



HENRY BLACKMAN SELL, the maker of Sell's Liver Pâté, Sell's Corned Pork Hash, and several other tinned products, a line known collectively as Sell's Specialties, is a man of letters turned meat packer. History offers no parallel to this remarkable evolution. Many men, of course, have done it the other way. Shakespeare was a butcher boy who became a great writer. H. G. Wells served a brief and reluctant apprenticeship behind a meat counter. George Horace Lorimer went from the Armour packing houses to the editorship of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Sell, however, is unique in having gone from prose and poetry to beef and pork. Now a trim, dapper, rapid-speaking man of fifty-eight, he was the literary editor of the *Chicago Daily News* back in the days when H. L. Mencken was calling Chicago the literary capital of the world. While Chicago was the capital, the Daily News Building was the royal palace, and Sell sat on a mighty throne. With the merest flourish of the sceptre, he could make or break a literary reputation. Some authorities still regard him as a pivotal figure in American criticism. "Sell?" one veteran of the literary wars, a still erect and ruddy old soldier, said recently. "Why, Henry Sell is the fellow who took criticism away from the *North American Review* and gave it back to the people." Sell has long since put all that behind him. Now he lives for meat, or, more properly, for his work as a canner of meat. Ordinarily blithe in manner and a bit on the arch and skittish side in conversation, he becomes grave and metaphysical when he talks about meat. "I only hope," he sometimes says, "that when I die, people will remember me for the excellence of my meat products."

Meat, though substantial as a food,

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I-REVISING MEAT

offers frail hope for immortality. The world has a short and ungrateful memory of the men who have kept it supplied with edible flesh. School children learn the names and dates of important figures in such lines as gunpowder, wheat harvesting, printing, and sewing machines. They are taught nothing about the great men of meat. The city of Springfield, Massachusetts, has honored its leading founder, William Pynchon, by naming a handsome history museum after him and in many other ways, but, though everyone pays tribute to his exploits as a pioneer settler in the Agawam country, the fact that he was the father of the meat-packing industry is always politely overlooked. As far as posterity is concerned, Sell, a native of Whitewater, Wisconsin, would be better off if he had stuck with literature and attached his name to books rather than to minced chicken and braised beef in gravy. After all, people everywhere know that the writing Swift's first name was Jonathan, but who knows or even cares to know that the meat-packing Swift was Gustavus? Sell, though, is not the sort of man who believes that because it was ever thus, thus it will ever be. He feels that he has a revolutionary program for meat and that the world will someday thank him for it. "What I want to do," he says, "is reexamine the whole structure of meat from top to bottom. I want to forget everything we've ever done with meat and start right in from scratch. I want to treat meat as though it were an entirely new problem, as though it were some precious raw material that had just been discovered."

Our attitude toward meat, Sell says, is largely conditioned by tradition, complacency, superstition, and bigotry, and in some respects we have made no progress since the Stone Age. It is true, to be sure, that there have recently been great advances in the breeding and feeding of meat animals, but these, according to Sell, have been of benefit principally to the producers of meat, not to the eaters of it. As to what we actually put into our mouths, we aren't much better off than we ever were. We just pull the meat off the animals and cook it as is. "Oh, sure," he says, with the impatience of a man anticipating a stock argument, "I know that we salt it down a bit and treat it with a few chemi-

cals now and then, but that's just to make it keep a little longer and chew a little easier. What we do is terribly superficial, really. The fact is that we just go along being smug and satisfied about the kind of meat Nature has given us. There's a lot of good in meat and a lot of bad. I want to see if we can get rid of the bad and make the good better. I think science can do things with meat the world has never even dared to dream of, and I won't rest till I've proved it." Sell believes that the whole business of packing meat needs overhauling and a new approach. "I think we can have better meat," he says, "and pack it better, sell it better, cook it better, and eat it better. I want to tear meat apart and put it back together again—a damn sight better, I hope, than it's ever been put together before. I was trained as an editor, and I plan to edit meat. It can stand a lot of revision."

