

NEW YORK, THE NATION'S PRODIGAL

I — *The City of Glorious Graft*

JOHN BAKELESS

IN America, waste is an old habit of long and not wholly dishonorable descent. It is a legacy of the pioneers, a part of the old American tradition; for with a wilderness to subdue and the wealth of a continent at their doorsteps, the first settlers troubled themselves little over what they wasted. There was plenty more; whereas speed in producing food or clothes or shelter was a matter of life and death. So the tradition became established; and the descendants of the earliest fathers have blithely agreed with the latest immigrants in at least this one American tradition: to get things quickly, to build hastily, to tear down when it is convenient, and to use up at break-neck speed the gifts that the generous gods have lavishly provided.

And as all things American are on their grandest scale in New York, it is there that we must look for an orgy of waste that would have appalled imperial Rome. If the Yankee metropolis is not the most American of cities, either in its culture or its population, it is at least the most observed, both by foreigners and by other cities of the land. It occupies more land, builds higher buildings, handles more business, receives more visitors and attention, lives at a quicker tempo than any other city in America — which means that it wastes on a more lavish and stupendous scale than any other city in the world.

New York brings its water a hundred miles overland through a marvelous system of aqueducts, carrying it beneath a mountain, over one river and under another, to protect the health of its millions — and then lets a third of it leak away in faulty plumbing and leaky faucets. New York brings fruits and vegetables three thousand miles across the continent and then lets half of them rot. Because of stupid jealousies, its business men waste \$14,000,000 a year in and about its harbor, while in that same harbor some of the city's own piers, constructed at enormous expense, lie practically profitless.

As for the city's government, Alderman George U. Harvey estimates the annual loss at \$100,000,000 — one fifth of its total budget. Alderman Ruth Pratt more conservatively suggests that \$50,000,000 is a fair estimate for the annual waste which

is not due to graft or peculation — though there is enough of that — but is simply the penalty of an antiquated municipal organization, of slipshod methods, carelessness, overlapping of departments, and the indifference of citizens — most of whom were born somewhere else and few of whom know or care anything about the city in which they live.

These figures become even more startling when compared with the estimated peculations of the Tweed Ring, which half a century ago was internationally notorious. Tweed and his associates, even during the three and a half years when they were at the height of their power, when their authority in New York City exceeded any despot's, took no more than \$75,000,000, and may have contented themselves with as little as \$45,000,000 — a small part of which was later paid back to the city. To-day such sums and greater ones are lost, not in three years, but every year.

SOME ITEMS IN NEW YORK'S ANNUAL WASTE BILL

Traffic wastes	\$500,000,000
Smoke wastes	\$96,000,000
Graft	\$50,000,000
Municipal inefficiency	\$50,000,000
Harbor and freight wastes	\$14,000,000
Wasted water	\$7,300,000
Wasted structural steel	\$6,000,000
Lost milk bottles	\$2,500,000

Why does New York waste? In the main, either because it does not know what it is doing or because it does not care. And the first, because the most notorious of its wastes, is graft. Graft, to be sure, is a municipal institution of respectable antiquity, which is by no means peculiar to New York. Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Pittsburgh all have their own tales of corruption. So had mediæval London; so had ancient Rome; and clay tablets, dug up in Mesopotamia and dating from before the time of Moses, offer mute evidence that the ways of officialdom change little with the centuries.

But there is this to be said for graft in New York: it is standardized and it is the last word in modern efficiency. In the onward march of American progress, about which Mr. Babbitt loves to boast, the municipal spoilsman has kept pace. His "deals" are no longer signed, sealed, and delivered as they were in the good old days; and they are in consequence far more diffi-

cult to detect. But even discovery is not always fatal to the up-to-date practitioner. Sometimes it is a mere prelude to promotion.

Graft of the highly professionalized modern type falls into two classes. First, there is graft on the big scale — padded payrolls, dummy employees, cleverly manipulated contracts, fees for “protection,” mysterious tips to buy real estate that the city will later take over at a ruinous advance, purchase of needless supplies followed by dubious but strictly legal auctions. And side by side with this profitable enterprise, there is graft on the small scale, the petty perquisite of petty office, which the grafter almost regards as his lawful due — a few dollars from a motorist for illegal parking privileges, a small gift from a business man for a convenient blindness with regard to fireplugs, a little cash from a harassed provision merchant who seeks to escape a needlessly minute enforcement of the sanitary code.

