

# PROFILES

## SPECIALTIES

### III~EXPENSIVE CHEERFULNESS PLUS

IN 1926, Henry Blackman Sell, now the president of Sell's Specialties, Inc., a firm that puts out a line of de-luxe canned-meat products, resigned the editorship of *Harper's Bazaar*, which he had held since 1920. This was in keeping with his policy of leaving a job when he had become a big success in it. Soon afterward, the Butterick Publishing Company—*Delinicator*, *Adventure Magazine*, and *Everybody's*—offered Sell a job as a kind of boss editor for the chain. He took it, but he spent only about half of his time at it. The rest he devoted to the Blaker Advertising Agency, a small but prosperous firm that he soon purchased from the founder and made larger and more prosperous. He got some of his business—he had a few public-relations, as well as advertising, accounts—through acquaintanceships he had struck up while he was on *Harper's Bazaar*. Among them were Hattie Carnegie, the International Silk Guild, Delman Shoes, the United Piece Dye Works, the Waldorf, Louis Sherry's, Elizabeth Arden, and Lucien Lelong. He also acquired the accounts of the American Radiator Company, Kewanee Boilers, the Standard Sanitary Corporation, the Standard Casket Company, and the Church Seat Company. Sell still owns the Blaker Agency, but he gives only a fraction of his time to it, because meat keeps him so busy. He continues to do some notable things in advertising—for example, he has done a lot of work on the campaign for CARE, the European relief agency—but his reputation in this business is based mainly on past glories. The famous slogan of the Church Seat Company, "The Best Seat in the House," is his. The idea of the Du Barry Success School came out of his office. He was the father of vitamin advertising. He was also the discoverer of one of the most familiar figures in American advertising, the hooded, wraithlike girl with the saintly pallor who appears in the Elizabeth Arden ads. He saw her in a Paris couturier's one day, and he instantly realized what she could mean to mud packs and muscle oil.

Sell had a fine time during the depression. His business went to smash and he lost most of his savings, but he

downed more champagne cocktails and more lobsters between 1930 and 1934 than in any other four-year period before or since. "I was lucky," he says. "I sat it out in Peacock Alley. I rode out the storm on the Monarch of Bermuda." He was a fairly big stockholder in Simmons Beds, which some customers' man had led him to believe would hold up forever. Simmons Beds began to buckle early on Wednesday, October 23, 1929, six days before the following Tuesday's climax, on which day they collapsed. Sell's agency quickly felt the effects of the market break, too. One morning he went to his office and found cancellation orders on two million dollars' worth of business in the mail. "Even the casket business went to pieces," he says. "Lord knows how people got buried." Eventually, Sell had nothing to do but sit around thinking in night clubs and restaurants. This was a pleasant mode of existence, but in 1930 and 1931 it was a lonely one. The sound of Sell calling a waiter echoed like the voice of a hunter in a canyon. Sell loves people, and he finds satisfaction in seeing them have a good time, particularly if the good time costs a lot of money. He believes that what he calls "expensive cheerfulness" is one of the foundations of Western civilization. He approves Henry Wallace's goal of a glass of milk for every Hottentot, and has recently been giving liberally of his time and money to the cause of feeding the hungry in Europe, but he would like to see the goal amended to include a champagne cocktail and a lobster for every Hottentot.

Sitting alone in the Oval Room of the Ritz one evening, Sell was seized with an idea for reviving the festive spirit. He had seen several people walk to the entrance, survey the empty tables, lower their eyes, shake their heads in the forlorn and sorrowing manner of a man looking upon the bier of a friend, and move on. His experience with the food and entertainment industries (he had been one of William Randolph Hearst's official party-givers) had taught him that success begets success, that there is no more effective stimulus to enjoyment than the sight of other people enjoying themselves. A restaurant may employ a



Henry Blackman Sell

chef with as many blue ribbons as My Own Brucie, but people won't have confidence in it unless they see other people eating there. It occurred to Sell that if the people who slouched on after seeing the Oval Room empty had seen it half full of people having a good time, some of them would have joined in the fun. He decided that what the restaurant business needed was pump-priming. He worked out a New Deal program for hotels and night clubs at least two years before Roosevelt came along with his New Deal for the rest of the country.

From 1930 until 1934, the chief clients of the Blaker Agency were places like Sherry's, the Ritz, the Waldorf, and Bermuda's Castle Harbour. Sell also had the Furness Bermuda Line account. They gave him their money not for advertising, however, but for non-paying stooges. For eating places, Sell supplied diners of experience and finesse. For places with dance floors, he supplied graceful and attractive young people. Perennial travellers, generally with names that would make the papers, were provided for the Furness Bermuda Line boats and Castle Harbour. "We filled up the Waldorf's restaurants with people who didn't have the price of a dinner in Child's, and we had them eat themselves out of shape on crêpes Suzette," he says, recalling his accomplishments with satisfaction, and probably with something less than scientific accuracy. "We had beautiful kids with holes in their shoes dancing all over the Starlight Roof. The place doesn't look half as gay today as it did then,

when the hotel was losing seven thousand dollars a day."

