

neer. You may know your business from a technical angle, but, lacking the practical personal contact with the actual laborer, your 'experting' makes your work absolutely valueless; yes, worse than valueless, because you have used up a lot of our valuable time and your report is not worth the snap of your finger.

"Now, son, let me give you some advice. You have a schooling in books and that is one of the greatest assets a young man can have. The trouble with you is you have only half finished your

schooling. Take my advice: If you are going to be a woods industrial engineer, just get on a pair of overalls, some spiked shoes, a wool shirt, and a pair of gloves; start in on the rigging and spend a year or two gaining actual knowledge of conditions. As you work study men, and then you will know something about them. You cannot study men—the hearts of men—from a picture or a story book. You have got to live with them and feel them. You have got to go hungry with them and perspire with them; pack blankets with

them, if it is necessary. Combine that experience with your knowledge gained through a college education, and then you will be worth a big fee. You will not only be a credit to yourself and the school from which you graduated, but you will be of tremendous value to the Nation.

You have made the first right step, young man—the best step a young man can take; but take my advice—complete your education by putting on a pair of overalls and study the greatest factor in industry to-day—the human factor."

## BEHIND THE LEVEES

BY FREDERICK W. JONES

**L**IFE in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta with the waters of the rising Mississippi washing the top layer of the emergency sand-bags<sup>1</sup> on the levees brings many of the uncertainties and fears of defensive warfare. It suggests both the siege of Vicksburg and the early days of a constantly tightening blockade. Everybody thinks and almost everybody talks in terms of the one great "If." The schoolgirl will have her graduating dress "If." The ball team will play Greenville next Saturday "If." The housewife debates with her family and neighbors the grave question of the wisdom of setting out tomato plants. The planter tries to show his contempt of that "If" by tossing a coin to see whether all hands go fishing or plant a hundred acres of corn. But I notice that one of these planters has this standing order with the merchant he and I deal with: Such and such a number of bushels of corn and such and such a number of tons of hay "if the levee breaks." Every family in the country has equipped itself with at least one boat and has planned what to do with the stock. In the meantime the

churches and the Sunday schools are filling up. Like Noah in the days of the approaching flood, everybody is trying to "walk with God." One preacher in my town has cleverly expressed it all on a signboard: "If the levee of life breaks, have you a lifeboat for eternity?"

Fortunately for the peace of mind of the planters in this section, there has been an abundance of fighting on hand. At the first approach of the besieging enemy a weak sector on the battle-front was found. For a distance of six or seven miles in the region of Miller's Point, about twenty miles north of the rich and beautiful city of Greenville, the levee was regarded by the engineers as insecure. A break there would send the waters of the Mississippi down Deer Creek, which runs for scores of miles through one of the richest parts of the lower Delta. Many hundreds of thousands of acres of highly cultivated plantations would be overflowed; cities and towns would be threatened with disaster; human life would almost surely be lost. Meetings were held in many of the communities along the creek. Organizations were perfected for the purpose of sending labor to strengthen the impaired defenses. Many planters offered to send the last man they had.

They argued that if the levee broke no amount of labor would be worth anything to them.

At first the Negroes were every morning transported in cars and trucks, returning at night. Later special trains were run; camps were laid out, and at times as many as five thousand men put upon the first, which is also the last, line of defense. Wherever darkies are found loafing about a Deer Creek town they are given their choice of going to work on the levee or being arrested for vagrancy. They usually choose the levee work, though to those who live several miles away from the rising river the thought of fighting it is terrifying. After a few hours of association with the seemingly harmless body of water, however, they seem contented enough. Two professional gamblers the other day paid fines of \$100 each and accepted sentences of eight months on the county farm rather than risk their necks or their superior social standing as members of a promiscuous levee gang.

Fighting the Mississippi is not particularly hazardous for those who are on the battle-front. Most of the danger is for those who live away from the levees. Whenever a break occurs, everybody within reach of them runs toward these

<sup>1</sup> Dirt, instead of sand, is used. Sand sifts through the bags. However, the word "sand" is always used instead of "dirt."

**U**NDERGRADUATES from 125 universities and colleges scattered through thirty-nine States and the Dominion of Canada entered The Outlook's prize contest for the best letters on the problem of modern athletics. The task of selecting the victors was a formidable one, for the letters showed the highest average of merit of those which we have received in any of the Outlook contests conducted during the past year.

The winner of the first prize is at Princeton.

The winner of the second prize attends Ohio State University.

The winner of third prize claims as his Alma Mater Cornell.

