

Dempsey whether he thought this letter "sportsmanlike." But why should any one expect the sportsmanlike in connection with prize-fighting?

Perhaps Gene Tunney can do something to rescue the prize ring from its evil reputation. He has certainly himself behaved like a sportsman. He has not been content merely with learning how to slug, but also how to box. He has at least treated his business as if it were a sport. It is significant that, as a consequence, of all the heavyweight champions he is reputed to be the least popular.

Blundering Bureaucracy

WHEN on September 15 a prediction by the United States Department of Agriculture that cotton prices would decline was flashed to the markets and broke them, a torrential demand for further information and explanation descended upon the Department. The Secretary of Agriculture could not, for the time being, be heard from. The Chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, in which the prediction originated, was not in. The Assistant Chief was not in. An administrative assistant in the line of publicity stood in the breach and tried to hold back the flood.

Only one thing was clear, and that was that this administrative assistant was not clear in his mind as to what had happened. First the news went out that the report to the markets was erroneous, that the Department had made no such prediction; then that a prediction more than a month old had been picked up and used; and, finally, that, while the prediction had been made for release that day, it was not meant for the public, but for the guidance of agents of the Department.

The most sinister feature of the incident is just this: That nobody in the Department of Agriculture knew instantly where the thing came from, that nobody was ready instantly to take responsibility for it and defend it. Apparently, it might have come from almost anywhere among the multitudinous wheels of a vast bureau.

Now the Crop Reporting Board of the Department of Agriculture, which has the legal duty of collecting and disseminating crop information, is elaborately and almost oppressively safeguarded. Its members are under bond. They are subject to penal sentence under a special statute if they divulge crop information except in the strictly guarded way provided by law. When the Board is in

session, not only are they locked in the Board room, but all telephone and telegraph instruments are disconnected. The blinds are drawn and elaborate precautions are taken to prevent the possibility of signaling from the inside to the outside of the room. Information goes out only when the Secretary of Agriculture has, with his own hand, unlocked the door of the Board room, gone in, and placed his O. K. on the report.

All of these precautions are necessary. The information which the Board possesses is of such a nature that if it were released in any irregular way or even one minute before it is due, not only the markets for that day, but commodity prices for the entire season might be upset, speculators' fortunes made, farmers' earnings for a year swept away.

Why, then, should somebody, identity unknown, without restriction and without supervision, be permitted to make a statement with the same power to upset markets and get it into circulation without anybody's knowing anything definite about it?

The answer is that he should not, and that answer has now been given by Secretary Jardine, apparently at the insistence of the President. The incident doubtless was nothing worse than a bit of blundering. It had been done before and nothing came of it. Secretary Jardine expressed astonishment that the markets had seized upon it in September, when they apparently ignored much the same sort of thing in August. One explanation which might have occurred to

him is that, whereas practically no actual cotton was moving in August, the ginning season was at its height in September.

No such incident would have been possible in the Department of Agriculture a few years ago. The Bureau of Crop Estimates, then a small and compact organization devoted exclusively to the gathering and disseminating of crop statistics, has since been chewed and swallowed, if not entirely digested, by a mammoth bureaucracy, its functions added to, multiplied, raised to the n th power, and extended to infinity.

What inevitably happens in a bureaucracy has happened here. The welfare of the country is of less importance than the theory and the routine upon which the bureaucracy proceeds. An overzeal for what is regarded as service results in disservice. And the evil will not be cured until the country, or at least Congress, realizes and acts against the dangers of bureaucracy.

The particular mistake which caused the furor of September 15 may not be made again. But it was not the first mistake of the kind. A much more important one, at least in extent, is discussed at some length in an article, written by Mr. Aaron H. Ulm, in this issue of *The Outlook*. The mistake of September 15 will not be the last. Mistakes likely to be disastrous will be made until the Bureau of Agricultural Economics is called back to its real business and simplified until somebody in authority knows what it is doing.

The Literary Hack

By LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT

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IT is depressing to think of the immeasurable reams of paper and the incalculable gallons of ink that have been used up by newspaper hack writers since the invention of the printing-press. Sometimes it seems as if not only this vast volume of paper and ink but the incredible toil of the laborers who made them had gone to unutterable waste. Take this very article, for example. What is its pedigree? And to what end has the travail been undergone that was necessary to produce it?

In some distant forest a pine or hemlock or spruce or poplar tree is felled by a hardy "lumberjack" who lives the adventurous life of the frontiersman, and to whom bacon and beans are a banquet. The log is hauled out of the woods over the snow by patient oxen, or

dragged on a creaking narrow-gauge railway by a puffing little locomotive, or floated down a tumultuous stream, perhaps to be caught in a jam out of which it is dynamited by agile, leaping loggers who often take their lives in their hands to untangle the grotesque and gigantic snarl. At last the whirling, dizzy poplar comes to rest in the "boom" at the mill whence it is "snaked" out to be sawn, ground, and sulphuretted into pulp—a veritable inferno for any tree that could think. It is then shaken, steamed, and wound, in company with other little poplars, into a huge roll of paper ready for the printing-press.

In the meantime the press, a complicated machine as big as a cottage and as delicate as a watch, has been prepared for the reception of the paper.

Coal-black miners underground and sweating, half-naked puddlers in the steel mill have co-operated in its construction. The paper is inserted in one end of this colossal machine, the mysterious electric energy is turned on and, presto, out of the other end comes what? This wretched article! *Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus*, was the comment of that genial satirist, Horace, on such efforts—the pregnant mountain labored and brought forth a wretched little mouse.

