MACHINE AGE IN THE HILLS

"They ran a concrete road through my hollow, and now I must live to see my grandchildren racing up and down in automobiles."

MACHINE AGE IN THE HILLS

By MALCOLM ROSS

New York
1933
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Set up and printed.
Published February, 1933.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

Gertrude Estelle Ross

CONTENTS

THE EMOTIONAL APPROACH

MACHINE AGE IN THE HILLS

PORTRAIT OF A PEOPLE

THE RADICAL APPROACH

QUAKERS INTO ACTION

WAYS OUT

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE EMOTIONAL APPROACH

Sentiment and Science
Impressions at First Hand

I

SENTIMENT AND SCIENCE

A MACHINE age twilight has settled over the coal hills of the South. There, during the past two decades, a region of small farmers was made momentarily prosperous by a sudden invasion of industry; then the wave passed, leaving them spoilt for the old way of life and helpless to face the new. Here, in miniature, is a cycle which technology seems to be working out in America at large.

We cannot forecast the effects of technology in all the interlocking industries of the United States. But in the coal fields we have an isolated social research laboratory where we can examine the already completed cycle from agrarian stability to industrial collapse.

In so doing we are struck by the persistence of the old patterns of bungling and bloodshed. This, we had thought, is a scientific age; yet we act as though no better tools than tooth and claw had ever been invented. Inside our laboratories we know how to apply the scientific spirit; but when we take the results of research into the marketplace we squabble over them in emotional unrestraint.

In this there is grave danger, since technology is an impersonal factor, not answering to emotional treatment. Its tendency is to put men out of work faster

than we can succor them, and it does this quite independently of human moods.

This phenomenon has long been under observation. Morose prophets have been predicting for a decade that machines would eventually create a surplus of human hands for which society will never be able to find work. Others supposed that increased production could keep pace with technology.

The argument was still in progress when the economic cataclysm of 1929 produced such a vast unemployment that it became a matter of small concern whether or not a man was in the breadline because a machine had put him there.

Some day, however, that question must emerge again into reality, and the answer will be of first importance. For a chronic surplus of unwanted workmen is a much more serious concern than an epidemic surplus which will disappear during convalescence from depression.

The point is closely linked to our emotional attitude toward the jobless. The notion of America as one big family implies that the luckier ones will dig into their pockets to carry the others over the emergency. This allows us to be optimistic about the future, on the assumption that a general buoyancy will in time float all derelicts off the reefs.

But suppose that we are mistaken. Suppose that millions of idle people become a permanent charge on our generosity. Shall we then be able to sustain the mood in which their sufferings seem real and their relief imperative? Or may we not become bored with those who lag behind on the way to recovery?

The industry of bituminous coal mining, once the

sinews of the young machine age, has been out-moded by technology and by the rise of rival fuels. It is a cantankerous industry, soured by the bile of insoluble difficulties. Its labor troubles crop up perennially. There is a growing surge of unrest which will not be denied. Operators and miners alike are beginning to understand that the rest of the United States can use no more than half of them. The others may do what they like about finding a way out. In isolated regions, where no other work is to be had, the implications of this are tremendous.

It is not presumed that this situation is typical of American unemployment. The case is far more special than anything which distressed farmers or urban mill hands must meet. But in this very uniqueness lies its worth as an example of what happens when a great industry goes so completely to pot that its workers must remain under-employed for as far ahead as anyone can foresee, and with no apparent chance to be absorbed by other industries.

What can civilization do with unwanted human hands? The question is urgent, as the current enthusiasm for national planning acknowledges. But it is confused beyond belief by the general instability of industry and by cross-currents of prejudice and self-interest. In attempting to achieve a clear-cut understanding of one single case of chronic unemployment—and by giving the human factors as much weight as the economic—we can perhaps throw the national problem into sharper relief. That, at least, is the aim of this book.

II

IMPRESSIONS AT FIRST HAND

DURING the year 1931–1932 I spent many months in the Blue Ridge coal fields. As all observers who went there, I was appalled by misery, entertained by the mountain character, and made uncomfortable by the air of suspicion hanging over the region. These things are part of the setting. Without them the economic issue is bloodless.

The red ink on a coal mining corporation's balance sheet has human meaning. It is difficult, however, to clothe a ledger in such flesh and blood that he who runs may comprehend. Newspaper reporters necessarily enter a labor warfare region at the peak of action and in search of drama. Their dispatches cite shootings and mass violence, with just enough exposition of the economic issues to carry the sensationalism. By trade the reporter is an agent of the American emotional approach to its problems.

Nevertheless, first hand experience grasps the feel and smell and colors of life, and sometimes a flash of intuition can illumine the scene more clearly than logic. For this reason there follow a series of field sketches, written on the spot on the days when they were experienced.

Holy Roller Meeting

We started after supper, with dusk in the hollows and the dogwood white among the ridge pines. A good night to go out with a mad young Kentuckian with a flair for getting himself in and out of trouble. I drove; John sat alongside, trying to egg me into deviltry.

"You all married?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well I was thinking your wife wouldn't hardly expect you to behave, with you so far away from her. Would she?"

"What are you plotting now?"

"I was just figuring that there's some pretty girls sometimes at these Holy Roller meetings and they sure get excited with religion."

"Does it excite you?"

"Hell no! Religion, you mean. As I was saying, if you want to meet some of these girls . . ."

"I want to see what happens—not get shot for trying to steal somebody's girl."

"I don't reckon you'll get shot. Just be careful about it. They are kinda reckless at these here meetings though. Where we're going tonight a fellow got fresh with a girl, like you was figuring on, and her man called him out of meeting and stuck a knife in his ribs. Sure was a lot of blood. They're touchy that way. But don't mind none. I had my arm around a girl at one of the meetings and a fellow behind pinched her knee twice and she told him to quit that but he done it a third time so I just reached plumb around that girl and yanked my .38 from under my left arm and says to

him 'Long gone outta here or I'll let you have it' and he went without anybody knowing what happened, exceptin' me and him and the girl. Didn't even stop the singing. When I got outside there he was waiting for me . . ."

John can tell shooting stories for hours and never repeat himself. The more credulous the listener, the taller the stories. To demand proof would be an insult to the artist. Besides, the wildest shooting story often turns out to be a simple narration of fact.

John worked as a miner in the Harlan field for a year, but that—as everything he does—was for the excitement. He is a romantic, and a mountaineer to the bone. Why fool around with work unless there's some fun to be had in it? His grandfather helped lay out the town forty years ago when court was held under an oak tree. Now John is merely one of the young hellions who get themselves into scrapes along the paved and lighted streets of the County seat. He is not much of an asset to the community, but he is grand company. It is necessary to look twice before the mockery is apparent in his quiet candid eyes. Once in his confidence, you can be certain that he would go absurd lengths to stand by you.

The Holy Roller meeting was in a miner's cabin a hundred yards up a hollow from the main road. The host was very earnest, very anxious that everyone should have a chair. It began sedately enough. Ordinary people coming in to spend the evening. Two young bloods sauntered into the room with a superior air—interlopers with the one purpose of making the girls acquiescent. John knew these two, and nudged

me to watch. They began talking with some of the girls, in that stream of Southern banter which says nothing at all and passes the time pleasantly.

Four very small girls sat on a table in the rear, swinging their legs and looking unconcerned with all this. The gathering so far seemed undistinguished and respectable.

Half an hour later there were sixty persons packed into the two adjoining rooms. Boards were passed through the window and stretched across chairs to make benches. The only light was from an oil lamp. The room was hot, and vibrant with humanity. The song leader began in a high nasal voice:

> "I am the man, Thomas, I am the man,
> I am the man, Thomas, I am the man,
> I am the man, Thomas, I am the man,
> LOOK AT the nail prints in my hand."

They sang and clapped their hands in an accelerating rhythm until their "siam the mayan thomas siam the mayan" became voodoo to make the heart pound with strange terror. The two young bloods had chosen chairs near the door. Now they and their girls disappeared into the night. The room grew fervent with the plea of a man with a sore ear for the prayers of the company. His face was tight with agony. He knelt, facing the wall, and men and women dropped to their knees behind him, breaking into a shout of inarticulate prayer punctuated by screams of "Oh Jesus," "Oh God have mercy." The mass wail rose to a climax. Figures shot from their knees at a forward angle and fell back. Someone behind the man with the sore ear

kept striking him on the shoulders so that he flew up like a jumping-jack, howling and clutching his ear. The babble waned to a murmur; calmed and softened until there was silence.

The man with the sore ear rose to his feet and faced the supplicants. His face was a vacuous mask. He feebly thanked God that he felt better now. The sin was out of him. All returned to their seats—chastened, sedate country people sitting in a semi-dark room to hear the words of their preacher.

This was a professorial little man, who primly asked a great red-headed hulk of a miner whether he would oblige by holding the lamp above the open Bible. The lamplight fell full on the hollow cheeks and rigid jaw of the red-headed man, and made the shadow of a gigantic head on the wall behind him. His eyes burned with stern fanaticism. He never said a word during the entire evening, but he was the most powerful force in the room.

The preacher built dull arguments on the text. Then he warmed to his theme. Christ was coming soon. There would be no more earthly pain. The proud would be cast down. Jesus would know how to comfort the poor and the hungry. Sinners had better stop their fooling around in sin and get ready to meet Him, because He might come right into this room tonight and demand an accounting of you, sister, and you, brother . . .

His pace quickened. He marched out of the lamplight three steps, back again to thump the open page. His gestures swept from ceiling to floor. He marked his words with a sharp "Ha!" followed by a wild laugh. The Power hit him in gusts of vibrations which

wrenched his body with the speed of electric shocks. They sang again and the whole fierce beating of pulses in song and blood rose again to a climax and again subsided when the little preacher was drained of emotion and ready to crawl into the shadows near a favorite sister in the faith. Only the red-headed man kept his terrific composure. He scowled into the darkness as two of the small girls, weary with meeting, tiptoed to bed. The two other children on the table curled up like puppies and slept, one on top, the other on the footboard.

A man with a cancerous nose got to his feet. A strip of adhesive tape was strapped across his face. The redhead held the lamp at arm's length, rigid as a statue, while the speaker humbly acknowledged his affliction as part of God's plan, and thanked Him for His mercies. When his shoulders began to jerk and his voice to take on the gibberish of 'speakin' in tongues,' I pushed out of the room to the porch where the air was clean and a moon hung over the lovely night hills.

John had preceded me. He was arguing eloquently with two friends about the chances of finding the silver which all of them know is still hidden in the Cumberland Mountains. The last Indian to be killed—they talked as though it were a week ago—died with the prophecy on his lips that the white men would shoe their mules with silver shoes when the great lode should be discovered.

John told of a mysterious stranger who knew the secret. He always wore two .44s and he would return from the hills with his saddlebags weighted down. One day he never came back. Somebody trailed and killed him . . . He, John, digging next to a creek, came on

an old log, six feet down, with a chain around it. Underneath there was slung an iron pot, but the creek water broke through into the hole and made him hop out. How about going back there this summer to dig up the pot?

The three of them made plans for a silver hunt. They might as well. There is nothing else for them to do nowadays.

We left the hollow while the chants were still sounding from the cabin. Reality did not rear its prosaic head until John asked to be dropped opposite the hill where his father's farm lies, and I saw him swagger up the path in the moonlight. A temperament like his has no use for reality.

Pigeon Roost

We climbed out of the town's pall of smoke into clear sunshine, crossed two mountains and dropped into the Pigeon Creek Valley. Here are bottomlands and a few slopes gentle enough for vegetable patches, a more prosperous place than the Mingo ravines, where corn shocks cling to the hills at incredible angles and where coal is the beginning and the end of existence.

The mines are less obvious in this valley. There are fewer railroad tracks up the hollows and the streams run clear. We drove to the Pigeon Roost School, where Mary Kelsey went inside to talk with the teacher while I loafed by the gate. A little brown and black pig trotted up the road on his own business. In a year he will weigh 300 pounds and be the hero of a hog-slaughtering party—sowbelly and hams, bacon and lard

to last a family half a year. I touched the brim of my hat to him.

The children came into the yard for recess. They played a singing game in which the two oldest girls face each other with joined hands raised to let the others file beneath. The tune was a variation of "Pop Goes the Weasel," and the words were chanted endlessly until they stuck in my head:

> "The needle's eye it doth supply
> The thread that runs so truly;
> Many a beau have I let go
> Because I wanted Julie."

At "Julie" they catch one of the moving circle and make her stand behind the leader; then they wind it up with a tug of war.

Some of the bigger girls wore blue overalls; there were bare feet and ragged clothes, and some may have been hungry; yet here was natural gayety and song, in the open air, with the haze of Indian summer lying over the hollow and the sun bringing out the last warm red of the oak leaves above the schoolhouse. It was hard to believe that this was a ruined countryside.

We left the school to go in search of the loudest snoring hog in Mingo County. The owner had boasted about his hog to Mary some days before, telling her never to pass Bias hollow without coming to hear the prodigy. Bias has plowed lands, log corn cribs and an air of serenity. Mrs. Farley, the hog-owner's wife, said her old man was not at home, and added cheerfully that the hog had been slaughtered, snore and all. There were some small pigs in the sty; one of them coughed

dolefully and the others were shivering against the boards in an ecstasy of scratching the itch.

No nonsense about Mrs. Farley. Her handshake is as firm as a fox-hunting squire's. Her deep voice, severe knot of hair and general swagger gave her a curious horsy air. She insisted that we set awhile. The aplomb of these mountain women puts the burden of embarrassment entirely on the visitor.

As we left her gate we came on an old woman who announced herself as Grandma Sprouse. Her body and face were broad and benign, lacking the clipped reliance of Mrs. Farley. She stood beside the car to gossip. Her high drawling voice came close to pathos but managed not to cross the borderline. She wanted to tell her troubles, and here were two newcomers with willing ears. Her cotton dress she had worn for three years, since her husband died; her slippers were not much account—and where did the lady get such nice stout shoes? This was an obvious hint for an exchange with Mary.

"Look here." . . . She pulled aside the single garment and showed a deep unhealed wound. Two years ago they had taken a thirteen pound tumor from there. Her boys just got through paying the doctor for that a month ago; and now she was packing something else lower down. The doctor said he'd take an X-ray if she could raise four dollars, but where was as much as a quarter coming from in these times? She knew it was cancer, but it would be a comfort to have the doctor say so.

Mary told her to get her shawl and come with us to the doctor's. She sat in the back seat and was garrulous, pleased with this excitement. . . .

She is sixty-seven, the mother of ten boys and one girl. Up the hollow still lives the red-headed woman who killed her oldest boy—shot him through the heart, and Grandma Sprouse would say it to her face. Another boy was found dead in the County seat with his leg cut off; maybe drunk, because it was pay day. Her only daughter, widowed four years ago, was helped out by her boy, who went to work in the mines when he was fourteen. But three months ago he had his toes mashed. They won't give him compensation, and he's figuring on going back to work, although he shouldn't with that foot.

Grandma Sprouse had been living with her son at Bias, but she would like to change because she felt uncomfortable living with a stranger woman—meaning the woman who has been married to her son for seventeen years. This son has seven children. He is important in the mine, not just a coal loader, and makes $12 a week.

Things were better, she intimated, before the coal mines came. The branch railroad through the valley was built during War times. Before that the mines were worked by no-account people, but when they offered the chance to make $20 a day, all her own people stopped planting crops and went to mining. It was fine while it lasted, with everybody rich. But it spoiled the country.

People used to sell 150 bushels of corn and have enough for themselves besides. There were corn huskin's and corn hoein's, better times and more fun in those days. Now nobody can make a living from the mines, and the railroads have taken up the valley flats so that poor people can't farm. The mine companies

won't let you lease a patch of ground unless you work for them. Last winter everybody near starved to death, and that's why there were corn and vegetable patches planted again this spring for the first time in fourteen years. But the summer crop is about eaten, and there's nothing left to tide over the winter. Boys and old men over forty can't get jobs in the mines. . . .

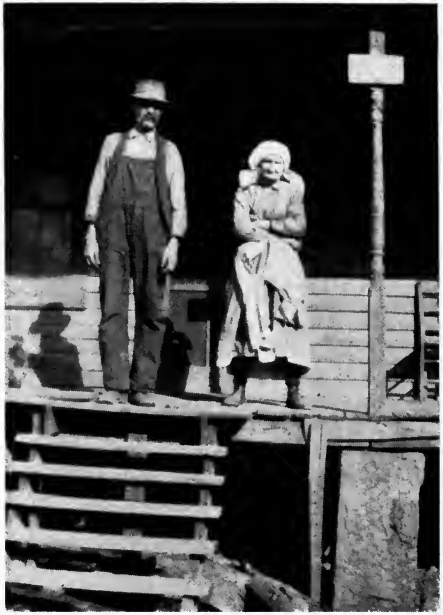
We could not find Grandma Sprouse's doctor. We brought her back to Bias. She pointed out Hell Creek, named, she thought, because people used to get themselves killed there long ago when there was trouble with the Indians. Her great uncle was held captive once. She remembered seeing one Indian, with long black hair to his shoulders. "He didn't look like our people."

We left Grandma Sprouse with her daughter, who was boiling clothes in a vat back of her cabin, stirring them with an arm as big as a blacksmith's. She had need of that arm, for last spring she hoed and planted a corn field on ground which had to be terraced against the slope. Her eighteen-year-old son was there, with his mashed foot and an air of quiet anger at his idleness.

We had thought Grandma Sprouse a salty old lady, but we had suspected she was something of a liar. Particularly we doubted her story of the miseries of a family living at Pigeon Roost where, said Grandma Sprouse, the mother this very day was burying a little girl dead of exposure from not having enough clothes to wear. We left our gossip—she neither scraped nor blessed us as her city prototype might have done—and sought the family at Pigeon Roost.

At the mouth of the creek Mary spied a shed so

We thought Grandma Sprouse a salty old lady . . .



There is little that is amiable about their fallow decline . . . .

dismal that she succumbed to the temptation to find out what was living inside. We crossed on stepping stones and waded through the mud. A woman poked her head through a paneless window and said:

"Come in by the door, my old man's blind."

He was a gigantic man, with a mop of thinning blond hair and an apostolic stubble of beard. His mouth was nearly empty of teeth. One eye was stony, and the other was covered by a dirty patch. He got up when we entered and waved his hand until he caught my arm. This man, I thought, is going to be violent. But he meant no harm. He was eaten to the vitals with a rage against his world, and here was an outsider to listen. He tapped his crooked thigh, tore open his shirt to show caved-in ribs, pulled the patch from his wounded eye. I could not help but see him as a ragged, much too young King Lear, fulminating in this stench.

His anger subdued us. He had been a miner, he said, for forty-five years, ever since his father took him as a waist-high boy out of school. His bones had been broken in accidents, but the mine companies then had taken care of him until he was well again. His right eye was lost in a powder blast years ago. He had all his life been able to keep food in the bellies of his family, until last May when a piece of coal flew into his left eye, and his boy had walked him home blinded. There he had sat ever since. He wanted to work, but he never could again. At fifty-four he was junked. The boy gave them what money he made, but he had had only one day's work in the past two weeks. Why did the company doctor refuse to sign his papers for compensation? He was blind, and compensation was the law? . . .

He plunged into a harangue about compensation and his rights, a mass of addled ideas lit by the blaze of injustice. There was no answer to give. He was probably wrong about the facts. The company doctor must be presumed innocent of cheating a blinded miner. The only reality was the spectacle of a strong man with the sap still in him, spending his rage and his strength, certain to drag out the rest of his days in infinitely slow cooling of that rage, until he should no longer care whether there was food in the shack.

The wife owned the only sanity in the place. Her eye was level and she talked calmly of the half sack of corn she had raised from three shocks. Against her shoulder leaned an adolescent girl, with a prettiness which made you shiver, for her luminous stare was half-witted.

A neighbor woman sat on a powder keg in front of the stove. We had hardly noticed her before, and now spoke casually to her. She turned out to be that Mrs. Parsley of whom Grandma Sprouse had spoken and (to our present shame) with no exaggeration of the Parsley family woe. The wife of the blind miner said that Mrs. Parsley had buried her child that morning. Mr. Parsley was sick and couldn't work. The two boys had been taken out of the Pigeon Roost School today to go to their sister's burying.

Mrs. Parsley confirmed this with a nod and an observation that times were likely to be bad this winter.

On the ride back Mary and I agreed that it had been hard on the two Parsley sprouts to stay away from the games in the school yard in order to go to a funeral. There will be time enough for burials and

tears when they grow big enough to go to work in the mines.

Home-spun

The automobile bus is a congenial affair in these parts. A passenger attempting to maintain a cold reserve is marked as a stranger, and not too shyly questioned. Coming from Jenkins this morning an old gentleman remarked:

"My first bath was in whiskey."

He explained that the doctor had brought him into the world blue as indigo and not a breath stirring, but granny had sent out for a gallon of whiskey, poured it into a butter tub and soaked him until he revived.

"Saved my life," he said. "When I was a boy good whiskey came at forty cents a gallon. Pop kept a jug under the bed and when the kids took a chill he'd sometimes have to lick 'em to make 'em take a drink. Better'n quinine. This poison they make nowadays out of potato rinds and sugar would make a man climb a tree backward. A man's so scared of being picked up by the law with any of it on him that he drinks down a whole pint at once and goes home to murder his family. These young fellows tote it out buggyriding. The girl takes a drink and comes home ruined. They ought to let folks alone that make good whiskey."

This was applauded.

On the roof of the bus we had two pigs and a raccoon in a cage. We stopped frequently for country people and miners to crowd inside. One bearded mountaineer hailed us and spent five minutes inventing questions to ask the driver. "Hadn't a thing on his

mind," said the driver when we went on, "just lonely and wanting to talk."

The driver does errands all along the route. He took a crate of eggs from a woman and peddled it at three places to get her price. He accepted requests to buy a pair of spurs, deliver a message and have an axle repaired. In spirit he is a country-store keeper on wheels; his leather upholstered seats are the soap boxes of a friendly and unpretentious forum. These mountains are still home-spun.

