



**H**ENRY BLACKMAN SELL, a man who in the course of the past thirty years has been quite a figure in literary criticism, interior decoration, advertising, magazine editing, couture, vitamins, and the manufacture of a line of tinned meat pastes, stews, and hashes known as Sell's Specialties, his present preoccupation, was born in Whitewater, Wisconsin, on November 14, 1889. Whitewater, which is in the southeastern corner of the state, is a small town that had then, and still has, a population of about thirty-seven hundred. Sell's father was the Reverend Dr. Henry Thorne Sell, a high functionary of the Congregational Church, the editor of a Congregational magazine named the *Advance*, and a big Sunday-school man. He is one of the men whom millions of American children can thank for the present-day short, informal Sunday-school sessions, in which finger painting, sex talks, and group play have replaced responsive readings, recitations, and half-hour doses of hymns. He was also a lecturer on the old Chautauqua circuits and the author of "Sell's Bible Study Text Books," a monumental work of twenty-one volumes, cross-indexing the Holy Scriptures. Few men, before or since, have tried to do such an all-out cross-index of the Bible. The work is still in print, and the name of Sell is still an honored one among the harassed clergymen who anxiously grope through it on Saturday nights for texts. Revolutionizing Sunday schools, competing with musical-saw artists and talking horses on the summer circuits, and rubricating every common and proper noun from Genesis through Revelation left the Reverend Dr. Sell little time for family affairs, but his son saw enough of him to acquire a deep respect for him. Although the younger Sell's attitude toward tradition is one of

# PROFILES

## SPECIALTIES

### II—FROM WHITEWATER TO A HOMBURG

such thoroughgoing contempt that he has become known in the meat industry as the iconoclast who dared to make a hash out of corned pork instead of corned beef, he sometimes seeks the comfort of continuity by comparing his career in meat with his father's career in theology. "Sell's Specialties and 'Sell's Bible Studies,'" he will say. "It's almost as though Father and I were an act. My products are supplemental feeding for the body. His were supplemental feeding for the soul."

Sell's mother, the former Mary Blackman, was the daughter of the richest man in Whitewater, the president of the local bank. "Grandfather *was* Whitewater," Sell says. "He was the Old Man there, the one who lived in the Big House on the Hill." Sell's mother was gay, careless about money, and a bit scatterbrained. It is possible that Sell's urge to improve the lot of mankind with good reading, good clothes, and good food is a variant of his father's liberal evangelism. His urge to improve the lot of Sell and to enjoy himself in elaborate and generally expensive ways could be a legacy from the Blackmans, who loved luxury as much as he does. Although the family was a pioneer one, having settled in Whitewater in the middle of the nineteenth century, and although Mrs. Blackman was a first cousin of Buffalo Bill, the life the Blackmans led followed an Eastern seaboard rather than a Middle Border pattern. They travelled a lot, visited for long periods in Boston and New York, and patronized most of the polite arts. Even in the cheese country, Sell says, they always managed to look as if they were on their way to Sunday dinner at Delmonicos. When, eight years ago, Sell learned that Howard Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney were rehearsing in the parts of Mr. and Mrs. Day for "Life with Father," he sent them a batch of photographs of his maternal grandparents. Sell is convinced, though nobody else seems to be, that the costumes and makeup for everyone who has played the roles, right down to William Powell and Irene Dunne in the movie version, have been modelled on those in the photographs of the Blackmans of Whitewater, Wisconsin. "Every time I see a picture of Father Day," Sell says, "he

looks more and more like Grandfather Blackman."

Sell went to high school for five years, but he did not graduate. His formal education was really the only unsuccessful project he has ever undertaken. He was a quick-witted boy but impervious to the current educational methods. "I've never had any head for organized knowledge," he says. "I don't think I ever passed an examination in my life. I crumpled up whenever I took one." After the public schools had washed their hands of him, he was sent, in 1906, to Culver Military Academy, where he stayed until 1909, when he was nineteen. Except in his studies, nearly all of which he failed, he did well at Culver. He eventually became president of two or three societies, editor of the student newspaper, and the school's official guide and greeter. He was good-looking and rather courtly, and whenever celebrities or the parents of prospective students visited the campus, he was shown off to them as an example of what nice, clean-cut, well-spoken boys went to Culver. It was never explained that this over-age paragon was in his fifth year of first-year Latin. In the spring of 1909, the commandant sent Sell's father a friendly but candid letter. "I regret having to say that the end for Henry is still nowhere in sight," he wrote. He said he doubted that Henry could ever be admitted to Yale, for which he had been intended, or to any other self-respecting college, and that while he was a decorative and engaging fixture at parties and receptions, it was well known that money came hard to a clergyman and it seemed inadvisable to sink any more of it in a lost cause. Dr. Sell took the advice, and Henry left Culver that June with an indeterminate academic status. Culver has nevertheless used him as a kind of advertisement, claiming him as a distinguished alumnus of the Class of '10. This pleases Sell, who has shown that he is not against education for others by helping subsidize university projects for nutrition research and by recently establishing a scholarship in sociology at Syracuse University.