The seven fourth prizes have been awarded to undergraduates of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Oberlin College, the University of Minnesota, the Iowa State College, the United States Military Academy, the Columbia School of

Journalism, and from a Pennsylvania institution, the name of which we may not disclose.

The names of all the prize winners who have permitted us to make their identity known, together with the first, second, and third prize letters, will be appropriately published in the Recreation Number of The Outlook—that of May 24.

The letters from winners of the fourth prize will appear in later issues of The Outlook.

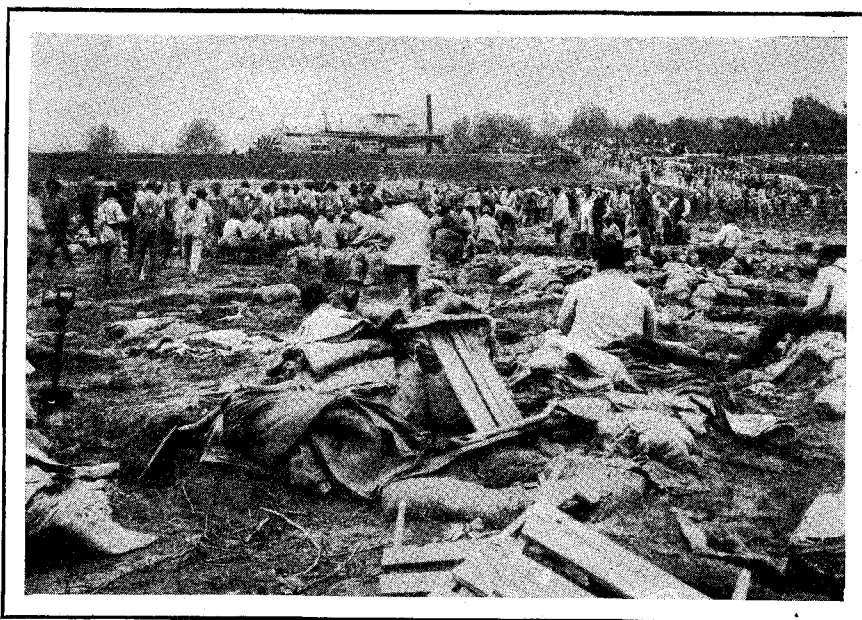


Photo by J. E. France

## BEHIND A THREATENED LEVEE

In the foreground are men engaged in putting sand in sacks. In the upper right, the small figures are men carrying sacks of sand up the levee to load on a barge for transportation to other weak points. About 3,000 men are working to save this point. Some 8,000 men in all have been working day and night on a strip seven miles long. The scene is at Stop's Landing, near Scott, Mississippi.

protecting dikes. When the water pours through the opening, the pressure elsewhere diminishes. The broken wall of earth will at least protect life and limb no matter how great the destruction of property.

The psychology involved in the thought of a break is disheartening, but, for all that, strangely interesting. It reveals one of the sad weaknesses of human nature. After men have fought the river day and night for weeks and it seems stronger than ever, a depression settles over many a desirable citizen that is relieved only by the thought that the fight is raging just as fiercely "on the Arkansas side," perhaps a little more fiercely, and if— Action, we are told in physics, is equalled by reaction. If terror strikes deep into the heart of the people of the Mississippi Delta when news of a break on their side reaches them, some feeling of an opposite nature, call it what you will, sets them singing—figuratively, of course—when the tidings of a breach on the Arkansas side are loudly proclaimed among them. One wide break and, as a rule, the campaign is over. The river and the other side win.

Every week we hear rumors of this order:

"A stick of dynamite was found at Avon."

"A bomb was thrown on the levee near Arkansas City. A guard extinguished it just in time. The man who threw it, escaped in a boat, headed for the Mississippi side."

"If the river rises much higher, Greenville will blow up the levee ten or fifteen miles down the river."

I put no faith in any of these rumors, but they add greatly to a street-corner discussion of the river situation.

This year the planters on both sides, with the help of the Government and Levee Board engineers, have put up a magnificent fight. But the river has stayed at a record height so long that there can be no relaxing of mind or body. And the longer the battle rages, the greater the damage in case of defeat. It is getting so late in the season now that it is doubtful if the overflowed lands would be free of water in time to grow a crop. The way the Delta man puts it is: "If we must have a break, let it come right now."

And in case of a break all this vast

amount of emergency work will be a complete loss. Those sand-bags—millions in number—will have to be replaced by permanent additions to the inadequate earthworks.