It was really something of a good-fairy role that Sell played, and, being a rather wispy, light-footed creature, he was happy playing it. Every night for two summers, except when he was off taking boatloads of good-looking deadheads to

Castle Harbour, he and his wife dined on the Starlight Roof, at an inconspicuous corner table from which he could survey the whole room while surreptitiously giving signals to the waiters and stage directions to his Cinderellas. "I had to keep my dancers dancing and my eaters eating," he recalls. "I had to see

to it that none of them welshed on me and ordered pork chops. They were supposed to order only the most spectacular dishes. The idea was to have everything *en flambeau*. Crêpes Suzette, cherries in flames, peaches in flames, flaming soups and meats and fish. Our motto was 'If it won't burn, to hell with it.' We

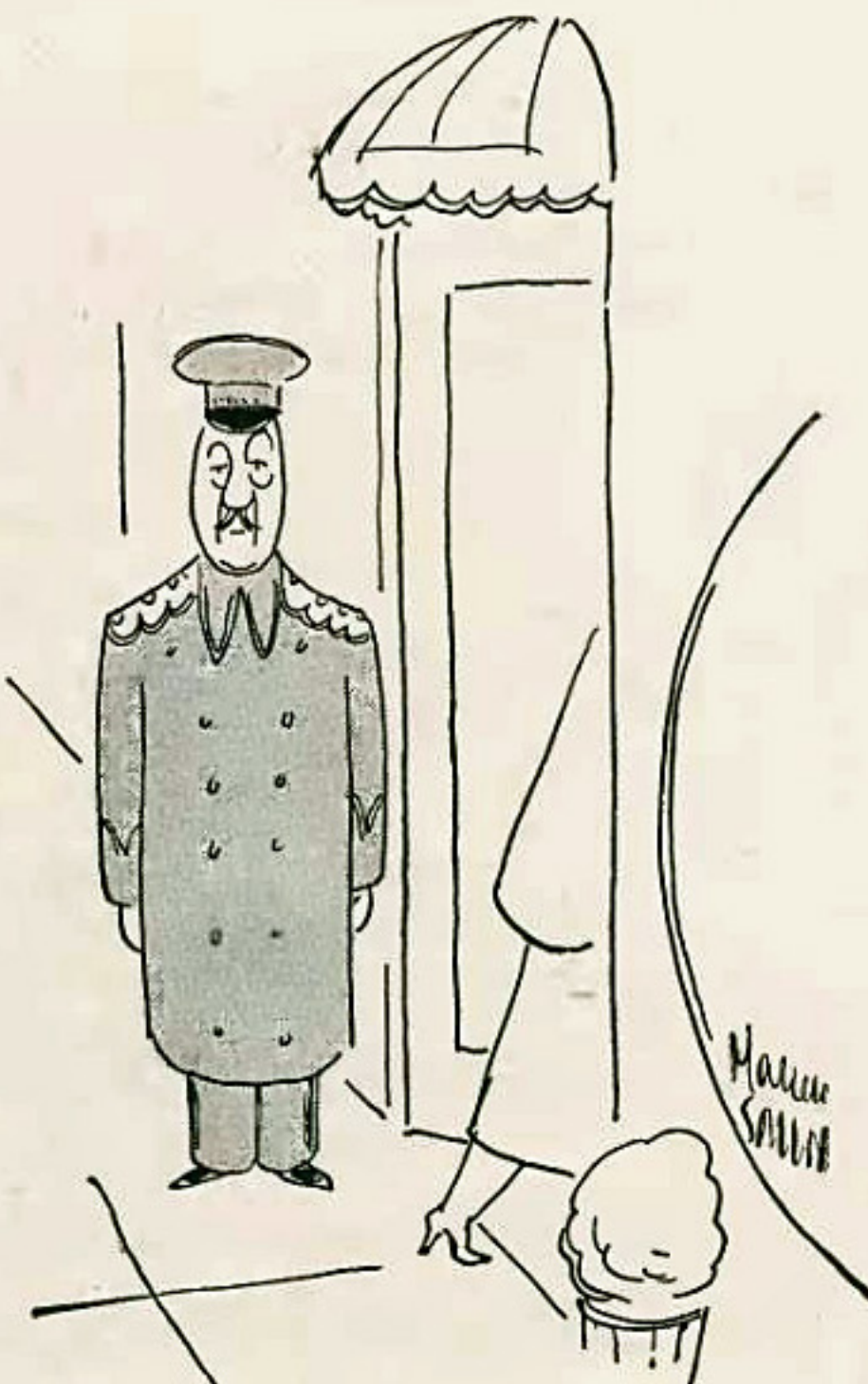
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wanted to get the customers inside, and we wanted to get them into the I'll-have-some-of-what-he's-having spirit." Sell was never more inventive than when he was thinking up schemes for filling the pleasure domes. The idea of using débutantes as vocalists was thought up by him. These girls had certain great advantages: they expected no payment, their names got into the papers, and their proud relatives and friends came to hear them perform and were thus brought within sight of the flaming dishes. Among the dozen young women whose singing careers were launched by Sell were Lois Elliman, Cobina Wright, Jr., Donna Christiana Torlonia, and Gloria Braggiotti.

**R**ECOVERY, along with repeal, brought Sell's hotel and restaurant operations to an end, and with recovery the advertising business picked up. It was through advertising that Sell later got into vitamins and then into meat, but before he went into either of these he had a brief adventure with wine. He had had the advertising and public-relations accounts of a number of the large French dressmakers and had done so well for them that when, after repeal, the winegrowers of the lower Rhine Valley decided that they wanted an American public-relations counsel, the French consul in New York recommended Sell. Sell liked the idea. He went to Strasbourg, by ship and plane,

to meet his prospective clients. He was met by a delegation of vintners. He found them charming people. "A lusty crew," he says. "An obese, earthy, warmhearted, affectionate bunch." Sell got right to work. By chance, he says, he ran into a couple of pretty girls he had known in Chicago and New York, and, with his publicity instincts operating efficiently, he immediately brought the girls and the vintners together. He had pictures of the winegrowers and the young ladies taken for the American press. It was a great start for the campaign, but it cost him his job. The vintners sacked him. Actually, it was not the winegrowers who had turned against him, but their wives. When the wives saw the pictures, they took the position that their husbands' wines ought to sell themselves on their own merits. They held a meeting and passed a resolution to this effect. The husbands were informed of the consensus among the wives, and another delegation, a rather mournful one, went to Sell to tell him they had decided he wasn't quite the man for the job.

