

to appear and what it is going to say. She certainly will if she knows the President.

There is one place in official life, however, which women should find congenial. That is the supreme court. Women love precedents. They live by them. When I informed Emily that she could collect only one hundred dollars on her trunk Rachel retorted, defiantly:

"Rot! I once knew a girl who lost a trunk in a hotel fire and they bought her a whole new outfit."

She and Emily, in fact, cited a dozen such precedents before they got through, giving names and dates and a list of the principal jewelry. The railroad hadn't a leg left to stand on.

But what became of the trunk? Oh yes. I almost forgot that. You see, a man would. It came around in about a week as if nothing had happened. No one ever explained exactly where it had put in its time. George and I maintained that it would have showed up, anyway. Emily and Rachel insisted that only their ceaseless vigilance had brought it through. You can take your choice; but suppose that, instead of a trunk, it had been a case of enacting a treaty or ousting an alderman. If a public official hereafter slacks up in his duty some woman is certainly going to ask him why and keep on asking until he answers. We're going to have trouble, we are. I can see it coming.

ON SOME DIFFICULTIES OF TELLING THE TRUTH

BY RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

THE only absolutely true thing ever said is that "All men are liars," and he who claims always to tell the truth is of all men the least truthful. The organized hypocrisy of society is in no particular so demonstrable. For, while truth is the last thing society expects or desires, it is the first thing it affects to demand from its members, from their earliest infancy. And it is characteristic of our disingenuous and forbidding edu-

cation of children that, among all the other difficult tasks we impose upon their bewildered minds, we lay upon them, first and foremost, the most difficult of all, that of telling the truth—as if we ourselves have ever told it, or even, with the best will in the world, have ever been able, or allowed to tell it, in the whole course of our subtly evasive lives. To tell the truth is, generally speaking, an impossibility, and to ask it of us is usually an impertinence. Even if we knew the truth about ourselves, which we do not, or only know skin-deep, it is, for the most part, our own business, no more to be surrendered to another than a poker player confides to his fellow players the cards he holds in his hands. To tell the truth, so called, about ourselves is to invite misunderstanding and to court failure; to tell the truth about society is to risk martyrdom and the penitentiary.

Pilate's famous question was, of course, asked long before he asked it, by various Greek philosophers. It has, indeed, been asked and argued since the beginning of conscious thought. But Pilate was wiser than most. As Sir Thomas Browne remarked, he "did not wait for an answer." Presumably, because he believed that there is no answer. "What is truth?" is one of the toys in the playroom of metaphysics, and is in the same category of unprofitable inquiries as squaring the circle, and the fourth dimension. We need not here concern ourselves with the innumerable "guesses at truth" with which mankind has so long agreeably, or disagreeingly, wasted its precious time. The only valuable truth about "the truth" so far arrived at is that it is relative, subject to conditions, variable as climate, and dependent on geography. One man's truth is another man's opportunity, and what is truth in Japan is merely politics in Washington.

The general assumption would seem to be that truth is what the majority of men believe to be true, but that position is manifestly fallacious. There is no

referendum for truth, and it has again and again been shown that the truth, so called, has been in the possession of but one solitary individual in the world, who, for fear of his fellows, kept it long to himself, or proclaimed it amid the flames, or denied it under torture, or whispered it cautiously under his breath, like Galileo. Truth is more precious than fine gold—because it costs so much to tell. An enthusiastic young writer once, in a lecture, told the truth, as he conceived it, regarding certain aspects of society. His audience was delighted with him, and he was happy in feeling that he had thus successfully shamed the devil. The newspapers reported him joyously, but, unhappily, one newspaper proprietor, who chanced to be his employer, took a different view of the truth, and that youthful enthusiast paid for his self-indulgence in veracity by the loss of a lucrative job. Doubtless, on second thoughts, he regretted the fine gold he thus lost, and, when next he felt the call to soothsaying, remembered his lesson, and kept his own counsel, and, incidentally, his position. Yet, in the first instance, he had but done what all good children are told to do, and all wise children learn to do—with a difference.

That difference, so to say, is the essence of the contract. Whatever telling the truth may be in the abstract, *seeming* to tell the truth is all that society really expects of us; and, while those who are righteous overmuch may indignantly condemn society as a humbug for the subterfuge, it is difficult to see how society could continue to exist without it. Society needs ideals to live down from. It knows well enough that only a small percentage of any ideal is attainable. But it is that small percentage of idealism which keeps society together. "The truth," though philosophically unthinkable and practically untellable, is idealistically useful. It may be an illusion, but society is a reality governed by illusions, and "telling the truth" is one of the illusions that govern it. It is only the bull in the china shop who tells

"the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and then—what becomes of the china? So long as we regard the china of society and social intercourse as worth keeping we must learn to tell the truth, as Bottom roared, like a sucking dove.

Telling the truth on a large scale—otherwise, the reformatory denunciation of society—is, as we have said, a dangerous matter, which, however, only concerns those in the business, a minority which, while we may sometimes admire, there is no need to commiserate. It is their way of enjoying themselves. Man lives even less by bread than by excitement. And there is no more exciting activity than telling the truth to society—that is, what we may call the progressive truth, for such truth can only get told by degrees, year by year, century by century, being in its nature evolutionary as well as relative. It is a matter for ourselves whether we care enough for our fellows to embark in this dangerous business. If we do, we have fair warning that we do so strictly at our own peril. Most of us, it is to be feared, do not care enough for our fellows. Maybe we did once, in our Shelleyan youth, but the revolutionary love affairs end in the light of common day, as perhaps we discover that our "fellows" are not all our fancy painted, or as we realize that we have all we can do to look after ourselves.