A Patriarch Reads His Doom

At a turn-off from the main road Arthur Gamble stopped the car to let me read this sign:

THIS ROAD TO ELSIECOAL

EVERYDAY WORK GOOD HOUSES

HIGHEST WAGES

EXCELLENT SCHOOL FAIR TREATMENT

That is a relic of the boom, when operators offered inducements and miners had cars to satisfy their itch for new sights, higher wages, better camps. We took the dirt road to Elsiecoal. It had been a big camp, with a double row of painted houses on the flats near the tipple. The hills were covered with flimsier shacks built in a hurry to crowd more men into the pits. Now the windows are boarded, the chimneys lifeless. More than 3,000 people not long ago called this emptiness

their home. A lone man on the store steps told us that the people went back to the hills after Elsiecoal shut down, but some he thought had become floaters in Cincinnati and the border cities where charity organizations handed out food.

The tin sheets are peeling from the power house, and the tipple is beginning to look dilapidated. It would be interesting to know whether the mine, during its brief operations, ever paid out the cost of the railroad spur, the equipment and the houses. It seems an expensive monument to overproduction.

We discovered a more vital relic on the return drive. Near the road is a two-story log house which I wanted to photograph. A well-set-up lad of nineteen answered the knock. He does not like strangers.

"I'm a union man," he said, and looked belligerent.

"That's all right with me. Can I take a picture of the house?"

"Ask grandpa. It's his'n."

The grandfather asked us inside, and almost at once gave an invitation to stay for supper, but the boy sulked outside and refused to talk to us. I was sorry for that. What is in his mind is more important now than the thoughts of his grandfather, although I would rather have lived the latter's life than face what is ahead of the youngster.

The old man is eighty-three, six-feet-two and unbending. He has a white beard and a patriarchal head. We sat in front of the open fire. Rings of pumpkin pulp were drying on rods before the hearth, filling the room with spicy scent. There was a flintlock musket which, he told us, his grandfather brought from

Carolina in 1800 when he took up the land and built the log house.

His wife died a few weeks ago. Her bed is in the room, covered with her best quilt. Her photograph, two old letters and some china were arranged on the bed, and ferns were set on the floor around it.

He talked gravely of the times when they all lived off the land in contentment. They still make their living from his 300 acres, seven of his children, with their children, packed into the log house and scattered in cabins over the place; but contentment has gone out of it for the old gentleman.

"Mining and roads have ruined the land," he said. "They ran this concrete road right through the middle of my hollow, and now I must live to see my grandchildren racing up and down a road in automobiles."

There was a lively old crony of his sitting with us. He carves wooden birds and puzzles, and is the champion dulcimer maker of the County. He played on one for us, and tried to persuade the boy outside to sing a mountain song. He would not do it, and I sympathized with his hatred of being quaint for the benefit of strangers. Why should he? The hospitality of the two old men—severe yet warming—is entirely authentic, dating from the recent past when a stranger was an infrequent guest to be pumped for gossip. Now strangers go by the house at fifty miles an hour, and those who stop ask silly questions. When the old man dies his grip will be released from the family. They will be free to take their chances with the new times, perhaps to make money and buy store clothes and automobiles, instead of slaving in jeans to fill leaky log barns full of corn and wheat.

I suppose that is what is in the boy's mind. He has escaped already by taking a job away from the farm. But the force of the old man's will still holds the family solidarity. It cannot long survive him.

Ambitions of Youth

We drove today along roads at the bottom of a wedge of hills, with every mile taking us to another huddle of miner's shacks, great drab beetles with their stilt legs braced against the slope. Rain hid the hilltops, a cold rain rank with the smell of soft coal from burning gob piles. The car lurched up a slithery side road, took to the slate bed of the creek in some spots, and once crossed it on a railroad trestle. The village looked particularly dreary today. On the far side the creek bank has clumps of laurel and ledges of clean rock. On the near side is a row of outhouses, some fallen into the creek, behind this a waste of mud strewn with tin cans, then the unpainted shacks in dismal lines facing the railroad track. The mine has closed down and the company store with it. No one has any credit left to buy food or clothes, candles or tobacco.

We parked the car and walked. A recently shut-down town feels stunned. We attracted no attention. A woman in a cotton slip and bare feet leaned on her porch rail to watch a girl play with a skip-rope made of a pair of stockings knotted at the toes. She stopped skipping to spit blood into a pool on the porch. The mother saw this without a gesture. The children were not in school, she said, because they had nothing fit to wear.

We went inside. There was a single bed, sheetless,

on which four people slept, two chairs with broken seats, the usual coal grate fire, old newspapers pasted up for wallpaper. The place smelt foully. We escaped, and fell into conversation outside with an ancient whose head waggled on a thin neck pleated like a turtle's. He has a conviction that sin brought the people low. Christ, he said, will appear soon on a golden cloud to gather into glory all those who were not scared to foretell His second coming. Some of the neighbors are going to be sorry that they were so ornery. God always takes care of deserving people.

In a piping voice he scourged the evil ways of the village, while gesticulating with the gunny sack which he was about to use for filching coal from the tipple.

The houses further along were better kept. We entered one decorated with religious prints and window curtains. Here our hands were shaken warmly and we were invited to sit down. The woman had gray hair above one of those fine mountain faces with clear blue eyes and a hawk nose. Her cheeks were veined with the lines of old age, yet she said she was only forty-nine, and brought out a giggling assortment of young fry to prove it. They were hard to reconcile with her toothless gums. Her talk was sensible. She said the silent boy sitting in the back room was convalescing from typhoid, having had the bad luck to be taken sick when, of all rarities, he had a job in the mine.

For a few minutes I sat quietly in the car, comparing the venerable mountaineer visited last week with the old codger seen in this village. It is incredible that mining alone can be responsible for the difference in them, one ripe with fulfillment, the other withered and weaving visions to escape from reality. These are ex-

tremes in a stock which varies widely in character. Yet this distinction seems inescapable—good blood and thin blood find their respective places in the old hill life; but in the mines they both eventually wind up on the same unlovely level.

A boy rested his chin on the edge of the door and grinned at me with fine brown eyes surmounting a grimy little mug.

"What are you going to do with yourself when you grow up?"

"Play."

"Don't be so foolish. You can't play all your life. Do you want to work in the mines?"

"I don't aim to do nothin'."

"Go to school?"

"Pap makes me. I got whopped twice today but it didn't hurt none. I had a book in my britches where she was trying to hit. That ole teacher ain't any account. My little cousin hit her in the stomach with his fist and he's only six. You oughta see him fight. Don't take nothin' from nobody. He throws stones through windows."

"Listen, I'm not interested in your little cousin. I want to know about you. Do you learn anything at school that you like?"

"Naw. Pap won't let me quit because I raise hell when I'm loose. But I'm quittin' this year."

"What can you do then?"

"Play."

"Never going to get tired of that?"

"Nunh-uh."

He showed me how he could knock up stones with a stick, but I wouldn't praise him for it.

Mine Valley and Town

The mines here are working only one day a week. The track is filled with unneeded freight cars. We found the schoolhouse back of this barricade. A very little girl was hunched up on the ties, using the overhang of the car as protection against the rain. The drip from the edge was falling on her knees and soaking her shoes. She was looking at the schoolhouse door, a miserable and enigmatic little figure, with a solemnity which rebuffed all questions.

The schoolhouse smells richly of coal smoke and unwashed young bodies. It is dark, so dark that the writing on the blackboard cannot be read from the rear seats. The children put their noses to the pages of their books to squint at the print. There are three grades in the one room, arranged in rows so the teacher can assign lessons in blocks. The only common denominator for all three is the lusty yells of those on the receiving end of a switch.

They are a ragged lot, some with bare feet, red and swollen from walking over frosty ground. Many of them are handsome. There was one youngster with a fragile face of great beauty. Most of them are towheads, most of them pale. I winked at one brat and he returned it without moving another muscle. These children, especially the girls, will be the seamed and beaten folk of thirty-five who appall nice people with their air of slovenly animality.

After dinner tonight I sat reading the paper in the lobby while Uncle So-and-So was giving an unctuous talk to the kiddies over the radio. He was telling his little nephews and nieces that they could get member-

ship buttons in his Club if they'd just buy packages of whatever Uncle is paid to advertise. The radio was turned on full blast. The lobby was crowded with drummers swapping stories, just as they had been when I left there this morning and the radio exercise man had been sounding his morning "one-two-three . . . legs off the floor . . . up, down" to an audience slumped on their spines in leather chairs. Nobody cares what the radio plays, so long as it is loud and continuous.

The newspaper has three local murder stories on the front page and an editorial congratulating the Postmaster for having been quick on the draw recently. The streets outside are filled with the boys and their girls out for a Saturday night.

A few miles away are the miners. To them the town is the gilt on the cake, infinitely out of reach. I hope they may never attain this flower of civilization. In their valleys they are underfed, uncared for, without hope of security for themselves or for their broods. That makes them pariahs in the eyes of people who themselves fall far short of the natural dignity with which the mountaineer-miners face sickness, hunger and idleness.

Dilemma

Three hours of talk this morning with the superintendent of the company which operates two small mines on ——— Creek. Two weeks ago he shut down the last of his mines. The company store echoes like an empty hay barn. There are forty-three families here who have had no work since last summer's strike. He means to evict them from the leasehold. They steal coal from

the company and live by begging. Trouble makers, he says. But the families who did stay on the job during the strike are now no better off.

He was anxious to tell his story. In town they told me he has consideration for his miners, although the union people call him a sly fox. To me he seemed genuinely distressed, a man caught in a hopeless situation, trying to steer a course between the need to make money and his sympathy for the miners. He sees his industry crumbling and its workers near starvation, and he is willing to believe that something fundamental must be done. In boom times he would not be spending the morning pleading with strangers to accept the honesty of his intentions.

Here are his excuses for closing the mines and leaving several hundred people stranded:

The fault lies in price slashing. Purchasing agents for big industrial plants play one operator against the other until the price is underbid to the point where no one can dig coal at a profit. At present big industries, able to pay a fair price, are paying less for coal than it would cost them to mine it.

The superintendent admitted that this burden fell most heavily on the miners.

"I can't go to the electric power company here and ask them to cut the rate for me so I can sell my coal at these prices. They would laugh me out of their office. I can't ask for reduction on the price of spikes or copper wire. When I'm in a tight hole the only thing I can do is put it up to the miners whether they'd rather shut down the mine or take a cut. They took it —again and again—but even that couldn't save their jobs. The company had run through its cash and its

credit. We had to shut down, and we can't let that bunch who struck last summer hang around the camp to stir up the others into raising hell."

The operator's nerves are worn thin. He is in a mood to evict families and to hire gunmen to do it. And the miners, many of them, are in a mood to resist. It is a merry-go-round draped in black.

MACHINE AGE IN THE HILLS

I

BACKWOODS CENTURY

THE mountaineer-miners of the South were once the commoners of England, a race of blondes and redheads, stems from the ancient Saxons, Celts, Angles and the Norse invaders of Scotland and Ireland. The pressure of poverty forced them from 18th Century England to America, where they eventually took up hill farms in the Blue Ridge. There they lost themselves for a century, and were knit by isolation into tough-fibered highlanders.

Today these people are completing a strange and disturbing cycle. Into modern times they remained under pioneer conditions, living on sowbelly and greens and singing old English ballads up remote mountain hollows, while the rest of the world was discovering that coal could drive machinery and build a civilization not dependent on scratching the soil for bare sustenance. To the mountaineers the machine age came a century late. They were unprepared for it. The violence of its impact wrecked their lives.

They were guileless children. Money could seduce them as easily as wampum did the Indians. Their casual natures made them ripe for exploitation, and their habit of personal revenge for a wrong left them leaderless. The results of this are today highly accentu-

ated in the Blue Ridge by the general collapse of bituminous coal mining. The unwanted miner people are degenerating under the down-pull of poverty. It would be shortsighted, as one coal area politician suggested, to "let them starve to death, the quicker the better." For they will smash their industry before they starve. The coal which this age must have will not come unmixed with blood unless we find a way to drain off the surplus of disaffected miners.

Under the most benevolent interference the mountain people remain irritatingly human. They are inarticulate and hardly know what moves their own minds. They live in the present, with no conception of how their habits and instincts took root; a people without a conscious history. To understand what they are today it is necessary to follow a backward trail across their formative centuries.

There were surplus workmen who died of starvation long before coal fired the first steam boiler. The trace of disrupting privilege runs back to 12th Century England, where Norman lawyers invented the land inclosure device in order to hedge common forests as deer parks for huntsmen Barons. The precedent was useful to succeeding landlords who wished to turn commoners off the land and use it to graze sheep for England's wool trade. The dispossessed country people drifted to city slums to become pioneers in that disjointed tradition which makes paupers of workingmen, not for lack of skill but because the entrepreneurs of civilization cannot think how to use their labor.

The frank Elizabethans did not dissemble rapacity. They first unjustly planted the Scotch in Ulster, then banned Irish produce as soon as it began to compete

with English farms. Ulster was forced into sheep growing, whereupon England placed an embargo on Irish woolens. The double-cross sent tens of thousands of Scotch-Irish to America during the 18th Century. The contentious breed did not stay long on the seacoast. They had had their fill of civilized tricks. Their vitality found expression as a frontier buffer between the cautious men on seaboard farms and the Indians in mountain hunting grounds. Their descendants are still there, mining coal.

The New World was a safety valve for the human pressure created by every form of economic injustice. For two centuries England's unwanted escaped from intolerable poverty in the old country to take up the virgin Continent's fenceless acres. We cannot suppose that the great body of these simple workmen elected to make the conquest of a wilderness out of a passion for hardship and danger. It was their luck to be sturdy yeomen whom the landed gentry and the politicians sent away from home on an invigorating adventure.

To pay their passage many of them indentured their labor for the first years in the new country. But the pressures which had started them on their journey did not always end with their arrival here. Those who cleared the first tidewater fields of Virginia did so not for their own ease but that landlords of the old tradition might ultimately take them over to cultivate tobacco with the cheap labor of black slaves. Again the dispossessed pushed westward, while behind them lawyers concocted patents and land grants to claim the new wilderness rim. It was not solely for glory of empire that the pioneers drove their few pigs and cows up Indian trails into the Blue Ridge.

In 1750 George Washington, in return for his services as public surveyor in Western Virginia, was granted a patent of 32,000 acres in the Great Kanawha Valley. He neglected his demesne until 1774, when he set out with 100 indentured servants to colonize it. An Indian outbreak diverted Washington's purpose. He sold his indentured servants to settlers along the Monongahela.

Washington, as landowner, could do this with the casual comment that "they were people who would have renewed their term of service forever." Two years later he gave up ambitions for landed privilege and founded a Republic in which free men might take up their individual parcels of the common soil.

The end of the Revolution sent the Continental Army back to seaboard States grown poor from seven years of fighting. Veterans in east Virginia, in Pennsylvania and in Maryland swung their muskets over their shoulders and trekked into the Appalachian country. Here were steep slopes which no tobacco planter would ever want. Singly, the families took up creek bottom homesteads. Their frustrated longing for freeholds was at last satisfied in the hills, ancient nurse of the small man's independence. There they built their log cabins and raised gigantic broods of children. They came to resent all strangers as threats to their security.

America gave the mountain people a century of peace; but at the very beginning of this period the impetus of new changes was making headway in England. There the peasants of the late 18th Century combed the beaches for sea coal to warm their hearths. The black fuel was less important than peat, until the spinning masters discovered that they could gear its power to their shuttles.

With a dream-like repetition of background, the same situation occurred in the American Blue Ridge fifty years ago. Here the mountaineers were living over the greatest unexploited coal field in the world, yet they did their cooking in skillets over a wood fire, and only casually used the outcroppings of coal veins to forge their horseshoes.

The dead and buried mountaineers of this century may rest more peacefully in their graves for never having known the industrial revolution in the old country. In Scotland the first coal miners were serfs, a race of black gnomes who forgot how the sun looked and felt. At first no working people gained anything by this discovery that coal could heat steam to drive machinery. Most of the hand weavers lost their jobs. Starving and humiliated, they formed mobs to smash the hated iron interlopers. The farmers suffered when the power looms raised a new demand for land on which to graze sheep.

These were the growing pains of the industrial revolution. As soon as men learned to use this powerful new instrument, the machine began to create a surplus of wealth. Greater production gave work to the surplus craftsmen and raised their standard of living. But the miners who dug this new source of riches shared least in its enjoyment. In all centuries, during every industrial change, miners have been the last to be remembered by the masters of the show.

In 1842 a British commission reported that girls and boys under ten years old were working as draft animals in the low drifts of coal mines: "Chained, belted, harnessed like dogs in a go-cart, black, saturated with wet, and more than half naked—crawling upon their hands and knees, and dragging their heavy loads behind them

—they present an appearance indescribably disgusting and unnatural."

The American contemporaries of these burrow children were sprouting in the clear sunshine of a free country. This was our golden age for the independent workman, and Walt Whitman was its poet:

"Land of coal and iron! land of gold! land of cotton, sugar and rice!
Inextricable lands! the clutch'd together! the passionate ones!
A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant and branching,
New politics, new literatures and religion, new inventions and arts,
See, ploughmen ploughing farms—see miners digging mines—see the numberless factories,
See, mechanics busy at their benches and tools—see from among them superior judges, philosophs, Presidents emerge, dressed in working dresses. . . ."

Old Walt's barbaric yawp chants the lusty joy of the man who creates with his hands. From among mechanics and artisans the intellectual leaders of the new race were to emerge, great home-spun men with vigorous thoughts sprung from the soil, the workbench and the mine. It was not to happen, however, that power machinery could invoke a like enthusiasm to that which Walt Whitman felt for the broadaxe in the hands of an American backwoodsman. It must be that we are in a transition period, and that the machine can eventually be tamed to serve the spirit of man.

II

"MONTANI SEMPER LIBERI"

By 1869 England had passed the last act to inclose common lands. The storms of the first industrial revolution had subsided into the smooth stream of Victorian stability. For the United States these disorders had hardly begun. We were still an agrarian people, interested in improving land and livestock. The Western plains could drain off any immigration surplus impounded on the Atlantic seaboard. The steam locomotive and river packet were merely speedier variations of the prairie schooner—clever mechanical beasts of burden to carry the land-hungry to their paradise. The newly invented farm machinery we considered as extra hired hands to help in the gathering of inexhaustible riches.

Some of the highlanders in the Blue Ridge were not immune to this excitement. Most of them were creek bottom farmers, content with log cabins and homespun, corn shucking parties and fiddle dances. But there were also lawyers, river traders and other men of vision who saw a better future for the region than mere sustenance farming. Before the Civil War, coal was more important to blast the Kanawha salt furnaces than it was for export. Shortly after the War, the new State of West Virginia, divorced at last from masters in the Old Dominion, awoke to the possession of

illimitable wealth in the coal outcroppings hidden under a thin dressing of forest mold on a thousand ridges. The State was to remain self-sustaining, but not alone from agriculture and timber. Here is the forecast of a contemporary:

"Ploughs and automaton harvesters may be transported in vessels fabricated by the labor of West Virginia from her own oak and iron, and the metal of those implements may be mined, the ore heated by adjacent strata of coal, the requisite flux obtained from the same hill, and all compacted into a perfect machine, with timber found growing on the surface, with perpetual water power that leaps the crags and falls gently into the vale below, meandering towards the Ohio river, quiet as the meditative ox that fattens on the sweetest of perennial herbage upon its banks. . . . That such a country should lack inhabitants or the hum of industry, or the show of wealth is an impossibility in the future."

Today, fifty years after this sanguine prophecy, West Virginia does not indeed lack inhabitants. She would be happily rid of scores of thousands of idle miner people. But the hum of her industry has lost its crescendo, and each year it diminishes with the world's decreased need for coal. A show of wealth still remains, yet the natural resources of the country have been drained away by the outside companies which developed them, and the wealth left to the natives of the region is retained in the hands of the few.

In 1869 there were 10,000,000 acres still in the original forest growth. It has since been cut down, and the stripped land is under the sheriff's hammer for unpaid taxes.

Bancroft visited this region in its virginal prime, and raised this paen:

"The scenery has a character of grandeur of its own; and in the wonderful varieties of forest and lawn, of river and mountains, of nature in her savage wildness and in her loveliest forms, presents a series of pictures which no well educated American should leave unvisited."

The historian's exhortation perhaps inspired the State's current slogan: "West Virginia—the Switzerland of America." This may still hold for the untouched hills; but wherever coal has laid its smudgy hand on a valley there are permanent scars of gob piles and tipple runways.

Dis Debar, Commissioner of Immigration of West Virginia in the 1860s, broadcast handbills advertising the new commonwealth's opportunities.

"In no other portion of our country," he said, "are there more inviting prospects to labor, enterprise and capital than are now presented in the Great Kanawha Valley."

The basis of this optimism was that same "cole" which the surveyor's notebook of George Washington had mentioned a century before. Dis Debar was not exaggerating the chance for capital. Today the city of Charleston spreads over both banks of the Great Kanawha River. Coal profits built dignified mansions for miles along the shore where the old frontier fort stood. At the far end is the State's new Capitol, a magnificent mass with a gold encrusted dome dedicated to the children of West Virginia. Within sight of the dome are children unable to go to school for lack of shoes, children who sleep four in a bed and wear filthy

underwear because they have no change, children ignorant that the world is larger than two hills framing a creek, a railroad track and a row of hovels.

When West Virginia was young and hopeful it chose as its motto: "Montani semper liberi." This was living truth to men who found shelter in the hills from grasping lowlanders. Today it is merely an epitaph cut in the marble façades of Charleston's public buildings. The mountaineers of West Virginia have not even the freedom to earn bread for their bellies.

The city of Charleston is a convenient victim for such comparisons, since here the contrasts are thrown into sharp relief. But things true of the Kanawha Valley are true over the whole of the Blue Ridge coal fields. The pits from which we dig our machine age fuel are rimmed with physical squalor and human wreckage.