Sell has always regretted that his association with the vintners was so brief. He says that, except for meat packers, he has never met such nice people in his life as the lower-Rhine vintners. Historically, though, it was probably a good thing that the wives felt as they did, for if they had not, alcohol might have triumphed over vitamins and meat.

One of the new accounts he was offered in 1936 was a pharmaceutical house that was putting out a capsule containing several vitamins. The company asked him to prepare its advertising copy for drug and medical journals. This account completely changed the direction of Sell's life. But for it, Sell's Liver Pâté, which is the foremost of the Specialties, would never have been born. As soon as Sell got the account, he felt a stirring inside him, a bristling of nerve ends, a quickening of the senses. He knew nothing about vitamins, but now that they had come to his attention he was for them. The physical-culturist side of his

character had been developing for a long time. Except for vitamins, which he had somehow overlooked, he had tried almost every touted method of the twenties for keeping up body tone. He was God's gift to Swedish masseurs. In 1925, he hired Philadelphia Jack O'Brien to give him lessons in shadow-boxing and punching the bag. He was a confirmed deep breather. He ate yeast cakes. He had had a brief flirtation with Couéism. He tortured himself every day on an inclining board. When glands came in, he twitched his endocrines daily in a series of prescribed exercises.

The capsule Sell was about to advertise was one of the first that contained all the known vitamins. Before that time, vitamin capsules had generally been taken only on doctors' orders, to make up for diet deficiencies. Authorities agreed that the feeding of vitamins might help to make a sick person healthy, but they doubted that taking large quantities of all the vitamins would make a healthy person still healthier. As a matter of fact, the issue is still being hotly disputed. Today, the vitamin situation appears to be one in which the medical profession is lined up against the research men in the laboratories. Deserters on both sides have gone over to the enemy, but, by and large, it is a matter of doctors against laboratory experts. Most doctors claim that in general they have got poor results from feeding vitamins to people; vitamins, they say, don't do anybody any harm, but they don't seem to do anybody any good, either. The research men say that rats have responded magnificently to dosing, and that human beings should do the same. The doctors say that their patients aren't rats. The researchers say that the doctors must be giving their patients vitamins in doses that aren't large enough. The doctors say the research men can't be pinned down on how much enough is. The research men hint that maybe doctors don't want healthy patients. The doctors hint that maybe the research men are tools of vested interests. And so it goes. Sell, who got in on the ground floor of this argument, allied himself with the research men. Instinctively he is on the side of any new gimmick. He ordered a report on the latest and best research opinion on all vitamins, the benefits to be derived from them, and the quality of the particular product he was to handle. The report was mostly encouraging. It confirmed the conclusions Sell had jumped to. Vitamins could do as much for men as for rats, and maybe more. As for this

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brand of capsules, it stated that the vitamins were high-grade but that there weren't enough of them. Sell confronted the maker with this intelligence and laid down two conditions on which he would accept the account: first, the vitamin content of the capsules must be jacked up; second, the manufacturer must embark on an advertising campaign to take the case for vitamins directly to the people. Since there were glad tidings to be spread, Sell wanted to spread them everywhere. Vitamins, he argued, are merely concentrated nourishment, and if anyone wanted to absorb more, he shouldn't need a doctor's order to do so. Restaurants serve second helpings of apple pie on request; Americans can walk into a grocery store and buy whatever they want to eat. Why shouldn't this new super-food be obtainable everywhere? The manufacturer balked at Sell's conditions, so Sell, with financial backing from a number of his friends, became a vitamin manufacturer himself.

Sell didn't try to work out a formula for his product all by himself; he got some university biochemists to lay down general principles, on which he based his recipe. Then he had the capsules made up for him by a firm in Detroit. It was Sell's genius at advertising and selling that put over not only his own vitamins but, according to trade historians, the entire craze for multiple-vitamin capsules. One of his most inspired moves had to do with naming his product. Sell, considering the problem of advertising and marketing his capsules, couldn't help feeling that there was something colorless and uninteresting about the word "vitamins." It seemed chilly and forbidding. It was an unfortunate neologism, because it brought no image to mind. Few people had ever seen a vitamin. Sell felt that no one would be apt to glow with the conviction that something called vitamins could make his life richer and healthier. He decided that some substance people knew about ought to be added to the vitamins in his capsules, but he couldn't think what. He asked his biochemists for ideas, but most of their suggestions ran to eight-syllable chemical compounds that would only make his selling problem worse. Finally, Sell himself came up with the notion of adding liver and iron extract. The proposal was received glumly by the scientists, who would say no more than that liver and iron wouldn't hurt anyone, but Sell knew that he had what he had been looking for. The average American has a fixed idea that liver and

iron are substances he ought to be getting more of. They have enormous prestige as muscle builders, chest expanders, and hair growers. "We stuck in the liver and iron," Sell says, "and



after that finding a name was easy. I mumbled it over to myself a few times—vitamins with liver and iron added, vitamins plus liver and iron, vitamins plus, Vitamins Plus. Eureka!" The "plus" was one of the great concepts of American advertising. When people spend their money, they like to think that they are getting a little bit more than

## TO A LADY IN A PHONE BOOTH

Plump occupant of Number Eight,  
Outside whose door I shift my parcels  
And wait and wait and wait and wait  
With aching nerves and metatarsals,  
I long to comprehend the truth:  
*What keeps you sitting in that booth?*

What compact holds you like a stone?  
Whose voice, whose summons rich with power,  
Has fixed you to the telephone  
These past three-quarters of an hour?  
Can this be love? Or thorns and prickles?  
And where do you get all those nickels?

Say, was the roof above you sold  
By nameless landlord, cruel and craven,  
Till, driven by imperious cold,  
You find this nook your only haven?  
Yield me the instrument you hoard,  
And I will share my bed and board.