**F**OLLOWING his emergence from Culver, Sell had a series of newspaper jobs. He and a boyhood friend,



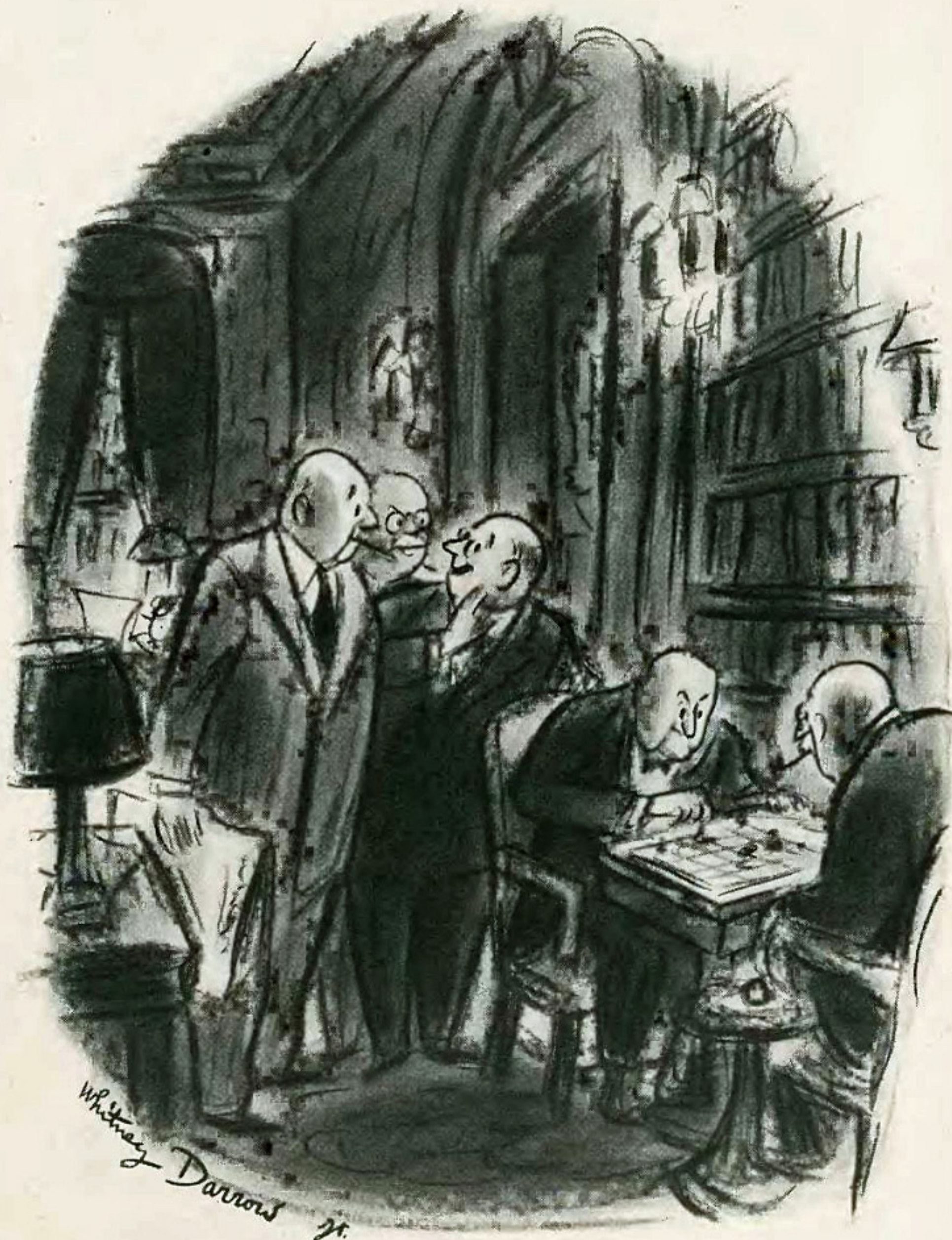
the late Hiram Motherwell, knocked around the Middle West picking up reporting jobs and holding them briefly. Then they bought a small movie house in Greenwood, Indiana. Sell managed the theatre, and Motherwell played the piano. The venture was a success, so they sold out and moved on to Dayton, Ohio, where they bought a larger, open-air theatre. Everything went fine until the cops descended on the place one night and ran Sell and Motherwell out of town for showing indecent films. The pictures were conventional ones, Sell says, but Dayton was in the hands of Philistines. After a while, Sell and Motherwell returned to Dayton, reopened the theatre, and showed a series of inspirational films chosen by a hurriedly formed committee of local ministers, who were glad to be of help to the son of the author of "Sell's Bible Studies." Ticket sales, however, never regained their old briskness, so Sell and Motherwell went back to newspaper work.

One of the newspapers Sell worked on was the Indianapolis *Star*. He was its gypsy editor. Indianapolis was a gypsy mecca in those days. Its metal-working shops had plenty of jobs for gypsy tinkers, fortune-telling was legal and popular, and the town was a great horse-trading center. The *Star* had a section devoted to gypsy advertising, in which occult wares were described and fortune-tellers announced their talents. It was Sell's job to solicit gypsy advertising and gather gypsy news. He wrote his stories and took in his ads in a broken-down Gilded Age mansion on the edge of town occupied by Queen Zenora, a wrinkled old Rumanian who claimed descent from the royal family of Egypt and who was the acknowledged social leader of the Indianapolis gypsies. When Zenora had no paying customers, she used to look into Sell's future for nothing. He believes that Zenora influenced his life and that she inspired in him the confidence to plunge into so many unrelated careers. "She told me I was failure-proof," he says. "She gave me a feeling of indestructibility and convinced me I could succeed

at anything I tried." Sell has been a confirmed friend of the gypsies ever since, and a fairly regular patron of fortune-tellers and astrologers. He doesn't exactly believe in their powers, but he doesn't exactly disbelieve, either. He is more or less in the position of the agnostic who goes to prayer meeting just in case there should be something to it. Being rather touchy about the subject, he insists that he has no faith in tea leaves, palmistry, and the zodiac but that he has respect for gypsy wisdom. "Those old gypsies," he says,

"have been watching life for a long time to see how things work out. If I know a gypsy isn't lying for the sake of a few extra dollars, I'll play her hunches any day."

