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## THE SKEPTICS' CORNER

by BERGEN EVANS

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### *That Adam and Eve ate an apple*

Nowhere does the Good Book identify "that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe" with the common Rosaceous tree, *Pyrus Malus*, which we today call the apple tree. The identification in the popular mind, which is very old, may derive from the fact that "apple" was formerly used with great latitude to designate almost any kind of fruit. Topsell, in his *Four-footed Beastes* (1673) refers to "the fruit or apples of palm-trees." Even today we have pineapples and oak-apples and custard apples. The apples with which Solomon longed to be "comforted" when he was "sick of love" have long puzzled the curious, both as to nature and intended use. Milton, by the way, calls the forbidden fruit an apple.

In the popular mind the fruit is definitely that of the common apple tree and vague amorousness is sometimes vaguely associated with it. In

a song popular during the war an overseas veteran besought his beloved not to sit under the apple tree with anyone else but him. And Mr. Walter Trudgeon, of Bodmin in Cornwall, recently sought a divorce on the grounds that his wife had offered a young man an apple. His suit, however, was denied on the grounds that despite Eve's precedent such an offer did not clearly constitute evidence of unlawful solicitation.

### *That early shaving brings on a beard*

Thomas Hardy says of Festus Derri-man, in *The Trumpet Major*, that "symptoms of beard and whiskers had appeared upon him at a very early age owing to his persistent use of the razor before there was a necessity for its operation." Hardy's illusion is shared by many fathers who sternly forbid their sons to shave too early and compel them to go about in callow straggleness — and by many sons who secretly scrape their chins (and even their chests) in the hopes

of speedily producing evidences of virility. In more recent days girls have been warned not to shave their legs "as it will only make the hair grow more" and some obey the warning, to the intense dissatisfaction of ogling males.

The belief has this much foundation, that as the bristly stubs of the shaved-off hairs return their possessor will be more aware of them. It will *seem* like more hair.

*That verdicts are reversed on appeal on typographical errors, misspellings and the like*

There is a popular notion, "a strange and persistent error," Max Radin calls it, that if the appellate court finds a typographical error or a misspelled word it will reverse the verdict in a criminal case. Actually—and again contrary to the popular belief—appellate courts rarely reverse verdicts in criminal cases and never on any such trivial grounds. "Something like that occasionally occurred a century ago," Radin adds, "but in most cases even then such an error was only a pretext for doing what the court wished to do."

Serious grounds, of course, may seem trivial to the untrained or prejudiced mind, but that's another thing.

*They're coming through the floor*

Undeterred by the disastrous exposure of the Gazelle Boy of Transjordan, the wolf children of India keep

on coming. Two new ones have been reported, one in Fyazabad and one in Cawnpore. The usual recognition signs were present: they loped on all fours and ate their food ravenously. The validity of the Fyazabad child is put beyond question by the fact that he was immediately attracted to an English lady who had "a way" with wild animals. The Cawnpore boy was kept in a cage and his being a wolf boy was vouched for by his master to the local magistrate.

Among the general rejoicings at the departure of the hated sahibs there must be strains of regret. Who will there be to believe such stories now?

American savants do not lag behind Hindu showmen and magistrates in spreading the glad tidings. Professor T. L. Engle of Indiana University, in the 1945 edition of his high school Textbook, *Psychology — Principles and Applications*, devotes two pages to the wolf girls of Midnapore—and not under the heading of "Credulity" either. Mr. Victor Harper, Executive Director of the Peoria Mental Hygiene Society, sees the girls' history as a dramatic illustration of "the effect of group contacts upon individuals" and "the difficulty of replacing an established habit system with another." Professor Philo M. Buck, of the University of Wisconsin, writing in no less august a journal than the *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* remembers as a small boy in India to have seen a wolf boy: "He scorned clothes, and no house was tight enough to confine

him. His voice was an inarticulate imitation of wolfish sounds. He was, except in shape, a wolf." "It is a terrifying thought," Professor Buck adds, "how easily and quickly the human returns to the brute." Mr. Philip Eisenberg in his book on psychology entitled *Why We Act as We Do* uses the story to prove "some very important conclusions about the dependence of human beings upon society." One of them is that society makes possible collections of works of reference by means of which we can check such stories, but Mr. Eisenberg was too restricted for space to be able to include that one. Professor Ogburn, of the University of Chicago, in his *Sociology* 336, "The Theory of Culture" (Summer, 1946) asserted that the Midnapore adoption was a fact of the first magnitude. When advised by one of his students that an article in the *Atlantic* questioned the veracity of the story he pointed out that the article in question was by a professor of English and therefore unscientific. He advised his students not to read it lest it unsettle their faith.

*That human nature is unchangeable*

Charles Dickens, the great humanitarian writer, arranged a special party to witness the hanging of Mr. and Mrs. Manning at Horsemonger Gaol, November 13, 1849. In order to have a good look at the last convulsive twitchings he rented space in a house whose rooms had a fine view of the

scaffold. "We have taken," he wrote enthusiastically to Leech, "the whole of the roof (and the back kitchen) for the extremely moderate sum of ten guineas or two guineas each."