Who brought all this about? It is futile to blame individuals. To our immediate ancestors, investments in coal properties meant the chance for personal fortune, or Creation of a Great Industrial Empire, depending on their habits of thought. Christian ladies in Boston held coal shares against the schooling of their children. Kindly people and charitable institutions profited by this natural gift secreted in the mountains seventy million years ago. If this present generation had the same chance it would make the same rush for riches. The desire for privilege is not to be wheedled out of humanity by moral upbraidings.

If the sight of a coal mining camp painfully recalls the defeat of our pioneer hopes, it may also serve to make us admit that we are novices at steering this machine age. We went blithely ahead on paths laid

out for another mode of travel, and at present we are badly bogged. Perhaps our only gain is the quickening of our sense of danger.

Whatever the new route, we need the constant reminder that this thing we call a machine age civilization is merely old Adam in a new suit. Coal miners are "surplus workmen in a declining industry." They are also hill-billies, who have by no means shaken off habits bred through generations of farm life.

III

LAST STAND

MECHANISTIC ballets make patterns on the stage which amuse the eye without at all stirring deep emotions. The audience cannot forget that the theatric symbols of machine power are moved by flesh and blood bodies. Human beings remain more intricate than their machines, and need more comprehension.

Devil Anse Hatfield is one very fleshly mountaineer who requires understanding. He was the link between the old hill life and the coal invasion. The bearded highland chief died peacefully in this century after a long career dedicated to shooting it out with the law and with the McCoys. Devil Anse in effigy, with square shoulders and bull frame done to the life in white Carrara marble, stands over his grave on a hill near old Logan Town, facing a mining valley where posters urging the candidacy of successive Hatfields for Sheriff now decorate telegraph poles. Devil Anse had the bad luck to outlive his times.

His original fief was in southern West Virginia, across the Tug River from the Kentucky clan of McCoys. Randall McCoy had a daughter; Devil Anse had a son who found her to his liking. While their elders were swigging corn likker at an election day gathering on the Kentucky side, the infatuated youngsters eloped across the Tug. The union was

blessed by neither Devil Anse nor the parson. In a few months the girl came back to her Kentucky relatives. A Hatfield man had jilted a McCoy girl, and her presence with a bastard daughter was a continual goad to McCoy revenge. The warfare outlasted the lives of all.

The Hatfield-McCoy feud had heroic passages. An old man of the Hatfield tribe made a lone stand against a score of McCoys and died with an empty gun in his hand, head up, full of bullets but taunting his enemies with his last breath. The clansmen died together rather than escape singly. They stuck coolly by each other in ambush, shooting a way out from behind tree trunks and stone walls, never moving faster than they could drag their wounded.

Heroics were esteemed in the hills, yet treachery was not always discountenanced if done in the common cause. There was an occasion when three McCoys stabbed one Hatfield to death in the back. In revenge a Hatfield raiding party, angry at resistance from inside Randall McCoy's cabin, set it on fire as a torch to light their pot shots at trapped McCoys. On this bleak night a Hatfield shot young Allefair McCoy to death, then broke her mother's back with a swung musket. Four of her children had been murdered; yet the indomitable old mountain woman would not let herself die so long as she could argue feebly for peace with her stiff-necked men folk.

Allefair McCoy's murderer was the first feudist to be hanged by the law. Years after the crime the McCoy faction put a legal noose around his neck in a grand public hanging applauded by 6,000 mountaineers.

This passionate and bloody race were hard to kill,

and as hard to stop from killing others by fair or foul means whenever their tempers were up. In peaceful interludes they tried to end the feud, but an argument over the number of notches on a hog's ear could implant that chill-fire in a man's brain which let him dissemble his rage for months before killing his enemy from ambush.

The first years of the feud were fought under no other regulation than fear of retaliation by the other side. In West Virginia all officials were Hatfields; the McCoys were the law on the Kentucky side of the Tug. Neutrals were few and unhappy. A farmer and his boy were shot to death on the highway through a regrettable resemblance to a Hatfield father and son expected by the McCoys along the same road.

The reformation of the feudists did not commence until the iron masters in the sturdy young city of Pittsburgh began to look southward for a cheap coal reserve. There could be no industrial progress there so long as land agents might be picked off by factional rifles. Items began to appear in the civilized press about shipments of ammunition to replenish the Hatfield army. There was a jocular vein to these comments, but the industrialists saw nothing funny in a private warfare fought between civilized States over a battlefield of valuable coal deposits.

The Governors of Kentucky and West Virginia exchanged demands for the arrest of each other's feud leaders. Each tartly refused. At this time the McCoys were in the ascendancy. They managed to have a price put on Devil Anse's head. It was a fat price, and it introduced the first of that ugly breed, the private detective who takes sides for money. Devil Anse once

captured a pair of them, put them up for the night and sent them packing with a warning not to come back. It was a romantic and futile gesture. Within less than a generation the private detectives would be mine guards, hired to keep guns cocked at unruly Hatfield miners.

The surveyor's rod had become a more powerful instrument than the squirrel rifle. They forced Devil Anse to move fifty miles inland where he would never again see a McCoy. He sold his Tug River land for a dollar an acre, and lived to see his hunting grounds become what was at one time known locally as "The Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field."

These consolidations of forest land into coal tracts were the American equivalent of the English inclosure acts. For the most part they were effected by companies owned outside the mountain States. Some mountaineers held their land and automatically entered the operator-owner class. There were, for instance, Hatfields who became rich and Hatfield cousins who exchanged log cabins for planed board shacks in a new mine village. In one generation class lines crystallized forever.

The mines transformed the penetrated valleys, without disturbing the far greater area where the old farm life continued. The lay of the land was to keep this inviolate for one more generation.

IV

THE BOOM

THE Appalachians are geologically the oldest range on the Continent. They were fifty million years old at the time of the Rocky Mountain upthrust. Since then they have weathered for twenty million more years into a maze of deep ravines chiseled by creeks which fall away from ridges of equal height. The comparatively recent Ice Age never invaded the Blue Ridge. North of it, in Pennsylvania and Ohio, the wall of ice scraped off the rotten surface ice and left soil deposits in wide valleys where humans can make a decent living with the plow. In West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee the steep hills have their original covering of thin soil, held together by the roots of laurel and rhododendron, hardwood trees and pine. On the backbones of the ridges castellated rocks balance in their last stand against wind and weather.

It is a lovely land to look upon, and its faults as a farm country are easily forgiven by the appraising eye interested in coal. These deposits were raised upward, for the most part, in horizontal position. They form a series of seams at different levels. Where the ravines have cut them it is possible to scrape off the surface litter and begin at once to drive a horizontal drift. The first carload is salable. Coal is the most easily mined of all bulky minerals, except those in open deposits.

Unimaginative man, seeing the easy pickings, has forgotten to say an appreciative word to nature for her seventy million years' work.

The first mines were along the big waterways where hillside tipples could spill the coal directly into boats. The first railroads followed the same river valleys and sent spurs up the tributary creeks. Wherever this steel centipede lay across the land the character of the hill life changed. The operator built a row of board shacks close to the tipple. The mine village had to be self-contained, so the company-owned store made its appearance.

The new miners liked this arrangement. Three-room houses with many windows were a step up in the scale from one-room cabins lit by a single opening. Neighbors were close at hand. Food required only a short walk to the company store instead of months of labor on sour soil. It was easier to buy ready-made clothes than to weave them by hand. Hard cash was a miracle to people who had never handled it from one year to the next.

The disadvantages began to show with the first hard times. Then there was neither cash nor the old means of getting food. The Southern miners learned the trick of going on strike through agents sent from the more sophisticated Northern fields. The Southern operators fought unionism to the death. There were black periods of lockouts, strikes and bloodshed. The mountaineers still on the land complacently observed that mine wages might not be so sure a livelihood as sustenance farming.

Isolation further helped to maintain the two ways of life within the same range of hills. Mule paths and the hard creek bottoms were the only roads. Over the ridge

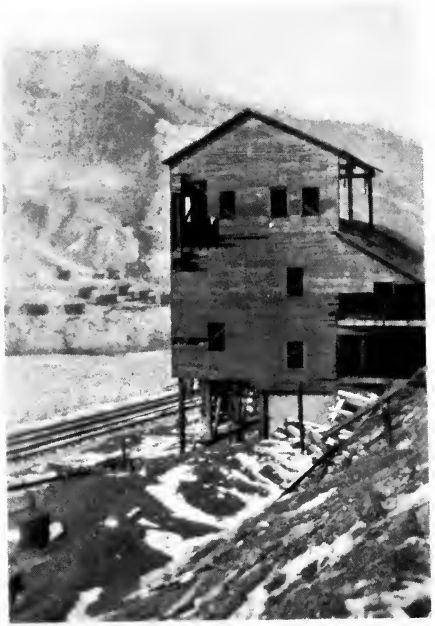
from a mine valley the mountaineer ways still held.

In the second decade of the 20th Century the balance between the old and the new way of life began to be upset by the aggressive penetration of big Northern companies. Left to themselves the local capitalists had opened a few mines convenient to river or rail. Now the Northerners came armed with technique and energy to drive a way through to the thickest seams, however inaccessible. It was becoming harder to find virgin coal in the Northern regions. The steel and motor car manufacturers were ready to tap their Appalachian reserves.

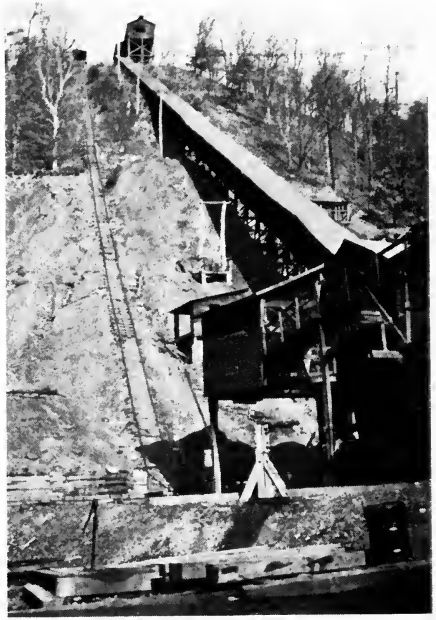
In 1910 Harlan County, Kentucky, was a backwoods community, dotted with log cabins, roadless, and content with such social life as suns itself in Kentucky courthouse squares, swapping news and squirting ruminative tobacco juice on the steps of justice. The coal seams of Harlan County are thick and of high value. So the wild gorge of the Cumberland River was violated by a railroad spur. Engineer gangs stripped the laurel from the hillsides. Electrified spurs, tipples, shacks and stores in a few weeks converted farm hollows and wilderness into working mine camps. On the third year of production a million tons were shipped out of the County.

Harlan was a wholecloth development by outside capital. The new money built the schools and churches, laid the hardsurfaced roads, hired the police and paid wages to the country people who exchanged the sunlight for the dark of a mine drift.

Such invasions of whole counties were infrequent in this period. The Blue Ridge was streaked here and there with coal, showing the sure trend; but it required the War in Europe to remake the lives of a



A rather expensive monument to over-production . . .



Tipples converted farm hollows into mine camps . . .

whole region of innocents who hardly knew the names of the belligerents.

In 1915 the United States began to make munitions on a large scale. American coal to forge shells tripled in price. In 1917 this traffic became patriotic, and to it the Appalachian reserves were dedicated.

It did not require a high degree of skill for a coal operator to be prosperous in those days. The Fuel Administration pegged a War price of soft coal at $2.58 a ton, enough to return a profit to any moderately well run mine. The market was stable and unlimited. Farms were hastily blocked up into coal holdings; the farmers bought stock in the mining companies or, if tenant farmers, went to work underground. Coal became the sole economic basis of existence.

It was not until after the War that the fever reached its peak. In the spring of 1920 there began a run-away market in coal comparable to the stock market Klondike later in the decade. France and Italy were desperately short of coal. In America rolling stock had been depleted and an outlaw strike in the car foundries had held back steel orders requiring coke. At a time when the demand for coal was greatest the Fuel Administration withdrew its restriction on price.

In a few weeks bunker coal for the Great Lakes was selling at $10 a ton; tidewater coal for export to our recent Allies touched a high of $14 a ton at the mine and $25 on the seaboard. Coal—this basic natural wealth—skyrocketed like a wildcat stock. The gamblers pyramided their profits into bigger coal companies, with larger land holdings bought at boom prices. There was no check to their folly.

The banks were eager to take mortgages on coal land. Machinery could be bought out of the sale of

stock to people hopeful of future earnings comparable to the $300 profit which novice operators were making on each filled gondola car. What did it matter if bungling methods left half the coal underground where no real miner would ever again be able to recover it?

At one mine a pile of slack coal, accumulated for fifteen years as unsalable waste, brought as much money at boom prices as the mine had earned during all its previous years of operation. Frantic buyers did not examine closely to see how much slate was left in the coal. "Anything black" could find a purchaser.

It was virtually impossible to pay miners too much in wages, since the size of the day's profits depended at such prices on the number of hands that could be squeezed into the pits. At the height of this madness some coal diggers earned $50 a day and sub-contractors made $2,000 a month.

On Saturday nights the miners came into boom towns on buying sprees. Their jeans bulged with more money than they had formerly seen during their whole lives. Eyes glittered in the light from shop windows. They staggered toward new automobiles with bundles piled on both arms and their chins steadying the top of the pile. They bought silk shirts at $15 apiece and threw them away after underground wear ruined them. Radio, washing machine and electric-iron salesmen picked their way along the spring mud of a mine village street to explain what these wonders were before taking orders for them. The miners papered their shacks with the leaves of installment house catalogues and peered at their wallpaper to select overstuffed furniture.

V

COLLAPSE

THE coal market collapsed in the fall of the same year. French mines were beginning to produce again. The domestic coal famine was over. So many new operators had come into the fields that production had swamped the demand which called it forth. The "snow bird" operators were bankrupt. In the succeeding general depression of 1921 many hundreds of well established mines were forced to shut down.

The impetus which started the mountaineers drifting into the mines did not die down for two years more. In 1923 there were 704,793 men working in nearly 12,000 mines, with a possible annual production of nearly a billion tons of soft coal. No likelihood exists that America will ever again employ so many men to dig coal.

The wave began to surge the other way. High prices had tempted operators into building a producing structure twice as great as the country normally needs. In the next four years 200,000 miners permanently disappeared into other industries.

No other large scale business is so completely at the mercy of such flurries in prices. When a steel strike causes a shortage and consequent price rise, it is not practicable for hundreds of amateur steel makers to set up shop for just so long as they can profit by the artificial demand. This happens in coal mining. A man

builds a village of thin board houses and offers higher wages to miners than the established companies will pay. When the false prosperity ends, the fly-by-night mine shuts down. The miners can shift for themselves. The operator no longer has any responsibility for them.

The 200,000 miners forced out during the years 1923–1927 were in the long run luckier than the 500,000 who stayed. America then was still prosperous enough to absorb them. The wanderers found work in Detroit automobile plants and Illinois steel mills. Only once was this outward drift interrupted. In 1926 the general strike in England threatened a coal shortage. In America the boilers of closed mines were fired in anticipation of a new boom. At once the roads were black with the flivvers of former miners, attracted by the curious power which coal dust has over all it has ever touched. But the 1926 boom died young. The returned miners headed north for good.

Coal had started down the long decline. Manufacturers of the Coolidge era made money burning coal which operators furnished at a loss. There were far too many operators still. No one of them wished to give up his independence and become a wage slave for a rival. Why should he, in particular, close his mine? Perhaps it would be possible to hold on by taking present losses out of the pay checks of his miners, until, of course, things picked up.

This psychology underlay the cut-throat war which was to ruin most operators and plunge their miners into hunger and beggary.

Coal mining is admirably fitted to the device of saving production costs by paring wages. Sixty percent of the cost of producing coal goes to the men who dig it. When faced with the prospect of losing a contract,

what more easy than to cut the bid ten cents a ton by taking the ten cents off the rate paid the miners? Or, what more natural than that your competitor should cut his miners a further five cents a ton and steal the contract from under your nose?

This unamiable competition first made itself felt during the falling coal price period from 1921 to 1924. Successive wage cuts were answered by strikes. The miners watched the installment men take away their automobiles, their washing machines and their radios. The boom was definitely over. They did not realize it, but they were being deflated down to the level where pay checks exactly balance the company's charges for rent, medical service, powder and food.

The miners wanted to keep the gewgaws which fickle economic laws had showered upon them. The United Mine Workers in 1924 forced an agreement at Jacksonville which guaranteed a minimum wage of $7 a day. At once some of the union operators raised a cry that they could not pay such wages and avoid bankruptcy. The non-union operators smiled blandly and under-sold those bound by the agreement. Strikes, bombings, machine guns, death and animosity—the old formula held. The union lost its power in most fields. The operators were relieved of the burden of battle, yet the passing of the union also took away the last check on cut-throat competition by eliminating the minimum wage scales. Left to themselves the operators slashed prices and their own corporate throats. By 1929 the once prosperous business of coal mining was in the doldrums. Some operators were still making money by dint of owning valuable coal holdings in good locations. Many were selling coal at a loss rather than have their mines deteriorate in idleness. Several

thousand mines had already gone over the brink into bankruptcy. All this, it must be remembered, was during the years when most of the country was exuberantly piling up profits and playing the stock market.

It was part of our pioneer tradition that the natural resources of the country should be developed by private initiative. The founding Fathers looked out upon the forests and plains of a new continent in confidence that infinity could not exhaust this inheritance. They could not realize the importance of the mineral fuels hidden under the earth, nor visualize the intricacies of a machine age. Law and tradition sanctioned the War-time invasion of the Appalachian coal regions; patriotism was served every time a new mine was opened. Yet the aftermath of all this enterprise was chaos.

The operator of the cut-throat '20s thought that his battle was with recalcitrant miners, when in reality both sides were equally at the mercy of a much larger interplay between men and machines. Scientific research workers in distant laboratories were assuming the power which union leaders and operators imagined was still in their hands. Viewed in retrospect, away from the heat of sectional conflict, there is nothing mysterious about this interplay.

For instance, the high price of coal in the post-War years caused the great industrial users to cast about for cheaper fuels. Their engineers invented devices for firing boilers and heating houses with crude oil and natural gas. At once two powerful rivals to coal were created. Similarly, research in more efficient consumption of coal taught the generators of electric power how to make a given lump of coal produce twice as many kilowatt hours as it had done in 1918. The rail-

roads, largest group of coal users, learned to cut their consumption millions of tons a year by better locomotive fire boxes.

All this is technological progress of a high order, yet in human terms the greater efficiency means less work for the men in coal mine villages. Every factor of blind chance and human contrivance seems leagued to deny them a living. Science during this period not only taught industry how to use less coal but also invented new methods by which the miners themselves could dig coal more efficiently and thus lessen the need for their labor. Before the War each bituminous miner dug three and a half tons a day; now he can average five tons a day. Seventy men can do the work formerly done by a hundred. The improvement lies in the mechanical hands provided to supplant the weaker human ones—steel cutters which rip through coal faster than a pick, stripping machines which grind hills to pieces, iron loaders which never tire.

These clever devices gave idleness, not leisure, to the miners; the sort of idleness which finds relief from boredom in making moonshine or in playing marbles in front of the company store while waiting for the foreman to chalk the familiar "No Work Today."

The condition was general in the Blue Ridge long before the stock market crash of 1929. There the miners entered the lean years of the depression already underfed and forlorn. They had not saved their wages. No savings banks had been there during the boom to compete with itinerant merchants come with silk dresses and trinkets to amaze unsophisticated eyes. After the crash, the outside world was too intent on its own troubles to hear stories of distress in the coal

fields. Miners were always in misery of some kind. It was felt that they were no worse off than the unemployed in other industries. In fact, however, they were; not only in degree of suffering but in the remoteness of the valleys where their one industry marooned them. When whole communities go under there is no one left from whom to borrow or beg.

The mine owner class had taken fantastic losses. An offer of $750,000 for a mine was refused in 1927; in 1932 the same property sold for $4,000 to the junkman. Companies still in operation were sold for a fifth of the bond issue they had carried in their heyday. In one mine County the tax assessor marked up its value from $62,000,000 to $104,000,000 over the course of four years. In 1932 a twelfth of the soil of this County was in the hands of the Sheriff. All the banks of the County closed their doors. At the rumor that one of them was to reopen, the citizens held a torchlight procession and danced in the street under paper streamers. Coal was their one deity, and it failed them.

If the miners had spent their hundreds foolishly, the operators had tossed their tens of thousands to the same breeze. The story of one child may serve to point their fate. Her untraveled parents had brought culture into the raw mine town in the persons of a French nurse and an English governess. Swank was hers in the form of a pony cart with not one pony but four, driven tandem down mountain roads to clop their hooves on the new macadam streets of the coal metropolis. The collapse of the boom drove her father to suicide. Today she is teaching in a one-room schoolhouse where mine children make life harsh for her with the fretfulness of undernourishment.

VI

REBELLION

THERE is a natural revulsion at probing misery. Ignorance and poverty are unattractive. The smell of unwashed bodies antagonizes nice nostrils and induces forgetfulness that filth is inevitable, where water must be carried in buckets to supply large families. A hunger march by angry scarecrows down civilized streets is so imminent a danger that panic seizes normally reasonable men. Bloodshed, they feel, is inexcusable, so it seems a justifiable expedient to guard property with militia machine guns in order to get a breathing spell in which to talk over sanely the cause of the trouble. Such parleys, however, seldom lead to helpful action. After the belligerents have been persuaded to return peacefully to their shacks, promises are forgotten.

We Americans are a volatile people, quick enough with our sympathies in a crisis, and as soon deadened in interest when the emergency passes the nuisance stage. Practical sociology we approach in the amateur spirit which imagines that untrained native ability will rise to trounce every opponent.

The recurrent pattern of alternate misery and affluence in coal mining should have inspired us long ago to stabilize the most important industry in machine civilization. Our only real gestures have been made when strikes threatened to stop our fuel supply.