There is no hope of proving the existence of graft of the first type — it is all too cleverly managed for that — unless one of the parties to the deal feels himself aggrieved and “squeals.” But as this very thing has happened twice within the last two years, each case revealing far-reaching and unsuspected scandals, it is reasonable to suppose that there are innumerable other cases which no one on the outside even dreams of. When one remembers that of all the graft that goes on, only a small fraction ever comes to light, it is easy to infer, from the huge sums of the public’s money known to have been dishonestly spent, the staggering total that is, and probably always will be, unknown.

MILKING THE MILK WAGON

The first of the recent revelations of graft on an ambitious scale was the milk scandal of 1926. And scarcely had it been completely investigated, when thefts of thousands of dollars weekly were revealed in the street cleaning department — their total aggregating millions.

The milk revelations began in March, 1926, with the arrest of one Harry Danziger, the so-called “milk Czar,” who fell into a trap laid by milk dealers unwilling to pay him for protection, and was arrested in the act of taking a bribe. The investigation which followed his confession revealed the existence of a grafting ring which for years had been literally “milking” the city by conniving at the adulteration of its milk supply and the sale of food products below the standard established by the Health Depart-

ment. According to former Health Commissioner Harris, at one time 1,200,000 quarts of impure milk were being distributed daily, and "no man can say what tragedies lie in their wake." A single official with a small salary later testified that he had banked about \$50,000 the first year of the ring's existence and from \$70,000 to \$80,000 the next. Another, fearing to deposit such a suspiciously large sum, hid \$92,168 in an attic. The total profits were probably about \$3,000,000; but it was money well spent, so far as the bribers were concerned, for the Health Commissioner, after investigation, estimated that the dishonest milk dealers were saving about \$34,500,000 a year, and that the public was being swindled out of approximately \$90,000 a day. The most amusing bit of impudence in the whole affair was the establishment by the ring of a private court of its own, which imposed fines on milk dealers who ventured to violate the law without asking permission!

Quite as startling is the gigantic graft in the street cleaning department, which is still under investigation. Here, again, no one suspected what was going on — except as all New Yorkers are perpetually suspicious of their own government — until one of the grafters, now in Sing Sing, burst onto the front page with a confession. The hero of the occasion — if one may call him so — was one William E. Loughheed, foreman of a street cleaning department garage in the Bronx. Suspended after charges of padding payrolls had been made, he indulged in prayer, and felt his "inner self" saying, "Tell all, tell all." (Unfortunately the inner selves of other city employees rarely urge their owners to be so communicative; and in consequence similar plots go undiscovered on every hand.)

Loughheed's revelations, even if one takes them with a grain of salt, are sufficiently startling. In his first statement he estimated the city's loss in this one department of a single borough as \$10,000,000 in thirty years, and intimated that similar conditions existed in at least two other boroughs, as was presently found to be the case. Later he estimated his weekly takings from illicit sources as \$2,500, but explained that he had to share so much of this with men higher up that his own share was only from \$500 to \$1,800 a week — a beggarly sum for an ambitious foreman. Altogether he had to hand over from \$50,000 to \$60,000 annually to superiors. Part of this was obtained by padding payrolls of emergency employees — men not under Civil Service but called

in to help out; but other charges made by Lougheed included "graft in the removal of refuse by street cleaning department trucks — refuse which should be removed by private trucks; thefts of money from the city through fraud in the delivery of gasoline to the garages; shakedowns of persons who would save money by having their ashes and other waste removed by street cleaning employees." Significantly, the official engaged in the investigation felt it necessary to state that "there are no hobbles on me from the City Hall" — as if a city official, investigating fraud committed against the city, might in the normal course of things expect hobbles!

Theft on such a scale is, of course, possible only because of careless municipal bookkeeping — and worse than carelessness among high officials; but it implies also an extraordinary indifference among the victimized taxpayers. In this respect New York's third big municipal scandal of the last two years offers a refreshing contrast. For it was the taxpayers themselves who, last year, infuriated by an assessment of \$16,000,000 for a forty-mile sewer system in the borough of Queens — from six to eight millions of which is said to have been graft — compelled a special investigation which exposed everything and drove the borough president from office. The apparent moral is that graft can be stopped if any one really wants to stop it.

