arrived Editor Dale bought a new pair of trousers, cocked his dilapidated and bullet-punctured bonnet rakishly over one eye, and promenaded down Main street with deliberate intention. The first man who jostled him got slapped right on the nose.

Richard was himself again.

### III

About here is where I should introduce Counsellor Tom Miller of Muncie, to me the most lovable character in Indiana. Until he had edged well into his forties Tom was a foundryman. He was also a profound reader and a doorstep student of human nature. As my old friend, Juanita Hansen, was wont to remark about all and sundry who met with her approbation, Tom Miller is "one of nature's noblemen."

As I have intimated, he was aging before opportunity knocked at his door in the shape of the news—to him—that any man of good character in the sovereign State of Indiana could appear—properly introduced—before a judge and get a permit to practice law. Tom threw down his tools, hied

him before a justice who passed out the necessary certificate of good conduct, got himself a room in the business district, bought a brace of law books and hung out his shingle.

His first client was an old Negro woman who had known and respected him when he toiled with his hands. She had been made to suffer much by a brutal husband and she figured that Tom certainly ought to be able to make her path easier. So she climbed the stairs and was made welcome by Muncie's newest barrister. She launched into a dismal story of morning and evening beatings and the confiscation of her laundry-work earnings.

Counsellor Miller was stirred to deep indignation. He grabbed his retainer of three dollars and then searched frantically through his two law books for a precedent to the opinion he desired to give. Finding none, he decided to establish one himself.

"Do you know what you ought to do, Jenny?" he demanded of the abused woman.

"No, suh, Mister Tom, Ah does not," she replied. "If Ah had knowed, Mister Tom, Ah'd a hung on to ma three dollars."

Ignoring the snappy come-back, the counsellor proceeded to give her her money's worth.

"Why, Jenny," he shouted, "you ought to go right out of here and shoot the so-and-so-forth of a so-and-so-forth."

Jenny grabbed her bag, thanked her attorney, went home, borrowed a gat, and met her husband with a load of hot lead as he crossed the threshold. She was amazed and indignant when policemen arrested her. Her defense was that she had acted on the advice of counsel. Luckily the wife-beater survived his wounds and there were plenty of witnesses to testify to his abuse of Jenny. A tolerant judge let her go. The story, blazoned from one end of the State to the other, brought clients a-ganging to Counsellor Miller.

But Tom is probably as poverty-stricken today as he was when he worked in the foundry. He has built up a large practice and he knows much more law than he did

when he passed out his first piece of advice. Always he has been the poor man's lawyer. Nobody thinks of paying him and he has to be in a fearful fix before he will ask for what is due. He never refuses a case even though it may entail railroad fare and hotel bills—to be paid by himself.

I remember him in Indianapolis four years ago representing the fallen Grand Dragon Stephenson in one of the latter's many appeals for a parole "to gather new evidence." It was a hot Summer's afternoon and Counsellor Miller was telling stories to a crowd of Indians and out-of-town newspaper men. The long thin legs were hanging up to the knees out of one of the big front windows of the old English Hotel, thus exhibiting about twenty-four inches of bare shinbone. Either for comfort or for economy's sake Tom wore no socks. From the outside pocket of his black coat there stuck a toothbrush—for the counsellor contemplated being in town for several days.

In some miraculous fashion he had got hold of a one-hundred-dollar bill. Probably he had obtained it from a Muncie banker on the promise that he would bring it back to town again—which he did, intact. His method was to introduce himself to each strange newspaper man and after some conversation to produce the century note casually, then remarking:

"Say, could you change this for me?"

The reporter, complimented by the intimation that Mr. Miller considered him worth a hundred dollars, would express his regret, whereupon the counsellor would continue:

"Well, well, that's too bad. Let me have two dollars till I get this pesky thing broke open."

The plan worked all along the line and Tom returned to Muncie with the note. But lest you should get the impression that this was deadbeating I hasten to add that I got my two back in due time and so, I have no doubt, did all the rest.

It was another sweltering day and Tom was back in his favorite seat halfway

through the window. A crowd of reporters had brought him the news that the then Governor (Ed Jackson) had announced that no person—not even counsel—would be permitted to interview Stephenson in his cell at Michigan City.

"The hell I can't," shouted Counsellor Miller, pulling his feet from outside the window in his excitement. "I'd like to see Ed Jackson or any other son keep me outa that jail when I feel like a-goin' into it. Why listen, boys, 75% of those fellows down there are my clients."

And he sat back, foaming and speechless with indignation.

That night an Eastern newspaper man writing a feature story of the Indiana klan mess-up had a witty paragraph about the self-admitted failure of Steve's lawyer to keep any of his clients out of jail and the confession that he had represented 75% of the present inmates of the State penitentiary.