Now I do not call this article wretched in affected disparagement, but because that term expresses the feeling that occasionally overwhelms every hack, whether he be writer, painter, or musician. Preachers, who have to do a great amount of hack work, sometimes suffer from such depression, I surmise. They have their “blue Mondays.” It is not because hack work is perfunctory. On the contrary it is often performed from a high sense of duty and with painstaking care. The words “pot boiler” are customarily used as a term of opprobrium by art critics. But does not this reproach spring from a mistaken sense of proportion? Mankind must have food, clothing, shelter before it can have art, and to keep the pot boiling is not infrequently the sternest duty of him who would, if he could, create great and noble works of art.

Let the pot boiler or the hack writer, provided his work is as sincere and honest as he can make it, be of good cheer. Something may come of it, after all, besides mere utilitarianism. The man who has to whip himself to do his daily column or his weekly article may take courage by recalling to mind the fact that some of the greatest names in literature are those of men who were once in the hack-writing class. Xantippe thought that Socrates was a useless and provoking hack. Shakespeare wrote many of his best plays as pot boilers to keep the box office of the Globe theater in a profitable condition. Dr. Johnson was the greatest hack writer the world has ever known. He alone has made the profession almost an illustrious one. Two of his greatest creative productions, the Dictionary and the “Shakespeare Commentary,” were pure pieces of hack work. He once said to his friend, Sir John Hawkins: “I look upon this [his edition of Shakespeare] as I did upon the Dictionary; it is all work, and my inducement to it is not love or desire of fame, but the want of money, which is the only motive to writing I know of.”

Perhaps the most remarkable example in English literature of the hack writer

who has become ennobled is George Meredith. In certain circles the highest test that can be applied to a candidate for a diploma of literary taste is to ask if he reads “The Egoist” or “The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.” My “I. Q.” in this respect is very unsatisfactory. I confess that I am unable to read Meredith with spontaneous pleasure. This is probably because I belong to the great middle class who, as an English Meredithian explains, “read with their eyes and not with their minds.” But at least I recognize my limitations and willingly admit that for intellectual power Meredith stands among the giants of his trade—the trade of novelists whom Heine called the pastry-cooks of literature.

It is not, however, for his intellectual power that I refer to Meredith. It is because for seven or eight years he was the veriest hack writer, supporting himself by contributing, says the most eulogistic of his biographers, “one or two leading articles and an average of about two columns of news notes each week” to a provincial newspaper, the “Ipswich Journal.” He was unhappy about it. “Above all things,” he said, “I detest writing for money. . . . And journalism for money is Egyptian bondage. No

slavery is comparable to the chains of hired journalism.”

I like Dr. Johnson better as a hack; partly because he did not complain but did his plodding work manfully, and partly because one of his sententious pronouncements is the best possible justification of the work of the literary hack. When his life-long friend David Garrick, the great Shakespearean actor, died, Dr. Johnson wrote that this untimely death “eclipsed the gayety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure.” Boswell took the Doctor to task for indulging in an anti-climax. “Is not,” asked Boswell, “‘harmless pleasure’ very tame?” “No, sir,” retorted Johnson, “‘harmless pleasure’ is the highest praise. Pleasure is a word of dubious import; pleasure is in general dangerous, and pernicious to virtue; to be able therefore to furnish pleasure that is harmless, pleasure pure and unalloyed, is as great a power as man can possess.”

If this article, then, in spite of its share in deforestation, should give any reader a little harmless pleasure I should happily feel that I have the backing of one of the sanest and most likable moralists of modern times.

Another “Big Four” Comes Through

By HERBERT REED

AMERICA retains the International Challenge Polo Cup, and with it a prestige as remarkable as has ever been achieved in any one sport.

A gallant band of British officers connected with the army in India, financed and abetted, encouraged and advised, by the Maharajah of Ratlam, as good a sportsman as ever came to these shores, was turned back by the one-sided score of 13 to 3 in the first game, and by the much closer tally of 8 to 5 in the second encounter, when the challengers had been reinforced in the forward positions by heavier men. The same four that defended the cup so decisively in 1924 against a challenging Hurlingham team that was torn with British polo politics, and led in a forlorn hope by Lewis L. Lacey, of the Argentine, a Canadian subject who fought with the British arms throughout the war, was chosen to defend after an early experiment with a radically changed formation. This consisted of J. Watson Webb at No. 1; the incomparable Thomas Hitchcock, Jr., at No. 2; the deft and canny Malcolm

Stevenson at No. 3; and Devereux Milburn, the world's greatest back and captain. It is characteristic of the man Milburn that, finding the newly chosen order of the American Defense Committee (Winston Guest, Hitchcock, Cheever Cowdin, and himself) going badly, he took the whole matter in his own hands, reinstated the veteran formation, and won through with it, so inspiring it with his own personality and leadership that in the first game of the series it turned in a brand of polo that certainly equaled if it did not surpass that of the famous original Big Four—the Waterburys, Harry Payne Whitney, and himself.

The American victory had been expected before the matches materialized. The English team had a peculiar history that did not add to its prospects, and a streak of luck in the matter of weather that was a downright handicap. Hurlingham, through which all challenges for the Westchester Cup, in play this time for the forty-first year, must be made by the terms of the deed of gift, had confessed its inability to gather up a team that could challenge with even a