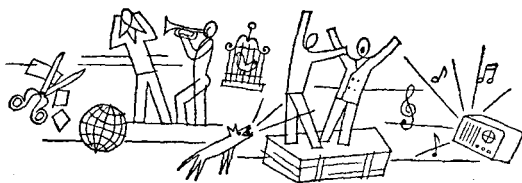

THE SOAP BOX



EDITORIAL NOTES

Shop Talk. The call issued in this place recently for manuscripts dealing fairly and objectively with such “irregular” healing professions as chiropractic, osteopathy and naturopathy has brought forth a considerable correspondence from the “irregular” practitioners themselves and also from the orthodox medical doctors. Some of the correspondents, especially those opposed to the “medical trust” and carrying on their unorthodox practice in smaller communities in the South and the Middle West, were somewhat abusive (as well as ungrammatical) in their communications, but most were only inflamed with a desire to state their case. We are already considering several articles on various healing arts and sciences, and if any measure up to our requirements, we shall print them. . . . A number of friendly readers who are professional or amateur etymologists have inquired whether we are open to free-lance contributions to our department of Phrase Origins. The answer is definitely yes, though we

must add that at the moment we have enough on hand to last us for almost a year. We want to assure all the aforementioned friendly etymologists, however, that no truly first-rate Phrase Origin will be turned down. For that matter, we never turn down anything really first-rate that falls within our editorial range, no matter how stocked-up we are with material. . . . One of our very able and valued contributors, Richard L. Neuberger (who wrote two excellent profiles of Senators Wayne Morse and Glen Taylor, and an article on the Canol Project, for us), was elected to the Oregon State Senate last November 2 with the largest total ever received by a legislative candidate in the state’s history. We offer our congratulations to Mr. Neuberger. A professional author who is universally respected, he will continue his writing, and we are happy to report that he is now working on several articles for the MERCURY, which will be published during the year. . . . Apparently because of remarks made here from time to time about our search for religious articles, we have

of late become the fairly regular recipients of several very hefty religious periodicals. One of the editors, who specializes in reading almost anything that is printed, has already gone through a number of these periodicals, and he reports that American religious journals seem to be in a very healthy state: they are bulky, full of news, and fat with advertising. This apparently is true not only of the religious journals published in the large cities of the North, Middle West, and the Pacific Coast, but also of those in the reputedly less opulent sections of the country. One weekly religious organ, published in Atlanta, Georgia, has hardly ever come out, during the past six months, with less than 32 pages, and the amount of paid advertising in it would please any business manager. All of which gives us an idea, namely, that it would please us very much to print an impartial, informative article on the religious press of the United States. This press is clearly very much alive, and doubtless wields a considerable influence. It may well be that the subject merits more than one article. We look forward to hearing from journalists who are willing to work hard and who can write acceptably.



The staff historian reports that the *MERCURY*, like nearly all other magazines of its type, seldom prints articles on archaeology, astronomy, botany, ichthyology and related sciences. This seems strange indeed. Surely

there is much of interest to the general reader in every one of these subjects. Can it be that the men and women involved in them are too shy to write for a general audience? We doubt it. In any case, we hereby extend a cordial invitation to them to send us queries and scripts, and, as usual, we promise prompt and courteous attention.



Our complaints concerning the absence of authors from Wyoming in our pages has had a salutary effect upon the residents of that great commonwealth of the West. Some mornings, judging by the mail, it seems as if the entire population of the state is eager to "make" *THE AMERICAN MERCURY* so as to clear the fair name of the community. We have no doubt that very soon we shall be printing something by a resident of Wyoming. . . . We would like to say here that there are other states whose residents have never "made" our pages, or who have been absent from them for many years. We mention Montana and New Mexico. There are also Utah and Idaho and — but perhaps we had better stop, lest we create violent jealousy among the great sisterhood of states.