Sell got into the meat business, just seven years ago, after compiling a spectacular record as a trail blazer in other fields. Writing and packing are merely the opposite poles of his experience. He was once an influential figure in interior decoration. It has been said that the genteel tradition that dominated the art showed its first signs of grogginess after the publication, in 1916, of "Good Taste in Home Furnishing," a book that he and his wife, Maud Ann Sell, wrote. He eased gradually away from belles-lettres by becoming, in 1920, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, and then, in 1927, assistant to the chairman of the board of the Butterick Publishing Company. In ladies'-dress circles, some people have gone as far as to claim that Sell is the inventor of the fashion magazine as we now know it. He is also hailed for his vigorous crusade in behalf of the mannish tailored suit, the cloche hat, and the Grecian drape. While still working for Butterick, Sell bought the Blaker Advertising Agency, which he made into one of the prominent firms of the period. In the early thirties, he abandoned journalism to concentrate on advertising. In some respects, his career from then on resembles that of the late William Wrigley. Wrigley was a soap manufacturer who gave away clocks, insurance policies, and whatnot—to encourage his soap sales. Sometimes he got so excited about one of his sidelines

that it became his chief interest. He worked through all of these things and several others, among them lamps and baking powder. He ended up in the chewing-gum business. One day, Sell picked off for his agency the account of a firm making vitamin pills. He got so engrossed in vitamins that he became a manufacturer himself of a line called Vitamins Plus. Vitamin men agree that Sell's campaign to put over Vitamins Plus helped enormously to make the taking of vitamin capsules, up to then the ritual of a few health faddists, a national pastime. "It would be interesting to know," a man who gets around a lot in the B-complex world said recently, "exactly how many extra planes we produced for the war as a result of Henry Sell getting the idea of putting vitamins on cosmetics counters." From the vitamin business, it was only a step to the meat, or protein, business. He took the step in 1940, selling Vitamins Plus to the Vick Chemical Company and putting the proceeds into meat. He still has the advertising agency, but he himself now handles only one large account—that of Elizabeth Arden, an old friend.

In addition to all his careers, Sell has had a number of sub-careers. Several of these have been involved with the entertainment industry. In 1912, he was a theatrical press agent, representing the Abbey Theatre, the Irish Players, Morris Gest, and several others. In the early days of the movies, he was part owner of an open-air theatre in Dayton, Ohio. For a while, when the last depression was at its worst, he was a doctor for ailing hotels and night clubs. His chief contribution in this field was the idea of using *Social Register* girls as café singers. This was considered a brilliant innovation, not from the standpoint of music but from the standpoint of night-club earnings. The theory, amply confirmed in practice, was that if rich girls performed in night clubs, their rich friends would come to see them and leave part of their riches behind. Then, after his fashion-magazine days, Sell was the American public-relations representative of a half dozen of the large Parisian dressmakers. For his work in behalf of French couture, he wears the red ribbon of a chevalier in the Legion of Honor. Chevalier Sell was also, briefly, the American representative of the winegrowers of the lower Rhine Valley, and in 1939 he served a short hitch as a Brain Truster, being a special consultant to the Secretary of Agriculture. Since he got into the meat business, he has twice branched out, trying his hand once as a soap manufacturer and

once as the producer of a cereal food called Extendo. He quietly abandoned both these projects.

SELL, who feels that he is only now on the threshold of his great adventure with meat, has already enjoyed some notable triumphs. For example, by devising Sell's Liver Pâté, the first and the most successful of his specialties, he has come as close as any man in history to actually making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Messing around in a laboratory with a lot of pig muscle, lard, wheat germ, soya beans, defatted milk, and other substances of a wholly unappetizing nature, he and some associates finally concocted what many gourmets feel is the perfect appetizer, a canapé paste of unusual taste and delicate bouquet, as well as an ideal accompaniment for truffles, aspics, and squab on

pedestal. "We were digging for coal when we came upon gold," Sell says. Sell's Liver Pâté is a result of its inventor's tour of duty in the Department of Agriculture. He had dinner one night at the home of Secretary Claude R. Wickard. Among the guests was Dr. Robert S. Harris, head of the National Biochemical Laboratories at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who got to talking about the coming protein shortage in Europe. He expounded the theory that it would be possible, after a little experimenting, to turn out a compact, concentrated food that would not take up valuable space in ocean freighters and that could be shipped without refrigeration. It should be of high caloric and protein value and provide everything else required for a well-balanced diet. Sell was momentarily out of challenges, and he found this one to his



"His talent isn't taking exactly the direction we'd hoped."