Temporizing has placed the United States in the identical situation which existed in 1897, when the discontent of coal miners rose in a storm to sweep aside enemies to the formation of their union. Common to both periods is that distinction between the lean purses of operators and the lean stomachs of miners. Financial distress is a sorry affair, but it cannot produce quite the same intensity of feeling as physical distress.

It is doubtful that any present-day mine owner watches his children grow querulous for lack of food, or die because there is no money to buy medicine. These things the mountaineer-miners are experiencing to a dangerous degree. They can live on an extraordinarily low standard, but thousands of them cannot fall below that dead-line without brewing a storm. The rumblings of this can be heard, as much in the weeping of a woman as in the threats of radicals. Petty thievery is now common among people who formerly respected the fact that a hog might be his neighbor's one chance to live through the winter. Calves are being butchered in lonely woods. Chickens disappear in the night. Company store windows are smashed for the food behind them. Delegations of miners have come into County seat towns to offer storekeepers the choice between handing out free food or having it taken by violence.

These lapses are significant. The miners are religious and apt to accept hardship as a penance to be endured in this world in preparation for the glories of Paradise. They are as fundamental as the Early Christians. Parsons preach the imminent second coming of Christ. It seems useless to fight the powers of this world when relief is so near.

Moreover, they are not equipped to make the fight.

The operators and the law are synonymous in their minds. Have not all their hunger marches been stopped by men in uniform, and their attempts to organize unions been frowned upon by the judges? To the most of them it seems wiser to remain on friendly terms with the operators in whose hands lies their immediate chance for food and shelter.

Among these innocents are a few firebrands who will not accept things as they are, men hated by their employers and loved by the miners they inflame with a sense of wrong. One of their leaders, a fighting mountaineer who will die with his boots on before he compromises, has this to say about the temper of his followers:

"The operators all cry poor, but they won't let a miner have his say on that subject. Right here in this field they are cutting men off County relief—paid for by the National Red Cross—when they find out they've joined the union. The operators lay men off work and evict their families from their homes for the same reason. Why? It's not a Communist union; they haven't that excuse for knocking it on the head. They hate Communism, but what they are doing is driving people into it as the only way out.

"I'm not a Communist. I've refused their approaches to throw my union their way. And all the time I can see radicalism spreading beyond my control. Our people say to me: 'We might as well shoot it out and be done with it. And when we get started we're going to pick off the big fellows. There's no use fighting their gun thugs anymore. We're going to dig up the tree by the roots.'

"I'm responsible for what they do. All right, but is

there any answer I can give to talk like that? There's no hope for miners. Nothing but despair for them. Their children are naked. There's not even enough rough grub. Listen around the fields. You'll hear: 'What the hell's the matter here?—haven't we got a right to live? What's wrong that we can't get to it?'

"These mountain boys thought they had a lot of freedom, and now they've woke up to see they haven't. If ever they do get started things are going to be bad."

The warnings of professional agitators suffer the fate of Cassandra. Words such as "the people," "freedom," "rights" have, in the mouths of agitators, a discreditable meaning to most hearers. They are good words nevertheless, words too important to reject until we discover whether the speaker is an honest man or a spellbinder, an informed man or a propagandist.

The impact of the machine age on the mountaineer-miners is changing their social character rapidly. They are learning to meet antagonism with antagonism. Their present trend toward anarchy must soon be crystallized, or else given a new direction. There will be compulsion from the forces of pressure at the bottom, or a wise justice from the top. This generation must decide.

PORTRAIT OF A PEOPLE

The People
Miners
Grievances
Operators
Downpull of Poverty
Children

I

THE PEOPLE

SEVENTY years ago J. H. Dis Debar, a Swiss-American, wrote this estimate of mountaineer character, out of his quarter of a century of observation of the Blue Ridge people:

"The genuine mountaineer is not much addicted to precipitous action, rarely loses his temper or self-possession, and beyond acquisition of the necessaries of life, limited by almost Spartan frugality, is disposed to leave the improvements of things around him to time and chance. . . . This is the more striking as his native intellect and sagacity are extraordinary and susceptible of high development under proper direction or the stimulus of personal ambition.

"Perhaps nowhere on the Continent are there such treasures of natural power buried under the rust of indolence and prejudice, and at the same time such a display of urbanity prompted by native tact. . . . He seldom inquires into his neighbor's business with indelicate curiosity; he never intrudes his convictions upon strangers in aggressive discourse.

"Yet, to presume from these amiable traits upon an unlimited meekness in the mountaineer would be a serious mistake. His self-esteem is not by far the least prominent of his characteristics, and insults are quickly resented."

None of the adults described by Dis Debar are alive today, but their grandchildren could sit for the portrait. The natural powers of the mountaineer are still concealed by indolence and prejudice. Their character has no field in which to prove its worth.

Primitive minds are at a disadvantage against men armed with technique. Outside of the mountain backwater, Americans have developed technique so efficiently that it seems a natural gift instead of something imposed on an original simplicity. In the formative years of the general American character dealings were direct between man and man; personal integrity was a commercial asset as well as the basis of morality. But there were public lapses countenanced in this code of the 19th Century, notably when superior people crossed the paths of those kept unprivileged by ignorance. A case in point were the Indians. Sitting Bull and Geronimo were shrewd and forceful men, yet their lack of civilized technique made it more expedient to crush them than to fit their barbarous brand of wisdom into the white man's scheme.

The mountaineer-miners stand today in somewhat the same relationship. Their courtesy, their strong love of family, their native code are products of close personal relationships bred in isolation. They have never been taught the intricate conventions of morality. Their feelings are the stronger for it, and crop out in extremes of conduct. Hate and jealousy, unfettered by the civilized practice of indirect action, lead easily to murder. There are no gang killings in the mountains, as cities know them, but there is apt to be a *crime passionel* reported in every County weekly. Conversely, the mountaineers have no need to be urged into family affection.

Their loves may not be silken and subtle, yet they are consumingly powerful.

This naturalness has had much charm to observers from tepid cities. It explains the romanticism with which novelists have clothed the mountain people. The words "Kentucky mountaineer" summon up pictures of a girl in a cotton frock, pine trees, a rendezvous with a young feudist from the wrong family. . . . This is a formula which, although based on fact, has been decorated too prettily. The reckless charm of the mountains is really there, not so much apparent in the sunset colors of the romanticist's brush as in the violent emotions of a people innocent of civilized restraints. A decade or so back it was possible for novelists to make copy out of our liking to hear that passion could still be relentless somewhere in our modern world. Today this is no longer authentic. The mountaineer who goes down into the mines changes his status from quaint figure of literature to disturbing member of industry. The old order is dying under the impact of the new.

The people of Breathitt County, Kentucky, have Irish names, the girls have black hair, fair skin and blue eyes. The men are free with their pistols, giving their County the name of "Bloody Breathitt." Coal is not of first importance here, so Breathitt may keep its code a few years more. In nearby Counties, where coal is everything, you must search for the old customs and viewpoint, usually finding them personified in old women, mothers of miners who left the farms to follow their sons into the camps. They are lonely and garrulous, longing to tell stories of their girlhoods, of the church meetings, the shootings, their marriages and the rearing of many children. They remember the building

of the first railroad, and how they waited all day to see the first engine belch smoke along the shining rails.

That still seems wonderful to them. The advent of the metaled highway is too recent to make a memory. Money from the new mines laid the roads within the past fifteen years, opening a new world. In it the hill people were raised up a step in their knowledge of life. Pills in cardboard boxes took the place of herbs culled on the hillside and brewed into strong teas. The mail order house catalogue became more thumbed than the family Bible. New board houses, nearby schools, ready-made clothes, tinned foods and automobiles to carry the whole tribe over mountains where lately one member had spent the whole day going to town on mule-back . . . here was every temptation to give up the struggle on hardscrabble farms.

A knowing civilization, armed with stock company procedure, and effective through the impersonality of absentee ownership, is bringing about a violent transition in the coal fields. In times when its maladjustments rise to a peak of crisis it is well to remember with what primitive minds modern technique must deal.

The gun is still a symbol of manhood in the hills. Young people, coming home from church socials, have been known to puncture the night sky with pistol shots to release their exuberance. Small boys carve wooden pistols and stalk each other around the tipple. Shotguns, squirrel rifles and pistols make up most of the hardware trade among mountaineers. To their ancestors these were the tools of daily living, and the gun-toting habit persists. The code condones shootings when it would be outraged by verbal affronts to religion or patriotism.

They were taught as children to resent affronts, and their memories are long. Where the people of isolated New England villages take out their rancor in gossip, the mountaineer shoots it out. Last Spring a Kentucky murder trial was piously interrupted for an hour's Easter revival service. But the court room was tense. The town remembered a similar trial recently interrupted by a pistol duel between witnesses.

The revivalist announced the hymn. As one of the worshipers arose a .45 gun on his hip caught on the chair and fired. Men stormed the benches, climbed the jury box and hugged the walls with hands on holsters. No one was hurt except two War veterans whose habit of prone cover under fire put them in a position to be trampled.

Memory is still green in this town of the insulting gesture of one hunted citizen who grabbed a deputy's necktie and shot it off close to the collar. Stories of killings are endlessly told, with gusto and a craftsman-like accuracy as to where the bullet went in.

The shooting habit is most sinister when mixed with moonshine. Brutal and wholly unlovely acts are done. The communities retain a morbid relish in them. "Christmas on Troublesome Creek" might be the title of a romance. Here is what happened on Troublesome Creek on Christmas Eve a year ago, as reported in the Hazard, Kentucky, newspaper:

"Billie Campbell, Ova Cleveland, Sam Napier and Cleveland Allen went to the home of Abe Combs, near Stacy post office on Troublesome Creek, early Christmas Eve. Ova Cleveland and some of the others soon became abusive and insulting to Abe's daughters and they were asked to leave. As the crowd left, Ova Cleve-

land said they would be back soon and have them 'hollerin'.'

"Abe, 60 years old, had prepared for a good fire for his little boxed cabin home. After the rowdy crowd had left and the family was enjoying the warmth and glow of the fire, a rock pounded upon the door. Abe opened the door and his daughter, Mary Ellen, rushed to his side. There the men stood in the direct rays of the light with their shotguns over the little paling fence. One of the guns belched forth and Abe fell upon the floor and Abe was soon dead, as his life blood poured freely from his body and ran upon the floor. As Mary Ellen yelled to them not to shoot again, a shot brought her to the floor, also wounding the child that was in her arms, and that recently died from the wounds. The next shot hit Susan, another daughter and wounded her.

"Mrs. Combs and some of the children state that a third man stood just outside the glow of the light. He had the same description of clothes that Billie Campbell wore, but they could not distinctly recognize his face. Soon after the firing ceased, and as the dead and wounded were lying in their blood Billie rushed in the house and wanted to know what the trouble was about. Mrs. Combs told him he was present and knew all about it."

The repetition in this bit of local reporting of "lying in their blood" is the mountain version of a Greek chorus, full of doom and tragic enjoyment.

Moonshine causes them endless woe, yet stills remain where grocery stores have gone out of business. Much of the corn crop from the handkerchief-size patches goes into the stills instead of into the oven. Arrests

cannot stop the trade. There is "the law," meaning any County officer, and "the big law," the Federal men. Between them they make constant raids up the hollows and start the fathers of large families on long penitentiary terms. The smoke from a new still rises immediately.

The bootleggers hang around the camps on paydays, taking company scrip for their wares when they cannot get cash. For twenty-five cents a man can get enough corn likker to make him sodden. Under its influence miners have cut off fingers, "voluntary mutilation," in hope of collecting compensation from the company.

These things are more general near the big towns. In the remote camps there is a poverty too absolute for even a scrip moonshine market.

The miners no longer have any outside amusements. Boards are nailed over the windows of the camp movie houses. The monthly dances have stopped. In cold weather the people huddle around the coal grates of their shacks, five to fifteen in a room, idle and despondent. They have nothing to read. In the Spring they do their loafing out-of-doors. Their country then is exquisite with red-bud and dogwood against the dark ridge pines. The sun is warm. There is indolence in the air. The men play checkers on the railroad track, and sometimes great hulks of miners kneel to shoot marbles with the youngsters. Others squat on their haunches in circles, squirt tobacco juice and talk endlessly. Companionship is their one inexpensive pleasure.

Religion is so profoundly knit into their lives that it is hard to say whether it colors their characters or whether their original nature makes them pour such

floods of emotion at the feet of a personal God. The townspeople of the County seats are fundamentalist Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians. The miners have their own churches, sometimes a board chapel, more often a shed which serves secular purposes during the week. Most frequently they meet in each other's cabins to hear one of their own preachers. In one Kentucky County there are eighty ordained Baptist ministers, most of them miners serving without pay. Among them are men of simple fervor. A young giant of a miner, a good workman underground, a tender father to half a dozen children, sits conning his Bible to prepare himself for the Sunday meeting when he will become for an hour a man of God. He has a power in the camp which makes the conventional parson-and-flock relationship appear trite.

This is the same religion as that of those Tennessee mountaineers who listened aghast to the heresies of the Scopes trial. It is beyond argument, something implanted in their beings when they were young and their fathers explained the Bible to them in cabins remote from formal preachings.

It represents the best type. Its weakness is an absorption in the letter of holy law to the exclusion of the practical concerns of their lives. Out of their misery they turn to the second coming of Christ. This implies a conviction of sin to make people prepare themselves for imminent salvation. In consequence, sin is much in their minds. They blame their hardships on their own moral short-comings (or on their neighbor's) and so sink into apathy. If Christ is coming soon to reward the faithful, present misfortunes are of small concern.

The belief gives them an extraordinary indifference

to suffering. They fall more easily into talk of their sinfulness than into discussion of what is wrong with the mining industry. "They do not sweat and whine about their condition," but they do "lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins." Their faith is that of the early Christians, and they are as easily exploited.

The Holiness Church offers sanctuary to the less stable of the miner people. Popularly "the Holy Rollers," this congregation is powerful in numbers and in its grip on devotees. Here is fatalism compensated by emotional debauchery. If life is cruel, there is an escape in hypnosis which flows hotly through the veins in momentary ecstasy. Shrieks and jerks mark the passage of the agony. The jaw wags in the dark syllables of "speakin' in tongues," and the degree of holiness of the communicant is evidenced by the force which hurls the body across the room.

The emotional orgasm does not end when they file exhausted away from the meeting. A sister may feel herself condemned and, after consulting unseen oracles, decide that her neighbor is unclean and to be avoided. Dissension is common among the elect.

The tenets of the Holy Rollers treat death and disease as acts of God, often as punishments. It is a sin for a woman not to bear as many children as possible.

Religion, however, is not required to persuade miners to raise large families. The girls marry at seventeen and thereafter the numbers of their children are only thinned by death and mischance. They love their children with animal devotion. The family represents the only security in a hostile world. It is not tragic to them that the father and mother, with a young child, sleep one way on the bed while a married daughter and her

child rest crosswise at their feet. They are used to burrow life. The sound, the smell, the touch of intimates is constant from the moment when the newest born child is laid upon the mother's bed and the next oldest must move out. In recent years many young children have stayed indoors all winter for lack of clothes. The idle miner father mopes in the kitchen. There is no escape from physical presence. Either they must nag each other to death, or else create an affectionate solidarity. They have chosen to spoil their children. Those fierce slaps with which nerve-ridden city women cow their young are unknown among the mountain people. Yet this complaisance gets obedience without sulks, at least until the children are old enough to learn the deviltries of independence in the schoolyard.

Marriage is a snare which all the youngsters clearly see laid for them. Girls with slim figures and gay eyes cannot fail to read their futures in beholding the slatternly breeders of children who so short a time before were hunted by the village gallants. They know, these adolescents, that their men will have no jobs, or inadequate ones, that they must live with his or her parents, that life will soon be intolerable. They know, and, lacking an escape, they put their fair heads into the noose.

Sound health is a rarity in the mine villages except among young children. Babies, weaned early because underfed mothers cannot supply milk, are fed on beans and fat side of pork before their first teeth are grown. Amazingly, they survive a gamut of diseases running from "riz head" to small-pox. They acquire an immunity to most infection, so that toes, eaten nearly to

the bone with bloodpoison, heal cleanly under antiseptic treatment.

Malnutrition and the absence of preventive medicine early begins the break-down of the reserves of native vigor. Tuberculosis is a familiar ailment. Joints swell with rheumatism, teeth rot away from pyorrhea, hookworm saps their energy, and pellagra sets their nerves on edge. In comparatively recent years syphilis found a footing among them.

To say "they" in these descriptions is to use too broad a term. The mountain people are not riddled with disease. All are tough-fibered, and many of them remain stalwart. The fact that they have a high death rate indicates merely that they are living under those same hazards which made the span of life short for the ancestors of all of us.

Old men are very few in the camps. Mining itself is an added reason for this. Each year it kills one in every 250 miners, and injures one in 35. Mine asthma and gunshot wounds help to make old age a rarity.

This is merciful. The normal miner has worn out his usefulness at fifty. The company may keep him on at easy work, or it may turn him over to the community. Old men dig and peddle sassafras roots, work in the gardens, or succumb to premature senility through sheer boredom. There is little that is amiable about their fallow decline.

Ne'er-do-wells are plentiful in the coal regions. They are the inbreds, the moonshine befuddled wreckage which, in this generation at least, are beyond response to any gestures of help. Many camps have them. They will continue to breed weak minds and lazy bodies. Nevertheless, it is not true, as many undiscerning peo-

ple contend, that in-breeding and insanity are the rule with any considerable portion of the mountaineers. Incest, idiocy and feeblemindedness are no more prevalent in the Blue Ridge than they are in Oregon or Florida. The lack of institutions to house these offscourings makes their occasional presence more obvious.

Naïve minds do not know how to face strangers, but for that reason they should not be misjudged. Shapeless clothes, indifferently shaven faces, and the general grime of the sooty region gives miners a malign outward appearance not deserved in fact. Traditions of dismal ignorance have made it a sardonic joke to single them out as "the purest Anglo-Saxon blood in the United States," for their present slovenly habits of body and mind are no cause for racial pride. They are children, totally unprepared to meet the struggle of modern civilization. Yet, when given a chance, they have responded with a surprising show of qualities. The bloodstream is merely sluggish.

II

MINERS

In 1900 the mountaineer life was unchanged and unchanging. A boy born at the turn of the century spent a childhood much like that of his great-grandfather's. During his adolescence the orbit of the outside world began to swing across the hills where needed coal reserves were hidden. By 1917 the most remote valleys had heard the rumor that it was possible to earn several dollars a day digging coal. The mountain boy, a grown man at seventeen, was easily persuaded to shake off the poverty of the family cabin and enter the strange black world underground.

Early marriages are the custom. A boy's parents had entered upon matrimony dowried with a few quilts and an ax to hew the cabin. But now the first few months of mining made the son richer than his father. So he found a girl of his own people, as dazzled as he by this great good luck, rented a company house for her and began to raise half a dozen children to be miners after him. He established a mining dynasty for his descendants—barred them from the soil, dedicated them to the sooty valleys where the railroad track is the public highway and the home belongs to that same company which runs the store, supports the schoolhouse and governs every function of life.

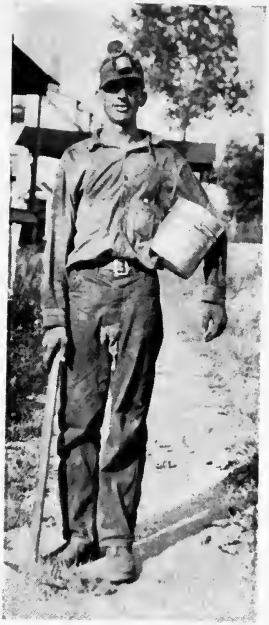
Today, still in his early thirties, this same miner is ridden with dependents, and likely to become a grand-

father before long by dint of his eldest daughter's instincts. In spite of the fact that all his adult life has been as a married man, he will not be able to advise his daughter wisely on courtship or the foolhardiness of giving more hostages to ill fortune. He himself is a man of primitive appetites, strong bodied and uncurbed by any of the considerations which mitigate modern passions and suggest caution.

He takes his morality from constant readings in the Bible, accepting the code of the patriarchs so literally that he himself has become one. Perhaps this attitude is weakening, in some degree, from proximity to the blithe amorality of the negro miners whose camp lies a few hundred yards up the railroad track. Still, God meant a woman to live with one man and to bear him many children. He imagines that those who whisper of birth control have reference to abortions.

Besides his Bible, the sole exercise for his mind is to repeat the union organizer's patter. He begins to suspect that the social order is using him for its own purposes, but he totally lacks comparative standards. He supposes that "folk everywhere are just as bad off."

Consider his life underground. He leaves daylight behind and spends working hours with a single point of light as cheer against infinite darkness. That is not wholly unpleasant. There is a certain swagger about it; it sets him apart from lesser men up top. He is on the front line, a miner, a pretty brave fellow. To smudge a white collar is an annoyance to townsmen, but to get really smudged with soot and sweat from head to feet is not so bad. All day he fights the rock, boring it, blasting it, shoveling it into cars from his knees in a



All day he fights the rock, boring it, blasting it, shoveling it into cars from his knees in a low drift.

In a piping voice he scourged the evil ways of the village, while gesticulating with a gunny sack intended for stealing coal.

four-foot drift, until his stomach cramps and he does not dare eat as much lunch as he would like. He fears the rock, yet grows careless of it, and shrugs his shoulders when they carry someone out with a head bashed by falling slate. There are compensations. It may be bitter cold outside, but the mine room is warm; or people may be fainting with the heat of the sun while he is shaded and cool in the long drifts inside the hill. Best of all, there is no boss to stand over him. He is paid for the number of tons he loads into the cars, and he can sit and smoke if he feels lazy.

In the Western copper mines most companies provide washrooms where the miners rinse their work clothes and drench their tired bodies under a hot showerbath. In the coal mines, where men get much filthier, showers are very rare. Down the mud roads black scarecrows slog their way to shacks where baths are impossible. The woman who watches her miner scrub off the first layer of soot in a tin basin is not likely to keep herself clean nor mind whether her brats change their underwear. Dirt and headlice, unwashed bodies and soft coal smoke in houses crowded three to a room—this is the life to which the miner turns after his day's work.