Perhaps you choose such public place  
To do your lips and change your vesture.  
You have not swooned, in any case.  
A motion, an occasional gesture,  
Assures me you are safe inside.  
You do not sleep. You have not died.

That paper clutched within your fist—  
I cannot quite make out the heading—  
Madam, is that a formal list?  
Do you, by chance, arrange a wedding?  
Or—dreadful thought I dare not speak!—  
Perhaps you rent here by the week.

Well, likely I shall never know.  
My arches fall, my patience ravel.  
And with these bundles I must go,  
Frustrated, forth upon my travels.  
Behind the unrevealing pane  
The mystery and you remain.

Yet, as I totter out of line,  
A faint suspicion waxes stronger.  
Oh, could it be your feet, like mine,  
Would simply bear you up no longer?  
So did you happen, unaware,  
Upon this cubicle, with chair,

And did it seem in all the town  
One spot where you could just sit down?

—PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

they are paying for, no matter what that little bit is.

FOR the next five years, Sell lived for vitamins. He made war on public apathy, fought the Federal Trade Commission to a standstill over his advertising claims, and took on several state boards of pharmacy in the courts, hammering away until they reluctantly agreed to give their blessings to multiple-vitamin capsules and set up standards for them. He got vitamins into department stores and on drugstore counters. Often, he was his own drummer. He started with the New York department stores. His first conquests were Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord & Taylor. "My God, but they *were* conquests!" a man who knows his department stores said recently. "Until Sell came along, you couldn't get so much as an aspirin tablet in Saks or Lord & Taylor's." The department stores in the cities in the Middle West and West were covered by a young woman named Janet Leckie, who began with Sell as a research worker and is now vice-president of Sell's Specialties. Miss Leckie drove across the continent a half-dozen times, sowing vitamins everywhere. Twice she was arrested for speeding. Once she got off by giving a box of Vitamin A, the anti-night-blindness stuff, to a state trooper who confessed that glaring headlights hurt his eyes. The other time, she convinced the judge that the importance of bringing buoyant health to the citizens of America was so great that no rate of speed she indulged in could be considered excessive.

The department stores sold Vitamins Plus over their cosmetics counters. The rather celebrated question "Have you been taking your vitamins?" made its first appearance in a manual Sell prepared for the clerks. The pamphlet also instructed them to sell the pills to women who were having trouble making polish adhere to their nails, and to talk them up to purchasers of hair tonics and brushes by announcing that vitamins would "help to improve the sheen and texture of the hair from within while she exercises it and polishes it from without with her new brush." This scheme was usually successful. "Life begins with Vitamins Plus" was one of Sell's slogans. He didn't quite believe what it said, but he felt no compunction about saying it, because he believed that he was saying it for the public's own good. He has never relaxed his almost maternal compulsion to cram nutrition into people in whatever guise they can be persuaded to take it.



*"Sir, I have come to ask your daughter's hand in marriage."*

Vitamins Plus frequently got into the courts, but the firm itself was seldom a defendant. Sell was in trouble only once, when the Federal Trade Commission had him on the carpet for thirty-nine advertising claims that it asserted were false. Only ten of the charges stuck. One, for example, was that the pills would make hair curl. The ten false boasts had been made not by Sell but by an overenthusiastic department store. Sell, however, took the rap. Most of the court actions involved department stores and drugstores that were charged, generally on the complaint of a state board of pharmacy, with selling pharmaceuticals without a pharmacist's license. Sell, though no party to the actions, always handled the defense and paid the expenses. He won every case, and without any aid from the bar. His chief counsel was usually Dr. Bernard L. Oser, who was, and still is, director of the Food Research Laboratories, Inc. Dr. Oser prepared his briefs in whatever grocery stores were handy to the courthouse. He

would appear in court with a bundle of groceries. Then, in the course of testimony, he would tell the judge it was his understanding that the board of pharmacy had complained that a store was illegally selling substances listed either in the United States Pharmacopoeia or the National Formulary, which are the rosters of drugs and medicines recognized by the law. He would then open up his bag and spread out on the bench his purchases—sugar, bicarbonate of soda, olive oil, yeast, salt, starch, and sulphur, all of them listed either in the Pharmacopoeia or the Formulary. In almost every instance, the judge threw the case out of court. Dr. Oser's work was a service to the language as well as to vitamins, since it helped blot out what is no doubt a false distinction between drugs and food. As it stands now, a number of foods are drugs when the doctor prescribes them, and a number of drugs are foods if someone just happens to eat them because he is hungry. By 1940, vitamins were firmly on

their feet. Vitamins Plus and a half-dozen other multiple-vitamin pills and capsules could be bought almost anywhere. Sell spent most of that year helping the Department of Agriculture out on some special administrative and public-relations problems. The Department had been sympathetic to his cause, and he had made a lot of friends in it, among them Wallace, when he was Secretary, and Milo Perkins. While Sell was working in Washington, he attended the dinner party in the home of Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard at which Dr. Robert S. Harris, a leading American nutritionist, fired his imagination by outlining the specifications for what turned out to be Sell's Liver Pâté. Once the pâté was in production, Sell bought up all the shares of the Vitamins Plus stockholders and then sold out to the Vick Chemical Company. He closed his books with a true Sell touch. The principal ex-stockholders were invited to a superb luncheon at the Waldorf. At dessert time, the waiters brought in elegant silver platters bearing something under glass. What this turned out to be was handsome alligator and pigskin wallets, from which protruded brand-new currency, mostly hundred-dollar bills, to the amount of each stockholder's interest. "It seemed a

