



Tongue Tide

"Not only is there more banquet speakin', so that a man can't go to a dinner without ear muffs an' a hypodermic, but luncheon clubs have sprung up so thickly that prudent men never leave their homes until late afternoon"

THE movies," said Uncle Henry, "hit upon a profound truth, even if accidentally, when they conceived the idea of a Strong, Silent Man. You've got to be strong to be silent, for speech is about the most powerful an' insidious of all human cravin's. The habit's bad enough if concealed from everybody except the family, but when it reaches the open, shameless stage, an' becomes oratory, nothin's more terrible.

"Heaven knows that President Hoover has practically depleted the country of man-power with all his commissions. Go into any town or hamlet, an' you'll find only grandsires, adolescents an' babes in arms sunnin' themselves in the empty streets. Even so, I'm sure enough able-bodied males can be found to make a study of oratory, an' report on its causes an' cure.

"Why not? The Government spends thirty millions on the extermination of the Mediterranean fruit fly, an' countless other millions on the Texas tick, the tent caterpillar, the gypsy moth an' the skin troubles of the Pribilof Islands seals an' muskrats. Are those any more important than a scientific investigation into a disease that ravages the United States from Maine to California, causin' untold sufferin'?

"There's somethin' subtle an' sinister about oratory, 'Lonzo. Mark the well-nigh resistless manner in which it saps the human will, reducin' even granite-jawed, Roman-nosed men to the consistency of putty.

An Age of Oratorical Orgies

"It's downright bafflin'. No man who has reached the shavin' age, an' is in possession of his sound senses, would bound out on a public platform, an' try to paint a landscape in full view of the audience, without ever havin' had a paint brush in his hand or not even knowin' that a palette isn't the thing that makes him dissatisfied with his wife's cookin'.

"Oratory is jes' as much of an art as paintin' an' music an' writin', yet every day you see men attemptin' it publicly with a reckless an' almost depraved disregard for the consequences, many of them without even the advantage of a moment's thought or preparation. That's the strangest part of it, for any orator, if he's honest, will tell you that he spends more time on his extemporaneous efforts than he does on a set speech.

"One of the main reasons behind the Eighteenth Amendment was the general belief that prohibition would put an end to after-dinner speakin', but instead of that the habit has spread an' each day sees thousands of new addicts. Earshot, once an innocent word, has

taken on a new an' terrible significance.

"Not only is there more banquet speakin', so that a man can't go to a dinner without his ear muffs an' hypodermic, but luncheon clubs have sprung up so thickly that prudent men never leave their homes until late afternoon.

"Any day, in any town, along about the noon hour, you can see a group of stern-faced men herdin' some pallid wretch up the street, surroundin' him closely, an' exercisin' particular vigilance when passin' alleys. You think, of course, that it's a sheriff's posse takin' some poor devil to the local bastille, but investigation reveals that it's only a committee escortin' the speaker of the day to the scene of his crime.

"I can't understand it at all. Y'see, 'Lonzo, it isn't as if Americans put any high value on oratory. Look back over history an' it is significant that none of our famous silver-tongues was ever sent to the White House. Jes' remember Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Blaine, Beveridge an' Bryan, all of whom could take a seed catalogue or a city directory an' make it sound like an Indian love call. Not one of 'em ever won in a talk, all goin' down to defeat before some tongue-tied opponent.

"We've always pinned our faith to Presidents who could take speech or leave it alone, an' the tendency is becomin' more an' more marked. Dear old Warren Harding spoke a great deal but not much, an' Mr. Coolidge never lost an opportunity to go into the silence, pullin' the White House in after him. As for Mr. Hoover, he drops his head on his chest whenever he speaks, showin' plainly that he knows he's doin' wrong.

"Silence, as a matter of fact, has always been a sure short cut to public favor. One reason, of course, is that the less a candidate says, the less he'll have to explain when he goes before a Senate committee.

"All of which makes this epidemic of public speakin' so puzzlin'. It isn't as if the cussed practice contained any happiness for anybody. Certainly the

Uncle Henry

addict himself doesn't enjoy it. Opium an' cocaine, at least, deaden the sensibilities an' produce forgetfulness, but the unfortunate victim of the speakin' habit is at all times keenly conscious of what he's doin', an' the memory of it furnishes him with anguish enough to last a thousand years.

We Love Our Agony

"I know, 'Lonzo. Many's the time I've swum dizzily in a sea of faces, fightin' vainly to get my upper lip loose from the teeth, strugglin' to keep both tonsils in the air at the same time, an' utterin' low gurgles at odd moments in the

hope that they might be intelligible.

"Nor is it as if all these dinner, luncheon an' breakfast speakers gave any entertainment to the audience; that is, unless it's made up of men an' women who see humor in broken legs or the shockin' brutalities of the comic supplements. Any good sword swallower would be much more interestin', for instead of spendin' an hour in vain attempts, he does it.

"About the only explanation for oratory that I'm able to think of, 'Lonzo, is that there's a malignant streak in human nature that makes us love the spectacle of human sufferin'. It's an inheritance from the Puritans, I reckon, who made it a point to take their pleasures sadly. Old Jonathan Edwards frankly stated that heaven was a place where the saved sat comfortably, with their feet hangin' over, an' watched the torments of the damned.