That he does not rebel more strongly is due to an apathy bred by his ignorance and his religion. Lacking a knowledge of the interests and comforts which the workmen of most industries take for granted, he imagines that life would be a rosy affair if only he could force higher wages out of the boss. That this is not true was proved by the miner himself during the boom, when money merely played on his weaknesses, changing his natural philosophy into bumptiousness. He does

not know how to use money for his happiness. Today, under semi-starvation, he spends ten cents out of a dollar for soft drinks and candy.

His faith in a Paradise not only consoles him for present misery but persuades him that the humbly placed miner has a better chance of entering Heaven than the rich townsmen. There is a profound fatalism about his religion, and it is strengthened by the uncertainty of life underground.

Since the War there have been more than 10,000 miners killed in West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. A quarter of a century ago, one man in every eighty was killed during a single year; now things have improved to the point where a man stands one chance in 250 of death during the twelve months.

In the obituary lists of County newspapers "killed by fall of slate" is the most frequent epitaph. The majority of those killed are crushed by slabs of rock sloughed off the ceiling, so that well-ordered mines now leave two inches of protecting coal to hold the slate in place. Mine motors and cars take the next highest toll; then dust and gas explosions. Five hundred men have been electrocuted in Blue Ridge mines since the War.

Carelessness may often be the cause of a man's death, since the experience of years is no apparent safeguard. More men with eleven to twenty-five years of mining have been killed in accidents than have novices with less than a year underground. On the whole there can be no guarantee against death whenever men try to cut a horizontal slice out of a mountain without letting the top of it fall on them.

Seventy thousand men have been injured in the mines of the Southern coal States since 1918. Most of

them recovered and went back to work; yet the effect —unlike death—is cumulative among the living, each year adding more men with wooden legs and empty sleeves. The loss of an eye frequently follows the bad habit of lighting a powder charge with a short fuse. This year, in a typical coal County, 560 men were too crippled to work in the mines.

The insurance rate of each mine depends on its past accident record. Consequently the operator's dislike of acknowledging an injury puts too great a premium on injustice. The mine doctor, who must sign a statement leading to compensation award, is under a pressure from the company which controls his living.

Compensation money slips through the hands of men who have never acquired any habit of saving. One miner, who was given $230 for the loss of his second eye, invited the neighbors into his hovel to celebrate, and thereafter the place was festive with hospitality until the money was spent and the blind man's family were again subjects of charity. Often the amount of the award is so small that it cannot tide over the period of recuperation. Last Spring a thirty-year-old miner was carried out of a drift with an affliction described as cramps. We met him a month afterward, lying fully dressed upon a sheetless bed. He reached awkwardly under his pillow to show the $58 for which he had signed away all further compensation rights. The mine had shut down since he was stricken. An outside doctor had charged him $25 for services, without telling him that the twisted face and thick speech came from a stroke of apoplexy, or that he would probably never again handle a pick.

Such tragedies are easy to find in the mine fields

when hard times have pushed all the people to the line of bare subsistence, and the sick and the unfit are left with none to help them. A picture of horror could be painted if only the drab colors were selected. It would not, however, present the subtleties of the canvas as a whole.

The miners' psychology under hardship cannot be probed by people who judge by urban standards. During the national depression many city men committed suicide rather than continue life without the amenities which cushion over-taut nerves. But the miner cannot reckon financial ruin in such terms since he never really knew the reverse of poverty.

Typical of many miners is a man we found reading and minding two babies on the porch of a shack in an abandoned village. His manner was courteous and his voice soft, except when ordering his hound dog away from our breeches. He had clear brown eyes, a wide forehead and sensitively cut features. His finger kept a place in a paper-covered book on the life of Christ. He said that he had raised a patch of corn last summer. He gets two days work a week in a mine down the creek, with a top earning of $4.50 a day. He has seven children, five of them in school. Things are tolerable with him. Instead of going to town in store clothes, he stays at home and mends the old ones.

That man's nerves are not jangled. He would never imagine suicide. In most respects he has an easier adjustment to ruin than the business man whose life was built on the prestige of money. Even under ordinary hard times he has the minimum requirements of shelter and food and clothing. He has tightened his belt and is waiting for better days.

The Southern coal miner only dimly realizes that better times are more unlikely for him than for the workman in any other great American industry. There is no one in the mountains to impress on the miner that the present crisis is infinitely more dire than any periods of hardship gone before.

The outward signs of a troubled industry are the same now as they have been in other periods. Wages are cut to the bone. Work is scarce. The operators make greater demands on their men. Loaders are docked for having small amounts of slate mixed with the coal, docked for not filling the cars until they spill over, docked on any excuse. Two men are made to load in one room, making it harder for each to earn as much as he could singly. Men have to wait hours in line in the hope of being assigned a car to fill. The threat of no work at all hangs over every miner to enforce gratitude for the chance to live. When two men want one job the employer can name his own terms.

It is the size of this surplus of miners which makes the present period sinister. If Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia coal was dug by men working only five days a week, the mines could operate with 65,000 less workers. That margin is merely the difference between reasonably steady employment and the number of days a week actually worked. It is based on figures not taking full account of the general depression in industry, which means that there are too many coal miners whether times are good or bad. Should the same comparison be made today—when mines are working only one or two days a week—it would appear that a mere fraction of the population could mine all the coal required.

Statistics can be made to prove anything. They are not needed to make a case for the fact that hundreds of thousands of mine people are dividing a pittance which might possibly give a decent living to half their number.

The depression taught the United States what unemployment can mean. For coal miners this is sure to be a permanent condition. The slump only emphasized the already obvious fact that too many miners had put their confidence in a commodity which the world is coming to use more and more sparingly.

The unwanted ones cling miserably to their valleys. They know no other work; have nowhere else to go. The fringe of those in great distress daily widens to pauperize more able-bodied men. Experience is beginning to teach them what they lack in economic knowledge—that some must get out of the mines or starve.

A natural split is occurring between those who have always been miners and those who went into the mines during the War boom. The latter remain small-farmers at heart. They dream of getting back into the hills with an ax and a mule to start life over again. Since most of them have neither the land nor the money to get back to it, they scratch vegetable gardens in the packed earth around their shacks and talk of crops over their lunches underground. But the old timers have no itch to leave the mines. They would rather stay on and fight the operators for better wages and conditions. They are the most radical. Their minds and hearts, like the farmer group, are mountain bred; but they have singleness of purpose. Their natural inertia is being prodded by a goad too sharp for even them to take with indifference.

III

GRIEVANCES

THE mine is a self-contained town. The company owns the land and the houses. It issues its own money in the form of brass tokens redeemable in goods at the company store. It hires and arms men to guard its property and to police the camp. Usually the valley is so remote that the school is on company property.

There are few checks on the control by operators of the lives of their miners. Each operator is an individualist who wants to be let alone in the conduct of his affairs, although he is willing to meet other operators on the common ground of County politics. Although in violent competition in the sale of their coal, class interest unites them in determination that the right men hold the offices of Sheriff, School Superintendent, County Attorney and, sometimes, the Judge. Sub-rosa County payrolls have not been unknown in the past. Whether or not this is true now, most officials are sympathetic with the operators in those mountain Counties where coal mining is the one industry and all other local businesses depend on its earnings.

Autocratic control of the miners' destinies produces widely different sets of local conditions, ranging from atrocious to good. It is far from true that moral indictments can be brought against all coal companies or all County officials. The danger of the system, how-

ever, lies in the lack of restraint upon those who do choose to grind a heavy heel on their workers. In the Blue Ridge, unions are forbidden and the miners have practically no means of protesting.

The grievances of those who are oppressed are so real that the American public reads the dossier of atrocities collected by investigators and in self-protection closes its eyes to matters apparently so wholly wrong that there can be no remedy. Yet such unrelieved emphasis on existing evils neither takes into account the brighter spots nor suggests that the roots of the evils may lie as much in an archaic system as in the bad nature of man. In effect a one-sided viewpoint makes change for the better more difficult. The decent operators are filled with resentment that they should be classed with the wrong-doers. They see that abuses exist; they themselves are constantly tempted by the ease with which miners can be exploited. But, so long as the public gives them all a bad name, it seems useless to make an individual stand for improvement.

It is perhaps time to examine these grievances less in the sensational style than in the manner of rational people who want to get rid of them.

The housing problem is a relic of the years when there were no hard-surfaced highways in the mountains. Then trails coursed up the valley bottoms, often running on the slate bed of the creek. Wet weather made these roads impassable. It was reasonable in the pioneering years that the living quarters, store and school should be grouped near the tipple. These first villages were camps in the literal sense, meant to shelter male workers who might later import their women.

The log cabin had an air of being suited to the casual life.

The barrenness of the miner's shack is that of stricken imagination.

Since the life of a mine is short, and the industry at best is uncertain, the houses were presumed to be temporary. Cheap board shacks, all alike and huddled side by side, were erected with the idea that they might be scrapped without much loss.

From the start the mine company was the landlord, and there is small chance that this will be changed. A miner has no incentive to put money into a house which he can occupy only so long as he keeps his job. Nor would anyone buy the house if he left on his own accord.

For these temporary shelters the miners have little respect. In discontented camps the inner doors are often torn down for firewood. One miner, in the good years, tried to rise above drab uniformity by buying wallpaper for his three rooms. Later he was fired. Before he left he spent a morning laboriously spitting tobacco juice over the wallpaper of his former pride.

Love of home is nipped at the root by fear of eviction. In the old life the wives made the cabins bright with patchwork quilts, strings of dried vegetables, hams and sacks of corn hung along the walls. There were hand-hewn chairs with hickory bark seats. Grass and wildflowers grew to the doorway. However bare and slovenly, the log cabin had the mellowness of age and an air of being suited to the casual life of the family.

The barrenness of the miner's shack is that of stricken imagination. The wife has forgotten how to quilt and embroider. She gets her food in tins. Iron cots replace wooden bedsteads and corn-shuck mattresses. There is a smell of the washtub indoors instead of an iron kettle for boiling clothes in the open. The yard around the mine shack is trodden dirt.

The indolence of the mountaineer nature shows at its worst in these sickening hovels. The old instinct for beauty expressed itself in songs and in the telling of mountain sagas, in weaving homespuns, in familiarity with the seasons, animals and birds. A child growing up in a mine town has little touch with these things. Filth and hardship form his impressions in the house. Out-of-doors, his playground is a gob pile. The mountains are very near, usually rising unspoiled from either side of this man-made scar. Yet these hills are not really the same. It only requires a trip away from them into places where no coal is mined to realize that a sense of oppression has been lifted from the soul.

Bad housing is the rule, but there are exceptions. Many companies, particularly the large ones, improve vastly on this picture. There are towns with painted houses, widely spaced and surrounded by grass and trees. Some have running water and bathtubs. Prizes are given for the neatest house and the best garden. It is easy to make life tolerable, even in a mine town. Invariably the people react to the effort with greater decency and inner content.

Rents are low by city standards, usually $2 a room a month. When the miner is making good wages, this is nothing. Nowadays it may take half his income to occupy a shack on which no repairs have been made for years, and which rents at the same price as it did during the War.

The fundamental trouble with mine housing is the persistence of the idea that they are camps to shelter roving workmen instead of what they might be—country villages for sane and cheerful living. Is it necessary that the worst features of city slums should be

set down in mountain valleys, that houses should be bunched along a railroad track in the center of hundreds of acres of laurel covered hills?

The original purpose of this huddling is gone. Good roads have done away with the need for miners to live in the shadow of the tipple. If the coal in a particular mine works out, miners from a central village could ride the few miles to the new site, packed in automobile trucks, as they are now in some places.

The much older mine villages of England have no such flimsy structures as house our miners. In our rush to open the coal seams we have let a temporary expedient become a permanent blight.

There is an aspiration in America at large to decentralize the cities, to place people in small communities where they may have country life and at the same time enjoy the advantages of good roads, schools and modern homes. The mines are reproachful examples of how far we are falling behind this possibility. There is no sound reason for such complete failure. The details can be worked out, providing a resolve is taken that horrors must not be foisted on a people too inexperienced to help themselves.

As with every other consideration in the miners' lives, good housing depends on the stability of the industry. . . . There are many points of attack to every national problem. Housing is a tempting digression; but here we are dealing with the human side, with the ruffling of men's tempers by injustice.

The prices at company stores are a grievance to miners. It makes no difference in their frame of mind whether an operator tries to set fair prices, since cheating has been so general that all operators are suspected.

Miners are usually constrained to buy at the company store, either because it is the only store, or because they know they will lose their jobs if they buy elsewhere.

In bad times company prices tend to drop to standard levels. Miners with so little to spend for food become highly critical if pinto beans are a few cents higher than in the town. There is a limit of endurance beyond which the most daring operator cannot go.

It depends on the individual operator. Some have always been fair; others charge outrageous prices in order to recover in store profits what they have handed to the miners in wages. This is a mean subterfuge, a confession that the operator is either greedy or that he will fail unless he robs his men. The custom is altogether disreputable, and the source of much bitter feeling.

Scrip is the token money accepted at the company stores. It is an advance on wages which an out-of-debt miner does not have to take unless he wishes to draw ahead of pay day. Actually, miners are so in debt to their companies that a majority never receives cash and so must buy everything at the company stores. If prices are the same as in independent stores, then scrip should be worth 100 cents on the dollar. But no one contends that scrip is not at a discount. A check-up on many instances revealed that a dollar's worth of scrip brings on the average seventy-five cents in cash.

In West Virginia the law entitles a man to par value for scrip on demand. Few miners know the law; practically none of them dares invoke it.

Short weight on the coal the miners load is possible in mines where the men do not hire their own check-

weighman to watch the scales. Rarely is there a check-weighman found at non-union mines. The miner credited with filling a two-ton car may actually have loaded 4,500 pounds. The only thing of which he can be certain is that he is not paid for more than two tons. The benefit of the doubt is, as usual, in the operator's favor.

High store prices, scrip, short coal weight . . . here are means by which the unscrupulous operator can so manipulate matters that the wage scale, although supposedly a constant factor, can be made merely an original credit subject to three methods of whittling down. The miners are justified in suspecting the motives which contrived such a system.

The mine doctor, above all others the man who could help the people, falls depressingly short of his opportunity. He is the hireling of the company, yet his wages are paid out of cuts from the wages of the men. A toll is taken from every ton of coal the miners load in order to pay the salary of a man who holds his living by grace of the operator's favor, not theirs.

Probably the miner pays more for medical care in hard times than any other class of workman, since the doctors' salaries remain where they were in good years, whereas the miners' wages and days of work are cut below the subsistence level. Not infrequently a $1.50 a month fixed charge for the doctor is as much as the family spends for food in a week.

Although the doctor may live in the camp, he usually has an outside practice. His principal duty at the mine is to treat the injured. This he does well. Injuries are by law subject to compensation. It saves the company money to patch up those who can make claims against

it. The doctor has power to sign the certificate necessary for an injured man to claim compensation. There is no recourse if the doctor turns him down. Doctors sometimes lend themselves to the trick of persuading the injured to sign away future rights for a paltry sum.

Theoretically the doctor is on call to treat all the sick in the camp. In extenuation it may be said that he is frequently pestered by complaints made for the pleasure of consultation. But there the brief for him ends. The range of the mine doctor's callousness runs from laziness to malpractice. He is difficult to reach. I have talked with a miner who had been waiting three days for the doctor to visit a dying child, to a mother whose daughter was given pills in a diphtheria case because the doctor would not run his car a few hundred yards through the mud to visit the house.

There is little preventive medicine done among a people subject to many diseases of malnutrition. Pellagra comes from a constant diet of corn meal and pork. It makes the skin itch, attacks the nerves and ends in insanity. In their ignorance the people take quack medicines advertised in the County newspapers.

In one rich coal County a unit sent in by the State Board of Health was forced to leave because it treated syphilis cases at rates below those of the local doctors.

There are exceptions to everything in this raw land of contrasts. A few doctors slave for their people. Some large companies have public health nurses and give health examinations. But in general the company system is actively resented by the miners, and held in small esteem by outsiders who have observed health being sacrificed for profit.

Mine guards are ostensibly hired to protect prop-

erty. There is nothing to prevent them from extending this trust to the duty of protecting their employers, the operators, in any way these see fit. Legitimate in theory, the guards can on occasion become paid thugs to enforce the operator's will. It is the practice in most mountain Counties to swear in the guards as deputy sheriffs, thus forging the will of the law with that of the operator to make an all-powerful weapon against the miners.

The guards are passionately hated. When trouble is in the air the guards' careers are likely to be short, and, knowing this, they notch their guns with the lives of many miners before it is their turn to die.

It would seem that peace can make little headway in these tortured valleys where economics moves in a vicious circle and old habits of oppression are so entrenched that the oppressors do not recognize themselves as such. However, on the one point of mine guards alone it is possible to point out what can be done when men of courage make the effort.

Judge Charles G. Baker, of the Circuit Court in Morgantown, once served in the militia called out to control a strike at Paint Creek, and there conceived a dislike of armed troops as a means of settling labor disputes. He also saw the danger of mine guard brutality. Now, as Judge, he will not allow his district to be ridden by the system which brings bloodshed to others. The guards, although paid by the companies, are supervised in this County by the prosecuting attorney. They are not allowed to be non-residents, and they themselves must obey the law. Hired solely to protect the property of their employers, they can only be armed when actually on it. They are not given the standing

of deputy sheriffs. To become a mine guard a man must appear with two character witnesses and post a bond of $3,500 for possible damage in the use of his pistol. His permit must be renewed each year, and can be denied in case of bad conduct.

In the last strike in this region there were as many mine guards arrested as there were miners, on the theory that the peace is best kept by enforcing the law equally. That seems obvious, yet the notion has not yet penetrated many Counties. There were plenty of fist fights during this strike, but no gun wounds.

In this same County the mine companies are prosecuted when they overcharge at their stores; and the miners are reminded that they can cash scrip anytime they wish.

Judge Baker is cited not for unusual humanity, but to illustrate what that quality can do when translated into action. The traditional grievances of the miners need the attention of just men with a sense of shame that those in power should be insensitive to misery.

IV

OPERATORS

It is as impossible to generalize about coal operators as it is to pillory all bankers, or to assert that every cotton converter has red hair. Absurdities of exaggeration follow attempts to take sides for or against the operators as a class. It is safer to sift them one by one as human beings, determining whether this one is benevolent or a tyrant, that one intelligent or prejudiced.

The accent generally put on the sensational side of strikes and mine guard brutality favors a public impression that the coal operators are unusually savage toward labor. This is true in too many cases; yet it is more reasonable to conclude that special circumstances bred this brutality than to assume that particularly bloodthirsty men chose the career of coal executive.

In like manner, the inability of the operators to agree on plans to prevent the collapse of their industry argues a high degree of incompetence. Yet any normal group of American business men, forced to feel their way through the same chaos, might do no better.

The mining of coal is troublesome for all concerned. Disorders perennially upset the industry, in good times as in bad. Peculiarly devilish conditions of production

and sale harass the operators and distort both their judgment and their sense of fair play. One disillusioned operator remarked to me:

"A single coal man may have sense; two operators together have less sense than one alone; a lot of operators together haven't any sense at all."

There is frustration in their minds. The debacle of the past decade has convinced most of them that the system must be changed or go to complete smash. Nevertheless, it requires an astute man to see beyond his own coal valley, and a brave man to act against his own interests for the general good.

At heart every operator is a capitalist, whether he owns the mine or runs it for someone else. One must risk money to open a mine, so all rewards belong to the man who takes the chance. Anyone who prates of coal being a national asset—something to be reserved for the use of the people—does so because he hasn't sunk any money in the business. . . .

"Where would I be if it wasn't for the foreign capital that opened up this State?—back at the head of the creek with my jeans and my cowhide boots, raising a patch of corn! My people pioneered these mountains, fought the Indians and cleared the land. We'd all be hill billies if Northern money hadn't taken a liking to the coal. Ten years ago there wasn't a good road hereabouts. Folk went up the creeks to get in, and were winter-bound for months. City people don't realize what that means. The coal companies pay the taxes that built these roads. You may say the people were better off when they farmed their own land; they could eat regular. But it isn't capital that's wrong—it's the fact that the mines are being run for the bene-

fit of people in the cities who have never seen the mines and wouldn't dare take a look to find out what's happening."

In that tortured statement by an adherent of the capitalist system lies a possible germ of change. He advocates giving the surface rights of the land back to the people so that they can make a part-time living from the soil and some cash from digging the coal for the companies. Another disturbed capitalist will cherish a different panacea, yet, in the large, coal operators are in a mood to consider any change which promises relief from the humbling hand of disaster.

A minority of operators, unable to face reality, persist in hanging on to every tenet of the sorry old order. They hope to keep miners in poverty so that they can have a permanent supply of cheap labor. They snarl at the mention of a labor union. They will consider no claims of other operators. They are hard-fisted feudal lords whose castles must fall about their ears before they will surrender to reason. They are dangerous men, for their strength is by no means spent.

In the Blue Ridge coal fields there are recognizable types of operators—the "snow-bird," so called from his habit of flitting in and out of the industry; the paternalist, whether an individual or a large company; and the die-hard conservative.

The snow-bird is deservedly unpopular with his *confrères*. His small holding lies idle until a rise in coal prices makes it profitable to enter the field. Temporary shacks and cheap equipment can place this fly-by-night in a better position than established companies with big overhead. In 1920 there were 4,000 wagon mines in operation, and in that year they shipped

4,500,000 tons of bituminous coal. These snow-birds are described in a United States Bureau of Mines report as follows:

> "They are chiefly important in the Appalachians, where coal outcrops abundantly along the railroads and surfaced highways. Under such conditions coal can be dug with almost no capital investment. The labor cost at wagon mines is high. Such workings can compete in shipping by rail only in periods of high prices, but can open or close without thought of fixed charges, depreciation and maintenance; their only consideration is the price of coal on the spot market."

