

COMMUNITY VALETS

By BURGESS JOHNSON

OUR propensity for "letting George do it" works both ways. It saves us bother, but makes George rich; for he, being like ourselves, a hundred-per cent shrewd American, finds a way to get himself rewarded this side of heaven. He "does" it, and does it well,—and lets us pay! The cost of living is high because we've reached the point where we hire people to spend our money.

OUT in Minneapolis a business man was growling as we breakfasted together. After listening for a time I was able, for my own comfort, to arrange in orderly fashion the story that he growled. It seems that he manufactures machinery, and a hurry order came to him from an European customer for two machines. If he could not guarantee

delivery before a certain date the order was to be cancelled. He figured out his time schedule carefully, and found that even with rush work he had but twelve days for transportation to New York to connect with the last possible transatlantic sailing.

"I called up the local offices of the Great Midland Railroad," he said, "and they told me the best they could promise was fourteen days to Tidewater, owing to car shortage and probable delays along the route, and they wouldn't guarantee even that under present conditions. I took up the matter with some Great Lakes people, and they couldn't help me out. Then it occurred to me to try the National Freight Handling Company. 'We'll do it in eight days,' they told me, 'and what's more, we'll guarantee to connect with your boat.'

"'How are you going to do it?' I asked them.

"'Well, we'll probably route the shipment by the Midland.'

"'But the Midland people themselves can't promise it over their own rails.'

"'Oh, but we can!'

"What's more, they did, and I got my order delivered with time to spare; but I had to pay for the service, of course. How did they do it? Simply by close personal attention to the matter. One of their men had it on his mind, and saw that the car started; and then another of their men gave it personal attention in Chicago. I was paying extra for a service that the railroad wouldn't or couldn't give me, in the circumstances, and that I hadn't the time or experience to provide for myself."

"What are you kicking about?"

"Well, I'm not sure I'm kicking, except that I always seem to be paying for extra service, and it cuts down my profits. I don't say it's anybody's fault but my own."

We began to talk it over, having a certain amount of time on our hands for idle chatter. And the path our thoughts took led us into the real estate world and then to trust companies and delivery wagons, and organized charities, and dealers in steamer baskets, and then, by various steps too numerous to mention, into intercollegiate athletics, where college boys pay professional coaches great sums to play their games for them.

Just then the waiter served some particularly good bacon. "Look here," I interrupted, "I know enough about camping to know that the difference between good bacon and poor bacon on the breakfast table is very often just the question of cutting it thin enough. There is a man who has applied his knowledge of this fact and made a fortune out of selecting people's bacon and then slicing it for them, and adding a charge for his services to the price of the bacon."

The cost of living will never drop very far, we agreed, whatever may happen to the costs of labor and raw materials, until people with money to spend stop wanting non-essential services, the prices for which are added to the costs.

By this time my breakfast companion and I were through our meal. Life looked brighter.

"After all," we suddenly agreed, "why should people stop buying non-essential services unless they actually have to?"

They are buying the time to stay at home a little longer, to read a few more good books, or to play golf. And they are buying a guarantee of good bacon because they choose to. Everybody who was of social importance in the snobbish days of old had a valet, and he paid the fellow to tie his cravat.

Now, thank Heaven, there are fewer valets of that sort. Business men today tie their own cravats, as a general rule,—or their wives do it for them, which is good for both them and their wives,—but they are buying a larger and more varied valet service than was ever contemplated in the idle days of Beau Brummel. Folk in every social circle are sharing community valets.

If business men are going to kick about the cost of it, they ought to know what they are kicking about, and then kick themselves. There is very little high cost of living. But there is a great deal of the high cost of letting George do it. Meanwhile great numbers of people are more contented because of George's services; and great numbers of Georges are happier because they are getting rich!

Only the pinch of nation-wide poverty will change these things.

It costs more to live because we have more to spend!

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

SURELY it was not one familiar with the quivering soil of Japan who coined the term "terra firma." In a country where two hundred and thirty destructive earthquakes have occurred in fifteen hundred years, it is not surprising to find the leading seismological authorities of the world. In no other country is there a national earthquake service so old and so well organized.

This organization is due to the late John Milne, an eminent English geologist, who began in 1885 to train natives like Omori and Nagaoka. Milne's catalogue of Japanese earthquakes is now a classic. When Japan commissioned Milne to organize a scientific earthquake service it was with the hope that the messages written by the earth on clock-driven drums,—veritable autographic warnings,—might be the means of sparing countless lives. That hope has been only partially realized. When there have been significant fore-shocks, Omori has been able to warn villages, and his warnings have been invariably heeded.

That the radio station of Haranomachi, 178 miles from Tokio, escaped in the recent disaster while whole towns were reduced to ruins, is due entirely to the advice which Omori gave to the American contractors. This advice was founded upon a study he made in California of forty-nine chimneys, as well as of houses, tombstones, and steel-frame office buildings. Thus the reinforced-concrete radio tower of Haranomachi, 660 feet high, assumed the form of a megaphone-like chimney, thick at the base and tapering at the top. A whip-snapping effect had to be guarded against, for California chimneys had generally been broken at a point one-third the distance from the top.

The movements of the ground during an earthquake are extremely complicated. At the origin of the disturbance they are rapid and irregular and displace the ground in all conceivable