However, the writer failed to get a most important point, which was that few if any of the 75% had started off with Tom Miller as counsel. They had had other attorneys, who had taken their all, and now, broke and friendless—even as was the once-powerful Steve—they had come pleading to the one man in Indiana who, they knew, would toil for them for nothing.

Tom Miller can talk Indiana to the Indians, and in so far as volume of court victories is concerned one would rate him as a successful lawyer. But as I have said, there is no money in the sort of trade that takes advantage of his kindly nature. However, he got his great chance from one of the most poverty-stricken of his clients and I regret having to chronicle that he muffed it—fearfully.

The money which Editor George Dale had obtained from the proponents of free speech among the readers of the *New York World* disappeared rapidly in a well of almost bottomless debt. When there was no more in sight the attorneys who were handling his contempt case—now on its



way to the Supreme Court of the United States—refused to carry on. Dale in his dilemma turned where he knew a refusal was an impossibility—to Counsellor Miller.

The chance to appear before that august body—the nation's highest tribunal—appealed particularly to Tom. He visioned the impassioned address he would deliver. He saw Taft, the Chief Justice and ex-President, calling him to chambers after he had been heard and grasping his hand in admiration and congratulation. Surely, this was an opportunity that must not be missed. Somebody had paid a bill due for years and Tom, for the moment, was in funds. He stuffed a clean shirt and a pair of socks—one must wear socks in Washington—into his hip pockets, picked up his faithful toothbrush a-running, and grabbed a train.

On request, if I remember rightly, from Swope, former United States Senator Moses Clapp of Minnesota was to present Counsellor Miller to the Supreme Court in the necessary procedure before the body grants permission to a novice to plead before it. Tom, just off the train and after a wash-up and a switch to the clean shirt, hurried to the Capitol. Hope ran high and his heart beat time to his speeding footsteps.

You could never tell where a thing like this might end. Perhaps he'd move later to Washington and appear before these distinguished old men every day—at a thousand dollars a day. The money itself wouldn't matter to Tom—except that it's easier to help folks when you've got lots of it.

He got into court just a split second ahead of the procession to the bench and stood there watching it, his feet suddenly frozen to the floor. Here was more apparent dignity assembled *en masse* than he had ever come in contact with during his entire life. The portly, imposing Taft; the splendid old man, Oliver Wendell Holmes; the brilliant Jew, Brandeis; Sanford, Butler—and a couple of stuffed shirts. But they weren't stuffed shirts to Tom Miller.

“Lordy, Lordy, Lordy,” mumbled the

perspiring counsellor, completely swamped by class. “And I've got to get up and talk to them! Oh, oh, oh!”

He pulled at his feet with the full force of his body and, miraculously, the ice which had seemed to be clinching them let go. Tom shied away from the bench like a young, unbroken horse, burst through the doors, galloped along the corridor, down the Capitol steps and past the Senate office-building. Nobody was there to clock him, but he maintains to this day that he broke the world's record for the half-mile flat. He never pulled a rein on himself till he stood at a ticket window in the Union Station yelling for space on the next train to Muncie!

#### IV

Slowly but surely a good percentage of the men whom George Dale had been attacking in his little newspaper were coming into their just rewards in the shape of periods of roasting in man-made infernos. One Governor of Indiana went to the Federal penitentiary; another avoided prosecution on bribery charges by pleading the statute of limitations; Grand Dragon Stephenson is in jail for life and a score or so of his ex-lieutenants in the Ku Klux Klan have done or are doing time; a mayor of Indianapolis was kicked out of office, and the chairman of the State Republican Committee is wearing the uniform of a convicted felon; Dale's particular persecutor, Circuit Judge Clarence Dearth, escaped impeachment by two votes in the Legislature and lost his office at the next election. All these had felt the sting of the Dale lash before their major punishment came along.

The other State newspapers swept through the breaches made by Dale, the crusader. A wave of disgust came over Indiana and engulfed a lot of big shots, though there were many others of as high a caliber in the art of trickery who got out from under and are still going good. Muncie, not much inclined to honor her own

prophet, began reading about him in important newspapers of the State and in those of other States. The city began to consider the possibility that she had been wrong and that this little firebrand had been right. It took commendatory notice from out-of-town to bring about this viewpoint, but once the seed was sown Dale blossomed forth from the outcast class. I was with him in his modest home when an invitation came over the telephone to address the Rotary Club, an organization which had frequently expressed its condemnation of his methods. He refused, but as he hung up he turned to me:

"At last," he observed, "I have arrived."

