



## THE PHOENIX NEST

### Fauna and Flora

Edited by Martin Levin

#### THE RIGHT ALLIGATOR

**I** WAS as pleased as punch last Christmas when a relative sent me a handsome, genuine alligator belt. A man can't have too many belts, and this one was exactly the right size. The only thing that put me off a bit was that this one came coiled around a genuine, stuffed alligator, twenty-one inches long, which is a good twelve inches shorter than the alligators I normally use.

If manufacturers insist on packaging products with stuffed samples of the creatures from which they've been created, they should, I think, make at least a reasonable effort to match sizes. A man who takes a thirty-four-inch belt, for example, is not going to be able to use a twenty-one-inch stuffed alligator, or, if he tries to make do with it, his friends are going to spot it immediately and think it's some cheap little old bargain-basement alligator, or even worse, a hand-me-down.

Philemon Muir, a boy I grew up with, is a good case in point. He had a lot of older brothers, and always had to use their old alligators when they were through with them. Some of them were pretty sad looking articles, too, and you know how merciless teen-agers can be—scathing, critical as all hell. The rest of us used to pack up for Boy Scout camp with our brand-new sleeping bags and pup tents from Abercrombie's, our tailor-made uniforms with genuine silk neckerchiefs; then here would come poor old Philey, looking so tacky we could hardly bear to be seen with him, with his brother Ed's stuffed alligator—too short, used-looking, skimpily stuffed, scales missing around its jaws—the kind that should have been thrown back in the first place or sold for fertilizer.

It was the same when we got to college. Philey's old man gave him a generous allowance, and he had a Hudson Terraplane and a charge account at Brooks, but here again, his alligators (by now we all had two, one for weekdays and a "best" one for Sundays) were so short and bedraggled he just couldn't hold his head up. He left without a degree, and we all knew why. Last I heard of Philey he was in Leavenworth—an utter failure.

Parents must learn to realize the value of status symbols to a youngster's

ego, or else the symbols themselves must be abolished by the Supreme Court. I'm coming more and more to favor the latter, since the whole packaging trend is getting out of hand, anyway. My wife told me the other day she had ordered a genuine cowhide bag, in preparation for our next vacation trip.

"Guess what it comes coiled around?" she asked.

—HAYES B. JACOBS.

#### THINK

**W**HEN I first saw him, alone in the drugstore booth, he was in the act of dropping a cigarette end into the dregs of a cup of coffee, where it perished with a faint hiss. The moodiness with which he then sat staring into the cup seemed to declare a belief that with all such dreary trivia we are ourselves but trivial components in a greater gloom. "Oh dear," I thought, sliding down off the fountain stool where I had been roosting with a coke. I stood watching him a moment. He was visibly one of those too long corroded by the single query "Why?" His entire air of brooding withdrawal was something more appropriate to Elsinore, but I thought I would step over and see if I could get through to him. Which I accordingly did.

"If the coffee was in this instance poorly brewed," I remarked, "think of another time when it will be better, or of the pleasure of brewing one's own, and of that morning aroma so delightful to the newborn senses. Think of the cigarette with which you have held communion with tobacco fields. Think of the nicotine flower, which is another matter, but the allusion shows the cruising speed of free association. Stop thinking and think of roses—roses under refrigeration and those warm in the sun. With such felicities everywhere about, what is more lamentable than to lament?"

He burrowed in a pocket for a pack of cigarettes, out of which he shook a fresh one. The match with which he lit it was abstractedly doused in the coffee cup.

"The position that there is nothing worthy of one's relish is a false one," I resumed. "There is a poetry that reaches everything, down to and including the oyster. Note that oysters begin to feed at the exact moment when the moon

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touches the meridian in which they lie. They also begin to feed when the moon reaches the corresponding meridian on the opposite side of the earth." I paused to let this sink in. I was not troubled by his having made no sign for me to sit down, preferring the advantage a standing position gave me. "Think of the numberless hues on a pheasant's neck," I continued, "or if the miracle of plumage is to your nature bromidic, contemplate that of moulting—a fabulously symmetrical process which we can only touch on here. You are strung on a harp of nerves, walk on a trellis made of bones, keep a hive of memories"—I tapped my skull—"in a walnut hull."

He bowed his head, bringing his brow to rest on the heel of one hand.

"Wait," I said, "Have you ever seen a star in a horn of the moon? Have you drunk black velvet, which is made by mixing equal parts champagne and stout? There is no quarter in which satisfactions may not be sought, nor any from which they may not unexpectedly spring. I ask you to believe that once in an inn in Salzburg I saw the proprietor wax the floors by skating around them shod in polishing cloths. Have you no humor yourself then, man? I warn you against so wholly losing your link with humankind. The prophet—or anyhow I—have truly said, 'Man that is born of woman is like a commutation ticket—not good if detached.'"

He nudged his cigarette over the rim of his saucer and snicked off a length of ash with a fingernail. He had now raised his head, but there was nothing in his aspect that could be confidently construed as resembling response. I reviewed my position.