CAPITAL H

The King James version, as far as I can make out, refers to Jesus in the third person always with a small h. But I was taught in school always to

refer to Jesus with a capital H. Why do I have to be more polite than the learned and pious men who did the magnificent King James version of the Bible?

BURTON K. MALFEY

Pomona, Cal.

IN AID OF GENIUS

I believe it was Bertrand Russell who once suggested that society make some provision for men and women who do not want to waste their time earning a living and wish to devote all their energies to writing fiction, composing music, painting portraits, etc. All I want to say is that the new Congress do something about this proposal. Precisely what the new Congress should do I don't know, but various ideas come to mind.

Let the Social Security Board set aside a sum to provide the bare necessities for any person who wants to be an artist. Each community might have a huge flophouse where such men and women could eat and sleep and meet friends. Each of them might also be given about three dollars a week for spending money — geniuses or potential geniuses are as much entitled to spending money as are the men and women who inherit money from their parents. Would there be a lot of fakers at these flophouses? Of course, there would. But there are also a lot of fakers in the banking business, journalism, the ministry, teaching — all the callings that adorn and afflict the human race. If after 20

or 25 years there comes out of these residences a fair poet or a fair composer or a fair painter — I don't say a genius, because only a later day can determine that — then, the money will have been well spent. But even if nothing comes out of them, the money still will have been well spent. The "loafers" will add something charming to American life and help take the curse off a nation full of clean and well-dressed young men who run after "security," and of brittle women who study the label on a man's jacket while they are being kissed.

But my own hunch is that real artists will come out of these places. I firmly believe there is a lot of talent in this country that is killed every day by the striving for "success."

ARTHUR A. MURPHY

Cleveland, O.

EX-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

I believe it was your Mr. Mencken who once suggested that all ex-Presidents, for their own peace of mind and for the welfare of the country, be hanged within six months of leaving office. Some day I hope that suggestion will be made law. I only want to add to it the proposal that similar treatment be accorded unsuccessful candidates for President on either major ticket. Do I hear my Republican friends shouting Amen?

P. DANIEL DAWSON

San Antonio, Tex.

MAKING ARSON OBSOLETE

BY JOSEPH FULLING FISHMAN

THE large summer home in Massachusetts was insured for \$75,000. Its owner had decided to live in Florida. He tried to sell the place, but couldn't, and found himself stuck with a sizable house, expensive to maintain and of no earthly use to him.

The seemingly perfect solution presented itself. He would set fire to the house and collect the insurance. But he was determined not to make the mistakes that landed so many arsonists in prison. He would not soak the place in gasoline and he would certainly not employ a professional "torch"; putting himself at the mercy of a blackmailer for the rest of his life was no part of his plan. He would start the blaze himself, not at the scene, but from Florida, a thousand miles away.

He came back to Massachusetts in February, intentionally reaching his house around three in the morning, when he was certain not to meet anyone who knew him. The necessary arrangements completed, he locked the door and hurried back to Miami.

Here he made it his business to be

seen in places where he was well known. When he was sure that his alibi was firmly established, he entered a telephone booth and put in a long-distance call for himself at his Massachusetts residence. There was, of course, no answer. But the jingling bell clappers, hooked to a thin wire, lit several matches by scraping them back and forth over sandpaper, and set fire to some carefully piled shavings. These, in turn, ignited a stack of newspapers and sent the blaze roaring through the house. Informed by his Massachusetts neighbors about the fire, the owner hurried back to collect his insurance.

But arson investigators, employed by the insurance companies, are experts in analyzing burnt substances, even in a building that has been completely gutted. Their search turned up the remnants of newspapers and shavings near the telephone.

Long-distance "touchoffs" or "alibi-torchings" were not a new story to these men. They began to check on the owner, who was the only man that would profit by the fire. The records of the telephone company

JOSEPH FULLING FISHMAN has written articles on crime for the *MERCURY* and many other magazines, as well as a book, *Sex in Prison*. He has worked for the Department of Justice and as Deputy Commissioner of Correction in New York City.