

Those mimic tapestries of air  
 Painted the mountains of Tibet,  
 And these beside the Amazon  
 Flaunted their proud vermilion;  
 These, spanning scarce your finger-nail,  
 Down Africa made tiny sail.

Torrid orchards 'neath the Line  
 Here their mystic fruits have sent,  
 Armored rind of scale and spine,  
 Half fruit, half savage ornament,  
 And flowers that seem to hiss and sting  
 Their sorceries of colors fling.

Other dream-lands beckon fair:  
 Old France, in this sedan-chair,  
 Wafts us sadly to Versailles,  
 With a little perfumed sigh;  
 Here a silver teapot's gleam  
 Brings old London in a dream;  
 With knightly casque and feudal oak  
 Troop in Chaucer and his folk;  
 Nor is there need the seas to span  
 To find your *Château en Espagne*.

For here along Fifth Avenue  
 All the dream-lands wait for you,  
 Little shops for every dream  
 Dotting the majestic stream.

## THE CRIME OF BEING OBVIOUS

BY LOUIS GRAVES

WE may suppose that since the power of speech was given first to man a distinction has been made between people who say commonplace things and people who don't. The cave-man author, chipping out his manuscript on a block of stone, was doubtless impelled to drop his chisel and take in hand his favorite wife-beating club to punish a spouse who went to the portal of the cave, looked up at the sky, and expressed the hope that it wouldn't cloud up, since she always *had* thought the humidity was worse than the heat. And down through the ages, as new ideas became old, and as, therefore, it became more and more difficult to be original, naturally the obvious-minded came to constitute an ever-larger fraction of the world's population. Thus, as those who could happily classify themselves as the elect became fewer and fewer in propor-

tion to the whole of humanity, their separateness grew steadily more imposing. As long as this went on quietly nobody was disturbed and nobody's feelings were hurt. For it was only the chosen circle that knew it was chosen; the outsiders went right on being outsiders, in blissful ignorance that every day they were making remarks that stamped and damned them as belonging to the multitude.

Then, upon an evil day, a man was seized with the inspiration to bring originality home to the masses.

Even if Mr. Gelett Burgess, in announcing the division of humankind into two classes, sulphites and bromides, was not the first to lay out this affair of conversational commonplaceness for the public view, it was he who first bared the crime in all its details, and so described the practitioners of it, with thumbprints and measurements, that they would be easily recognized by themselves as well as by others. No doubt his purpose was to end a nuisance. But instead of doing this he brought into being a far greater one by so humiliating bromides that many of them began to attempt—with results in boredom transcending anything they had achieved before—a rôle they were quite unfit to fill.

Now what has driven them to this folly is nothing more or less than a species of intimidation. They tremble lest clever mockers hold them under the lash of scorn.

It is high time that this intellectual reign of terror should end. That can be accomplished, however, only by united action. And we should form a league with some such name as the Association of Unashamed Bromides. The foundation of our program must be a sort of Declaration of Independence containing a list of well-known remarks or assertions that we will swear to make boldly and without apology whenever the fancy seizes us; for example, such as:

"It never rains when I take my umbrella with me."

"I don't see why it is any more wrong for a woman to smoke than for a man."

"This is the age of transition." (Specially for public speakers.)

"It was not the German people we had a quarrel with, but only their rulers."

"New York is the most provincial place I ever saw."

These are just a few specimens offered by way of illustration. Of course there will be hundreds, or even thousands, of such in the entire list, others being added every little while as they gain a currency wide enough to make impossible any suspicion that the user is giving voice to something novel.

Be it understood that we proponents of this association have no animus, and make no campaign, against sulphites. On the contrary, we admire them and delight to do them honor. Our movement is directed toward the reclamation of the would-be deserters from our own ranks, the natural-born, bred-in-the-bone bromides, who never can be anything else and yet who struggle fatuously against their humble destiny. These belong to the conversational proletariat, and are afraid or ashamed to admit it. They are traitors to their class, whom, it being impossible to hang, we would redeem. Wandering hopefully but blindly in a sort of No Man's Land, they call to mind nothing so much as *nouveaux riches* who have left behind the people with whom they were brought up, and with whom alone they can be at home, only to find themselves excluded by a barrier, invisible yet impassable, from the circle of the select few whose favor they court. As we see it, no movement could be more deserving than one directed toward returning them to the fold of their kindred.

It is not difficult to recognize these persons when one comes across them. Whatever the topic of conversation, a moment is sure to come, and soon, when a bromide trying to be a sulphite conclusively labels himself. He displays certain earmarks that make his ambition

unmistakable. About his contributions to the talk there is an over-eagerness, an over-emphasis, that is curiously compounded with a suggestion of misgiving, of apprehension lest his remarks do not prove as telling as he hopes. In his deadly determination to avoid saying something that might be put down as commonplace, he gives you the feeling that at heart he is uncomfortable; that, if he would only admit it, he is in much the same distress as the servant girl in Mr. Barrie's *Crichton*, who, weary of attempting "refined" manners, yearned plaintively for the privilege of being vulgar again.

The very trouble is that he has not yet reached that point of frankness with himself. His nightmare is that somebody will think him Victorian. He would not dare to admit that he had ever enjoyed Sir Walter Scott. These days he talks admiringly of Dostoevsky, but in a vague kind of way that makes you suspect he might be hard put to it to say just what it is he admires. If the talk takes a musical turn, almost always you will find him patronizing toward Italian opera.