In 1913, Sell went to Chicago. Having had little luck at coming up in the world the Richard Harding Davis way, he tried the Horatio Alger way. He became a glove salesman at Marshall Field's. He sold plenty of gloves from the start—enough, in fact, to go from basement gloves to main-floor gloves in a week—but he had to stand all day on



"Now watch out for the fireworks."



his feet, which made them ache. He had distressing visions of a million dollars in the bank and his feet in a pail of hot water. He got transferred to a sitting job in the store office, but this didn't suit him either, so he tried to get on the staff of the *Chicago Daily News*, which he admired. The *Daily News*, however, did not admire him. It was typical of Sell's career in journalism that what he was unable to get from the editorial department, he eventually got from the business department. He decided to get on the staff of the paper by working up a project with business appeal.

He studied the Chicago papers and discovered what he thought was a weak spot in them, then went to the *News* offices and told the business people that the paper was missing a big thing by not making a special appeal to the immigrant groups in the city. Before he was through, he had the mouths of the circulation men watering as he told how the newsstands would be mobbed by clamoring hordes of Poles, Italians, and Bohemians once Henry Sell started a department on Polish, Italian, and Bohemian life in Chicago. The business office told the editorial office that a great new journalist had been discovered. The city editor didn't think so, but he agreed to buy three articles from Sell, at twenty-five dollars apiece. Sell wrote them in a week. He continued to produce at that rate for more than three years, by which time *News* readers had made the acquaintance of just about every barber, grocer, priest, and bartender of foreign ancestry in Chicago.

Successful though he was, Sell was not put on the regular reporting staff of the *Daily News*. The *News* had some distinguished journalists on the payroll, and the editors felt that property values would be lowered if a nobody like Sell was admitted into such company. All sorts of ruffraff might come in after him. This was all to Sell's benefit. The distinguished journalists got around thirty-five dollars a week, and Sell was making twice that by working only half time. In addition, he had the leisure for a number of other activities. He did some free-lance writing for art magazines, and he became a theatrical press agent, handling all the shows that came into the Fine Arts Theatre and all the Chicago appearances of the Abbey Players, the Manchester Players, the Irish Players, Morris Gest's companies, and a number of others. For a couple of years, Sell was stage-struck. He wrote a short book in defense of the New Theatre called "What Is It All About?" and also served

as a super with the Chicago Opera.

In 1914, Sell married a young actress, Maud Ann O'Harrow. The Sells decided to retire from the stage and set themselves up as authorities on interior decoration. Sell worked an evening or two a week in the Marshall Field furniture department. There he supervised the pushing around of some tables and chairs until their arrangement pleased his eye, then took pictures of them and



wrote about them for the Field house organ. This was better than standing behind a counter in the glove department, because he could drop into a chair whenever he pleased. He also became the paint-and-wallpaper expert for the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Every month for several years, he and Mrs. Sell had their four-room apartment completely decorated for a hundred dollars a room and then wrote an article on how to redecorate a four-room apartment for four hundred dollars. In 1916, a ground-breaking book by the Sells, "Good Taste in Home Furnishing," appeared. Its ideas seem to be a mélange of a once-over-lightly reading of William Morris, the notions of Frank Lloyd Wright, then one of their close friends, and some thoughts of their own. It is hopelessly dated today. ("I am not in any way presupposing," Sell wrote, "that electricity is the final

## PRIMAVERA

Now April, with a gusty whack,  
Startles Manhattan's whale-shaped back;  
And now, through every street and lane,  
Flutters the blowing cellophane.

Hell's Kitchen windows bloom with bedding.  
Stripped fields are quick with metal wings.  
Cigars their tissue skins are shedding  
Like snakes of less enlightened springs.

All dormant creatures stir in sleep.  
From dark dead storage roadsters creep,  
New-Simonized and gleaming fair,  
To sniff the Ethyl-pungent air.

And now the motorist his wheel  
Grips, and elects his bridge, and goes  
Northeastward, where the orange peel  
Peeps from the tardy-melting snows.

At dusk he turns his headlight beam  
Southwest, and toes the brake, and mutters,  
Quick-swerving from the cat's-eye gleam  
Of beer cans crouching in the gutters.

The merging car streams purr and wester  
And flow in one elastic mass  
Where woven parkways of Westchester  
Pass and repass and underpass.

While higher, through blue evening air,  
The bolted Whirlwinds, four or pair,  
Bring silver minnows of the gale  
To rest beside a drowsy whale.