Invitations to any such jollification today would certainly be declined by all people of Dickens' social level and the inviter would probably be regarded as more of a monster than a dear, considerate fellow. Those who argue that "human nature never changes" will insist that our squeamishness is merely a vogue, that people could easily be "educated up" to the enjoyment of such spectacles again. But are they not merely saying that "human nature" *can* be changed, and re-changed?

*That white eggs are better than brown eggs*

Housewives seem to have strong convictions concerning eggshells. At the moment nothing will sell but white eggs, and white eggs only, by selection, diet or breeding, are produced for the city markets. Perhaps the customers associate white with cleanliness, but if they do they fall into a double error, for there is no necessary connection and any egg is the better for not having been washed. As an egg emerges from the hen it is covered with a film of mucous which usually picks up some dirt before it dries. In washing off the dirt the protective film is also washed off, making the egg that much more likely to spoil.

There have been times and places

where brown eggs were as much in demand as white eggs now are. It was felt that they were "richer" than white eggs.

*That fine teeth are due to toothpaste*

An instructor in a midwestern university has for many years now started off his classes by asking the members to write an essay in which they explore their sensual boundaries by listing the things they like to feel, see, hear, taste and smell.

High on the list of gustatory pleasures every year is toothpaste. They love it. The morning mouthful of foaming, slippery sweetness is, obviously, one of our supreme national delights, the more delightful in that it appeals to the morals as well as the mouth, being "hygienic," "good for you" and "necessary for sound teeth."

Many tests have shown that toothpaste won't do anything that a little salt or soda won't do and that the foam and sweetness and various aromas and tastes and tingles are mere pursuits of happiness. Some of the most widely-used dentifrices actually stain the teeth and the manufacturers cheerfully advise the purchaser on the bottle to use soda once a week or so to remove the stain!

The catch is that people who use toothpaste probably do have better teeth than those who do not and hence are confirmed in their faith in advertising. But the toothpaste may not be the cause of the better teeth.

As J. B. S. Haldane has pointed out in one of his essays, those who can afford toothpaste can probably afford better food, too, and it is known that nutrition plays a large part in the condition of the teeth. Then, too, those who use toothpaste are obviously interested in the care or appearance of their teeth and this interest will most likely take them to the dentist who, if he is a good dentist, will no doubt warn them against brushing their teeth too much.

*That couples may be divorced for "incompatibility of temperament"*

Though, to be sure, the reasons alleged for many divorces are only window, or courtroom, dressings for incompatibility of temperament, only sunny New Mexico actually recognizes this as grounds.

*That an "I am no longer responsible" ad in the paper relieves a man of any further responsibility for his wife's debts*

Hopeful husbands who attempt to pull themselves out of insolvency by their own bootstraps in this manner have to pay for the ad *and* their wives' shopping tours. A husband is generally held responsible for his wife's necessities, whether the couple is living together or not, and the court, not the husband, will decide what does and what does not constitute a necessity.

# SAGEBRUSH JUSTICE

BY WAYNE GARD

WILLIAM COZENS, who in 1862 became the second sheriff of Gilpin County, Colorado, picked up a couple of husky horse thieves one afternoon but didn't know what to do with them. Court would not open until the next morning; the county did not yet have a jail; and Cozens' equipment was limited to a Sharp's rifle, a pair of Colts, a few handcuffs and leg irons. The only solution he could think of was to take the prisoners to his home, handcuff them to a post at the foot of a bed, and allow them to sleep on the floor. He did this in spite of the fact that his wife was confined to the bed with a new baby, and what she had to say about it sent him scurrying the next morning to round up enough loafers to build a primitive jail.

Lack of secure jails was one of the chief impediments to the enforcement of statutory law on the frontier. In California, where the gold rush brought a sudden surge of adventurers, the jail problem was especially acute. At Yerba Buena, which became San Francisco, a hungry prisoner appeared before the alcalde one morning, carrying on his back the

door of the calaboose, to which he was chained, and demanded his breakfast. In 1849, desperate San Franciscans bought a dismantled brig, the *Euphemia*, and used it as the boom town's hoosegow. At Sacramento in the following year, the bark *La Grange* was acquired for the same purpose.

Other California towns were in similar straits. Los Angeles kept wrongdoers in an old adobe dwelling in the rear of the Lafayette Hotel. This jail was so insecure that the jailer, George Whitehorn, chained his prisoners — like fish on a string — to a big pine log that extended the length of the room. Contra Costa County built a stone jail in 1850, but prisoners continued to escape. Placer County's jail in 1851 was a log cabin at Auburn. In the next year, W. B. Ide, a justice of the peace at Monroeville, in Colusa County, built an iron cage and placed it in the shade of a tree, thus keeping lawbreakers in the fresh air.

In the plains country, where building materials were scarce, jail troubles were common. Sometimes arrested men were placed in dry cisterns to sober up or to await bail or trial. In

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