

Au revoir, darlings! Good afternoon, Mees Greegs."

She is gone. We settle back in our places. Miss Griggs goes to the bookcase and finds *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

HOW MUCH A WORD?

A FORECAST

by Robert M. Coates

I HAVE always been what they call a great reader. Even when I was very young, people used to say to Mother, "My! What a great reader that boy of yours is!" And Mother used to say, "Yes, he certainly is getting to be a great reader, isn't he?"

Now probably a lot of all this was just maternal pride, because after all I don't honestly believe it is possible for a child of ten or eleven years to be a really Great Reader. And besides, that was before the day of the two-pounds-for-a-nickel magazines, and reading itself was still in its infancy.

But anyway, all I wanted to do was to make it clear that I have some claim to authority in the matter which I wish to discuss. And what I want to discuss is the way these authors get paid for the stories they write and which I and you (yes, you!) read. Because it seems they get paid by the word.

When the matter was called to my attention the other day, I literally gasped.

"You mean they get paid by the word?"

"Yes," said my informant, who for reasons of his own doesn't want to be dragged into this, so we must leave him anonymous. "Yes," said he. "That is exactly what they do".

"No matter what word?" I said.

"No matter what word," he said.

"Well!" I said. That was all I could think of to say at the moment.

Because, after all, is it logical? Words of one syllable, by this system, are just as good

as any other words—except, of course, those used by a higher-priced writer.

Thus a phrase like "Oscar closed the door" may be worth anywhere from two cents to forty, or even up to a dollar, depending on the rate paid by the magazine in which you read it. And even an "and" by, say, Mr. Peter B. Kyne, becomes of much greater value than an "and" by, say, myself.

Of course, I am not going to pit my "ands" against Mr. Kyne's, nor my "its" against Miss Hurst's. It only occurs to me that an editor worried over production costs would do well to order a stock of "ands", "its", "thoughts", "bys", et cetera, from some lower-priced writer, and not buy his prepositions and conjunctions from the Titans of the Authoring industry any more.

But even that would be begging the question, when what we need is a really sweeping reform, and no ifs nor buts about it. So now I am going to put all false modesty aside and say that an "if" or a "but" by me is just as good as an "if" or a "but" by E. Phillips Oppenheim any day of the week. Is this a free country or isn't it?

As far as I can see, there is only one way to handle this question fairly. Pay by the word, yes; but pay differently for different words! There, in a nutshell, is your solution.

For example, let us say that prepositions are valued at one cent each, or \$1.00 a gross. Well, that gives us a beginning. Conjunctions, I should say, ought to be worth a little bit more, because they are usually longer. Put them at \$1.50 a gross.

So far so good. But it is with adverbs and adjectives that we are going to have difficulty. You can't handle them in job lots. Take, for example, the word "marmoreal". I ran across it the other day, in a story by A. E. Coppard, and I remember remarking at the time to the man standing next me in the Subway, "This Coppard must have been thinking pretty quick to remember that word right when he needed it".

"This is the station where I get off," re-

plied the man, whose name unfortunately escapes me, so I could see he agreed with me in the fundamental principles of my theory.

Take "rutilant", or "rubescent". Words like that have much more tone than "red". They should be paid for accordingly. We could even prepare a list, like the butter and egg market, showing current authors' quotations:

	Opened	High	Low	Closed
ambience	\$0.14	.18	.12	.15
compact (of)	0.22	.22	.08	.09
anodyne	0.11	.17	.11	.16
burgeon	0.04	.09	.03	.08
riant	0.10	.11	.09	.09
marcescent	0.22	.22	.17	.18
moue	0.19	.20	.18	.19
moo	0.02	.02	.02	.02
pastiche	0.13	.15	.13	.14
Archaisms, misc.				
(doth, wast, ye, etc.)	0.07	.11	.06	.08
German misc.				
(<i>Ewigkeit, Sturm und Drang, etc.</i>) ..	0.11	.14	.09	.10
French, misc. (<i>hein!</i>				
<i>bah! m'sieu, nom d'un chien, etc.</i>) ..	0.21	.21	.13	.13

The market opened at a downward trend, which continued, though at steadier pace than marked yesterday's trading. French adjectives went begging, though a few small lots were taken by a syndicate of lady novelists. French interjections were strong, and the heavy bulling led shrewd observers to predict a new batch of war stories next year. The expected rise in archaisms failed to materialize, and some frantic covering was done by those traders who had been buying against the spring crop of poets. Persistent selling forced the bottom out of "Compact (of)", and it dropped to the season's low, hinting that another New School of Criticism will shortly be formed.

Thus everything could be arranged on a business basis, and matters would be simplified greatly. For one thing, I understand, in the old days authors used to spend hours polishing off their sentences and searching for the *mot juste*. Under my scheme, all they

would have to do would be to look up the market quotations and there would be the *mot juste*, ready to hand.

It might even work to the advantage of us Great Readers, as well. For if authors get paid for one word, they could reasonably be fined for another. For using Russian words, like "droshky", "verst" and "moujik", I should say the fine ought to be about fifteen dollars per verst. (Cries of "Hear! Hear!")

For making cracks like: "We had some *pliffjaurks* (pronounced 'flapjacks'), which is the Malay term for cold parsnips . . .", the author would be penalized ten yards and have to start back among the advertisements. Let's see how much erudition they would show then! (Loud and prolonged applause.)

WHEN WE WERE THIRTY MILLIONS

by Don C. Seitz

THERE were no book clubs in the eighteen-fifties, when, according to the sapient Thomas Carlyle we were a nation of thirty millions, "mostly fools". Were we? Certainly our reading and the quantity we absorbed does not indicate it. Up to the end of 1853, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in the previous year, had sold 275,000 copies. George Palmer Putnam had laid the foundation of his fortunes by reviving interest in the still living but long absent Washington Irving, who thought himself that his stay abroad had extinguished interest in his works, but Putnam was able to show a sale of 144,000 copies, with the *Life of Washington* yet to come.

Soft sob stuff, written by "Fanny Fern", as the wife of James Parton called herself, dubbed *Fern Leaves*, earned royalties on the sale of 45,000 copies. Miss Anne Warner, the reigning female novelist of the day, had to her credit the disposal of 104,000 copies of