"Somethin's got to be done about it, an' quickly, unless we want to find ourselves in the same class with Siam, Dahomey an' other tenth-rate nations. Why is Germany makin' such rapid strides? Why is France, forgin' ahead so remarkably? Why is England on the upgrade? *Because they have no luncheon clubs.* Only Russia puts equal emphasis on public an' continuous speech, an' look at the poor thing!"

"I can understand people gettin' together for luncheon," said Mr. Stubbs, "but why do they want speakers?"

"So as to prove that there's somethin' worse than the food," answered Uncle Henry. "That's the only reason I can think of."



Any honest orator spends most of his time on extemporaneous efforts



Well, the wives laid down an ultimater that if they didn't go on the next long trip there wasn't gonna be no long trip

The Circuit Writer's Wife

THERE wasn't no good reason why Sylvester Morris shouldn't of got a fan letter long before he did. He was a great big guy and he had long, flowing hair and broad shoulders and a nice grin, and it was only after you got to know him good that you would realize he wasn't exactly smart. In fact, you might almost say he was very dumb.

He had come to us straight from the sandlots. In spring training he had shown that he was a fly hawk and could hit, and when Rollo Cassidy broke his leg during the exhibition season, Sylvester stepped into center field and stuck there. He wasn't no wonder, because he wasn't very addicted to brain, but at that he was a swell mechanical ball player and the sport writers all said that he had a great future in fast company.

But from the time he joined the club, he was fruit. They all picked on him, and especially Dink Jewell. I'm free to admit that Sylvester was just a natural target for kidding, but Dink was the kind of a gimmick who didn't know where to stop. There was always something poisonous in Dink's kidding, whereas all the other guys was just looking for a good laugh.

Dink never had liked the big, raw-boned rookie; or, anyway, he felt himself a heap better than Sylvester and he seemed to resent all the publicity Sylvester got. You see, the big guy was swell copy for the newspaper fellers. We had a one-two-three club and Sylvester gave us a real offensive punch. He took a good cut at the ball, and when he hit 'em they stayed hit. Besides, Dink was slipping and knew it. He had been shortstopping in the majors for nine years and his legs wasn't as good

As a ball player Sylvester Morris was simply a letter-writing fool—and love letters, at that!

By Octavus Roy Cohen

as they used to be, so I reckon it was natural that he should get peeved at any youngster who was going good. Of course, Dink is still up there, and liable to remain, because he has got a great baseball head. But when he does go down to the bushes there won't be a whole lot of grieving because personally he wasn't never hardly more popular than a snake. And being a little guy, the fellers couldn't very well take a crack at him.

WELL, anyway, it was when the season was about six weeks old and Sylvester had won himself a regular berth that he busted into the locker-room one day before the game looking like he had just received an inheritance or something. He was waving a letter and announcing that he had got it. Dink was slipping into his unie and happened to be standing nearest and he asked Sylvester could he see it. Sylvester blushed and said he could and the first thing you know Dink lets out a howl and mounts on the bench and says he has something to read us.

"Boys," he yells, "we have got a gay Lothario in our mist. Hats off, everybody, to Mister Sylvester Morris, the demon outfielder, while I read you a letter he has received."

Then he reads us off the following:

"My dear Mr. Morris:

"I was to the game yesterday and I think you was just grand. It must be wonderful to be a ball player and I bet you have got a lot of sweethearts. I think they (the ones you have got) are all very lucky. You probly would not look at me. I am 19 years of age and my friends say I have got a good figure and am pretty. But you could not care about meeting me so I will sign myself, with love—

"A LITTLE BLONDE."

Of course, we all hollered. We crowded about Sylvester and made him believe that he was the only ball player in the major leagues which ever received a love letter from an unknown dame. It was a heap of innocent fun and we piled it on pretty thick, especially as Sylvester was eating it up. I never seen a bird smile so happy and dumb in all my life, and finally, when the noise died down, he give us a gesture.

"Shuh, boys," he says—"that ain't nothin'."

"What do you mean," demanded Dink Jewell, "it ain't nothin'?"

"I get lots of them kind of letters," lies Sylvester. "The girls is writing me all the time."

"And why not?" demanded Dink in-

dignantly. "Ain't you handsome? I ask you, Sylvester: Ain't you?"

"Shucks! I ain't so awful good-looking."

"You're the Adonis of the major leagues. Ain't he, fellers?"

We agreed that he was.

"And you're a swell outfielder, Sylvester. They ought to be all chasing you. Now what I want to know is this: Why don't you follow up this lead? This here cluck might be a millionaire's daughter or something."

"She didn't give no name or address," glooms the big lad. "You see," he explains—"it's like she says: I got so many women chasing me that one, more or less, don't matter much. So I reckon it's just as well I shouldn't be bothered with her."

So far it was all good-natured. Sylvester was a natural target, and we enjoyed giving him the razz. But he was a whole-souled kid and we really liked him, even if two thoughts at the same time would have given his brain a blow-out. But Dink Jewell wasn't content to let it rest there. He knew—just as we all did—that Sylvester was lying about getting lots of letters. And he begin to probe, like a doc that wants to know where is that safety pin you swallowed.

"WHEN are you gonna show us some of them other love letters you got, Sylvester?"

"Gosh, Dink—I don't keep things like that. I just tear 'em up."

"You're gonna get more, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"Promise to show us those, will you?"

Sylvester was plenty embarrassed. "I don't think that would be exactly right, Dink—showin' a girl's letters