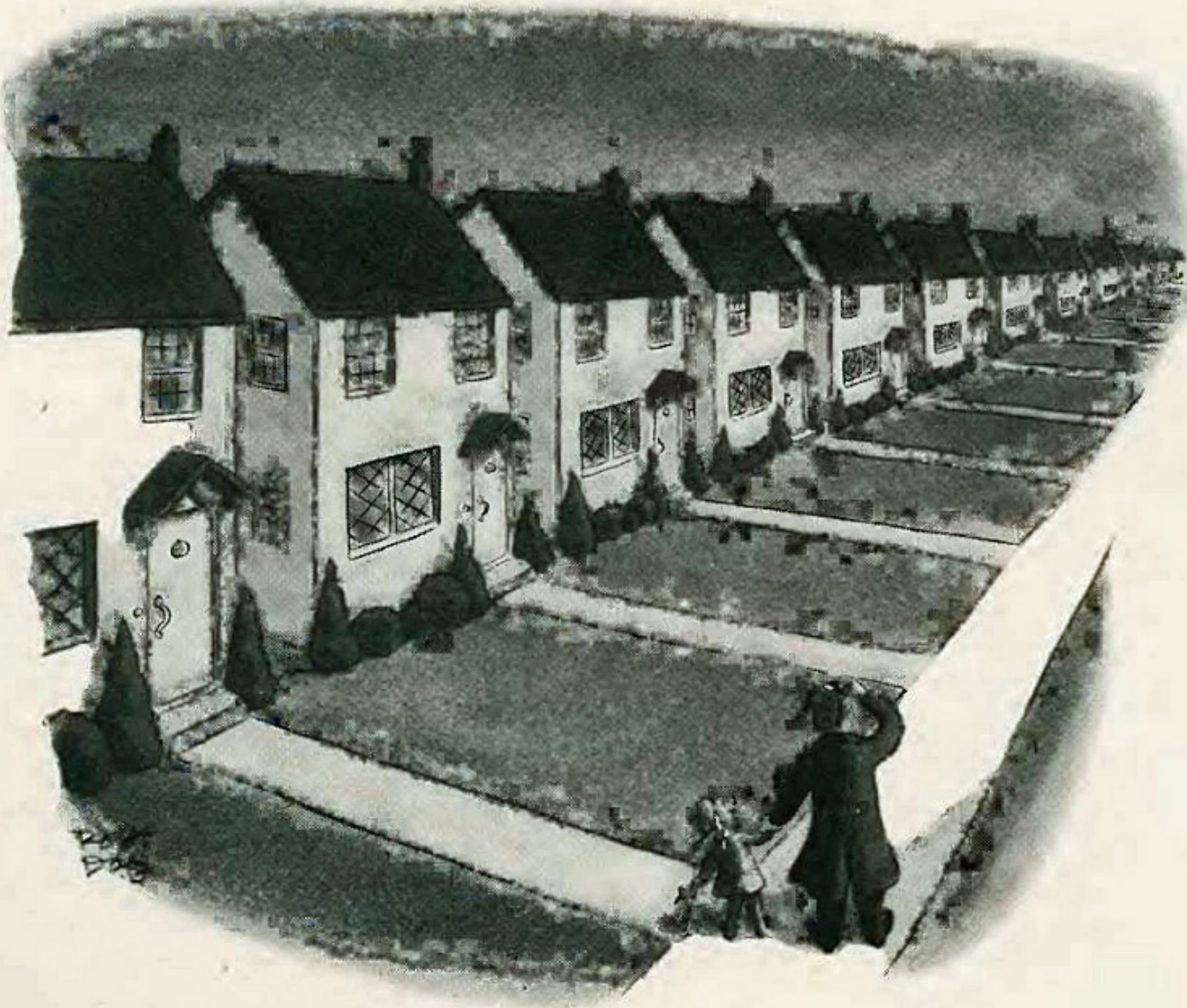
little more gala than sending out checks," Sell says.

**S**ELL has been in meat for almost eight years now. It is the longest time he has ever been in anything except advertising. When friends prophesy that another year or so will find him in hormones or television, he answers that meat, unlike vitamins or fashion magazines or any of the other lines he has worked at, is not one career but several. He is always finding out something new about meat. Meat is a permanent frontier country, he feels. For the long pull, he is working on his Project X, a food, with a meat base, that he believes may lengthen the human life span. Moreover, he expects to go on adding to his line of Sell's Specialties. This last year, he has been working with particular zeal on his Chicken & Rice, which is about to appear on the market in limited quantities. Canning a combination of chicken and rice is, Sell says, one of the toughest jobs the industry has ever tackled. There has been for years a huge demand for it, but no one has been able to pack it satisfactorily. The trouble is the rice, which becomes a soggy, tasteless mush as it soaks up the meat juices. During the war, a "converted" rice was developed for the armed

forces, and though it was not put to the ultimate test of being exposed for a long time to chicken juices, it stood up pretty well in most liquids. It is now on the general market, under various trade names, and Sell thinks that it will enable him to put a permanent end to the chicken-and-rice problem. He and Janet Leckie frequently visit the kitchen in his Brooklyn packing house to taste samples of the new product and order revisions in the recipe.