We had made our way through gradations of substance up to and including the human race. These having touched no filament in him, there remained only one card to play. There was nothing



left to adduce, that is, but the acknowledged and attested flower of the human species—a beautiful woman.

Fortunately, there was one at hand. She was browsing at the cosmetics counter. I had noticed her there when I was sitting at the fountain. I drew his attention to her now with a wave of my hand.

"What," I said, "of that? Look. A form like Diana, skin like cream, hair like plaited gold. Note the patrician tilt to the nose, throat, and chin alike, not to speak of the imperial ease of that gesture," I added, alluding to a movement by which she had tucked in an



errant strand of hair. There was the same grace in the way she shifted a small dog she was carrying on one hip. It was a miniature poodle, dark gray, cunningly shorn. The woman was in the man's line of vision, so that he would have had to look down or away not to see her; still, he made no effort not to take her in. "There you have in effect the distillation, not alone of her sex, but of her time as well—for everything about her patently breathes our version of sophistication. This is the crown of animate matter as we know it."

We watched in silence as she took a small parcel from the druggist, paid, and thrust it into her bag. Having snapped the bag shut, she turned and started in our direction, on the way out.

"With such diversions as this in the visible world, surely the salt cannot completely have lost its savor," I said with a smile. "Here she comes. I see her eyes are pools of muscatel. Ah, and now perhaps she will favor us with a word."

For the woman, approaching, had in fact opened her mouth to speak. And the sound of her voice only added to those charms already enumerated. It was a soft voice, somewhat throaty, suggesting poured honey. She addressed herself to the dog.

"A fraud," she said. "That's all you are or ever will be, a little old fraud. You said the same thing last night and it didn't mean a thing, so why should I put any stock in you now, you old fraudycums." The crown of animate matter as we know it paused, and, with the tip of a gloved forefinger, pressed the animal's nose, as though it were a doorbell. "Just as *snide*."

Now the man could not be said to be lacking in response. He looked up at me and grinned with what I felt to be actually rather needless zest—a twisted, ironical sort of grin, like a bent nail. I turned angrily on the woman.

"You," I said, following her as she continued on to the door. "Who has given you leave to open your trap? Think for once beyond the illusory tissues of appearance, of the hutch of bones in which we really live, and which outlasts this Vanity Fair. Think enough at least to ask 'Why?' Ask why the snail, regret, must stain the rose of memory. Ask why the brine of grief must erode each cheek, till time at last lays bare this poor walnut hull. Think of ice on the piteous mountain tops, and of the clinkers that the universe will end in. Think of all such as are, not merely prone to queries, but skewered on perpetual thought. Think. . . ."

—PETER DE VRIES.

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# MAXIMUM CHALLENGE

## *Is the Economy of the Western World Splitting Apart?*

**F**OR THE second year *SR*'s annual business survey is devoted to an exclusive report of the recent meeting on economic problems by the trustees of the Committee for Economic Development. The Committee for Economic Development is a group of 200 businessmen and educators whose purpose is to explore the economic problems facing our free society and to suggest policies for the guidance of our economic life.

The central question before the meeting was: "Is the Economy of the Western World Splitting Apart?" Exploring that question directly were four outstanding experts: Sir Oliver Franks, former British ambassador to the United States and now chairman of Lloyds Bank; Paul van Zeeland, former Prime Minister of Belgium, long active in the European Economic Community established by Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Germany, France, and Italy; Axel Iveroth, president of the Federation of Swedish Industries; and Paul Hoffman, a founder and first chairman of CED, head of the Economic Cooperation Administration at the inauguration of the Marshall Plan, and now managing director of the United Nations Special Fund for Economic Development.

Discussing their talks and asking them questions were eleven trustees of CED, all of whom have considerable background in and knowledge of the problems discussed. The recorded texts of the main speakers and edited versions of the trustees' supplementary remarks are included in this issue of *SR*.

The four addresses have been widely recognized as important economic landmarks. In particular, that of Sir Oliver Franks had an immediately visible effect on national policy. Within hours after he made his remarks their substance was widely circulated in the State Department, the Treasury Department, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Some observers wrote that the speech might well usher in a period of policy development like that which followed the late Secretary of State Marshall's speech at Harvard on European recovery.

Sir Oliver's call for the establishment of a new mechanism, or forum, similar to the Organization for European Economic Cooperation but comprising the countries of the Atlantic world, reverberated in the meetings of the NATO Council and of the Western Big Four. A communiqué from the Big Four included a summons to an informal economic conference to be held in Paris this month to discuss "the sound use of economic resources and the maintenance of harmonious international relations, thus contributing to growth and stability in the world economy and to a general improvement in the standard of living."

This development and the continuing efforts to bridge the gaps between the European Six, the Outer Seven, the United States, and Canada underscore the importance and the timeliness of the addresses of Messrs. van Zeeland, Iveroth, Hoffman, and Franks. They go deeply into topics of overwhelming importance to all who would not only keep the economy of the Western world from splitting apart, but would unite its strength for the tremendous tasks that lie ahead.

DONALD K. DAVID, *Chairman of the Committee for Economic Development*  
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