Beneath these matter-of-fact remarks are 4,000 stories of excited hopes and—usually—broken fortunes. Here is the brief career of one boom snow-bird, as he himself tells it:

"I left college to enlist for the War, spent twenty-three months overseas and didn't get back until the Spring of 1920. The town looked much more alive than I had remembered it. In France I had promised myself a silk shirt as soon as I got home, sort of a gesture to prove I was through with cooties and mud. I couldn't believe the clerk when he told me that an assortment of peppermint-shade silk shirts came at $20 apiece. He said it was the coal boom and that the miners had bid up the market on silk shirts. I left the store with my Army shirt still on my back and with my eyes wide open to something pretty exciting to a lad in search of a job. Down the street I met a couple of old friends. Before the War they hadn't a nickel to their names. They interrupted each other to tell me how much they were worth now. A few days later a banker offered to

loan me $10,000, without security, to set me up in the mining business. He said I couldn't lose.

"Within a month a partner and I were operating our own shoestring mine. At $8 a ton we were coining money. Then a defective boiler made us shut down for a month. Almost as soon as we started operations again the peak of the boom had passed. We held on for a while, then lost all we had put in, plus what we could borrow.

"I had no right trying to be a coal operator. Our main contribution was to make a mess of a perfectly good coal seam, so that no one else will be able to mine it when a real need arrives."

This snow-bird can smile now at his fatuousness. He is young still, and can remember the adventure without bitterness. He admits, however, that his operations helped disrupt the industry and that his high wages beckoned men from the farms to their ultimate sorrow.

There is another type of operator, whose actions are those of a tyrant yet whose motives would be accepted as respectable in less contentious industries.

Robinson was born on land which his great-grandfather had taken away from the Indians after Pontiac's rebellion. He was educated at the State University and Harvard Law School, then settled down as a small town Southern lawyer with intimate knowledge of his own community and important personal connections with people in Boston and Philadelphia. In 1916 he came alive to the possibilities of coal mining in the County. He found an experienced operator as a partner. They acquired a lease, capitalized it to raise money for machinery, and prospered so well that the company plowed back enough earnings to buy 18,000 acres

containing 40,000,000 tons of coal in reserve. Robinson's original investment of $15,000 was now worth $167,000. He is a frugal man, and was so deeply interested in building up his capital structure that he never withdrew more than $5,000 a year from his mounting fortune. Most of his miners owned automobiles; Robinson never did.

The company shared in the boom winnings. At the end of the summer of 1920 Robinson valued his equity at $350,000. But this was based on the earning capacity of the land, and during the next four years this declined with the price of coal. By 1924 coal was selling at $2 a ton. If it fell still further, and if the recently signed Jacksonville scale of minimum wages went into effect, Robinson's mine would begin to lose money. He and his partner agreed not to sign the agreement.

The men struck. The company had a contract to supply a railroad with 300,000 tons of coal, but the recalcitrant miners refused to get out of the shacks needed to house whatever scab labor could be imported to dig coal for the contract. Eviction notices were posted. That, when the miners are strong enough to fight back, is always a declaration of war.

Three years of nightmare resulted for both miners and operators. Robinson the genial lawyer became Robinson the hated operator, sitting at dinner in his own home with a rifle across his knees. The evicted miners rolled barrels of dynamite into the street between the shacks where the scabs now had their unhappy being. Robinson hired eleven veterans who had manned machine guns at Chateau-Thierry.

"Never take the offensive," they were instructed, "but finish anything anybody starts."

In the first battle the new guards lay on their bellies behind sputtering guns. Afterward seventy-five bullets from the miners' rifles were counted in the wall behind them. One War hero lay dead as a hired gun thug. In a second fight the union-owned hall was burned to the ground. Each side accused the other of firing it, and later the union sued for its value in the courts.

Who won this war? The union lost its strength. Robinson lost his property. Today he is deeply in debt. His remnant of coal holdings is under the Sheriff's hammer. He is old, he is tired, but he still has his highlander pride.

"This is my country. My people settled it. I would have been a damned coward to let them run me out."

In that he is being a mouthpiece for his great-grandfather, the Indian chaser. The lawyer in him keeps reiterating:

"Contracts should be maintained, free from the dictates of anyone."

How can Robinson be evaluated in this unhappy rôle as coal operator? He is a capitalist who met the claims of labor with machine gun bullets. Yet today, chastened and humanized again by disaster, he is sharing his pittance from a disrupted law practice with a family of eleven persons, not relatives. In hot blood his actions had a share in bringing about the downfall of the union; today he expresses a conviction that labor should be given the chance to organize as a stabilizing force for the entire industry.

He is a paradox. The qualities of rugged independence, so greatly admired in the great-grandfathers of all the Robinsons, were applied to a cause which society cannot applaud. He had the education and the

heart to be successful without doing violence to his own ethical code—in almost any other industry. There is still a spark of fire about him when he defends his actions, but he loses animation and his eyes fill with pain when he says: "It made an old man of me."

"Robinson," of course, is a pseudonym. But the man himself is real, and there are many more of him. Something is wrong with the system which wastes such material.

Paternalism is the normal relation between comparatively educated employers and untrained workmen. Nowhere in the United States is this as strong as in the mountain coal fields. The operators can give or deny livelihood.

Paternalism is well-meaning in some camps, selfish in others, according to the character of the operator. The hard-boiled operator holds his men in a peonage degrading to both. It is so easy to treat these hunkies as inferiors who must be kept in their place. They were never used to anything better. If you lose your grip they will raise hell. . . . Fear of the miners is responsible for tyranny in some cases. In others unadulterated hoggishness wields the whip.

In one mine the great fan which ventilates the drift got out of order. The operator would do nothing about it. Work in the thick air gave asthma to one miner, who then tried to collect signatures for the petition which, under the law, allows ten miners to summon an inspector from the State Bureau of Mines. The men were afraid to sign. It would mean their jobs. So the foul air remained.

Many such incidents could be cited. The very nature of the paternal relationship drains from small men

whatever original humanity they owned. Nowadays, under the spur of dwindling profits, they do things to their miners which the general public listens to with skepticism as the ranting of radical propagandists.

Confusion of mind and heart assails the observer who talks to these operators in their own setting. For instance, this one speaks in fatherly vein of his people. He wants them to have their rights—but you can't trifle with miners when they get into a black mood. . . . By that he had reference to the occasion when someone in the camp blew up the drum-house, whereupon the operator evicted ten families. Pregnant women were driven into a shelterless winter night. The operator agonized over this; yet he did it.

Judgments in such cases are tinged with futility. The mind must search back of the event, and there comes to the conclusion that paternalism itself is too dangerous an instrument to be left unchecked in the hands of any group of men.

The alternative is a meeting between men, who respect each other, to thresh out whatever is troubling either side. Before that can happen in the coal mining industry the operators must slough off old habits and the miners must be educated several pegs higher than they are now. It will require a long time.

Meanwhile, paternalism has a brighter side. For every atrocity there are twenty considerate actions done by operators alive to the needs of their people. This is still paternalism—part of the dangerous system wherein the heartless can be vested with power—but in the better phase it provides the only present chance for fair-dealing.

On the whole the big companies have learned that

their profits are more certain if they build decent houses, provide shower baths and toss in an occasional tennis court. American industry learned much about workman psychology during the post-War decade, and this wisdom is reflected in mild degree in the coal fields. Good camps attract the best workmen. It is ledger benevolence. Sometimes, however, the intentions of the parent company break down in the regime of the local mine manager. In the best of coal camps the welfare work is pitifully inadequate compared to the benefits gained by more sophisticated bodies of workmen, such as the Railroad Brotherhoods, through their own initiative. Miners lose advantages in the degree that they are naïve.

Benevolent paternalism is perhaps better illustrated where the owner-miner relationship is direct.

Let him go by the name of Sam White. He is a second generation operator, with the judgment and the engineering skill to keep his mine open while less able competitors are going into bankruptcy. His camp occupies a knoll within a circle of wooded hills. The houses are widely spaced on a gridiron of red mud roads. Some front yards have trees, and the winter ghosts of corn and cabbage stalks show where the miners raised small gardens last summer. Beyond the schoolhouse is a large baseball field. There is a double row of garages, relics of the boom, now empty. The company store is clean and well stocked. Prices are no higher than those in the County seat stores.

Everything is serene in this village except the inhabitants. They are on short rations. Their clothes are worn out. They hardly ever see a dollar in cash. The great world beyond their hills demands only enough

coal production to keep the mines open two days a week, and the wages from this cannot keep pace with an uninterrupted production of children in the camp. Paternalism here, however well intentioned, cannot satisfy hunger nor brighten the outlook for children whom their fathers' industry will never need.

White and his family own this mine. He is officially a capitalist, one who gets out of bed before daylight every morning, spends twelve hours a day underground in miner's clothes, knows every soul in the camp and is always present when a birth or a death might be the easier for his attentions.

We stood at the tipple to watch the day shift leave the mine. A miner handed his pay slip to White and complained that the deductions for rent and food advances left him with only 32 cents in cash for two weeks' work. Here was the traditional grievance that the company gives wages with one hand and takes them back with the other. Miner and operator talked it out with mutual and unforced grins.

"You're living with your brother, aren't you?"

"Yep."

"Didn't we agree that you as a bachelor would pay his rent so that he'd have enough money to feed his kids?"

"That's right."

"Well, look here—with only two days' work a week you can't pay that rent and have much cash left. I'm stuck too, Joe. I can't get contracts enough to keep us going more than two days a week. Sorry."

The miner tugged at his coal-dusted mustache, looked woefully at the cash balance on his pay slip, and slouched down the hill.

I asked White why he couldn't let the houses go rent-free during these hard times.

"It's fifty-fifty whether I give them the houses free and reduce their wages or keep the wages up and collect rents. At the present price of coal any increase to the men would make me shut down and throw them all out of work. I haven't the money to lose."

He took the lever of the electric engine and drove us for a mile straight through the mountain. Facets of light shone in the headlight beam far down the narrowing tunnel of coal. The air was still and smelled lifeless. On a curve the track spread and put the engine off the track, posing a problem for two men without jacks or crowbars. We sloshed over the slippery ties to find help, and finally heard the muffled hum of a cutter at work. The two miners were operating a squat monster with a flat seven-foot blade around whose rim barbs revolve at high speeds to cut the coal. The small room pulsed with racket as the blade disappeared into the face. Black dust swirled in gloom feebly relieved by the cap lamps. The cutters finished their job and for the first time paid us any notice. They were a curious looking pair, with soot bearding their chins and cheeks, and their eyes bright from the acetylene flames above their sweaty foreheads. They laughed at the story of the disabled engine. A good one on the boss. They stored their tools on the machine, which drew its blade into itself, wound up the coil of wire and started down the track under its own power.

"A machine like that is not a safe plaything for greenhorns," White said as we trailed it down the drift. "These two men make fifteen undercuttings a night with it. Good pair."

A dollar's worth of scrip brings an average of seventy-five cents in cash.

For twenty-five cents a man can get enough corn likker to make him sodden.

They had the engine on the track again in two minutes. We threaded a way out to daylight. Here White spoke his mind. . . . The men he hired knew their jobs. The foreman is accurate in marking new cuttings so that walls won't bulge; the miners use blasting powder with decent respect, and they cut away pillars that hold the roof over their heads without killing themselves and wrecking the mine. This is no game for a sloppy worker. The boom brought the amateur miner into the fields; the industry must find means to get him out. Eventually there will be a minimum of seasoned miners who will do the nation's coal digging and be well paid for it, if only operators will stop ruining each other with cut-throat tactics. . . .

"Where will all the misfits go to earn a living?"

White shrugs his shoulders. "I'm a coal operator, not an economist. There are a lot of children growing up in my camp. They worry me. As far as this mine is concerned, most of them will have to forage for work somewhere else."

White is typical of the comparative success which integrity can bring in managing a small property. But he is playing an independent hand. To the general problem of coal mining he contributes nothing.

A passion for social improvement cannot be said to be a characteristic typical of coal operators. Nevertheless, there are many who have changed their minds on important points during recent years. In most mountain Counties it is not politic for an individual to break away from his class conviction that the miners must not be allowed to organize a union. In the very center of this opposition, publicly and with fervor, an operator last winter made this speech:

"Prices are downright criminal at a lot of company stores. I know of a profit of thirty-four percent on bare necessities. That man is taking back all the miners can make. . . . Any employee has a right to a voice in an organization to protect himself. And if we give them that right they can do for us what we can't do for ourselves—stabilize coal prices. It can't be done from the top. Operators don't trust each other. We need the unions as a police agency to see that we operators act square with each other. We've got to give the miners a voice to stop this damnable cut-throat competition and the taking out of our stupidities on the miners. Blood is paying today for what brains should have done."

V

DOWNPULL OF POVERTY

THE hunger of many people in a richly productive country inspires a general fear that so unwieldy an economic scheme may collapse entirely. Hunger is the most easily understood symptom of a sick civilization. Few people normally miss two meals in succession, yet each realizes that hunger, like pain, is worse in actual experience than one had thought possible.

Out of this instinctive reasoning the words "starving miners" have been much used to convey an impression that the mine areas are desperate. But how hungry actually are the miners? Acute starvation causes distended bellies, pipe-stem legs and drawn skin. These, so far, are rare in the mine fields. Starvation is too loose a term. The case is less dramatic and, by the same token, less easily epitomized in a phrase.

Certain investigators, for instance, were amazed last winter that lack of money to buy food is not the only cause of malnutrition among the mountain people. When they found the mine children grossly underweight, they blamed the low wages of the fathers. Shortly, however, they discovered that the children of nearby mountain farmers were undernourished in a like degree. Being honest investigators, they had to revise the opinion that higher mine wages alone can cure malnutrition. First it is necessary to rid the moun-

taineers of their outrageous diet, to teach them to use milk and fresh vegetables instead of corn bread and beans soaked in hog fat. It began to appear that the importation of such prosaic persons as public health nurses might save more lives in a month than the gun thugs have ever snuffed out.

There already existed a background of semi-starvation from bad diet. Then an actual lack of sufficient food of any description came with the downfall of the coal industry. For five years the miners' principal interest in food has been to stifle the ache by eating bulky foods, usually starches. To wash it down they have compounded a mess of flour and water, known locally as bull-dog gravy. Here is a typical menu for a week, taken from case cards:

BREAKFAST	LUNCH	SUPPER
beans	o	beans
beans	o	potatoes
potatoes	o	beans
gravy and apples	o	beans
syrup	o	beans and bread
beans	o	beans

In this camp thirty-two families were examined. Of 161 children, 60 were in poor health, an average of two out of five children in every family. One of every two parents was listed as actively sick.

Is there a relation here between health and income? —showing a lack of food over and beyond the question of diet? The miners of the camp worked seven days a month, earning $17.50 each. The deductions for rent, etc., are $11.00 a month, leaving $6.50 for a family of seven to buy food. Clothes, under these conditions, are

out of the question. The 224 persons in that camp have a daily food ration of three cents apiece.

In the winter of 1931-32 a gentleman in the South voluntarily went on a diet costing him nine cents a day, in a public demonstration that life can be supported on so small a sum. The martyr, however, began his ordeal in a state of previously nourished well-being. It is quite another matter when years of hunger have reduced bodily resistance. Many mine children, upon being given milk last winter, could not drink a full pint until practice expanded their stomachs to normal size.

The signs of extreme poverty are open to casual observation in the mountain coal Counties. A woman hailed the car to ask for a lift. She was 43 years old, pregnant, the mother of twenty children of whom seventeen are dead. She has tuberculosis. Her errand was to walk ten miles to the town to ask for Red Cross aid. An isolated case, surely, yet one whose very existence accuses civilization.

In one County there is a public dumping ground where men, women and children—and sometimes a family of pigs—root for morsels of garbage. Some school teachers of the County seat were asked to make a survey of the mine children. Skeptical that real suffering existed, they returned frantic over what they had seen.

The cows in the mine fields wander during the winter months in disconsolate search for fodder. They forage along the roads to chew paper boxes and newspapers. Many are dry, not from the season alone but because their owners cannot buy them food.

There are still mine camps where three meals are eaten daily, but they become more and more scarce

as the failing coal market cuts down the number of working days. At the other extreme are the mines shut down by bankruptcy. Here the responsibility of the operators has ended. Beggary, moonshine-making and strange subterfuges take the place of wages.

Between these two fall the great majority of mines kept going for years on the borderline of dire want. To these conditions three quarters of a million mountaineer people seem permanently condemned.

Statistics to show their condition are so alike in all Counties that one mine may stand as typical: The following monthly deductions vary only in detail from mine to mine:

Rent	$5.00
Light	1.00
Powder	2.00
Doctor	.90
Insurance	2.00
Sick fund	1.00
Checkweighman	.20
Total	$12.10

The miner is paid 22½ cents a ton here for loading coal. The men loaded 84 tons each during eight working days in the month, an income of $18.90 a month. After the company deductions were made, each family had $6.80 left to spend for food. That is less than five cents a day per person.

No Government or operator statistics can be had to draw a picture of penury in the mine fields as a whole. However, figures were obtained last winter

showing that one County with a mining population of 27,000 persons had an average of 1½ days work a week to sustain them. There again the five-cent-a-day ration is general. What the pinched faces and empty larders seem to indicate can be substantiated each time that an examination of wages is made.

Hunger plays different tunes on people according to their fiber. Some whine in beaten self-respect; some crave relief in violence. But the majority of miners take hunger in stride with the other woes of poverty. When disaster is complete, the sturdy stock of the human family seems to contrive a protective fatalism, not unlike serenity. The competitive emotions attached to pride and ceremony are burned away by the one great need to keep alive. Courage and love of kind attain the power of simplicity.

Here are the people found in five mine shacks, visited at haphazard during a morning's round of a recently abandoned village.

It lies in the bottomlands of the Tug River, facing the steep hills which rise directly from the Kentucky shore of the stream. The road to the camp runs along a golf links, now freshly green under a light Spring rain. The golf links was constructed during prosperous years for the pleasure of the County seat business men. It contains more arable acreage than can be found for miles around. If cut up into small patches for idle miners to till, it could feed hundreds of families for the entire year. The idea has not occurred to the golfers.

At the far end of the links the camp begins. Scars show where the railroad spur was recently torn up. The tipple is dismantled of machinery. The mine will

never reopen. The houses of the former miners are leased to a man who sub-lets them at a profit to miners still with jobs in nearby mines.

We were invited into the first house by a six-foot blond miner who was hoeing a front yard onion patch. He found chairs for us. Three silent and wide-eyed children stood beside their mother to watch the strangers. There is, however, no feeling of strangeness on either side. They like to know who you are, and talk freely about themselves. Lemmie, the father, is thirty years old. His father was a prosperous farmer in Kentucky. The old man disapproved of his taking a job as a car boy in the mines when he was twelve. Now, after eighteen years as a miner, he has nothing to show for it but a few rags on the family's backs and a hope that the garden will do well this Spring. He wishes he were back on the farm—so do most of the men he knows. Look how every hillside is being cleared for crops, with new split fences around every square foot the men can claim. He himself could not get hold of more land than the piece around the shack. His wife means to preserve most of what he grows, for next winter is likely to be worse still.

There was no complaint in their words or voices. We shook hands all around, and left to call at the house of two widows.

The mother was a sentimental old lady, melting into easy tears in narrating the death of her husband from pneumonia, contracted by going underground when he was already sick. The daughter's husband was killed by a fall of slate. Both women take turns hitch-hiking to town for Red Cross food donations. The daughter is planting a garden in the yard.

Their troubles were recounted in a casual vein. How to keep going is the substance of village conversation. What really excited the old lady was the current gossip about the Leckies, a smart young wife and a no-account husband, whom the landlord was about to turn out of camp because they could pay no rent. Someone had persuaded the Salvation Army to give the couple railroad fare to the last town he had worked in, with no other view than to get rid of them here. The Leckies were to be evicted as soon as the wife's rheumatism was well enough for her to travel.

She drew an unsavory portrait of the Leckies. The husband was tubercular. When he exerted himself he spat blood and his fever rose, so that no mine would hire him. He was lazy, too, for the neighbors had heard his rheumatic wife calling for a glass of water, and then the voice of Leckie grumbling about it.

We found the two Leckie babies crawling around the porch in single rag shifts, wet from sallies into the drizzle. The youngest must have been sitting on his bare bottom in the yard mud. In one of the two small rooms Leckie was boiling a pot of coffee, a sullen man, with preternaturally bright eyes set in a face made more pallid by contrast with a black stubble of beard. A woman called to us from the next room.

Everything about the shack suggested that Leckie's wife would be repellent. Instead, there was a slender girl with copper hair, clear blue eyes and fair skin. Her nose and cheeks and chin were modeled with sensitive distinction, and held a cheerful candor which lit the rayless room with beauty. She was lying on a bare bed in a nightgown, propped on her elbow. Her speech was mountain. First, she said, her thumb had

swelled, then it had gone to her knee. She had tried to set her foot to ground that morning but couldn't manage it very well yet. She is twenty-two, and the older of her babies is nearly three.

We were abashed; gave some advice about her rheumatism; spoke a few hesitant words of sympathy, then said good-by. Outside we said in one voice: "How did she ever marry Leckie?"

Next door lived Moore, the lay preacher, with his wife and six children. He has been a miner for twenty-five years, yet looks amazingly young compared to the old woman who marshaled the children to the front porch to exhibit their tattered jeans.

"Never saw such times," she said. "Ain't bought a stitch of clothes for 'em in a year."

Moore was a handsome man, and very voluble. There was an impression of watching the face of a weather-beaten lawyer whose small-talk had suddenly taken a turn for the querulous details of daily living. He recited his inability to keep up his head on current wages. He owes $20 to the landlord of the abandoned camp. The outside mine, where he gets a few days work a month, charges him the regular ninety cent cut for medical care in spite of the fact that the doctor refuses to make visits out of the camp limits. This, said Moore, means spending a sixteenth of his monthly income for no benefit. In January an outside doctor charged him $15 for delivering his youngest baby, and the family have nearly starved ever since trying to pay the bill.