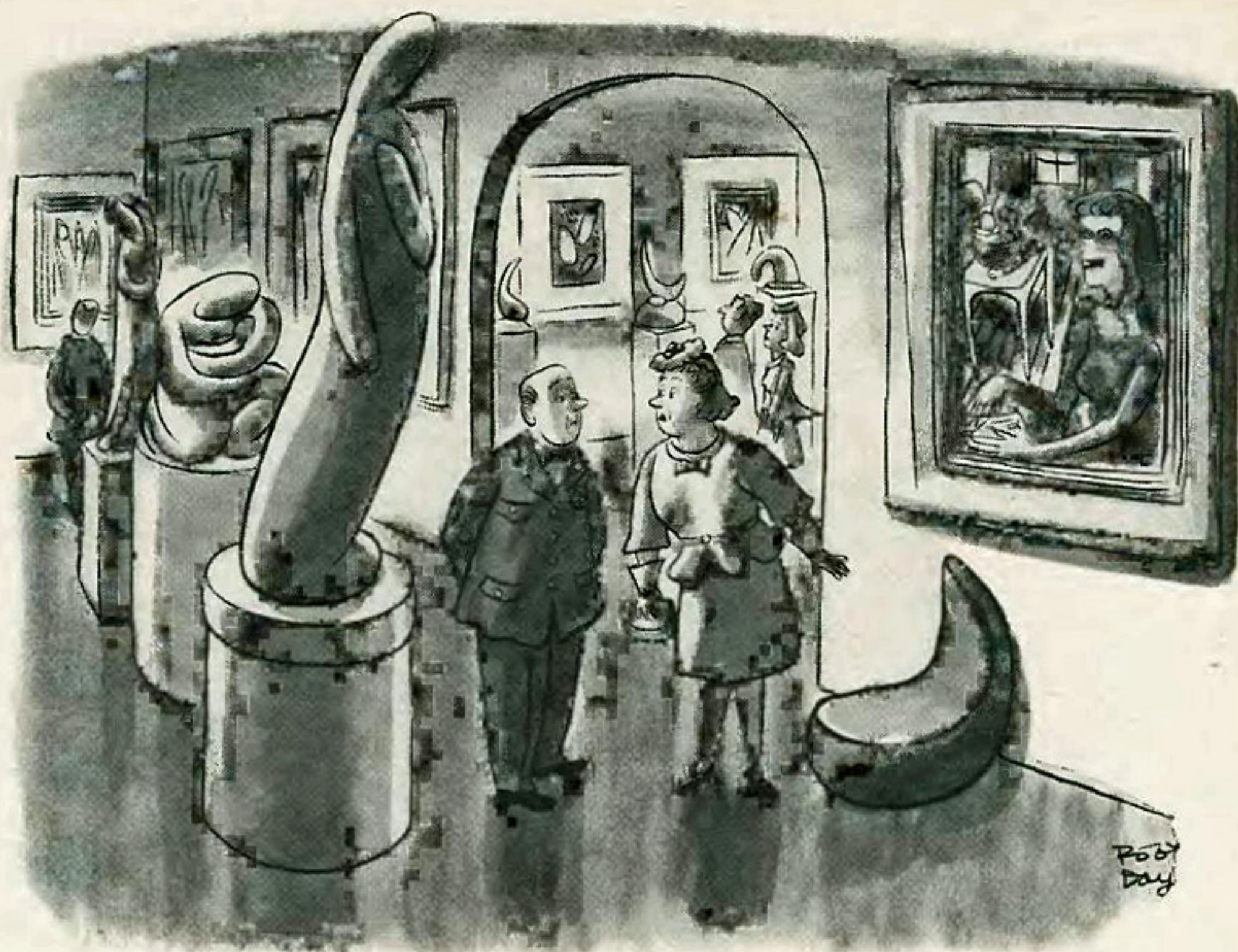
Flow warmer, Hudson, by our side.  
East River, float a gentler tide.  
Leviathan, between his streams,  
Stirs—and gulps Jonahs in his dreams.

—ALEXANDER LAING



triumph of illumination, but it is in general use, and has a certain adaptability not to be found in gas or oils.") Nevertheless, it was a revolutionary manifesto in its time. It sounded a battle cry against the revolving whatnot, it put the finger on curly maple and dark woodwork, it described shiny floor surfaces as an "abomination," and it courageously debunked Oriental rugs. The book sold over a hundred thousand copies and established the Sells as authorities in the field. Sell abandoned the field at once.

That same year, Sell stopped writing his *Daily News* feature articles and became the book editor of the paper, a job he held until 1920. Carl Sandburg and Ben Hecht were on the *News*, and Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser, Floyd Dell, and Vachel Lindsay were all Chicagoans. Margaret Anderson's *Little Review*, which claimed to have sponsored "twenty-three new systems of art," and Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, both published in Chicago, were the liveliest literary magazines in the country. But although literature was being produced in Chicago, it had to go to New York and Boston for approval or disapproval. Journalistic criticism was dominated by a few Eastern magazines and newspapers, most of whose reviewers were either Ivy League professors or elderly gentlemen of means. Few of them were sympathetic to the roughhewn stuff being turned out in the Middle West. Sell decided that the *News* should have a book page to give Chicago writers a sounding board. He went to the editors of the paper and told them that he could provide them with a first-class book page. The editors weren't interested. He went to the business manager and told him he could make a lot of money on book ads. The business manager put over the idea for him. The section was published every Wednesday. It consisted of as much advertising as Sell, who was his own space salesman, could get; a column of



"Pardon me, is this to sit on?"

literary gossip and opinion, written by Sell; a cartoon or caricature, by Gene Markey; and three or four book reviews.

When the *Daily News* page was at its height, H. L. Mencken called it "the only civilized book section in this Presbyterian satrapy." However that may be, it was certainly as unrestrained a book section as has ever been published anywhere. It represented no known school of critical theory: Sell's reviewers ran all the way from police reporters, whose prose style was pure Race-Track Final and who saw no need for shifting gears as they went from the works of Johnny Torrio to the works of James Branch Cabell, down to flowing-tie aesthetes and lady poets, who wrote lacy little pieces sprinkled with Pateresque epigrams. Sell permitted, even encouraged, unbridled logrolling. Ben Hecht called Sherwood Anderson a genius every other Wednesday. On the alternate Wednesdays, Anderson worried and chewed over the great problem of whether the word "genius" was adequate to convey the full scope of Hecht's powers. Sandburg and Masters paid tribute to each other with the same re-

lentlessness. If one member of the union said that another's book would be read a century from now, the author thus honored would come back with the opinion that the work of the first member would be acclaimed two centuries from now. Naturally, nobody expected to be paid for exercising such privileges. Except for Sell, who did very well, everyone in the book department worked for nothing, or at least for nothing more than free drinks and a lunch every Friday at Schlogel's Restaurant, then Chicago's Mermaid Tavern.