The struggle between man and one of God's most terrifying forces—the Father of Waters—is grim, but it fascinates. In time of rising water guards patrol the levees day and night. They are ordered to keep off strangers, to shoot to kill, if necessary.

Upon their patrol they keep a sharp lookout for sand boils. These are spots close to the base of the levee that show cracks, out of which muddy water is beginning to boil. Whenever these are found a little levee of sand-bags is thrown round them. The water is allowed to rise to the height of the river and all pressure is removed.

Water is continually seeping through the levees. So long as it is clear there is no danger. The moment it becomes muddy, however, there is danger, and immediate treatment is required. Branches of trees are cut and laid over these weakened places. Sand-bags are then put upon the branches, and the resulting mat securely holds back the water if made in time.

Whenever boils are threatened, stakes marked by white rags are driven in the ground and the guards are constantly on the alert for the first signs of danger. Every now and then a part of a particularly weak levee will "slough off." Such a condition is critical. If it responds at once to treatment, the situation is saved. But if the levee continues to "slough off," the case is hopeless. The levee will break.

Fortunately, the engineers can usually hold back the water for twelve hours. In that time the people living close to the river can reach safety with their



Photo by J. E. France

## A LEVEE THAT IS IN GREAT DANGER OF BEING BREACHED

The scene, near Scott, Mississippi, shows the face of the levee sloughing into the river and carrying the breakwater fence with it. The water is about twenty-five feet higher than the farms at the left which may be seen just over the line of men who are working to save the levee and their homes.





P. &amp; A. Photos

#### THE "FATHER OF WATERS" AFTER HIS BONDS ARE BROKEN

The photograph shows the Mississippi at Poydras, eleven miles south of New Orleans, and records a victory for the river in the recent floods.

stock and at least a part of their personal property. The surface of the river at the time of this writing is higher than the tops of the chimneys of the Negro cabins on the near-by plantations. And yet, in spite of this height and the volume of the escaping waters, their progress in any one direction after they have once broken clear of the levee is slow. They spread out in all directions, seeking the lowest places first. In 1913, when the levee broke three miles north of Mayersville, Issaquena County, Mississippi, it took twelve hours for the water to reach the town.

Many high mounds built by the Indians are scattered about the Delta. Dwellings and barns are built upon some. The others are crowded with neighboring stock in time of overflow.

When the breach is made, the river plows a lake, often one hundred feet in depth, filled with water of the deepest blue.

For several weeks transportation is conducted altogether by boats. In Mayersville and other levee towns every family has its skiff in good order in the back yard, all ready for any emergency.

Most of the larger cities and towns on or near the river have a system of protection levees. Greenville has a particularly efficient system. All that is required in case of need to make it watertight is to close with sand-bags the gaps made by the highways leading out of the

city. This the authorities had done at the time of this writing, except for a space on all such highways wide enough to allow one vehicle to pass through.

The people who dwell in the lower part of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta in time of high stage at Vicksburg care very little whether the levee breaks or not. Their lands are overflowed, anyway. The swollen Mississippi sends great volumes of its waters up through the mouth of the Yazoo. Then is seen the strange sight of that river and all its tributaries flowing up stream. That phenomenon is now in full operation. Hundreds of thousands of acres of land are under water—land that, for the most part, had been planted to cotton and corn. Trains running through this section from Vicksburg use tracks upon a high embankment, but each day they arrive later than on the day before. The water is now well up upon the steps of the coaches. When it reaches the fire-box of the locomotive, all communication with the outside world will cease except by boat.

The Red Cross and the Government are feeding sufferers in this region. This condition of destitution will be widespread if there should be a break in any part of the Delta sections of the lower Mississippi Valley. And the battle will be won by the side that has the greater endurance. If the river remains high on the levees for many more days,

it will surely make a breach. The water will soften the earth until resistance is no longer possible. But if the river soon returns to its normal position the siege will be raised. At best the Delta has only a fighting chance.

As one stands on the top of the levee at such an attractive city as Greenville, watches the terrific flow of the current in midstream, and then looks down upon the busy streets of the peaceful community twenty feet or more below, one cannot help being at least a bit ashamed of one's country. The frail protection against this fearful, sleepless enemy, the makeshift weapons of defense (such as sand-bags and willow branches), the constant danger along these extended levees from the dynamiter! Thoughts of all this come, and then with them the realization that that monster out there, so potential of disaster to a region still prostrate from the effects of the World War, was born hundreds of miles away and nourished and strengthened by nearly all parts of the United States except Mississippi and Louisiana. Surely a Government that can overcome a thousand miles from home the engineering problems of a world-serving canal—problems that baffled the genius of M. de Lesseps—can forever take away from its own people the dread, returning almost every spring, of a flood sent from nearly all the Nation's great watersheds.