At the next gubernatorial election, running as an Independent Democrat and without endorsements of any kind, Dale polled 58,000 votes—quite a showing for a man without cash and only beginning to gather friends around him. At the mayoralty primary in Muncie last September he defeated the regular Democratic nominee and at the November election won hands down and ahead of the ticket. He campaigned on a clean-up platform.

Living up to his promises he fired the entire police force on taking office last New Year's. Since his inauguration starkness as a description of Muncie fails to fit. It is now a joyous city, a remarkably clean city, a politically untrammelled city—and most interesting things are happening there every day.

Right out of the box the mayor ran into trouble with Police Judge Frank Mann, who had been elected on the same ticket but whom Dale had characterized as "a bad running-mate for me." In his usual forthright fashion he had asked Mann, from the platform, to get out of the race.

The candidate for police judge replied somewhat wittily that he had no intention of doing so—although he added that he did not expect to be elected. His main purpose in running, he explained, was to embarrass the head of the municipal ticket

as much as possible. He concluded with the prophecy that he would spend the whole of the year 1930 chuckling to himself at the colossal defeat which was bound to be Dale's portion—and incidentally his own. But what did he care?

Instead, both Mr. Dale and Mr. Mann were swept into office, the latter winning, according to the former, because he had affixed himself "to the tail of my kite."

Then the bother began. Judge Mann, according to the mayor, was much too easy on manufacturers of bad liquor. Dale thinks the world and all of makers of drinkable booze, but is mighty bitter against handlers of stuff which may do injury to his fellow countrymen and women. However, he and his police force are doing all they can to enforce what the mayor considers an unenforceable law. In accordance with this intention one hundred and three rum-handlers were haled before Judge Mann during the first six weeks of the new administration. A beautiful cross-section of court-clogging right there.

Only three of these, according to the mayor and his chief of police, were jailed. Action was decided on. Dale was due for a holiday in Florida but just before he left he ordered the police force to take no more cases of liquor law violation before Mann.

"I've quarantined the judge," the editor-mayor announced in his next issue of the *Post-Democrat*.

Then off he hopped for the South.

He left no instructions about a let-up in the gathering together of booze peddlers and by the end of ten days Chief of Police Massey had the city jail so crowded that the walls were starting to bulge outward.

"Bastille bursting," he wired his chief in Florida. "What will I do?"

The mayor, basking down there in the sunshine where cocktails are two dollars apiece, felt bighearted and telegraphed back:

"Let the poor fellows go."

Chief Massey obeyed him. The mayor stayed bighearted right up to his return

home, for he then announced editorially and officially that he had lifted the quarantine and given the judge another chance. Up to this time of writing things are running smoothly and the jurist is now regarded as a Daniel come to judgment in Muncie.

Dale claims that if a person washes himself frequently and regularly the cleanliness of his exterior portions will communicate itself to his innards. With this thought in mind he has set out to make Muncie the most sanitary-appearing second-class city in these United States. He appointed a rabid Socialist to the office of street-cleaning commissioner.

"This fellow," he explained, "figures that no person in the world should have more than two dollars and eighty cents and that all persons should be equal. When I took over office the well-to-do folks were getting a first-class service on garbage removal and the poor were getting a rotten deal. I knew the system which brought this about but instead of interfering with it I simply told my commissioner to gear himself up all-round to the service given the rich folks. That boy got my point at once, being the Socialist he is, and he just falls over himself getting out garbage, whether it's from a millionaire's home or from a colored man's shack."

The mayor is particularly enthusiastic over the covers which the Socialist has put on the garbage trucks.

"Great idea, that," he remarked, slapping his hands together. "During previous administrations the wagons would go jolting along the streets bouncing dead dogs and cats all over the place. Now these wire-net covers keep everything aboard and shipshape."

The paving contractors of previous days have all been chased out of the City Hall since Mayor Dale took over office. A number of contracts in favor of the old crowd were entered into just before his administration took over, but these were canceled by the new City Council on the

proposal of the mayor. New agreements were entered into immediately, cutting the price thirty-five cents a square foot.

The mayor's brand-new police force is the smartest thing in the Middle West. All the boys wear turn-down collars on their coats, with white linen and black ties. The caps are the crush kind popularized by Grover Whalen for his New York coppers. The Muncie boys are so proud of their clothes that they won't take them off even when not on duty. Which, as the mayor remarks, gets almost twenty-four-hour efficiency out of a man who would otherwise toil only about a third of the day.

During the height of the battle with Judge Mann the mayor gave an apt illustration of the importance he attaches to the even break.

The police force picked up a couple of men said to be drunk. Not long after they ran across the father of a prominent politician and supporter of the mayor in a like condition. Being honest and fair coppers, as their mayor had instructed them to be, they tucked away the old man just as they had the other two offenders.