When we were first exposed it was annoying to see held up to the mirth of the world observations we had made so often, so solemnly, and with such complete satisfaction. We had been innocently happy in saying that New York was pleasant for a stay of a few weeks, but we shouldn't like to live there all the year round, or that we could remember faces perfectly, but simply never *could* remember names, or that whether a town was nice or not depended entirely upon the people one knew there, and hundreds of other things like that; and it was a shock to be informed, in accents of ridicule, that nearly everybody else said the same thing. For a time we almost feared to open our mouths lest we should give voice to one of these statements marked as taboo by the chosen.

The majority of us got over this shame soon. Recovering from the first shock,

we went on in our old accustomed way, and were soon so reconciled to the idea of being cast in the usual pattern that we could even laugh at ourselves, without bitterness or regret, when some new evidence of our usualness was thrown in our face. Reading the letters of F. P. A.'s *Dulcinea*, or any dialogue in which the participants uttered opinions patently trite, and coming upon a sentence with a familiar ring, we could cheerfully confess, "Yes, I've said that same thing many a time, myself." It came to us that having plenty of company in our flatness was a vast comfort. And it remains so. After all, from the very circumstance of our numbers, we associate mostly with one another, and it is only occasionally—and then only for a few minutes at a time—that close contact forces poignantly upon our attention the existence of a class apart from and above us.

So, all would be well were it simply a question of the two main castes. They would go on living together in peace and amity, on the one side a willing deference, on the other amused condescension and raillery. But it is the members of the intermediate nameless caste who spoil the party. They did *not* recover from the shock of learning that they had been uttering platitudes; they are *not* reconciled to being commonplace, and are determined not to be so classified. So they go about among us, striving, with an effort plain to all but themselves, to be what they are not. Though not so numerous as the simple, unpretending bromides, there are, alas! enough of them to constitute a formidable plague.

Extermination by violent means being impracticable, the problem, then, re-

duces itself to one of conversion. And conversion can come about only by enforced self-revelation. The immensity of the task is evident, for what is more difficult than to convince a person that he belongs with the proletariat—social, economic, intellectual, or any other kind—once he has taken the notion he doesn't? Every instinct of vanity, all the innate snobbery of the human animal, rise up against such an admission. Yet I am persuaded that there is at hand a quick and yet a thorough solution. It is a bold scheme I have in mind, and it is this:

We must appeal to the sulphites. It is they, and they alone, who can strike the scales from the eyes of these misguided aspirants and induce them to settle down quietly and contentedly where they belong. We cannot do it ourselves, for these folk have no respect for us; they persist in their belief that they are superior, and should we hint the contrary they would put it down to jealousy. But the class to which we all yield homage can easily do the trick. It is merely a question of shifting to a new target. And isn't the bromide a pretty well shot-up one, anyway? Doesn't it get to be a rather spiceless sport, firing at this humble creature, with its slow movements, its friendly countenance, its honest, well-meaning disposition? The merely commonplace person is harmless and necessary—and natural. And nobody who is natural is interesting prey for long. But the pretender is always good to shoot at. It is for the sulphites, then, to turn their guns of satire away from those who commit the crime of being obvious and direct them at those guilty of the more obnoxious crime of trying not to be.

# EDITOR'S DRAWER

## THE TALE OF A TAIL-SPINNER

BY ROGER CURLY

"BROTHER," said Anne to me one afternoon while I sat pondering the riddles of the universe and when my new suits would come from the tailor's, "why don't you do something?"

The audacity of her question astonished me, and for a moment it seemed my mind went blank.

"That isn't the Curly tradition," I told her, firmly, when my mind had become focussed on the problem. "Besides, what can I do?"

"Oh, I don't think you are so bad as a that," she lauded me. "There are lots of things you can do. You can dance, and you can drive a car, and you can play bridge, and"—she searched around in her mind for words of praise—"and, oh, lots of things. Whenever you look at a dinner menu you always seem so keen and intelligent."

I was not yet convinced, although I could not see that she overrated my abilities.

"The Curlys have always been very brave," mused Anne with a far-away look in her eyes.

I should have known better; I should have been on my guard. But there was about her gaze such an air of pellucid innocence that I agreed cheerfully:

"Oh yes!"

"There was your great-grandfather Curly," continued Anne, with that reminiscent voice, apparently pursuing no conversational course in particular. "He fought in Mexico, you remember."

I did not remember, but then I must have

been very young. There are many things I forget.

"You come of such a brave race," cooed Anne; "that is the reason I am sure you will like it."

"Like what?" I demanded, suspiciously, for Anne's voice was just a little too soft, her face too guileless.

"Oh," she said, carelessly and glancing far away, "I have arranged for you to take aviation lessons."

I waited a minute. I waited half a dozen minutes, for the thought was a very big thought, and I could not think of it all at once. Anne always did have high ideals. I thought of aviation, and I thought of the tall, steep sky, and I thought of being a flying man, a sky-pilot, and an angel. I thought of the solid old ground and the peaceful chair in which I sat.



ON THEIR FACES WERE COMPASSION AND SYMPATHY