The department was consistent in another respect; it was almost always against foreign authors. Any book by a writer outside the continental United States was certain to get the bum's rush in the *Daily News*. Hecht and John V. A. Weaver were constantly dressing down Galsworthy, d'Annunzio, Ibañez, and all the other important figures of European literature. Cockiness, not chauvinism, was responsible for this policy, Sell explains. "We just felt that our own writers were doing such good stuff that we didn't want readers to be distracted by all those outsiders," he says. "We weren't any too friendly to East-



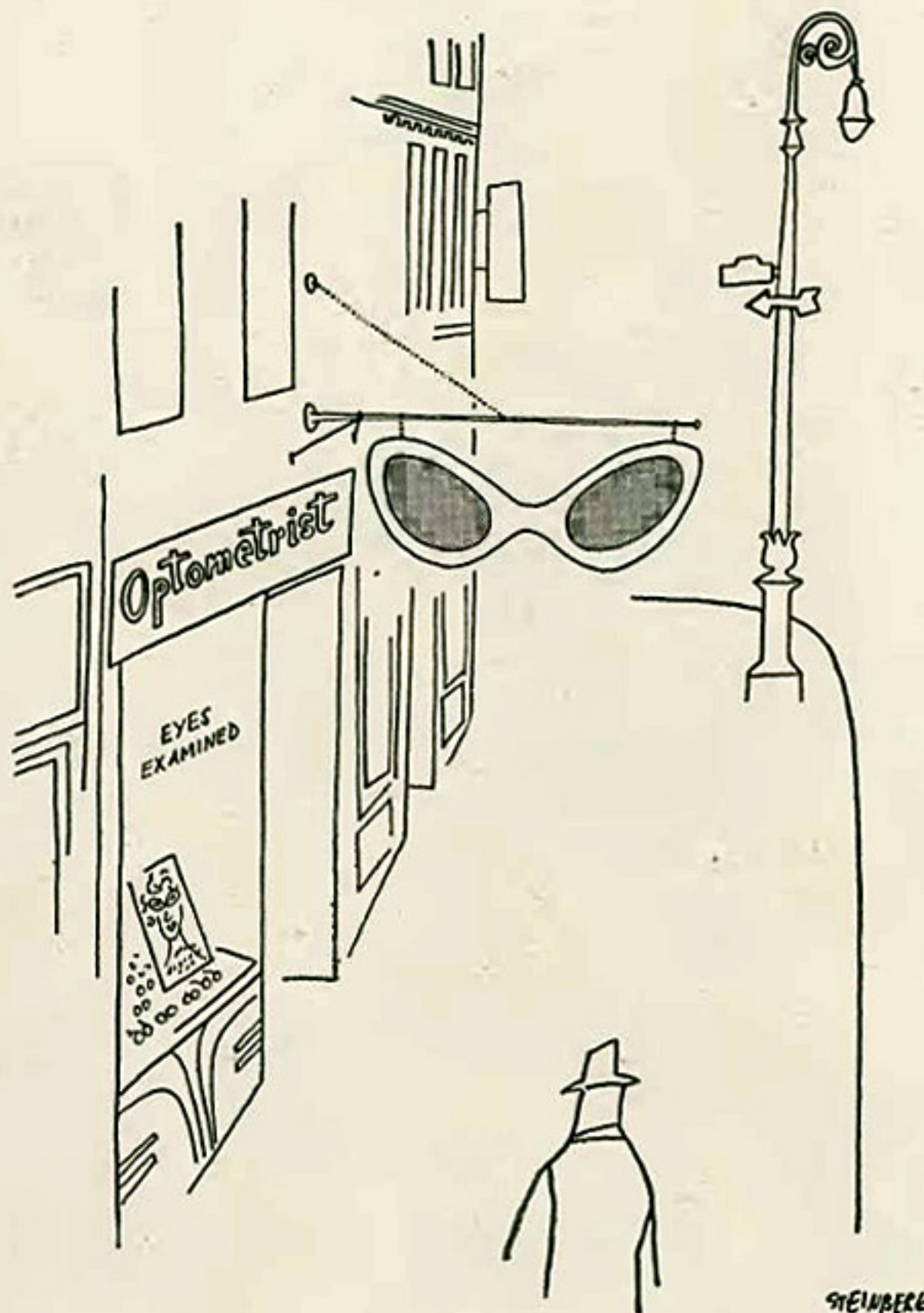
erners, either." The *News* came close to losing its Scribner advertising when he wrote an article on Galsworthy's ears, which were pointed. Sell had gone to New York to interview the great man, but he was so taken with the ears that he devoted his whole piece to them and went into some indelicate zoological comparisons. Scribner worked off its ire by buying space in the paper and denouncing "Henry Sell and his herd of green heifers." When foreign authors visited Chicago, they got the same treatment their books did. Literary protocol once forced Sell to invite Hugh Walpole, in this country on a lecture tour, to lunch with the crowd at Schlogel's. Sell and Hecht went to the restaurant ahead of time and sawed halfway through the legs of the chair the guest was to occupy. In the middle of the soup course, a prearranged campaign of the most outrageous flattery began. Walpole was told that Chicago regarded him as the peer of Dickens, Thackeray, and Scott. He was asked how it felt to realize that his name would ring gloriously down the ages. Did he plan to be laid to rest in the Abbey or was there some little kirk of childhood memory where he wanted his remains to be deposited? Walpole drank it all in, and after a while assumed a position favored by people who are drinking in flattery. He stuck his thumbs in his armpits and tilted his chair back. "We were really frightened at first," Sell recalls. "We thought they'd have to take stitches." The story of what happened to Walpole got around England and the Continent, and lecture managers began to notice that foreign writers booked into Chicago were strangely cool to the idea. When Ibáñez passed through Chicago on his American tour, in 1919, he demanded police protection.