As a matter of fact, how *little* we care for our fellows is one of those sad truths that early begin to dawn on us, a truth, however, which it will never do to tell, but which we manfully try to dissemble, even to ourselves. As gracefully as possible to bedeck and bedrape that truth for the benefit of our acquaintance, to disguise, in fact, our deep indifference to, and tragic boredom with, our "fellows," is our social being's end and aim, our necessary shield in the struggle for social existence. The amount of genuine friendliness in the world is very small, but, happily for society, the convention has been imposed upon us of pretending

the opposite. So long as we maintain an exchange of services, or so long, say, as we amuse or otherwise attract one another, the burden of the mask is light, and we only let it fall when we forget our interests or our manners.

"Manners," that finest flower of evolution—what are manners but a system of delicate evasions by which we avoid telling the weary truth to one another, while seeming all the time to tell it? The art of harmonious social intercourse consists in our mutually conspiring to safeguard one another's illusions. We keep our friends by encouraging their illusions about themselves and their illusions about us. This could never be done if we were forever club-footedly telling one another "the truth." Of course there is, happily, a certain small amount of pleasant truth to tell in the world, and this we gratefully make the most of, eking out the deficiency with considerate "exaggerations." But what we call "disagreeable truths" are, of course, in the majority, and the kind of person who goes about telling them is, to say the least, not popular, though, if we lived up to our precepts, we should love and honor him for his implacable "sincerity." Instead, we run a mile at his approach, or hand him the cup of hemlock. To tell another his defects very seldom removes them. One is more likely to help him by attributing to him merits he does not possess, and which, by our gracious suggestion, he may come to acquire. And in any case, "the truth" about another is seldom our affair. Moreover, to tell it, under some circumstances, is illegal, for in a court of law "the truth" may be no less a libel than an untruth. The law, indeed,

recognizes the difficulties and dangers of telling the truth, in its provision of advocates to tell it for us, and in its specific warning to defendants and witnesses to attempt no amateur truth-telling, as anything they say "will be used against them." There is, indeed, sometimes no way of conveying the truth, particularly about ourselves, than by telling the half or three-quarters lie. For an isolated fact, in itself veracious, wrenched from its context, may belie the truth of a lifetime. To deny it becomes then a necessity of conveying the general truth. So long as men differ about right and wrong, and one man's food is another man's poison, such so-called "lying" is a mere matter of self-defense. We may do certain things which we consider right and proper to be done, but that another who thinks differently should have knowledge of them may result in a total misconception of our character and conduct. Outside a few simple matters, we are entitled to live by our own standards, but when the acknowledgment of those standards is inconvenient, or worse, we are within our rights in pretending to adopt the standards of others. Often what we call another's "ideal" of us is of such vital importance to them that it becomes something like our duty to seem to live up to it, for the sake of their happiness, though we may feel that they have no right to ask it of us, and though such ideal has never been our own. To seem better or kinder than we are is one of our first duties toward those who love us. This is known as telling "white lies," and, generally speaking, "white lies" constitute all the truth that can be told, or that it is necessary or desirable to tell.



EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

BY EDWARD S. MARTIN

CHRISTMAS again, and is the world any better? Is it more comfortable? Is it more peaceable? Is it more confident that the future is going to be worth the adventure of testing it? People who write letters from Europe have been telling us of the prevalence of a sort of hysterical gayety in the most distressed countries. Is that passing? And if it is, what succeeds when the hysteria evaporates? Is the residuum a gayety that is natural and wholesome? Or is it soberness, which also is wholesome? Or is it gloom?

One can hardly call it a gay world yet. There are cheerful people in it—a good many in this country especially—but it is not yet a gay world. In the end the war may prove to have done the world good, but the end is not yet—if ever—and the improvement is not yet marked. Indeed, one correspondent who writes from Europe says he has yet to see anyone who has been improved by the war, whereas those who have been damaged by it are plentiful. But that is only like saying that the immediate results of illness are not good, and that convalescents are apt to be querulous and irritable.

There were many people who were improved by the war—deepened in their feelings and experience—made aware of what was in them. A good many such people died, and doubtless died the better and the more profitably, for what they had done and what the war had done for them. But take the world generally, and it must be confessed that its recent consecration seems to have worn thin, and it shows the querulousness of convalescence.

It is not comfortable yet, nor good-

natured. It is anxious; it is perplexed. It is not sure what is going to happen to it, and is dubiously impatient and unreasonable.

Consider our recent efforts to elect a new President. Were they characterized by sweet reasonableness? Were the discipline and consecration of the war revealed in them by exceptional loftiness of political aim and deportment? Was misrepresentation less common than usual? Was discussion on a higher plane than ordinary? Did selfishness yield to concern for a damaged world reaching out after rehabilitation?

One cannot answer yes to any of these queries. It was hard to believe that the country that was trying to elect a President was the same country that, since its last effort of that nature, had gathered all its strength to do battle for what it thought was right. Party leaders seemed to contend primarily for control of the government, and moral issues tended to be lost in the crush. It was not very heartening.

No, the world of the moment is not very nice. It tastes strongly of "the morning after." All the bad of the war is on its hands, but the good of it has yet to be worked out.

And here is Christmas coming, and what have we to say about it? First that such a world condition is not unnatural, and corresponds pretty closely with common personal experience. In times of exaltation we get to understand a lot that seems to get away from us again as soon as we get back to concentration on the problems of earth. For us Americans, as for other people, the war, when we finally got into it, was a time of great exaltation. It took us out