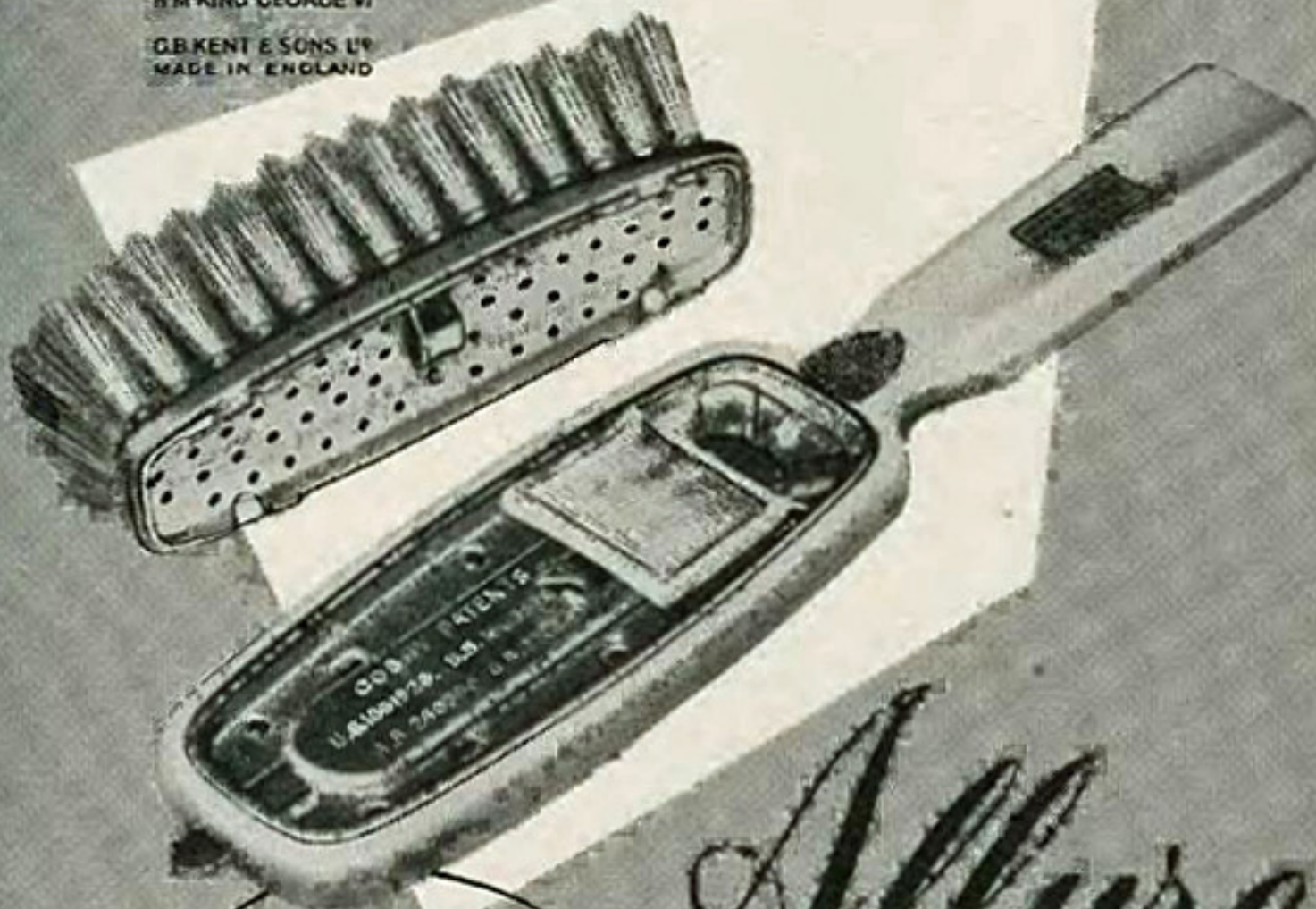
Even canning plain chicken has its headaches. The worst of these is boning the bird. The price of canned fowl could be considerably lowered if the meat could be separated from the bone rapidly and without waste. A lot of high-priced hand labor goes into the finicky job of picking shreds of meat off the small, slippery bones of chicken and then picking bone splinters out of the shreds. Sell ran up against this difficulty when he was concocting his Minced Chicken. He inquired around among his meat-packing friends and learned of a man named William A. Denissen who had made a study of chicken stripping and had trained himself to deflesh an average-size chicken in thirty seconds. Denissen combines a restless, inventive intellect with fingers as supple as a violinist's. "A wonderful fellow," Sell says, "the kind of man who makes it a joy to be in this business." Denissen, a highly paid meat buyer for the Howard Johnson organization, had discovered that the flesh of a chicken is joined to the chassis at only six points. When these six connections are severed, the bird peels like a banana. Sell prevailed upon Denissen to give lessons to the chicken strippers of Sell's Specialties in his spare time. None of Sell's employees came anywhere near matching the Master's dexterity, but a substantial speedup was effected. Sell is now wondering whether it would be cheaper to continue to do the stripping in Brooklyn or to import already stripped chicken from Nebraska, where the strippers work for less.

According to Sell, the relations between a



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agrees—"The  
Kent-Cosby Allure  
Perfumed Hair-  
brush improves  
and beautifies  
the hair."



MAKERS OF BEST BRITISH BRUSHES SINCE 1777

Sole distributors in U. S. A., Cosby Brush & Import Co., Inc., 630 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

meat packer and the people who eat his meat are close and based on trust. He learned this through an experience in naming his products. When he started as a packer, he called his company Sell's Planned Foods, Inc., and his products Rose Mill foods. It was Rose Mill Pâté at first, not Sell's Liver Pâté. Rose Mill is the name of a farm in Connecticut owned by Earle McHugh, a Hearst executive. On the farm is a gristmill that grinds the flour for Pepperidge Farm Bread. McHugh, along with several other friends, invested in Sell's new enterprise, and some of the ingredients Sell used came from McHugh's place. Rose Mill seemed a good enough name to Sell, who considered it far more dignified than, say, such names as Donald Duck Brand, My-T-Fine, Superba, Sweet-Um, Hav-A-Kan, and so on. Rose Mill Pâté's first few months on the market were disappointing. Sell was advised by a chain-store grocery official of wide experience that the trouble lay in the name. "It's a terrible name," he told Sell. "Might do for carrots and peas or canned peaches, but it's all wrong for meat. Meat has to have an author. The people want to know whose work it is. Look at all the successful packers—Swift, Armour, Wilson, Hormel, Stahl-Meyer, Campbell, Heinz. Every one of those names tells the public that a man, not a duck, stands behind what they're getting. Meat is supposed to have style, and the people want to know whose style it is." Sell changed the name and sales improved immediately.