Sell occasionally exempted a few foreign writers from the Sell treatment. Shaw was one of them, and Sell even managed to get a free review from him. James Joyce was also well treated. It is a curious fact in literary history, and one that was probably unknown to Joyce, that while he was still trying to find a publisher for "Ulysses," parts of it were appearing in the

*News*. At least two years before Joyce had even heard of Sylvia Beach, while "Ulysses" was still a work in progress, Sell clipped fragments of it from the *Little Review*, in which sections of it were being printed, and ran them whenever he was a column or two short of book copy. The editors of the *Little Review* almost went to jail for publishing Joyce, but Sell was never bothered by the law. Sell had a catholic enthusiasm for literature. The book that seemed to move him most was Frederick O'Brien's "White Shadows in the South Seas." He had it reviewed twenty-six times in the *News*. Sell introduced the principle of the multiple review to literary criticism. If his affection for a book was mild, he had it reviewed just once. If it was strong, he had it reviewed several times. "The Education of Henry Adams" got five reviews, "Winesburg, Ohio" and Mencken's "The American Language" seven, and Lardner's "You Know Me, Al" four. "White Shadows" was, however, the champion. Often, Sell let writers review their own books. Willa Cather reviewed "My Antonia" in the *News*, and Conrad Aiken examined several of his own collections of poetry. There were certain evidences of collusion between Sell and

Burton Rascoe, who was doing a book-review column for the *Chicago Tribune*. It is possible that "Jurgen" would have gone unnoticed, like Cabell's earlier books, but for the famous brawl over it between Rascoe, who liked it in the *Tribune*, and Ben Hecht, who agreed to dislike it in the *News*. The fight was taken up by the New York reviewers, particularly Heywood Broun, who thus brought the book to the attention of John S. Sumner. Sumner took the publishers to court on a charge of obscenity and thereby brought the book to the attention of the public. He lost his case. Some of the most informal and non-committal literary criticism ever published was written by Carl Sandburg for Sell. "I'd give Carl a book," Sell recalls, "and he'd forget all about it for three or four months. Then I'd get a letter saying, 'Dear Harry: That was an interesting book about Iowa farmers you gave me. Thanks a lot. How are things going? Yours, Carl Sandburg.' I knew I'd never get a review, so I'd just publish the letter. I figured anything he wrote was important."

CHARACTERISTICALLY, Sell was in top form as a bookman when he resigned his literary editorship at the *Daily News*, in 1920. Its contributors were acquiring national reputations; its advertising revenue was steadily growing. Since he had everything going so nicely, Sell felt that the time had come for him to move on. A friend, Ray Long, who had been editing a group of magazines in Chicago, was made editor in chief of a chain of Hearst magazines that included *Cosmopolitan*, *Hearst's International*, *Motor*, *Motor Boating*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and three British publications. Long offered Sell the choice of several vacancies. Sell chose the editorship of *Harper's Bazaar*, on the ground that it was the job for which he had the fewest qualifications and the one in which he would learn the most. "I'd never read a copy of it in my life," he recalls, "but I knew it was supposed to be a kind of classy fashion magazine. I knew Grub Street pretty well, so I thought I'd have a



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## DE PINNA

FIFTH AVE. AT 52nd ST., N.Y. 19

look at Park Avenue." He turned over the *News* book page to Harry Hansen and went to New York. Hecht decided to go with him, and the two of them, thinking that the new editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and his friend ought to look like the new editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and his friend, went from the train into a haberdashery in Grand Central and bought two canes and two homburgs. Sell also placed an order for a shoe trunk. He had only two or three pairs of shoes, but a trunk for nothing but shoes was the most luxurious thing he could think of. Then Sell and Hecht strolled up Park Avenue, wearing their new hats, and with their new canes twirling, to look over Sell's new beat.

Not many people on Park or any other avenue were reading *Harper's Bazaar* when Sell took over. The magazine, which had been bought by Hearst seven years earlier, was in poor shape. It had been founded in 1867 by Fletcher Harper, one of the Harper brothers, as a kind of ladies' edition of *Harper's Weekly*. The space that the *Weekly* devoted to politics and other matters of masculine interest the *Bazaar* devoted to fashions, homemaking, and child raising, but the illustrations and several of the departments, such as the "Editor's Easy Chair," were picked up bodily from the older magazine. It did quite well the first few years, but Fletcher Harper, whose idea it was, died in 1877, and it began to go to pot not many years after. Hearst made it a magazine of fashion and social news, putting it in competition with Condé Nast's *Vogue*. Hearst thought that his publishing genius could conquer the rich as easily as it had conquered the poor. He was badly mistaken. For one thing, the prominent families of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston had for years looked upon him as a loud-mouthed California vulgarian.

*Harper's Bazaar* faced equally serious obstacles in Paris, the natural source of its most important features. In a fashion magazine, the pictures of the new styles are the main attraction, and in 1920 staff artists of magazines had to attend the private showings of the Paris dressmakers and sketch the new designs. *Harper's Bazaar* artists, unlike *Vogue* artists, were not welcome at these showings. The *Bazaar* was in as bad a position as a newspaper would be

if its reporters were barred from the city hall, the ballparks, and the criminal courts. Hearst had run through three editors trying to lick this problem. Sell, the fourth, went to Paris to see what the couturiers had against *Harper's Bazaar*. Even the name of the magazine, he found, was a drawback. The French couldn't say it. "*Vogue*" was a French word, but when a Frenchman tried to say "*Harper's Bazaar*," his tongue got twisted. Sell's first step was to look for friends of the couturiers. He found several, among them the Duchess de Gramont. Sell and the Duchess exchanged courtesies: Sell introduced her to Hearst, and she introduced him to Vionnet. After Vionnet, the rest fell into line. Sell also set out to get the French dressmakers and perfumers to advertise in *Harper's Bazaar*, and as an inducement cut its advertising rates by eighty per cent. Up to that time, the French had not seen much point in advertising in America. Sell accomplished two things at once: he got the French into the habit of advertising here and, by allowing them to invest money in *Harper's Bazaar* ads, he got them to take an interest in helping him out editorially. He told the French advertisers that they needn't even bother to have their ads translated into English. Sell is not only the father of French dress and perfume advertising in this country, but of the native-language advertisement. "It just occurred to me," he says, "that an ad in French ought to draw as well as one in English. I explained to them that pictures meant

more than anything else, and that, besides, the name of the advertiser would be the same in French as in English. They went for it because they'd always figured it would be a nuisance to get their stuff translated. Anyway, in some mediums, it would be better to say in French that a perfume stinks than to tell how sweet it smells in English."