PETTY GRAFT — THE ETERNAL

Graft on this heroic scale "makes" the first pages of the newspapers because it is so spectacular that it arrests attention. But it probably amounts to less in the long run than the petty graft practised, day in and day out, by hordes of underlings. The victims range from the great mercantile establishments, which in spite of their size and power are sometimes helpless, to the small store keeper on a by-street, who is always helpless. There was, for example, the department store which decided to put in new electric fixtures; and — quite forgetting that a local political power was also in the fixture business — gave its order to someone else. A day or two later it was miraculously discovered that the delivery wagons were interfering with standpipes and fire hydrants. The policeman on the beat became strangely meticulous, and inspectors descended like locusts. The puzzled owners investigated, discovered their error, found a way of awarding still another contract for yet more lighting fixtures — this time to the

right man — put five thousand dollars where it would do the most good — and found themselves suddenly at peace.

Or there was the great corporation — one of the most powerful in the world — which discovered to its chagrin that its newest building would never go up in Manhattan unless the right man got the excavating contracts. Its word was law across half a continent — but not in “the district.”

On “the little fellow,” the small shopkeeper who cannot protect himself, descends a horde of harpies — though Providence has mercifully decreed that only the small fry among the harpies shall assail the small fry among the victims. It is always possible to trump up charges, to discover something wrong with a building here, an inadvertent violation of the sanitary code there, or some wholly unintentional offense against a quite forgotten law elsewhere. Because of this system, there are certain social levels in New York where fear is always dominant. Perhaps a laborer knows that unless an envelop with a few dollars inside is dropped each week into a certain locked box of unknown ownership, his work will suddenly vanish. Beset with the worker’s perpetual anxiety for his job, he fears and pays. Or perhaps an applicant for employment by the city, having taken the requisite examinations, finds it inexplicably slow in materializing. Some one gives him a hint. Let him drop a hundred dollars — in bills, of course, since checks are getting dangerous — into the right slot, and see what happens. He does; it happens — for grafters must keep faith; at least to a certain extent, else trade would slacken.

So long as they do keep reasonable faith, “the little fellow,” knowing he is helpless, pays graft willingly — provided it is not beyond his purse. And generation by generation, New York’s minor grafters have pondered the fable of the goose and the golden eggs. Knowing what the traffic will bear, they charge just that — and no more. It is, as one victim explains with a sigh “a good deal more carefully calculated than the tax rate.” As a demonstration in exact science, these niceties of modern graft have perhaps a social value. But, except for that, they represent a waste of countless millions — every cent of which, of course, comes directly or indirectly from the pocketbook of the ordinary citizen. As a consumer he pays increased prices to cover the cost of graft to the merchant, large or small. As a taxpayer he pays needless wages to the municipal employee, who, having given a price for his job, feels no necessity of being efficient to hold it.

A fair share of the waste in New York, however, is not due to graft at all, but just to the general clumsiness of one of the world's largest business organizations — in which the fewest possible people take any interest. A former official tells how it once fell to his lot to direct some excavations in Central Park. He duly applied to the proper department for laborers, and the laborers duly appeared — all veterans of the Civil War, men of seventy and over, so old and frail that half of them were scarcely able to hold a shovel. The explanation was quite simple. Regulations required that preference be given to Civil War veterans — and preference *had* been given, without any trouble to inquire whether they could do the work they were sent to do. Fifty years from now will a grateful city be demonstrating its gratitude to the veterans of Château-Thierry and the Meuse-Argonne by passing over their sturdy sons and setting them to dig its ditches?

MUNICIPAL CLUMSINESS

What is optimistically described as “centralized purchasing” is a fair sample of waste which profits nobody — not even the grafters — but is purely a matter of bad organization. Big business long ago discovered that it takes an expert to purchase on the grand scale, and every corporation to-day has its purchasing agent. New York City, the biggest business of all, pretends to have one too. The city made a magnificent gesture in 1923, when it set up the Board of Purchase, which — so the beautiful theory ran — would do the city's buying. Unhappily, it was only a gesture. The Board does, indeed, buy for the city on an enormous scale. Casual items in its annual purchases include 3,000,000 pounds of meat, 704,000 dozen eggs, 672,000 pounds of butter, 295,000 tons of coal, and nearly 2,000,000 gallons of gasoline. But there has never been a genuine effort to adopt real centralized purchasing, in spite of the fact that two hundred cities in the United States and Canada have demonstrated that it means a reduction of from ten to fifteen per cent in the cost of their supplies. New York's Board of Purchase exercises authority only in those departments which the Mayor controls by his appointive power. Meantime, in each of the five boroughs, the borough presidents go blithely on their way, each with a separate purchasing department, some of them with several methods of buying. That means at least six distinct purchasing agencies to start with, but there are others. The Department of Education does its own

buying, for example — spending a million and a half a year for fuel alone. The Board of City Record, again, spends independently nearly the same amount for “printing, stationery and blank books and publication of the *City Record*” — the municipal newspaper which not one citizen in a thousand ever sees. One need not be an expert accountant to see that most of these expenditures could be combined at a marked economy.