Our last call was at the Burchards', a young married couple with one baby, and another on the way. Mrs. Burchard, like Mrs. Leckie, owns a beauty which

would be held rare in any surroundings. She was bare-legged and dressed in a bright frock salvaged from better times. There was gentility in her manner and appearance, but they were clouded by being too sober, too conscious that her youth will be gone before there is chance for happiness. Her man came in, a straightforward lad with an acre on the hill which he is planting to corn. The two of them have determination, and a better chance to work out reasonable lives than have the ailing Leckies.

These people are not chosen to display extreme cases. They are run-of-the-mill.

All who approach the miners without prejudice come away with a strong liking for them. This, however, does not imply that one must wink an eye at their foibles, their ignorance and their outright faults. Day by day in the mine fields the cancer growth of poverty can be seen sending poisonous fibers into the life of the people.

Last winter thievery became common. Pigs and chickens were stolen, sometimes to the great hardship of their owners. Cattle and hogs were driven to lonely hollows and slaughtered at night. There were many hold-ups of gasoline stations. Company stores, and even the supply rooms of charitable organizations, were looted. There is a fringe of men who, as they themselves say, would rather go to hell than beg. Many conscientious men, in despair over the misery of their families, were sent to jail for the theft of bare necessities. The judges not seldom carried out the law with sad eyes. In town after town there have been delegations of miners walking in to demand free food as the

right of last resort. These matters are not mentioned in the local newspapers.

Mountain morality is as fundamental as mountain religion. For the normal mountain boy and girl an early affair leads to an early marriage, after the manner of natural people. Thereafter infidelity is rare. This code still holds among the mountaineer-miners, but the breaches in it are widening.

"The gals are purty, and when they git to town there's men there to advantage them."

The Health Department of one County privately reported that it was treating girls of thirteen and fourteen for syphilis. There are too many daughters to be fed in most mine families, and there are ways to enter town life through jobs at lunch counters or pick-ups along the highways.

In the idle camps there is little to think about, and sex assumes terrific proportions to the adolescents. In some Counties there are no longer any restrictions against placing illegitimate births on the records.

Poverty is making sharp attacks on the integrity of the family, most pitiably, perhaps, through the temptation it puts in the way of harassed fathers who have only to walk over the hill to leave their cares behind. The search for work carries the men miles from home. Why return to face a half dozen hungry people for whom you are already helplessly in debt? Perhaps there is a job in the next County; then money can be sent back home. . . . With only half-confessed intentions, or because their nerve is broken, they drift away and never come back. But the habit of matrimony is stronger than the new freedom. There is likely to be an unattached woman in the next camp, a widow

through death or desertion, and her alien family is taken on in an extra-marital relationship which bears every likeness to the old one, except the sanction of a marriage clerk.

The wanderers are not all in search of work. A curious thing is happening in the mountains, a sort of return to those periods in the Middle Ages when wars disrupted peasant stability and bred a race of nomad beggars. Machine age industrial warfare has likewise produced such floaters, louts whose type the burghers of 13th Century Europe would recognize.

Some have discovered that begging and theft contrive as good a way of life as hard work with similar hunger. There are also the derelicts, the widows and the men who are too crippled to work. The harlot, the mountebank, the witless and the criminal are not wanting among this crew. The deserted mine villages are being taken over by the squatter riff-raff.

It will be remembered that 200,000 men left the soft coal mines of the United States between the years 1923 and 1927. The Appalachian region had its proportionate share of these desertions, leaving there a surplus of houses which today stand in semi-ruin, sometimes as many as 4,000 empty houses to a County. The meanly built ones are now weathered to windowless shells with sagging roofs and an evil stench which the winds cannot sweep away. But there are valleys with long rows of still habitable dwellings, painted and clean, built by owners who meant their people to live in comfort.

Wherever the mine companies no longer care what happens to their property, or wherever they once began the practice of giving houses rent-free to men

thrown out of work, there has sprung up a village of paupers. Men pitch horseshoes all day in front of the barred and empty company store. Tin cans litter the road. If an out-house falls down, the family uses the one next door. By raising a few vegetables, by sending some older son to get a day's work in a nearby mine, by odd jobs, charity, begging and theft, they manage to keep alive.

The neighboring villages invariably would like to blow these lost towns off the map.

"What we want is civil war—get 'em to kill each other," one irritated citizen remarked. "We ought at least to dynamite the empty houses and clean the bums out."

This thinker had not gone on to the next step of what to do with them then, although a minister of the gospel suggested to a meeting held on the subject that the public funds for charity be used to pay the Sheriff to transport all the idlers across the County line and dump them there with orders not to return.

A more charitable view was expressed by a man in Tennessee.

"There's a queer town up in the hills a piece. We call it Widowville—mostly women who've lost their husbands, not a grown man in the place. You can count four kinds of widow women there: Volstead widows whose husbands are in the pen for making moonshine; widows whose men wandered off from 'em; widows who never got married properly, and the real ones with their men folks killed in the mines. They're all kinda helpless. We send 'em food to git along."

The people of the lost towns are usually described in the local phrase as ornery. Here are a few of these

drifters from various camps whom necessity has thrown together in a leaderless community:

One is the camp midwife. The husband has tuberculosis of the spine and sits watching from the porch while she works in the vegetable garden. Their one remaining hen found its way into a neighbor's yard where it was hit on the head with a rock by the son of the family, not without applause for his aim from his parents. The hen stalked groggily out of the yard and into the woods to die. Gossip brought the tale of her hen's demise to the midwife. She confronted her neighbor, not so much in anger as in regret that no one had had any benefit of the victim.

"Marthy, you should 'a ate that hen. Times is too hard to waste anything. So long as your boy was so smart with his rock throwing you should 'a ate the hen and not let her rot to nobody's good.". . .

A woman had her fourth child a few months after her husband was sent up for bootlegging. When Opal Pauline was a few weeks old, the mother herded the brood of four to the highway and begged a ride to town to see the father in jail. She returned triumphant with the story that the father's eyes looked pleased when the baby was given him to hold; said that this made it easier to wait for his coming out. . . .

A less faithful spouse of the village, also with a husband in Government custody, took her children to live with a substitute father. She says that she will see to it that her husband is sent back as soon as his term is up, since the present arrangement is more agreeable. . . .

In one family the children are dressed in a carefully studied begging costume of rags and soleless shoes,

then sent out to work the surrounding district. They carry a note saying that the father is in the hospital and the family starving; but their story is known for miles around and they now have to go long distances to get results. . . .

Last fall the woman was evidently dying of tuberculosis. She was lying under a dirty quilt and a coat. Three half-naked children mooned about the room. All four coughed continuously. The husband explained that his wife dropped into unconsciousness for hours at a time. Eight months later the same woman was discovered up and about, with great dark eyes, yet doing her housework and caring for her children. She had had no doctor and no medicine; yet had held on to life, and will bear more doomed children. . . .

The man was caught waiting in the dark to butcher a stolen calf, and sent to jail without enjoying the fruits of his sin. This left his wife and family dependent on the County for food. Once, when the County truck came three days late, the two-weeks' supply was eaten before nightfall and the woman was in town begging for more. An investigation of this gargantuan appetite uncovered the presence of a non-paying boarder in the family, an old man—cited as having no friends or relatives—who was doing more than his share of the household eating. The investigator insisted that the woman turn him out, but she protested that her convict husband would be angry if word got to him that she had ousted the friendless old man. A few days later the same investigator dug out the fact that the old man's son and daughter-in-law were living only a few houses away. The neighbors explained that the pariah was eighty years old and so

crabbed that none of his own people would keep him. . . .

Such are the people of the lost towns, by turns ornery and generous, sly and candid. Ravaged by disease, they are tough at the core and hang on. Sunk in depravity, they offer charity without hope of acknowledgment. An inexplicable people.

Once we stopped at a village on the rumor that a young girl had tried to kill herself the day before. A flat-chested young miner's wife, neighbor to the girl's family, gave us the story. The would-be suicide had swallowed a bichloride of mercury tablet at noon and had lain in agony all afternoon until a car could be found to take her to the hospital in town, where she now lay dying.

"How old is she?"

"Seventeen."

"In trouble of some sort?"

"Not that anyone could say."

"Why did she do it then?"

"Dunno. A woman in camp had these pills and gave one to Mary, saying this is what you swallow when you want to kill yourself. Mary said she didn't want to kill herself, but the woman says: 'Oh take it anyway,' and she did."

This baffling half-light was all the miner's wife could throw on the incident.

Why had the tempter woman and the foolish girl been so trivial about death? Possession of the bichloride tablets argues a plan born of bitter brooding. Had the woman worked it out in her mind that it is well to die young and so escape life: or did her malevolent egotism wish to see another suffer? Was the

girl frightened into taking the pill; or did a sensitive young despair make the momentary decision possible?

To probe the motives of misery is to drop a plumb-line into depths where no firm bottom can be touched. The only sure ground is the obvious fact that poverty sickens the body and warps the mind.

VI

CHILDREN

To ENTER into the lives of this unhappy people would be wholly mawkish unless done with the objectiveness of a surgeon probing a wound. More than that, mere pity for distress will accomplish nothing unless better mine conditions are shown to have a direct bearing on the security of the American people as a whole.

It is of little use to pretend that the United States will make any real gesture to help coal miners if the reward is no more than a gratifying sense of charity and justice. The only previous concern for their troubles came at those precise crises when strikes threatened to cut off the national coal supply. It is even more certain in these present years—when no shortage of coal is feared, and when the country at large is engrossed with its own problems—that the nation will attempt to shut its eyes and let private charity offer what palliatives it can. We are a kind-hearted race, and there will always be some who are pricked into action by the sight of actual hunger.

The miseries of coal miners, however, have gone beyond the point where that will suffice. They are directly relevant to the larger scale troubles of that machine civilization which our immediate forbears

began with such enthusiasm and blindness of purpose in the 19th Century.

Today the possible downfall of the entire system more nearly approaches probability as improved machines and technology continue to produce goods which many people cannot buy because the work of their hands has been taken over by these same machines. The dilemma needs no formal presentation here. It is alive in the minds of the civilized world. Around it revolve the thoughts of economists and the aims of politicians.

It was supposed in the immediate post-War period that the older generation had heartlessly ruined a world which the younger generation must rearrange in the light of its own unspoiled spirituality. This delusion has since vanished, not alone through the inevitable tempering of youth by experience, but, in a more profound degree, through recognition that the complicated machine structure answers only to the direction of a progressively complicated technique. The idea that a simple purity of motive could be effective in this modern world is a new version of the myth of Androcles and the Lion, which supposes that goodness of heart can tame natural predatory instincts.

The sensitive modern individual at best finds it difficult to apply human urges to a problem which seems so largely mechanistic. His sense of frustration is further deepened by the habit of thinking in bloodless generalities such as "technological unemployment" and "loss of consumer buying power." But let this approach be reversed, let the disorders be observed at their source; then it appears that there still remains scope for courage and common sense.

The primary unit remains the human being, even though in the mass he produces some strangely inhuman effects. This is not to deny that the machines are out of hand. They are out of hand, and all of technology, plus all of the instinctive arts of human relationships, will be required if the machine is not to emerge in evil ascendancy over a ruined world.

In this light, a consideration of the suffering of the miner people is not an emotional indulgence, but rather the collecting of data on which we can make an analysis of why they were ruined, how that affects the country at large, and what can be done about it. If we can defeat this particular machine age threat, then we gain confidence that less dangerous situations will yield to intelligent effort.

It has previously been shown that, by sardonic chance, the most unfortunate people in the United States are those who dig the very stuff on which machine civilization was founded. Here enters a negative "if." It no longer remains solely a matter of practicing sociology on coal miners so that we can learn how to fit surplus mill workers and lumberjacks back into the economic stream. Very definitely, if we do not save the miners from final degradation, we shall see labor wars wreck the industry. This may seem a very heavy-handed preface to remarks concerning the children of coal miners. It was set down as much for the sake of the writer as for the reader—to be a check on the subjective pity and disgust which coal field miseries inspire in all who witness them. It is over-easy to sentimentalize the mine field children, and important not to do so. They, more than their too handicapped parents,

still have the chance to shake off the burden of ignorance. The time is past when decorous pity can be of use. Drawing room charity should give way to intelligent social planning, which means a fundamental shift in the way the children are trained for life.

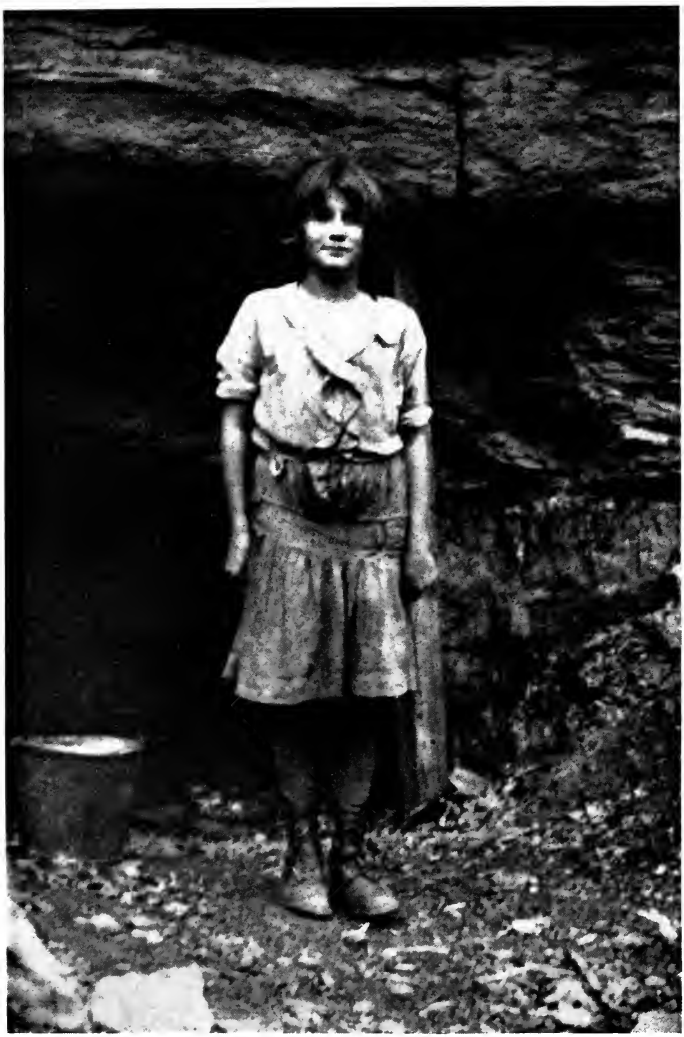
Some of these children must be the next generation of coal miners; the rest will be surplus hands in a region which has no other way to use their energies.

The miner's boy has a not unhappy childhood. He wears disreputable clothes and often goes barefoot over winter roads; yet so do all his friends, and he has no competitive shame. He is sometimes hungry. He never saw modern plumbing. He sleeps in a room with four others. At one time or another his face is covered with sores, and its normal coat of dirt is daily scrubbed none too gently by an overworked mother.

Against all that, during the first few years he remains innocent that he is marked for the mines; he has the good sun on his half bare body; the wooded hills are beyond his doorstep; he has dozens of youngsters his age to play with; he knows the feeling of family solidarity, and has a good relationship with parents whose instincts are courteous. He swings a home made ball bat in the school yard, bedevils his teacher, and in his heart thinks cockily of himself.

Then he gets to be sixteen. For a long time he has longed to wear—not just borrow from an older brother—a miner's cap with the tin clasp to hold the lamp. It is the badge of being a man. He claps one on his head as soon as he can, and then he is caught for the next thirty years, or until a slab of slate snuffs him out.

The girls go through a similar routine. Their infancy



Soon they marry and begin to raise more miners . . .

is hard, yet free of restraint. They have friends. They shinny up trees. In their eyes at least, their adolescence is beautiful. The stir of desire makes them stop hating the boys who teased them. Soon they marry and begin to raise more miners. At eighteen they are fresh and lovely. At thirty-eight they are scored heavily by child-bearing and drudgery.

It is not true that they could escape if they had initiative. There is plenty of fire and ambition in many of the young ones; and it may be said that the adolescents need courage to face the prospect of marrying and raising a large brood in a house owned by an uncertain boss. In fact, you need only see them to observe decisive character in their faces and in their talk.

The case is this—they have never been exposed to anything except mining. Soft coal fills their stoves and cooks their first corn bread. Soft coal veins crop out in every road cut. Soft coal smoke blends with the blue mists of spring and curls through the winter snow over burning gob. Tipples bound their horizons. No one has ever told them how to make a start at anything else.

A boy born and raised in one of these rabbit warrens on a coal town street has no notion that he is to be pitied. He goes as dirty as he pleases. You can tell by his looks how far he lives from the river to which buckets for washing water must be carried. What carefully nurtured city contemporary would not envy him a father who disapproves of new fangled notions of keeping spotlessly clean?—or, when he gets older, is proud of the boy's ability to hold his likker?

The wild ass's colt grows up no more naturally than

does the miner's boy. He falls easily into the ways of his elders. A Kentucky Santa Claus list last winter revealed that the desires of the boys were for BB guns, double-barreled shotguns and stills. At one school a sixteen-year-old boy, exasperated at the constant teasing of another, shot him through the wrist. The bullet went on and hit one man in the leg and a woman in the foot. These two by-product wounds were considered unintentional. According to the president of the local Parent-Teachers Association (the mother of five children) the original shooting was all right—someone had to teach the teaser a lesson. It occurred to no one that the 8th grade boy who carried and used a pistol should even be reprimanded.

Such freedom keeps up the tradition of mountain individualism. The boy who makes a place for himself in this battleground of personality can—and should—feel that he has done his best. But the rules apply only to the lost mountain life. He begins to discover his mistake when he enters an adult world where training is the only way to superiority.

The health of mine field children is appallingly bad. The babies are weaned quickly and put on the family diet of beans, potatoes and sowbelly. Their bones are brittle. The saving sun alone prevents most of them from having rickets. In one County the prevailing undernourishment has given trench mouth to twelve out of every hundred children. No dental work is done for them.

It is the boast of Kentucky that the State and County taxes are the lowest in the Union. This may attract new industries seeking to avoid taxes, but it shows to disadvantage in such matters as the education

of Kentucky children. There is, for instance, no provision for truant officers. The mine children stay away when they wish. The frequent lack of shoes to wear or lunches to carry makes school attendance a casual affair. The case is little better in Tennessee and West Virginia. None of these States provides textbooks. The teacher in the one-room schoolhouse must keep discipline over a lawless pack, instruct several grades simultaneously, and stir a desire for learning in children who cannot concentrate because their stomachs rattle from lack of food.

The teachers are extraordinarily devoted; yet are themselves limited to the three Rs and a useless collection of cultural facts. The higher grades have the time-honored classical curriculum. On a blackboard I saw "IDENTIFY THESE:" chalked above a list of minor Greek gods and heroes. A proper identification of Neptune does not touch reality in a mining town.

The lower grades are crowded. Sixty children in one room is not unusual, with most of them sitting two in a seat. They drop out rapidly after the fourth grade. The eighth grade classes seldom have more than two or three pupils, and few go on to high school. Why should they? Nothing they learn so laboriously offers them a foothold to climb out of a coal shaft.

It is in the schoolroom that one can make an estimate of the mountain people before poverty has had time to twist or break their spirits. The racial strain appears plainly in the children, for good or bad. There are some dull and unpromising eyes; the majority have great verve. At every school I have seen children who are beautiful, boys with well shaped heads and fine features, girls with a sensitive loveliness not

dependent on the evanescent bloom of childhood.

We drove to the head of a creek to visit a deserted mine town. In front of the schoolhouse two boys were planting laurel and small pines, watering them with cupped hands dipped in the creek. This swank is in preparation for the County school inspector. The building itself needs adornment. The first floor window panes are broken, and the ceilings have fallen on the unused desks. One room on the top floor is sufficient for the few remaining children of the camp. No mine has been working in the place for two years.

The teacher is blue-eyed, pretty and weighs about ninety pounds, so that she has to back up her slight proportions with a big paddle. She apologized for being all tired out from whopping one of the bigger boys. Last year, she explained, the boys ran out two teachers with their deviltry, and she means to set their minds straight on who is the boss.

Schools of this sort belong to a regime which cannot last much longer. The building of roads is already bringing in a new era. In one West Virginia district, two modern brick schools have been built to consolidate half a dozen cabin schools. Busses bring the children to school free. Instead of being starved for outside reading, they find here a good library. Instead of kicking an old tin can around for exercise, they have footballs and games in the big school yard.

No one regrets the passing of the quaint cabin school. It can not meet the needs of the changing life. It still remains, however, the rule in the mountains. The few enlightened district school superintendents desperately need backing for their projects.

A testy coal field citizen was asked what he thought should be done about the miners' children.

"Drown the brats," he answered.

These comments are characteristic of a less rigorous local opinion:

The Circuit Judge: "The mine camp nowadays is the worst place I know to raise kids."

The preacher: "The conservative churches have lost their hold on the mine children to the Holy Rollers."

The labor leader: "There's nothing around a mine camp to inspire them to do anything except mine and marry."

The operator: "I wish they could have a taste of something they like to do. They'd stay in school longer if there was some mechanical work to interest them. This generation of young ones are getting leary about what they see ahead. The girls take a look at matrimony and shy off from it. I can't blame them. Lots of the boys don't want to follow their fathers into the mines. They are restless, but they haven't anyone to steer them in a new direction."

The school superintendent: "The boys from twelve to nineteen go to loafing and crap shooting after they leave school. There's nothing for them to do except get into jams. Good stuff, though, if you can catch 'em and hold on. They are clever with their hands, but we have no technical courses to bring that out. I don't believe in academic careers for them—excepting a few with a real bent for scholarship. There are some of those, you know, but what the majority lacks is vocational training courses to make good mine superintendents and foremen. Or take a skilled mechanic—he's a lot happier man than a coal digger."