Sell broke down society's prejudices against *Harper's Bazaar* largely by making people think of it not as something owned by a boor named Hearst but as something edited by a charming young man named Sell. His homburg and his cane were a good investment. He ate only in restaurants patronized by the people he wanted to read the magazine. He and his shoe trunk went to Palm Beach, to Newport, to Saratoga, and to all the other social







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towns, where he introduced himself to the proconsuls and politely asked their cooperation in getting society notes and pictures. He was usually accompanied by Baron de Meyer, a kind of combination Cecil Beaton and Mike Romanoff of his day. Society people loved to be photographed by Baron de Meyer, who was the son of a Viennese horse breeder. Baron was one of his given names, but many people thought it was a title. He got his start in the world through his wife, who was supposed to be a natural daughter of Edward VII; on the strength of this, they had been accepted in fashionable European circles. Society's interest in the couple ended with the death of Edward, and they started life all over again as a roller-skating act in the Middle West. De Meyer soon decided, however, to take up photography, which he thought looked like a coming thing, and worked his way up until he was *Vogue's* star. Sell hired him away by offering him three times as much money as he was getting. Sell discovered that he could convert scorn for Hearst into something like admiration by spending Hearst's money in the right places and on the right things.

The effort to take the curse of Hearst's name off *Harper's Bazaar* was the beginning of Sell's career as a host. He won readers by feasting them. It was a slow and costly but effective way of doing the job. People felt better toward Hearst after they had had one of his filets mignons. Sell discovered, too, that one of the best weapons for conquering the American aristocracy was the British aristocracy. The British didn't care much one way or the other about Hearst and considered the distinction between a California upstart and a New York upstart too slight to be bothered with. Sell proceeded to grab off visiting dukes, duchesses, and earls for feeds at Sherry's and the Ritz. Once he had them, New York society was a cinch.

Sell was an influential man in fashion magazines. There is even a small band of Sell fanatics who claim that he was the Marconi of the industry. "I didn't invent anything," Sell says. "I just applied the methods of the Chicago police reporter to the job." Actually, it was more the press photographer's than the reporter's methods. When Sell took over, *Harper's Bazaar*, like *Vogue*, was averaging about forty or fifty per cent illustrations. About half the graphic material was sketches and half was photographs of society women. Sell left the artists who were supplying the

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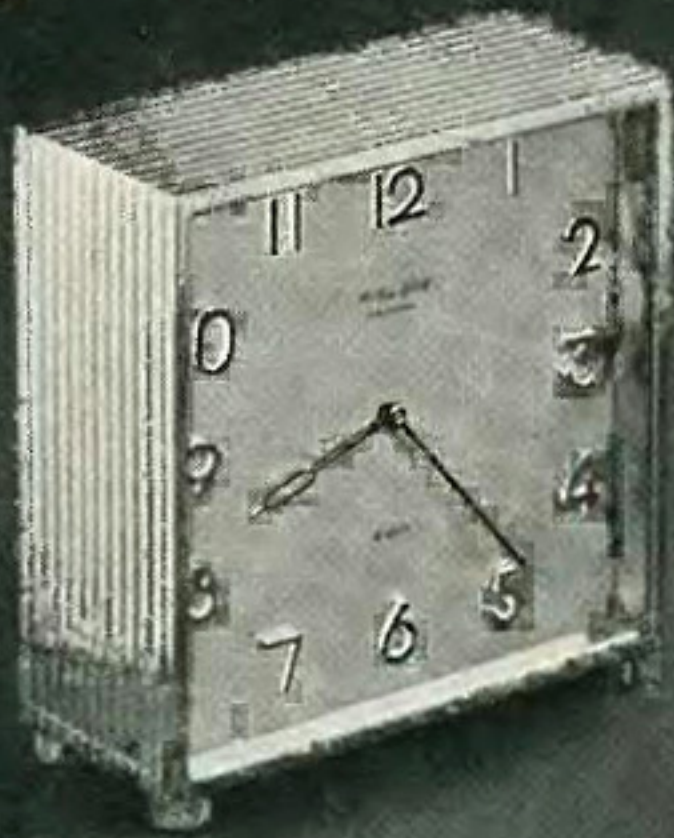
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sketches pretty much alone, but he completely reorganized the photography. The society photographs had mostly been carefully posed studio studies, the idea being to come as close as possible to Gainsborough. Generally, they were pictures of great ladies in white silk dresses sitting or standing with their backs to eighteenth-century tapestries, which mainly ran to horses. These photographs, arranged three or four to a page, were often oval-shaped or arched. Sell junked all this décor. He junked nearly all the posed pictures, too. In their place, he began to print informal Baron de Meyer snapshots of the great ladies with their backs not to frowzy studio tapestries but to the sands of Palm Beach, the seascape of the Côte d'Azur, the field-stone walls and privet hedges of their own gardens, and the gaudy murals of night clubs. In effect, he replaced the society portrait gallery with the society snapshot album. The few posed portraits he thought worth publishing were run not four to a page but one to a page, and the backgrounds were simple—a white wall or a black curtain. Devoting a whole page to a single picture was considered radical in those days. The rule had been to make pictures no larger than was absolutely necessary to show the details without causing eyestrain. In one issue, Sell, taking his cue from some of the Continental magazines, had a particularly attractive portrait printed running across all the margins and right off the edges of the page, in what printers call a "bleed." "I picked a time when Mr. Hearst was away and Ray Long wasn't looking," he recalls. "But they liked it when they saw it, and pretty soon all the magazines were doing it."