Meat will probably turn out to be Sell's permanent calling, but it is possible that from time to time he will branch out into related fields. When he changed his brand name, he also changed his firm name, from Sell's Planned Foods to Sell's Specialties, Inc., which, he feels, leaves him free to go into anything that strikes his fancy. He has already made a brief excursion into, and a wise retreat from, the soap business, which is, of course, intimately related to the meat business. Two or three years ago, some of his scientist friends got him all stirred up about soap. They told him that the stuff the manufacturers were palming off on the public was a travesty on what a cleansing agent ought to be. Even the best of it was too harsh, too weak, too smelly, too slow, and too greasy. Cleansing technology had leaped ahead several centuries, but the soap kings, whose coffers could hardly hold the money that poured in, hadn't made a move

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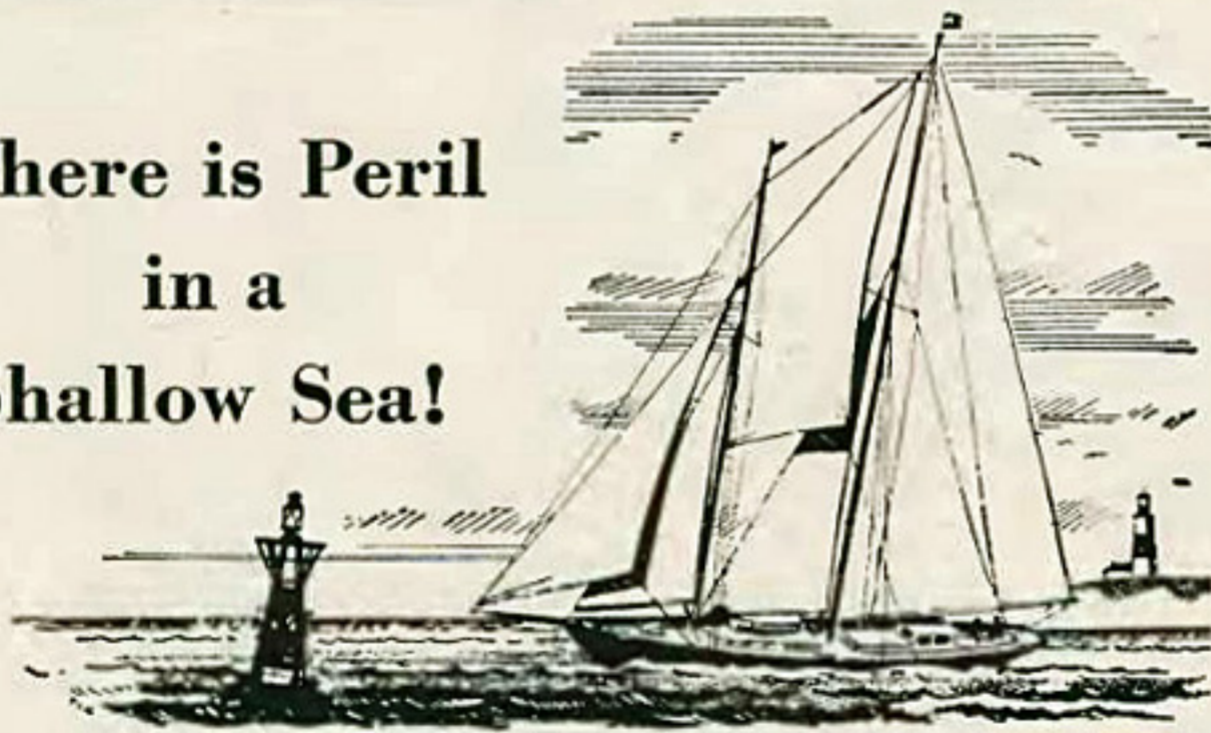
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in a  
Shallow Sea!



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to put the new knowledge to use. They were selling seventeenth-century soap by using twentieth-century advertising. Intelligence of this sort invariably inflames Sell's social conscience. He decided to put the skids under the soap kings. He told the scientific men to go back to their laboratories and make him up the best detergent science could produce. What they came up with was a liquid that undoubtedly was one of the most powerful cleansing agents ever known. Dirt fled from the gentlest application of it, yet it made a bathroom smell like an apple orchard in May. It could be used on a school-girl's complexion or a grease monkey's overalls with equal effectiveness and safety. Sell called it Soft-n-White. He sent samples to the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Parents' Magazine*, and the *Herald Tribune Home Institute*, all of which favored it with superlatives. Everything looked fine until Sell sat down to figure out what he ought to charge for the wonder soap. His arithmetic showed that, simply to break even, he would have to charge a dollar a quart, three or four times what people were paying for seventeenth-century soap. The economic facts of life were against Soft-n-White. Sell reasoned that the public, in its ignorant and somewhat soiled state of development, wasn't ready to pay that much for soap. He did not court bankruptcy by putting Soft-n-White on the market, but he keeps making it up in small quantities—the recipe is based on a formula patented as Sell's Formula 501, the Detergent Plus—and giving it to grateful friends, meanwhile looking forward to the day when people will come to their senses and realize that there is no sense in going around half dirty.

Sell also tried, without much luck, to move in on cereals. He set up a cereal factory in the Blaker Advertising Agency's art department and eventually produced what he called Extendo, which, like Soft-n-White, grew out of his indignation over the low quality of most commercial products. "It's revolting," he says. "The cereals you buy are nothing but boxed air. The boxes themselves are half full of air, and the stuff in the other half is mostly air, too. And it's probably just as well the boxes aren't full. You would get as much nourishment from eating the boxes as you would from the contents." Extendo was a combination of whole-grain cereals packed so tightly that the boxes didn't contain so much as a cubic inch of air. It wasn't golden brown,



# COURVOISIER

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and it wasn't especially crunchy or crispy or crackly, but it was—or so Sell felt—good, wholesome eating, the kind of cereal that men used to fill themselves on before setting out to conquer the wilderness. The public didn't take to Extendo when it was marketed, apparently having debauched itself too long on cereals that pop, snap, sing, and whistle, that are shredded and flaked and toasted and nutted. People reared back from an honest cereal like a rumpot face to face with a glass of milk. "We were able to sell Extendo to farmers for their hogs or their chickens," Sell says, "but we didn't want that. We were interested in human beings." He returned the art department to its rightful occupants and went back to meat.