# SICK DAYS

BY HERBERT S. GORMAN

WE come upon sick days:  
The little room  
That viewed your endless ways  
Is like a tomb.

Lie still and do not move  
And hold your breath  
And be in life, poor love,  
A hint of death.

## CLIMBING THE BUSINESS LADDER

AN OPEN LETTER TO GIRLS CONTEMPLATING A BUSINESS CAREER

BY KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

WHEN a writer has been a sufficient number of years before the public, he or she attracts correspondence as a magnet attracts iron-filings, so that the daily mail is always regarded with combined repugnance, hope, and suspicion on its appearance at the morning meal.

It may now and then contain tributes of one sort or another (though these are rare), it may proffer requests for autographs, books for bazaars, manuscripts for an immediate opinion, subscriptions for the needy in all the arts; but it is sure to hold appeals for advice on a bewildering variety of subjects, ranging from choice of diets to unhappy marriages.

So when two requests drifted in last week for a message to several hundreds of young men and women studying in business high schools and colleges of the country I read them with calmness, tinged with some surprise that I had been approached on this especial topic.

Speaking dispassionately, I think I am safe in saying that I have less business capacity than any other prose writer of my acquaintance. Still, the subject kept recurring to my mind, and I began thinking just what I should say and just how I should say it were I to agree to the artless proposal of one of these institutions, that I should come and talk to the students and that my railway fare would be paid if necessary.

Accordingly I gradually accumulated a few scattered ideas, based entirely upon the apparent lack of social experience or the manifest indifference to ordinary social usage that I daily encounter in shops, professional and business offices, with clerks, maids, telephone and telegraph operators, and others; and now that I have marshaled them into line it appears to me that they

may be of some service to the young persons who have so innocently counted on my superior knowledge.

Were I forced into a business career myself (I certainly should never be invited!), these, I think, would be the articles of my creed:

First, I would cultivate good English speech, at any or all hazards, as a subject of paramount importance. The needs of business are best met by a liberal education. If you have not had it, no one can prevent your getting it in off hours. There is something called, probably for the sake of convenience, "Commercial English." I may be making myself disliked as well as misunderstood, but I protest that there is only one sort of good English. 'I know that there are certain "forms" to be followed in business correspondence, and am thankful that one need not, at least, begin letters to husbands, lovers, and friends, "Yours of the 15th at hand and contents noted." But all forms are capable of slight differentiation, and you will find some time that the members of a firm say, for instance, "Miss X writes an uncommonly good letter." What does that mean? Something more, certainly, than that she always follows a stereotyped form, whatever the occasion. Miss X, in learning how to write, probably first learned how and what to read. Perhaps Miss X knew the difference between literature and "reading matter" before she thought of a business career. Miss X may have had a vision of "style," and when in some crisis she was given a free hand by her superior officer may have used it in transmitting his messages and wishes, his thanks, or even his downright anger in being asked to do, or agree to, something or other. Business men undoubtedly exist who think that any statement of facts or conditions, however ex-

pressed, phrased, spelled, or punctuated, will serve, but I beg those of you who may soon be in supernumerary positions or in those of considerable responsibility to remember that the command of language is always a source of efficiency and power. Know as much as possible of mathematics, physiology, history, geography, or what not, as your position demands or your desire for general information dictates, but know how to speak and write *delightfully* (I refuse to limit you to the word "correctly") and you will never be unemployed or poorly paid.

Second, I would cultivate good manners. They cost next to nothing and anybody can acquire them—at least almost anybody. It is unfortunately true that manners refuse to grow on some people. Not all plants bloom; some run to foliage. If I couldn't be a "blooming plant" (the word in this connection means to me grace and distinction), I would try for "foliage." That would emphasize many things; for example, proper deference to elders and superiors. I use the word advisedly—superiors do exist, and it is discreet to recognize them when you see them; I think we are all a little near-sighted in this matter in America. It would include also patience and teachableness, adopting a happy attitude towards work, and a tendency to smile when saying, "Certainly," instead of remarking, "All right," and banging the door.

I should not chew gum (pardon the unpleasant suggestion!), no matter how much it added to the joy of life or the relief of boredom. If any one chances to ask what relation exists between gum-chewing and good manners, I will answer at once, "None at all," and leave the questioner to reach his own conclusions as to my meaning.

All these highly informal suggestions