In New York, therefore, “centralized purchasing” turns out to mean independent buying by at least eight different agencies! To a business man the situation is unthinkable. But municipal business has little to do with business principles.

Another example: New York City runs not one set of hospitals but three — all under different departments. They ought all to be under the direction of a single Medical Board — a fact so obvious that there are now suggestions something may be done about it; and the administration ought to be rigidly scientific and non-political. Though there is no use pretending that this is now the case in many hospitals, it would be easy enough to make sure that the hospital administration *was* non-political by the simple expedient of eliminating the salaries of the men in control — as is done with the board which administers the Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, admittedly the equals of any in the world. Where there are no salaries, the motive for political control is lacking; and thanks to the honorable tradition of the medical profession, first class scientific brains are always to be had free. It is more than can be said of ward-political brains — for them, the poor public has to pay high prices whether it knows it or not and whether it wants them or not.

The municipal budget is another of New York’s grand gestures toward business efficiency — a fine gesture, but somewhat deceptive.

Everybody lives on a budget these days, from the Federal Government to the poorest pair of newlyweds, just back from their honeymoon and playing at housekeeping in one room and a serving pantry. New York City has a budget too. It is the biggest budget in these United States, except Uncle Sam’s own. The annual turnover of the city’s treasury is two billion dollars, and in 1926, New York spent a hundred million dollars more than Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit together. Its budget must take care of a public debt almost equal to that of all the forty-eight states; and the employees whose salaries it provides

are almost literally an army — for in numbers they equal the United States regulars. The annual payroll is \$235,000,000.

Evidently the budget which outlines the expenditure of such huge sums ought to be prepared by methods which are the last word in the science of accounting. Is it? Not quite! As a matter of fact, until 1928, New York's fiscal system had never even been adequately described in print except once — and that by a Chinese student in quest of a degree!

The trouble begins with disorganization at the very top. For the Director of the Budget, who is responsible for drafting the document which roughly determines the city's half-billion-dollar annual expenditure, has no staff beyond a clerk or two and a stenographer. What the city spends is actually determined by a body which rejoices in a resounding title: The Board of Estimate and Apportionment — in other words, the mayor, the five borough presidents, the comptroller, and the president of the Board of Aldermen. The examiners who assist the director of the budget come from the office of the secretary of the Estimate Board — the very board that the unfortunate director is supposed to persuade to reduce expenditure! It is too bad Gilbert and Sullivan never heard of the arrangement.

But there remains a reviewing authority in the aldermen. Ah, the aldermen! In their hands lies the power to protect the grateful taxpayers who elect them. To them the budget must be annually submitted. They may reduce but not increase it.

Now the budget of the city of New York is a bulky document of 367 pages, consisting exclusively of figures. It is as big as a popular novel, and to the instructed eye more interesting than most of them — it contains so many more plots, you see. But it does not appeal to the literary tastes of the five-and-sixty aldermen.

Do they spend hours in careful analysis of each of the budget's 3,732 separate "codes"? Do they debate anxiously and long whether, after all, their president might not struggle on with his official cares assisted by one or two automobile engineers, instead of the three assigned him? Do they go in a body to the Board of Education to ask about that mysterious official who has no title and no discoverable functions but who has the pleasing sum of \$7,500 as salary? Do they investigate the rumor that the city's taxicabs cost fifty cents a mile to operate, whereas you can take an ordinary taxicab for thirty cents? Do they inquire into the ancient mystery why the city needs taxicabs at all? Or do

they raise the question why municipal executives must be provided with cars and chauffeurs, while executives in private employ provide their own?

No, no. Such sordid thoughts are far from the minds of these worthy men. In the year of grace 1927, they did not reduce a single item of the budget that the august powers above laid before them. As one alderman explained to a neophyte: "They had a lot of experts go over this budget. We needn't bother with it. Why worry?" To do them justice, New York's aldermen worry very little. Although the law allows twenty days, they pass a half-billion-dollar budget in as many minutes — they have been known to do it in twelve — and stride forth from the aldermanic chamber with a sense of high resolve and duty done, back to their daily toil as undertakers, real estate men, lawyers, and — and workers for "the organization."