Pretty soon word came down from the office of the police judge to free the first pair of celebrants. The chief of police called up the mayor and explained the situation. Far from being angry, His Honor immediately perceived where the situation could be used to save his friend from the embarrassment about to be caused by his father's intoxication.

"If the judge wants his friends let out we'll have to let them out," ordered the mayor. "How's so-and-so coming along?"

"He'll be able to put one foot in front of the other in about an hour," reported the chief.

"Good," said Dale. "Be kind to him and as soon as he can walk let him go home. I don't want to see any favoritism in these sort of cases."

"You see," he explained later, "my conscience would have made me treat my friend's father as the other two were



treated. But when the court freed its friends I could in all fairness free mine."

But the doors of the jail don't always swing back as easily. One man of prominence did the mayor a grievous wrong in olden days. When in power this person had a habit of hanging round the City Hall. After Dale came in he didn't seem able to break himself of it.

"The next time you see him in the corridors," the mayor told the chief, "pick him up for vagrancy."

"Say, mayor," called the chief about an hour after the "vagrant" had been tucked away. "This bird's raisin' all hell down here. He's got a hold of the bars and he's like to pull them out. He swears he'll sue the city for fifty thousand and his lawyer says he can collect."

"Where's his lawyer?" asked Dale.

"Right here, on the other side of the bars, talking to the prisoner."

"Slap him in the next cage and let them argue it out," ordered His Honor. And

there the two stayed till they cooled off. Nothing in the shape of a suit has been filed so far. Dale gathered a wealth of information on people while he was a news-hound.

A Muncie citizen called the mayor on the telephone the other night and asked him for advice on the matter of making home brew.

"Mr. Mayor," he said, "am I within the law? I've made some beer in my cellar and if I'm wrong I want to break up the bottles."

"How much did you make?" asked the mayor.

"Just enough for myself, Mr. Mayor. Just enough for one."

"Hell, man," exploded His Honor. "The next time you do anything like that make enough for two and then call me up. I'll be right over."

Such a mayor—and he has almost four years to go yet—will certainly lift the charge of starkness from Middletown.

## WRITER'S CRAMP

BY JOEL SAYRE

"I CERTAINLY appreciate this little visit, Mr. Reeves," said Mr. Sturgess, the big man in the \$150 suit. "All my life I've wanted to know what the inside of a lighthouse was like and now I know."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Mr. Reeves. "Anything I can do for a friend of Jimmie Calder's is a pleasure."

"Gosh, it's certainly a great place you've got here," said Sturgess. "Living-room, kitchen and everything. Even a telephone. And that store room! Why it's equipped like Sears-Roebuck."

"Yes," said Reeves with intense apathy, "the Department of Commerce does pretty well by its wave-swept towers."

Sturgess looked at him curiously.

"'Wave-swept towers,' eh?" he repeated, "'wave-swept towers!' Why, you're quite a poet, Mr. Reeves. 'Wave-swept towers.' Hmm. Pretty good."

The lighthouse keeper blushed. He was a pale, glum-looking, little man in dungarees. On his head he wore the knitted article known in the Navy as a watch cap.

"And you know so much about the lights up there," Sturgess went on. "All about the optics and everything. You certainly know a lot. I mean about the lights and everything."

"'Nautically trained lighthouse engineer,' I believe they call it," said Reeves in a flat voice. There was a silence.

"Say," said Sturgess suddenly, "by the way. I nearly forgot. I brought out a little something here with me." He pulled a huge silver flask out of the pocket of his overcoat lying on a chair. "Some Scotch. Just off one of the big liners. And not scraped off, either. How about a snort?"

"Why not?" was the lighthouse keeper's reply.

He went below to the kitchen and presently returned with two glasses and a pitcher.

"You'll have to take it with water," he muttered. "The Department of Commerce doesn't supply club soda."

"No club soda, eh?" said Sturgess, giving him another searching look. "No club soda. What do you think of that?"

"Oh, I've been around," said Reeves bitterly.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything personal," said Sturgess, "but you will admit that this is a funny place to hear about club soda."

The lighthouse keeper was blushing once more.

"I suppose it is, really," he said. "Forget about it. Well, here's how."

The two men took long pulls at their drinks.

"Must be a great life here," said Sturgess somewhat tentatively, after a long silence.

"Simply wonderful," replied the other nastily.

There was another silence.

"How about another snort?"

"Why not?"

Sturgess poured and the two men drank again. The entire round was consumed without the aid of words.

"This is pretty good stuff, if I do say it myself," remarked Sturgess. "How about another snort?"

"Why not?"

"This is pretty good stuff if you do say it yourself," said Reeves after a while.

"Why not?" said Sturgess.