From time to time, Sell has operated on a small scale in something far less tangible than soap or cereal. He has dabbled in politics. A rabid liberal, he did a lot of work for the Roosevelt campaigns. In between, he tried to help the New Dealers in their legislative battles. A few years back, he prevented, practically by himself, a penny-pinching Congress from killing the Department of Agriculture's school-lunch program. Sell was sitting by his radio one night when Dorothy Thompson attacked the House for defeating, by a vote of 136-52, a bill amendment, sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, providing for school lunches. It was considered a sure thing that the amendment would be killed by a similarly overwhelming vote in the Senate. Before Miss Thompson had time to get her hat on and leave the studio, Sell was on the phone asking if she would make a recording of the speech. She did it, on the spot, and within a couple of hours Sell had found a factory that was willing to give over the next few days to making fifteen thousand transcriptions. As they came out of the machines, he had one mailed to every governor, mayor, bishop, cardinal, columnist, editor, college president, radio announcer, school principal, and Rotary and Kiwanis official whose name he could get hold of, as well as to all members of Congress. To everyone on the list who wasn't a member of Congress, Sell also sent a wire asking him to play Miss Thompson's speech on his phonograph and then put the heat on his senators to vote for the program. Within forty-eight hours after Sell heard Miss Thompson's broadcast, irate telegrams from important people began flowing into Washington. Sell sent out first, second, and third followups to the people on his list who were slow about replying. One politician finally wired

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back what must be one of the most unequivocal commitments in the history of his temporizing profession: "I am for the school lunch. I am for the school lunch. I am for the school lunch." The Senate passed the amendment by an overwhelming voice vote. It went back to the House, which passed it by a vote of 133-23.

SELL may shed careers, but he never sheds the infatuations that got him into any of them. It is like living simultaneously in the present and several pasts. He still has, for example, a lively interest in fashion magazines and in fashions. Hattie Carnegie, Sophie Gimbel, Valentina, and Mainbocher invite him to their fashion shows, and he always attends, decked out as splendidly as he was when Vionnet first consented to allow him inside her Paris atelier, twenty-eight years ago. It is many years since he has been a professional litterateur, but he fits a heavy reading schedule into his crowded life, and he never lets himself go very long without enjoying the company of writers. Interior decoration is another abandoned career, but he keeps up with developments in the field, and he is always fussing with the things in his apartment, on East Fifty-seventh Street, which he has had ever since he came to New York, in 1920. His taste runs to the elegantly modern. In 1929, he bought all the furnishings of the Gold Medal Room, a prize-winning office at the Paris Decorative Arts Exposition, had them shipped over here, and set them up inside a glass-walled room he had built in his offices. He worked in it for several years and then sold the furniture. He now does his deskwork standing before a draftsman's board. He thinks that he gets more work done that way, mainly because seeing him standing up seems to persuade visitors to cut their calls short.

A life as varied and active as Sell's takes a certain amount of planning, and he finds that working out a weekly schedule for himself is the solution. Every Saturday, after he has swallowed his morning quota of vitamin pills, yeast cakes, and wheat-germ oil, and done his fifteen minutes of folding himself into layers on his inclining board, he charts his course for the next seven days by writing a program down in a black leather book. The business hours of his working days, Monday through Friday, are devoted, of course, principally to meat, and he makes no rigid plans for them. The life of a meat packer is full of crises and of opportunities that knock but once, if they bother

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to knock at all. Sell has to be prepared to act quickly if a carload of desirable pig liver is dumped on the market. Again, some laboratory genius may discover a new amino acid that should be added to the formula for the Liver Pâté, or else discover that some old amino acid already in the pâté doesn't do anybody any good. Recently there has been a distressing tendency among scientists to announce that a lot of the amino acids formerly considered vital to our well-being are useless. To take care of such exigencies, Sell surrounds each business engagement with ample cushions of time. He also leaves one day a week entirely unassigned. "The flight plan always includes one day of blind flying," he explains. For spiritual nourishment, he attends, in season, a concert and an opera a week. He reads for an hour or so every night before going to sleep. Usually he reads whatever happens to be lying around the house, but his schedule calls for one book of American history a month. History is one of the "fire escapes" in his life—one of the ways he has devised for running away from gloom. "I just read it to get a line on the betting odds," he says. "It gives me the feeling that we've come through so many times before that we're bound to do it again." He also takes a swim, a massage, and a dancing lesson every week. On Saturday he resets the pedometer he always wears and pledges himself to walk at least twenty miles in the coming week. He likewise allocates a certain amount of time to the trapezes and flying rings he has in his apartment. The French circuses he saw while he was abroad for *Harper's Bazaar* aroused his interest in acrobatics. Until the Three Flying Codonas' act broke up, a few years ago, Sell always invited the Codonas, old friends of his, to drop into the apartment when the circus was in town. They liked to inspect his work. "Alfredo Codona used to tell me I was the best acrobat in town at my income," Sell says.

—RICHARD H. ROVERE

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

Miss Audrey Owens, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Homer Owens of Middlesboro, Ky., is to be married to James Sanner of Mt. Zion and T. Q. Sanner of Mt. Zion and T. W. Sanner of Moweaqua, today in First Baptist church of Middlesboro.—*Decatur (Ill.) Herald & Review.*

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