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

They meet once a week. Their handling of the budget is a fair sample of their efficiency. For this tremendous service their grateful fellow-citizens come softly to each of them and deposit five thousand dollars every year, a total, when secretaries, automobiles, and incidentals are included, of half a million dollars. To paraphrase a once popular song — "that's where the money goes!" Sad to say, that is not the only place where it goes. The list of all the other places could be stretched out to the crack of doom. But a few more specimens will suffice.

The city maintains needless officials — some of them at high salaries. There is, for example, the city chamberlain, who once performed the ordinary functions of the treasurer of a great corporation. But since then the office of comptroller has been established, and the chamberlain's duties have fallen from him, one by one. To-day he earns his salary by deciding in which banks the city's cash shall be deposited, and countersigning checks. For this the city pays him \$12,000 a year. Is it any wonder that Mr. Henry Bruère, the chamberlain of the Mitchell administration, proposed that his own office should be abolished? But New York still keeps the good old office going — to the average municipal politician the proposal to abolish an office is as near blasphemy as mortal lips can come.

Again, in Queens, which is a county as well as a borough, the county clerk not long ago received \$8,000 a year. For this, with

the aid of two deputies, he recorded deeds and mortgages, issued licenses, recorded judgments, and kept court records. In 1927, however, he was relieved of half his duties. A new official, the Register, receiving \$10,000 and aided by two deputies, took charge of half his duties — the recording of legal papers. The County Clerk, however, still goes on, doing half his former work, but now at a salary \$2,000 larger than before, and with the aid of one more deputy. The total increase in cost to the taxpayer is more than a hundred thousand dollars a year. Three other counties have the same wasteful duplication, whereas in Richmond the County Clerk still finds it possible to perform the duties of both officials — at only \$7,000.

Another example of a somewhat similar waste is New York's expert in the drafting of bills. For his ability to write the curious jargon in which legislators conceal what thoughts they have, this functionary receives \$10,000 annually. Yet the officials who do the same work, and more of it, for the state receive but \$6,500.

MUNICIPAL JOY RIDES?

During the course of this investigation the writer of these lines has amused himself from time to time by counting the municipal automobiles parked in shoals outside the Municipal Building — both those which were and those which were not labeled as the law requires. From these he constructed for his private delectation a neat table of statistics. He has no intention of inflicting it upon his readers here — but it was illuminating. For its average shows that an almost invisible per cent of the city's automobiles are properly marked.

Now this is, no doubt, a trifling matter. It is conceivable that every drop of the city's gasoline and all the city's automobiles are used on strictly municipal business. Quite probably, when the weary head clerk of somebody's office staggers home from work, he meets his wife's suggestion that they take the municipality's automobile and motor out to Aunt Matilda's with a frowning, "No!" Doubtless he reminds her of the provisions of section 33 in chapter 24 of the Code of Ordinances. No doubt he alludes frigidly to the duty that he owes the city. Doubtless he bids her read the Budget instead of the *Graphic* and consider.

But in the minds of unregenerate persons the lingering doubt will not down. May there not be just a few black sheep among the glistening white ones who man the city's office desks? And may

they not reply: "Why sure, Jane. The old car ain't marked. Let's run down to Aunt Matilda's. The city buys the gas."

I do not know. I make no charges. I only know what *l'homme moyen sensuel* is likely to do in cases like that. And the city employee, as a type, is very *moyen*. The point is that the city pays about four millions a year for automobiles and their operation. Perhaps it really does need them all. And doubtless they are never employed except upon official business. So far as I know, the city's employees are all, all honorable men. Anyhow, I hope so. But wouldn't it be a good thing to mark all city automobiles as the law requires, and see whether costs do not decrease?

More serious than all this, however, is the hit-or-miss financial policy with which New York looks to its future. Since 1919 the budget has doubled; since 1910 it has tripled; and yet the city famous for its wealth and business shrewdness plunges blindly ahead. At present there is no programme for its future capital outlay even a single year ahead—still less a comprehensive plan looking several years into the future. Yet if past experience is worth anything at all, New York will probably have to reckon with an average *annual* increase in expenditure of some thirty millions. It is building subways. It plans to build schools, docks, hospitals, bridges. It has elaborate proposals for future water supply. It must do something about its sewage; for it cannot remain indefinitely the "island in an ocean of filth" that it is at present. All this to be done from hand to mouth, year by year, planlessly, clumsily, wastefully—in other words, in the New York manner. Is it any wonder millions are squandered—sometimes honestly, sometimes dishonestly, but always stupidly? Yet the remedy is obvious enough—the working out of definite policies for the financial future such as exist in every ordinary business.