Sell introduced the readers of *Harper's Bazaar* to a new kind of celebrity. The factual material, before his regime, had consisted principally of reports on the season at Newport, the season at Saratoga, and the season at a number of other places. Sell found the articles dull and suspected that the readers did, too. He condensed the information they contained into captions for his pictures and devoted the space thus saved to articles about chefs, *maitres d'hôtels*, dress designers, headwaiters, entertainers, and so on. It was a daring move, like presenting a queen with a portrait of her chambermaid, but society people found that the help were more interesting than they were. Sell also ran a lot of fiction in *Harper's Bazaar*, but he made no innovations in this field. Sell's only important service to American letters in this phase was the encouraging of what



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turned into Anita Loos's "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." Miss Loos had written Ray Long about a conversation with a pair of chorus girls who wandered into the drawing room she and her husband, John Emerson, were occupying on a train to the Coast. Long showed it to Sell, who bullied Miss Loos into doing a story about the pair. "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" appeared serially in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1925 under the title of "Fate Keeps on Happening."

Hearst was impressed by Sell, who proved that he had thoroughly absorbed the publisher's philosophy of getting things done, which Hearst once summed up as "When you want a duck egg, get a duck." Hearst, especially admiring Sell's talent for dinner parties, put him to work entertaining for the Hearst organization. Even after Sell left *Harper's Bazaar*, he got an occasional call to supervise a party for Hearst. What with Hearst's money and his own imagination, his parties were among the most resplendent affairs of the twenties. Tradition went by the board when Sell got to work. He would import handsome trees from Vermont for a party and then have them tinted pink, white, or orange. Irish damask, considered by many the most elegant of table coverings, was considered by Sell acceptable for a picnic in the woods, but for a dinner party at Sherry's, the Ritz, or the Waldorf, the tables had to be covered with a mushy layer of rose petals. He liked to pile one sybaritic trapping on another, then suddenly break the sequence with an earthy touch. Three or four hours after the guests at a party at Sherry's had begun a feast involving nightingales' breasts under glass, some curtains along a side wall flew apart to admit a host of hot-dog carts, manned by a merry and noisy crew of Sicilians rounded up by Sell. His most dazzling production was a dinner party aboard the Ile-de-France when she docked here soon after her maiden voyage, in 1927. There were wheel chairs from the Atlantic City boardwalk to take guests from their taxis to their tables. Doormen from Sherry's helped the guests out of their cars and settled them in the chairs. In the pier shed, Sherry's waiters stood with magnums of champagne to slake any thirst that might develop en route. Gypsy fiddlers walked alongside the chairs as far as the gangplank. The main salon was hung with pink tarlatan, and pink and white trees were scattered about. The only illumination came from altar candles set before each guest's place at table. "It was the most sensuous damn

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 in  
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 A play by THOMAS HEGGEN & JOSHUA LOGAN  
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 Directed by Joshua Logan  
 Settings by Jo Mielziner  
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"All Triumphant."—*Barnes, N. Trib.*  
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 MARJORIE and SHERMAN EWING present  
**THE HARTMANS & HANK LADD**  
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**ANGEL IN THE WINGS**  
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"A WITTY & MOVING PLAY."—Barnes, *Her. Trib.*

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thing I've ever seen," a man who was there says. "It was like a banquet in Hell."

There were unique Sell features about Sell parties, which, for the most part, were given simply to make friends for the Hearst organization. At some of them, every third person was the guest of honor. This meant that every one who came was either the guest of honor or seated next to him. "I'd just take a man aside," Sell says, "and tell him that though we weren't making any fuss about it, the party was really for him. I'd ask him not to mention it to anyone else. Then I'd tell the two who flanked him that I'd chosen them to sit next to the guest of honor. It worked out fine. Everybody felt happy and important." In his entertaining days, Sell was probably the country's largest purchaser of bath salts. He sprinkled them over painted trees, shook them into the folds of draperies, placed sachets of them here and there, and dissolved them in champagne buckets full of hot water placed under the dinner tables. The idea of giving a party with only one orchestra depressed him. He never had less than three. Having the orchestras play in rotation, however, seemed drab and uninteresting, so he rehearsed the musicians himself until one orchestra could stop playing in the middle of a phrase and another could pick up the tune without missing a beat. No matter how Sell's parties began, they almost always ended with gypsies, who, as the clock struck midnight, would rush in on the guests shouting and singing and shaking tambourines. Then they would scatter, some to tell fortunes, some to fiddle, and some to dance. At the end of the evening, Sell would bring out a bag of gold pieces and pay the gypsies off. He always paid his gypsies in gold.

—RICHARD H. ROVERE

(This is the second of a series of three articles.)

Asked whether they wanted counsel, Rosenberg, 42, short and balding, wearing a rumpled lumber jacket and kneading a cop in his hands, said he did.—*The Mirror*.

He'll need counsel if that cop ever comes to.

THE OMNIPOTENT WHOMEVER  
[Virgil Thomson in the *Herald Tribune*]  
... and an even vaguer paragraph about Rameau or Couperin or Hans Christian Bach or whomever it was whose piece began the program.

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