

for my 'stinker' thinks I don't know about his sweethearts." But the editors bravely print such snappy comments as "You would sell more magazines if you didn't make too many mistakes," and "I read the article called 'Why Women Divorce Their Husbands.' I will tell you why women divorce their husbands. Because that is Mother Nature's way of keeping the population from increasing." When the readers really let themselves go, they are apt to produce something like this: "I strongly object to an item I just came across . . . Man is a selfish beast . . . A woman's only weapon is her tongue and it doesn't compare with the filthy language and gossip I have heard from some men . . . Your article was

destructive, not constructive. When men read that, you just give them more reason to justify themselves and make us all wrong. Men are street angels and home devils. I am not a man-hater as I had a good father but a mean husband."

It is unusual that so much adverse comment is printed in the letter columns, but it is not difficult to see what prompts it. Apparently people do turn to these magazines for advice, and in most cases their frustration can only be increased by the kind of double-talk they find. More often than not, the advice they receive is no more tangible than this typical pronouncement: "The reason so many marriages fail is because people do not know how to make them succeed."

PHRASE ORIGINS—61

IN HOCK: *The Hock-Days are the second Monday and the second Tuesday after Easter Sunday. Hock Days were celebrated in England from at least the fourteenth century by humorous methods of collecting money for the parish. Until this specific method was forbidden by statute, the women would seize the men on Hock Monday, and the men would seize the women on Hock Tuesday, setting them free only after the payment of a small sum known as "hock money."* The name of the practice offers a wonderful temptation to the amateur etymologist to deduce that "in hock" meaning "pawned," and therefore held in custody until a sum has been paid, is derived from the old English custom. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to that effect. The phrase "in hock" is not English, and is not even found in the main volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary. It is duly recorded in the Supplement and in Webster's as an Americanism. It comes from the Dutch word hok, "a hovel," "a prison." In gamblers' slang of the last century, "in hock" meant to be beaten, to be in debt, and finally, "in pawn."

MORRIS ROSENBLUM

THE "FRINGE" RELIGIONS

BY ALSON J. SMITH

A NEVER-FAILING source of wonder to the European is the number and variety of religious sects in this country. The United States census recognizes 212 separated denominations, and there are at least forty more that are not listed because they refuse to disclose their membership figures. Only in India is there a comparable proliferation of sects and cults. A casual survey of the church page of any metropolitan newspaper on a Saturday night discloses a riotous and joyous confusion of tongues that might easily persuade the stranger to these blessed shores that he had arrived at a reincarnation of the Tower of Babel. On the Sabbath, the paper tells him, he can witness the materialization of his dead mother, have his horoscope interpreted, learn how to breathe correctly, find out what hell looks like, get a preview of Armageddon, hear a sermon on Nostradamus, learn to speak with tongues, handle snakes, and get cured of alcoholism. All in addition, of course, to the standard Sunday routines of the

Catholics, Methodists, and Presbyterians.

Ninety-one per cent of all church members in America belong to the 24 largest denominational bodies. But it is the 7 million who are affiliated with the other 188 sects, and the 3 to 5 million who are connected with the unlisted cults, that provide most of the color to the religious scene in this country. And it is these so-called "fringe" groups that show the largest percentage of increase in membership. While the major bodies lose members, remain stationary, or report small increases, the sects bound ahead with startling increases up to 600 per cent. The multiplication of "store-front" churches is one of the major social phenomena of our time.

Most of the sects, it goes without saying, are small. The Primitive Friends have one congregation and 25 members, and the Bullockite Free Will Baptists have two churches with 36 members. The Spiritualists, however, claim about 150,000 members, and Jehovah's Witnesses, while not

THE REVEREND ALSON J. SMITH'S article, "What's Right with the Ministry," appeared in the October MERCURY. His Faith to Live By was published last year by Doubleday.