Both the losses due to downright dishonesty and those due to inefficiency could be reduced by systematic and aggressive watching of officials and their work. What such methods can accomplish was shown in Baltimore, where they brought the tax rate down forty-nine points. But in New York this voluntary labor is divided among various groups, not always on harmonious terms.

It is in the nature of things impossible to make definite and reliable estimates of the amounts the city loses through graft and other forms of waste. Downright fraud is too carefully covered up for much of it to be proved, unless thieves fall out; while "honest graft" and sheer waste are so interlaced with legitimate expendi-

ture that they cannot always be separated. Alderman Harvey's estimate that the city loses twenty per cent of its budget yearly through waste plus graft is not unreasonable. After all, that leaves the taxpayer roughly eighty cents of value on every dollar he pays, which — as municipal government goes in this land of the free and home of the brave — is really not bad. Dr. Joseph McGoldrick of Columbia, though admitting frankly that no estimates of total waste and graft are reliable, suggests that "it can scarcely be less than ten per cent and, if any means could be found to measure it, it would not be surprising to find it as much as thirty per cent." Twenty per cent, then, seems to be a fair if not a conservative estimate; and if the example of the Tweed Ring is worth anything, it is safe to say that the percentage was at least no smaller in the past. Take twenty per cent of New York's total expenditure since the chartering of the greater city in 1898, then, and you have a figure roughly representing thirty years of speculation and extravagance. The sum thus arrived at is \$1,355,501,632. It is, to be sure, no more than a guess that tries to be scientific; but it is not unreasonable, and probably errs, if anything, on the side of conservatism.

What, then, of the years to come? Will waste continue to grow as the city grows? Here we are on even more dubious ground. It is true that the politicians have been able to double New York's budget in the last ten years — thus doubling their own opportunities — without any real protest from the taxpayers; but that was possible only because property values were also rushing upward. The tax *rate* did not change, and the taxpayer scarcely noticed the huge amounts of which he was being mulcted.

That beatific state of affairs cannot, however, continue forever. Some day property values will cease to sky-rocket — and the politicians will either have to stop boosting the budget or raise the tax rate. If they take the first course they will curtail their opportunities. If they take the latter, they will provoke a roar of protest. The chances are they will prefer to keep the public quiet by holding down the budget, and make up the difference by still further refining their methods, thus continuing that laudable progress in the technique of graft that has marked the years since Tweed and his friends erred through excess of greed and ended in discovery.

*Next month, Part II of this FORUM survey,
"The City of Dreadful Waste"*

FOOTPATH AND HIGHWAY

BY THE PEDESTRIAN

WEEDS



Woodcuts by H. Glintenkamp

OH, that's just a weed." For a long time this was my thoughtless reply to trusting friends who sought my advice about interlopers in their gardens. All weeds looked alike to me. I recognized that they had differences and that they required different methods of extermination; but since extermination was my main thought, I damned them all as "just weeds." Then one day a wistful novice asked me to come and identify a flower in his garden — "a beautiful yellow flower." It was only common oxalis, but, well nourished and tenderly cultivated, it made a brave show, far braver than the sickly roses in the next bed. Suddenly there welled up the memory of an Adirondack mountainside carpeted with oxalis in bloom. There it was no weed at all, but a delicate, exquisite wild flower. True, it was not the ordinary *Corniculata*, but the lovely *Ace-tosella*; still, even *Corniculata* in my friend's garden looked beautiful to me. I could no longer dub it "just a weed."

Most weeds, in other words, if they can be thought of as wild flowers, take on individuality and beauty. The glories of our roadsides and meadows — buttercups, daisies, goldenrod, thistles — are among our most pestiferous weeds, seen from the narrow view of the gardener. Even the dandelion, curse of lawn-makers, is magnificent by the roadside. Or, to turn the picture about, the delicate violet, fallen from heaven, can be almost as tenacious as witch grass, risen from hell. For years I looked on violets with the adoration I still bestow on daffodils and anemones, but once I had a garden on the edge of a little wood in which violets were luxuriant and from which they advanced, *as weeds*, upon my asparagus bed. I almost gave up the unequal battle; those innocent little violets, far more than the great oaks towering above them, positively gave me a shuddering sense of the advancing jungle.

Yet the violet, of course, can make a good case for itself when