On one point most commentators agree . . . birth control would be a great kindness. A group of women were overhead discussing the arrival that day in camp of a neighbor's fifteenth child.

"She's all right," one gossip remarked. "Look at me, born and raised ten children and never a daddy a'tween 'em."

This collector is not cited for her irregularity but as exemplifying a patience with child-bearing which is really resignation dressed up to appear as enthusiasm. They need something to be proud about, so numbers, since they are inevitable, mark the rating of a successful mother. Decency of appearance and manners are neglected as unattainable ideals.

Production of an uncombed and half-naked brood is the mine wife's main chance for self-expression, closely followed by her choice of their names. "Necktie" and "Freelove" appear in one family group. Twins are a signal for alliteration . . . Roby and Troby; Geraldine and Magaline. Perhaps the naming of a boy "Omeegie" expresses a really candid sentiment about additions to the race. The mother "searched the Bible from kiver to kiver" and finally came on the word Omega. Upon being told that it meant "the last one," she so named her boy in heartfelt hope that he would prove so.

There can be no well-intentioned argument against birth control for these slaves to ignorance. Should miners be more temperate?—when their loves are the only things not deductible from their pay slips? Should their wives continue to bear a child every year, and bury every third one? This maintenance of a cheap

It is easy to sentimentalize the mine children, and important not to.

Some will be coal miners; the rest will be surplus hands.

labor supply for future operators seems hardly a reasonable goal.

Yet it will continue. A fight for birth control in the mountains would have a moralist thundering from every pulpit, an editor fulminating under the masthead of every County Banner and Register.

Moreover, no move to limit the size of families succeeds under the rabbit warren standard of living. This must be raised, and the general level of education along with it, before the woman of the mines is relieved as a breeder of more children than her body can stand or the community can support.

If ever a people needed to be taught the fundamentals of how to live, the race of mountaineer-miners is it. The grown men and women, for the most part, are too set in their ways to learn; it is the pliable children in whom the present chance lies.

It can be reasonably assumed that the sons and daughters of American bankers, lawyers and business men will be sent to college and will develop in much the same pattern as their parents. The children of carpenters and clerks will find their comparable level, always excepting those few who will go to extremes of development or retrogression. Opportunity in the United States has undergone a certain crystallization during the past few decades. In the mine fields, however, there is still a unique reservoir of unexploited talent—combined with abysmally poor prospects of releasing the floodgates. In the mine camps of the Blue Ridge there are now 400,000 children. In fair times and foul they never cease being born. The present regime condemns them to bloody and barren lives.

THE RADICAL APPROACH

"Bloody Mingo"—1920

Strike Meeting—1931

Kentucky—1932

I

"BLOODY MINGO"—1920

CLASS hatred is easier than fair-mindedness. To a radical the words "coal operator" have only one connotation and that wholly bad. Likewise, the shibboleth by which the owner class can damn any degree of complaint is the label "Red." In the eyes of each side it is impossible that degrees of virtue exist in the other cause.

This formalization goes far more deeply than words. The man who cries "agitator," or "gun thug" has come to a conclusion that half-hearted measures are useless. He begins to polish up his weapons, whereupon the issue is taken away from his intellect and handed over to his emotions. In this way the radical laborite makes certain that he will not be swayed by any glimpses of honesty on the part of an operator. The same system makes it possible for the operator to be heartless, while still retaining a conviction that he is working for the ultimate good of the miner's wife he makes homeless.

Blinders are useful in mine warfare in the same way that hymns of hate are useful to prevent troops from fraternizing. The human family has an incurable liking for each other once the barriers of strangeness and prejudice are knocked down. Intimacy is justly feared by the directors of partisan conflicts.

The clash of hard-set opinions produces practical results. The guard who shoots an unarmed miner, or the miner who dynamites the operator's home, manages to act inhumanly because the concentration of his emotion drugs any disturbing pity. Furthermore, he knows that he has the backing of his party, and will be protected and made a hero.

The only partisan sin is to be lukewarm for the cause. Miners and their leaders must stand foursquare on all points against the opposing ranks of mine owners, operators, hirelings and dependent townspeople. Noncombatants who take a place between the lines generally get covered with the mud thrown by each side. These unfortunates are a normal phenomenon of all class warfare. The current style is to call them "intelligentsia." Their impulses are usually on the side of labor. Their lack of a direct stake in the fight lessens their effectiveness, and they also suffer at times from lack of first-hand knowledge of the facts. A literary man, however earnest in his attempt to reach firm ground on the other side, can make himself ridiculous by an over-enthusiastic plunge into strange waters.

In American mine wars these generalities are applicable whether in the report of a killing in this morning's newspaper or in the musty account of a forgotten strike in the yellowing files of papers decades old. Mine troubles in the United States acquired a definite pattern shortly after the Civil War, and this pattern has since been repeated so often that the habit of settling an economic question with bullets is as confirmed as it is objectionable. Identical words fire every conflict; the same cruelties mark the course of battle. It would almost appear that strikes are a biological necessity. Whether this is so may appear by observing the persist-

ent pattern as it appears in several typical mine battles.

First, it is important to stress one point. Blind partisanship—the kind which says "To hell with 'em; let's go!"—has won many victories. Both the miners and the operators have on occasion profited greatly by being intolerably narrow-minded. Labor leaders have proved to their satisfaction that the sensationalism of a strike is the only way to force public attention on the grievances of the miners. Operators have discovered that it is possible to batter down opposition with a big stick. Neither side will calmly watch any attempt to take away its favorite weapons.

Granting that violence is honored by custom, let us examine the course of a strike which, if it had been won, might have resulted in ultimate good for both miners and operators.

Mingo County, West Virginia, owes its name indirectly to Devil Anse Hatfield. During the last two decades of the 19th Century, when the McCoy feud was at its peak, the Hatfield family battleground was still part of Logan County. Northward lay Logan Town, itself the scene of so many drunken brawls and killings that it supplemented the bad reputation of the Southern half of the County. When the coal companies finally ousted Devil Anse and settled him near Logan Town, it was happily decided to let that region bear the brunt of the evil and—it was hoped—now dead past. The County was split in two, and the name of an Indian chief, Mingo, given to the former demesne of Devil Anse as proof that peace had settled there. Nevertheless, in the year 1920 the new County came to be called "Bloody Mingo."

The arrival of coal mining in the mountains had not

altered old habits. The children and grandchildren of the feudists still toted guns and had a conviction that all strangers were merely trespassers on land rightfully belonging to them. But a division between the natives had occurred. Rich Hatfields found themselves aligned against cousins compelled by past improvidence to work in the pits. The clan had been smashed against an economic barrier.

The Mingo struggle, however, was much more than a family affair, for here the cause of national mine unionism was sacrificed to the rivalries of Northern and Southern operators. In 1920 the United Mine Workers of America was the most powerful labor group in the United States, if not in the world, with 385,724 members paying dues. Its treasury was full; it had sixty percent of all coal miners under its control; it could enforce contracts providing a fair minimum wage. The Union had become so cocky, in fact, that it was committed to do battle for the six hour day, the five day week, and the nationalization of all mines.

The stronghold of the Union was in the Northern tier of coal States where miners from Europe had imported their union traditions. The individualist operators of the more recently opened Southern fields had fought off all unionization, with the exception of a few war-time organizations which had been allowed to bloom briefly under patriotic fervor.

The Southerners gained definite advantages by denying miners the right to organize. Since they did not have to meet the high union wage scale, they could sell their coal more cheaply and so invade Northern markets. Also, whenever the United Mine Workers thought it necessary to hold their prestige by calling

a strike in the North, the Southerners captured the business during the shutdown. In the States of West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and Alabama there was, in 1920, a potential production of six hundred million tons of bituminous coal, enough to supply the domestic and export needs of the entire United States. Should strikes close every Northern mine the Southerners were ready to become heirs to the industry.

John L. Lewis, leader of the United Mine Workers, was not blind to this Southern threat. By January 1, 1920, the central West Virginia district of the Union had been built up to a membership of 42,000 miners, under the leadership of a mountaineer-miner of Irish descent, Frank Keeney, later to become an arch enemy of Lewis.

Union strategy at this time favored an attempt to organize a really tough field in the hostile operators' country. Williamson, county seat of Mingo County, called itself "The Heart of the Billion Dollar Coal Field." Here was the spearhead of the Southern operator phalanx. If it could be broken, the mountains might go union.

All during the Spring of 1920 the organizers did missionary work among the Mingo miners. The operators retaliated by evicting men from their houses as soon as it became known that they had joined the union. The actual evicting was done by detectives of the Baldwin-Felts Agency, lineal descendants of those detectives whose first appearance in the hills was to earn the blood-money put on the heads of Devil Anse Hatfield and kindred feudists. The mountaineers hated them then, and still did. The detectives were not gentle

about throwing the evicted families and their household goods into the company street.

The division in local opinion began to show. Sheriff Blankenship, sympathetic with the miners, ordered the arrest of twenty-seven detectives for disobeying a law requiring thirty days' notice before evictions. Likewise on the side of the miners were Chief of Police Sid Hatfield and Mayor Cavell Testerman, both of Matewan.

This coal-built town was the mushroom growth from a log cabin hotbed of the feudists. To Warm Hollow, a stone's throw from the present railroad station, Ellison Hatfield was once carried on a litter from the Kentucky shore where he had been punctured by the knives of the three young sons of Randall McCoy. Devil Anse had captured the boys and tethered them in a nearby cabin to await the outcome of the wounded Hatfield's fight for life. Ellison died. The three McCoys were rowed across the Tug, strapped to posts and shot in order of their ages, eldest first. Matewan, in 1920, still remembered that there are short-cuts to justice.

On May 19th of that year thirteen Baldwin-Felts detectives appeared at the Matewan railroad station after a day spent in evicting miners. They knew their danger. Al Felts, field leader, had a warrant in his pocket for the arrest of Chief of Police Sid Hatfield. The detectives' prearranged signal for action was to rise on the toes and drop back to heels. It was to prove of little use.

They waited in a knot for their train. The streets were not crowded, yet there were miners loafing about. Sid Hatfield and Cavell Testerman joined the Felts men to argue about the warrant.

Witnesses later swore both ways on the question of

who fired the first shot. Al Felts and Mayor Testerman dropped side by side. Sid Hatfield's two guns are locally credited with killing seven Felts men. Four wounded and eleven dead were stretched on the pavement when the quick volley of shots ended. Three of the thirteen detectives escaped by jumping into the Tug River.

This was the "Matewan Massacre," opening battle of a long war of attrition. Next day the head of the detective agency, Tom Felts, raced to the scene to revenge his two dead brothers. The train bearing this fresh Felts contingent passed through a double line of miners, squatting beside the tracks with shotguns handy. The engineer saw them and decided that it would be safer to pull straight through the town.

Sid Hatfield and ten miners were arrested for the murders. Tom Felts swore that Hatfield was in love with Mayor Testerman's wife, and that he had provoked the quarrel as an excuse to make her a widow under cover of such a general killing that his personal motive would be overlooked. The charge was considered a bit far-fetched. The law and private revenge gave Sid Hatfield one more year to live.

The massacre confirmed the operators in their determination to smash the uprising. They turned to a persuasive weapon, publicity, in an effort to wean the miners away from the unions. Bold-face editorials, written by the operators and paid for at space rates, began to appear daily on the front page of the Williamson, West Virginia, newspaper. The argument was developed along this line: The miners hereabouts, good fellows at heart, are being misled by dangerous Red union organizers. These, in turn, are being egged on

by Northern operators who wish to see coal mining ruined in all Southern fields.

Here, out in the open, was the economic barrier to unionism in the South, a wall which emotional appeals for the miners has never been able to topple. The non-union South was so set on keeping its low-wage advantage over the union North that it could allege the perfidy of outside operators as an argument to its own miners. Delicate word juggling was needed to convince the men that the greater glory of the Southland demanded their abnegation of the right to collective bargaining.

"The operators North of the Ohio River," said their brother operators of Mingo County, through the local paper, "told the United Mine Workers that they must organize West Virginia or that they would not be recognized in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania. These operators have contributed money to the U.M.W. attempt to organize West Virginia for the purpose of holding down production here."

The necessity to meet the Northern attack was rubbed in by a contention that coal mines "pay the taxes out of which the roads and schools are supported . . . bring into this community practically every dollar that comes for the sustenance of our business institutions."

The Northern Union's platform in favor of nationalizing the mines gave the Mingo operators an opportunity to be deeply shocked:

"It is unbelievable that a big labor organization should demand an ownership in property in which it has no investment. . . . They are as revolutionary as the reddest of the Reds in the I.W.W. . . . Are you

ready to have all property held in common? Are you ready for nationalization of industries as obtains in Soviet Russia? The men are being exploited in their leaders' ambitions to attain the power of a Lenin or a Trotsky."

In flirting for the support of local merchants the operators earnestly pleaded:

"Socialist propaganda is trying to compel the operators to relinquish control of the company stores. If the United Mine Workers gain the upper hand, their 'no profit' plan would destroy the independent business of the community. No merchant of Williamson could survive this kind of competition."

Unfortunately for this appeal to the storekeepers, the writer ruined his logic by making the next sentence a bid for miner support, saying: "Prices in the company stores are often below those of independent stores." There is something less than candor in an attempt to set the merchants against a union which would lower company prices, while at the same time asking miners to believe that those prices are already lower than in independent stores.

In spite of these editorials, the miners struck on July 1st. The State Constabulary came in to preserve order. In their wake appeared that stormy petrel, Mother Jones. Of the earth earthy, Mother Jones had spent her long life trying to goad poor people into rebellion. Few have ever understood miners better than this bitter old woman with the bawdy tongue and indomitable heart. She knew them to be casual and ignorant. She could lash capital, the press and the pulpit with scorpions of invective, but her finest scorn she saved for the miners themselves.

"Damn you," she shouted to them at a strike meeting in the Courthouse square, "you are not fit to live. Of every ton of coal so much was taken out to hire professional murderers to keep you in subjection, and you paid for it. You stood there like a lot of cowards, going along chewing scab tobacco and you let yourself be robbed by the mine owner—and then you go about shaking your rotten head. Not a thing inside."

Mother Jones at this time was ninety years old, a venerable witch whom nobody dared to burn. The operators' association hired a stenographer to take down her words and printed them—as being self-condemnatory—above their own chaste comment: "Good citizens of Mingo County will repudiate any such utterances."

But when Mother Jones grew abusive on sacrosanct subjects, the operators felt on surer ground: Thus Mother Jones:

"Why don't your ministers go out and preach as Christ did? You don't because you are afraid of the high-class burglars and their dollars. You are gambling in Christ's philosophy, but you are not carrying out Christ's doctrine."

To which the operators replied:

"This thrust aroused public indignation because of its irreverence and its contempt for a holy calling, and because it was entirely unwarranted and obviously false. . . . The mothers of the country, whom we all revere and respect, were charged with responsibility for a charged increase in juvenile crime. Women were disparagingly referred to by 'Mother' Jones as 'club cats'."

The operators were ill-advised to answer the in-

spired old termagant. In the unhumorous tension of an embattled mine field it is doubtful if anyone even found heart to smile at Mother Jones' "club cats."

Mingo County was now wholly given over to all those humiliations invariably woven into the mine war pattern. On the day when the grand jury returned indictments for the Matewan Massacre against Sid Hatfield and the others, there were also indictments brought against public officials for bribing union organizers to leave the County. Corruption was in the atmosphere. Terrorism walked the streets. Hard-eyed men lounged in doorways with hands ready for a quick draw. They met all trains to advise through-passengers not to take the air on the platforms of Mingo County. Lone reporters from outside newspapers found themselves elbowed on each side by escorts whispering advice to climb aboard the train which had brought them.

Murder ranged the hills. As the McCoys had done thirty years before, snipers hid in the bushes on the Kentucky side of the Tug to take pot shots at mine guards. The power house of a large mine was dynamited. The busiest beings in Mingo were the bloodhounds.

Anse Hatfield, a grandson of Devil Anse, sat one August evening in front of a store in Matewan. The street lights suddenly went out. A shot from the dark went through Hatfield's body and broke the jaw of the man sitting next to him. This murder was also ascribed to Sid Hatfield.

Another family connection, who sided with the operators, received and published this letter:

"Ed Hatfield—if your business as a company suck is very important, settle it now if you Hesitate you

will be late if it takes murder to stop you we can do that all right we are tired of your way of doing, life is uncertain death is sure."

The American Legion volunteered to be sworn in as coal deputy sheriffs. Instead, military law was decreed under a battalion of United States troops.

This is routine in a determined strike. When the local authorities cannot put it down, the State and the Government lend their final power. The attitude was summed up by Governor John J. Cornwell of West Virginia in what he considered a damning accusation:

"The Sheriff of Mingo County and his force of deputies has been friendly to, and sympathetic with, the union."

The miners are certain to lose both ways. No one heeds their verbal complaints. If they resort to violence they become a nuisance which Authority in some form or other must suppress. No idea is in circulation that Governmental suppression of a strike carries a corollary responsibility to suppress the evils which caused it. As soon as the Government has done its police work, it moves out.

The Mingo strikers, evicted from the camps, established several tent colonies with high resolve to stick it out until their union was recognized. One colony was raided; a man was shot and dragged by the heels between the row of tents; flour sacks were punctured by militia bayonets. The tent colonies were virtual prisons, with Federal troops patroling the roads to prevent outsiders from reaching them. In the dreary anti-climax of the strike the tent colonies became breeders of disease.

The triumphant operators printed bulletins offering

amnesty to miners who would desert the failing cause. They published a payroll showing that men remaining at work were averaging $15 a day. They showed that the first strike month, July, produced only 2,852 tons of coal, whereas December production had risen to 190,000 tons. The strike was over.

A year later Sid Hatfield was to be tried for murder in McDowell County on change of venue.

"It will mean my own murder," he told his friends, but they persuaded him to leave his guns in his hotel room. He walked up the steps of the Welch Courthouse with his wife's arm on his. A detective, waiting at the top of the steps, leveled two guns at Sid Hatfield's stomach and fired. The Matewan Massacre was avenged. The detective was later cleared of a murder charge.

The Mingo operators were again free to keep wages below union scales and hence undersell union fields in the North. Infatuated with success, they increased the production of their mines and opened new ones. Their prosperity lasted just so long as the national price of coal held at high levels. When it finally fell, there was no union minimum wage to prevent the operators from bidding for coal contracts by underselling—not the North this time—but each other. They themselves punctured the bubble. Mingo County knew distress years before the national business slump. Today it is desperate. Coal mining, as the operators boasted in their heyday, "brings into this community practically every dollar that comes for the sustenance of our business institutions." Today its one industry has failed Mingo, and the people are hungry.

What can be said for union leadership in the 1920

strike? It did not spring from native miners familiar with local psychology. The front line troops were ignorant mountain men. They did as they were told by agents of the United Mine Workers, a Northern group so obsessed with the idea of high wages that it played politics to that end alone.

Two very different authorities may be quoted on this. In 1920 Woodrow Wilson wrote:

"The United Mine Workers of America is the largest single organization in the United States, but no organization can long endure that sets up its own strength as being superior to its plighted faith to society at large."

Mother Jones said:

"They are making the rank and file political pawns in the leaders' game."

Wilson's prophecy came true. The national organization of the United Mine Workers was shattered during the succeeding years of strikes called to maintain wages at impossible levels. Its leadership lacked the canny instinct which knows how to win public support for reasonable goals.

If, at this time, the union leaders had taken a candid look at the economic scene, they would have known that coal mining was on the decline and that the number of miners then in the pits would have to be reduced if any of them were to make a decent living. A 1920 program to limit coal production and to find other jobs for the surplus miners might have gone far toward averting present ruin.

Hind-sight is easy. The point is only made now because this same need for limiting production and finding new jobs for unwanted miners is today the

only means to stave off final disintegration of the whole coal mining structure. Yet nothing real is being done about it.

The Mingo strike in 1920 might have been won if the United Mine Workers had poured in enough money to give the strikers staying power. Suppose it had been. The more bloodshed and bitter feeling, the more is a union contract likely to be a mere truce patched up between belligerents who are ready to break it at the enemy's first sign of weakness. A union in the Southern field during the 1920 decade would have had to fight tooth and nail, shotgun and dynamite, for its existence. It may be said, however, that this struggle would have forced attention to the malady before it was too late for the doctor. Higher production costs would have discouraged further over-production and forced some operators and many miners out of the industry; but would have done so to the great benefit of those remaining. All the operators would have been hurt, but the brief pain would have prevented a languishing decline of the entire industry.

Shall society say who will or will not be allowed to produce from the nation's store of natural resources? Here is a neat problem for the economic philosophers. It will be prominent in the next decade, for the alternative is chaos.

As a final—and absurd—supposition, assume that the operators had allowed the miners to organize peacefully in 1920. Whenever given the chance, miners are genuinely friendly toward their bosses. The Mingo operators muffed a chance to win the coöperation of their miners during the bad years ahead. They might have given the men a union and still kept the wage

scale below the Northern rate through the device of regional contracts. Instead, they used sectional prejudice against the well-being of the majority of their own people, incidentally sharpening a knife for their own throats.

Ever since these fratricidal mine wars began in the mountains, the most important issue of all has been wholly neglected. The coal industry needs intelligently trained miners who can stand on their own feet and argue out of reason, not prejudice. Hill billies may be quaint characters, but they are captious workmen. They stop being hill billies when the pall of ignorance is torn away from their hidden talents. During the boom madness the labor turn-over was as high as fifty percent a month. The miners ran like children toward the glittering promises of any rival operator in the next valley. Today, more than ever, the operators need the coöperation of intelligent workmen. They cannot have it until training has instilled discipline into the volatile people of the hills.

A union could have been schooling the miners, and the fact that American mine unions have not done so offers no reason to damn this main chance to make self-respecting workmen out of scare-crows. The miners need public support, not bloodshed, for these ends. It is not an impossible goal. A start must be made someday.

The idiot decade of too much prosperity is gone. