

Editor's Easy Chair

"I HAVE just had a gratifying illustration of the conscientious perfection of the American people in enacting and enforcing a law when they are agreed that it is really for the common good," the Good Citizen said, coming in with an air of unquestionable welcome, and taking a chair as a matter of course without invitation.

"And what is your illustration?" we asked, and we had almost added, "Julius," in our sense of the End Man which possesses us in some of these colloquies.

"It is my failure to get a prescription containing a little cocaine made up without a renewal of it by the doctor who gave it me. Formerly any druggist would have made it up, but a law has been passed forbidding it without fresh authority from science, and I applied to one apothecary after another without success. My own round-the-corner apothecary, who will sell me almost any 'dram of poison,' refused with the apologies due an old customer; he said he would not dare to give me the unguent without my doctor's reiterated authorization. So I had to recur to the doctor and get it at the expense of his usual house fee."

"That was rather fine," we approved. "It says, what we are always saying, that we are a law-abiding people. Even when we lynch suspected persons, as we do now and then, up and down and across the land, we merely take the law into our own hands."

"Yes," the Good Citizen assented, somewhat absently, but pulling himself together to add, gaily, "I was thinking that if it had been a revolver I wanted, instead of an unguent with a little cocaine in it, I shouldn't have needed a renewal of the prescription. Why, I wouldn't have needed any prescription at all! The first hardware man, dealer in fancy articles, clerk in a department store, or pawnbroker, would have sold me

a revolver and asked no questions. I might have been an obvious madman, a drunkard, a boy, a tramp, a miscreant with criminal stamped on my face, and he would only have had a little jocose hesitation. I could have got a box of the right number of cartridges, and taken my 'gun,' as I should have called it, and gone off and killed myself, or the man or woman I meant it for, and it would have been all right as far as my buying or owning the 'gun' was concerned."

"It is rather peculiar," we said, with a ray of American humor lighting our features. "Still, if it is the law that you cannot have a prescription with cocaine in it made up, and you *can* buy a 'gun' for the familiar purpose of suicide or homicide, the fact goes to confirm our position that we are a law-abiding people."

"Yes, so we are; and with full liberty to buy 'guns' and kill ourselves and others, what do you think of our legislation?"

"We suppose," we mildly intimated, "that the free sale of revolvers is a survival of the citizen's right to bear arms for his defense against an outburst of tyranny or usurpation on the part of the government. Without the right 'to utter,' if not to 'argue freely,' as Milton says, with the self-cocking 'gun,' perhaps our liberties would be in danger. Besides, many of these 'guns' are bought for purposes of self-defense. They are very useful against burglars, whom you have at a great advantage when you spring up in your night-robe, rubbing the sleep out of your eyes, in the full glare of a dark lantern, while the intruder has you covered with his 'gun.' Your habit of rising to a sitting posture in bed, and shooting your wife while she creeps about the room to get her medicine without waking you, is another proof that the sale of revolvers cannot be restricted without imperiling the safety of ev-

ery household. Against highwaymen the 'gun' is one of the simplest necessities of the suburban dweller; it has almost abolished the highwayman in commuting communities. Mad dogs have been well-nigh exterminated by it after they have bitten half the neighborhood and several spectators have been shot in the legs."

The Good Citizen smiled as with relish of another's irony, though we had never been more in earnest, and said: "I have been looking into the shootings of a single fortnight in the larger cities of the Northern States, for I wished to exclude the section where shootings have been the habit of life, though I think now that the 'gun' is as freely used in the North as in the South, and enjoys as great favor on the seaboard as on the frontier, if there is a frontier any longer. In my inquiry I have had the help of a clippings bureau, and I fancy the result will amuse you, if not seriously interest you." He took out of his breast pocket a ragged batch of newspaper scraps, and began again without prompting from us. "I won't read these in detail, though they are all very dramatic, but will give the facts as abstractly as possible. I will begin with the gunnings in New York, and will give them as they come. June 29th, a colored boy, sixteen years old, shoots at another boy who has annoyed him, and hits a baby-carriage. This is in Williamsburg. The day before, in Brooklyn, a boy of seventeen shot at a boy of nineteen, in a quarrel, but missed him. On the same day, in the same place, an Italian was shot dead at a saloon door by some unknown man, apparently in mistake for another. June 5th, on the Staten Island ferry-boat, a broker shot himself dead. July 3d the senior officer of a gunboat at Brooklyn shot himself through the head. On the 6th, in Hell's Kitchen, New York, an Irishman, pressed to drink against his will, 'drew his gun and began shooting' at the saloonful of people; none were hurt, but a woman was almost scared to death. On the 3d three young men came into an 'athletic club' in Grand Street, and fired five shots about the place, and wrecked it. That night an old man in Williamsburg got out of bed and shot himself through the temple. At

a picnic in the Bronx the same day, in a fight with the police, fifty shots were fired and one man mortally wounded. Early on the 4th, in West 110th Street, two burglars fired at a policeman, who fired back and wounded one of them fatally. That night an Italian detective received four shots in his body in a saloon on Twelfth Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street, from the pistol of a man he was trying to arrest. Still again on the 4th a woman was struck by a stray bullet while she was washing dishes in her kitchen in East Fortieth Street. In Hell's Kitchen, again, a mad-drunk negro killed a policeman the night of June 30th by shooting him through the head. July 4th, a boy shot a hippopotamus with a pistol, and another boy was shot dead in Robbins Avenue by two men who were firing their guns in their yard. Three nights before, a saloonkeeper was shot dead by thieves in Queens Borough. Fourth of July evening, five persons, sitting on their front steps in East Eighty-first Street, were shot by some unknown wretch who fired wantonly into the group. The same joyful evening an Italian janitor in Williamsburg fired on some boys who were teasing him, and killed a 'man, a little boy, and a stranger.' In East Eighty-first Street an old woman, two babies, a young girl, and her father were wounded by stray bullets. Once more on the 4th, an Italian barber was found dead in his shop, shot by himself or by thieves. Yet once more, on the 4th, two burglars fought policemen in 110th Street, and were more or less 'shot up.' The day was not wanting in dramatic interest in Brooklyn, where a boy accidentally shot himself in the neck and a girl was hit in the arm by a wandering bullet. In a subway train, near Twenty-third Street, New York, an Italian drew a revolver, but was arrested before he could use it. This was on the 28th of June; on the 30th an Italian woman, in East Houston Street, shot herself fatally by accident with her husband's revolver. In Central Park, the night of June 30th, one young man shot another in the head, the wounded man did not know why; both were accompanied by ladies. In Poplar Street, Brooklyn, that night, a boy was hurt by a stray shot; about the same time an

Italian was taken from East 107th Street to the hospital with three bullets in his breast. A teamster was badly wounded in Bleecker Street, June 28th, by one of a murderous gang. On the 29th, a man looking for his wife with a revolver was arrested in Central Park. On the 28th, a young girl in Jamaica fired two shots at her father, but missed."

The Good Citizen looked up, as for sensation in us, but we asked: "Don't you think your close is rather ineffective? Now, if you had ended with that Italian janitor, taken to the hospital with three bullets in his breast! But a poor girl who fires two shots at her father and misses—"

"Gracious Powers!" the Good Citizen exclaimed. "Do you think I've been aiming at a dramatic impression?"

"If you have, you have missed it as badly as that poor girl who could not hit her father with two shots. But what were you aiming at? The fact that New York is a bad place? Well, we knew that already. It is dangerous, but you cannot deny it's amusing."

"It is no worse than other American places," the Good Citizen returned, rather unexpectedly, and he drew out another batch of newspaper scraps. "There were probably just as many shootings to the population elsewhere in the United States during that fortnight, though I can't say that Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, quite kept up her average. Still, you may like to note that on June 29th a man shot a woman in the back of the head there, and meant to shoot himself, but lost his nerve when he saw her fall. Some boys began keeping the Fourth on June 30th, and one was shot in the jaw with an old revolver. The same day, one boy unintentionally killed another with a rifle. July 2d two men were cleaning their revolvers for use on the Fourth, and one accidentally shot the mother of the other who was looking on at them. On the Fourth proper a glancing bullet hit an Italian boy in South Ninth Street; it does not say whom the shot was fired at. But upon the whole the showing of Philadelphia is comparatively poor; perhaps it is the ancestral Quakerism in the blood there. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, tries to bring up the State's average with a drunken

negro threatening the colored quarter of the town with a revolver on June 28th, and a discharged employee shooting the landlord of the Dauphin Hotel the same day. Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, supplies only the case of a man mortally wounded on the Fourth by a neighbor shooting at a mark; and Cleveland offers for the whole State of Ohio only the fact of the use of 'guns' in the Garment Workers' strike on the 28th of June. But here the clippings bureau is plainly at fault; in the whole of Ohio there must have been far more shootings in that fortnight. In Detroit, Michigan, alone, on successive days in the last of June, a man shot his wife and killed himself, and a Detroit man shot himself in a Rochester hotel. New Jersey, being nearer the metropolis, the clippings bureau has been more diligent or the gun-play is livelier. At Trenton, June 28th, a boy tried to kill a dog and shot a baby in the head. At Keyport, on the Fourth, a young man was trying a 'gun,' which he thought was not loaded, and instantly killed his betrothed. At Newark, on the 1st, a boy was showing off with a 'gun' in Pine Street, and shot a girl in the leg. At Raritan, the night of June 29th, a burglar was shot in a house which he was trying to rob. Indiana, which is now our literary center, contributes one doubly mortal duel with shotguns at Jasonville; one accidental shooting of a boy by another boy with a 'gun,' at Indianapolis, on the 26th of June; at Spencer, a wife murder and suicide, with a 'gun,' on the 28th; at Evansville, on the 30th, the fatal shooting of a white man by a negro. From Chicago, Illinois, strangely overlooked, there is nothing; from Peoria, Illinois, there is the simple case of one negro shot down by another; at Rock Island, Illinois, two persons were killed and several wounded by a shotgun at the serenade of a bridal couple. At Cedar Rapids, Iowa, an old man, disappointed of an inheritance, killed himself with a 'gun' on the 26th of June; at Utica, New York, four days later, the colored porter of a dining-car shot another negro."

The Good Citizen looked up from his exhausted scrap-heap as for applause, but the editor said, "All this seems a very

poor return for your pains and expense at the clippings bureau."

"I have not included the duplicate items in the hundred, which a bureau will always send you, and I have not given the shootings by the police. But I think you will allow that there are shootings enough, purely secular and unofficial, to give us pause in the indiscriminate sale of the 'gun.' If you have paid due attention to my instances, you must have noticed what a large proportion of them were the shootings of boys by boys, and of moral minors by other moral minors, such as the wild Italians who have learned nothing so aptly here as the exchange of their native stiletto for the adoptive revolver. None of either sort seems to have had the least difficulty in getting a 'gun' with the apposite cartridges. But if any of them had gone to a druggist with a prescription containing the slightest trace of cocaine, he would have had to get it renewed by his doctor, or the druggist would not have made it up for him."

"Still harping on your unguent," we smilingly noted.

"Only for the sake of contrast," the Good Citizen retorted. "The anti-cocaine law is all right. But where is the anti-gun law? Is there none, or isn't it enforced?"

"We are sure we don't know," we said, dreamily, perhaps a little wearily.

"Nobody seems to know, and why? Everybody concerned knows about the anti-cocaine law. Is nobody concerned in the anti-gun law? Any one, without distinction of age, sex, color, or previous condition of servitude, can go to almost any sort of dealer and buy a 'gun.'"

"And what would you do about it?"

"Well, I have not thought with finality yet, but at a go I should say that no 'gun' should be allowed to leave the murder-factory where it was made without being first numbered, and its number recorded by the government. The wholesale dealer should account to the government for every such 'gun' by its number, and the retail dealer should receipt to the

wholesale dealer in turn by number. No 'gun,' upon any pretext whatever, should be sold at second-hand, and any 'gun' traced by number to a second-hand sale should subject the buyer and seller to fine and imprisonment. Fine and imprisonment should also be visited on the dealer who sold any 'gun,' new or old, to a purchaser who did not show a license to carry a 'gun,' duly issued by the government and witnessed by a notary public. No such license should issue to a minor of either sex, and none should issue to any man or woman except upon satisfactory proof to the authorities that there was unquestionable reason for his or her carrying it. Not less than six months' jail should satisfy the law for a first offense in a person found carrying a 'gun' without a license; not less than a year's jail for the second offense. Any person accidentally wounding another with an unlicensed 'gun' should be held to have done the shooting purposely. I think such a law would do to begin with."

"You apparently," we said, with a smile, "wish to break up the use of the 'gun' in a community supposed to be civilized, and duly protected by the police."

"That is my idea," the Good Citizen replied.

"And suppose the community is *not* civilized and *not* protected by the police?"

"Ah, that opens up a large field of inquiry," the Good Citizen said, thoughtfully. "Are you prepared to enter upon it? Are you ready to say that a city in which fifty shootings took place in a fortnight, like New York, was *not* civilized? Will you affirm that 'this fair land of ours,' as the political orators call it, where perhaps two hundred shootings took place in the same time, is a howling wilderness, which has been mistakenly assimilated from the less homicidal savages originally holding it?"

"Well, that would require a little reflection," we said; and we smiled, perhaps cynically.

Editor's Study

THE function of nutrition, considered simply for what it is physiologically, leads out in all directions to much real knowledge of a harmoniously constituted world. First of all, we are brought face to face with Desire, and we see that we do not eat and drink because we have mouths and stomachs, but that these organs themselves are shaped by hunger and thirst, and upon the sure presumption of complementary satisfaction. It is really a very wonderful thing that material substances outside of the body may be seized upon and made a part of that body, and that those which are fit for each living thing may be selected by an infallible instinct. Here is an implication of partnership in the very constitution of things, in creation itself.

Following this clue, we come to have a sense of the oneness of all life. What we call separation is an illusion, maintained only to emphasize kinship. All the matings in nature are possible through the divulsion of things which belong together. Nature conspires for increase through such conjugations, as in the subtle commerce between insect and plant—the bee fertilizing the flower it feeds on.

If we choose to advocate pluralism, which is surely more interesting than monism, we seem to have as good a showing, and may say that oneness is an illusion, maintained only to emphasize partition. In every term she shows us, Nature disguises its opposite. While we are regarding the unicellular organism, it divides—its mode of parturition—and when we say the one has become two, we are contradicted, since the two are still one—the identity is not broken. We bury a kernel of corn in the earth—it rises a multitude; gaining from its nutrition a procreative increment; always nutrition tends to translate itself into the reproductive function—its opposite pole. So, in the general course

of cosmic evolution, descent and diminution seem to be emphasized, when Nature, rejoicing in so tropical a diversion, points to the rising of plant and animal life that must increase with the sun's waning.

Again, this desire of the cell—its hunger and thirst—is seen to become the culture of this whole planet, and finally, in its refinement, becomes the index of a dainty human culture. Taste, as incidental to the selection of food and a good part of its relish, is an incentive to the development of agriculture and commerce and promotes invention. Fire is caught and cherished, and, with the cooking of food and the use of the wine-press, conviviality softens and exalts social intercourse, and a finer regard is bestowed upon shelter and raiment. The gods are tempted into guestship and alliance by the flavors of burnt-offerings and libations of wine. Springtime and the harvest season become occasions of religious festivities in honor of the Great Mother and of the Wine-god, with the accompaniment of dance and song—the vibrant uplift of what seems a purely physiological carnival.

With the artificial refinements incident to the social progress associated with nutrition in its festive aspects we have nothing to do here, but only with the natural outgrowth from the exercise of a function so suggestive to the rudest of men of a grace and bounty lying outside of themselves that participation in these becomes a religious act, nature thus rising into a kind of supernature. Bread and wine have been immemorially the mystical symbols of a human-divine communion.

To the unsophisticated man the distinction between the visible and the invisible, the sensible and the suprasensible, nature and supernature, would not have been sharply drawn. He lived so entirely in his sense and motion that strange and surprising phenomena would some-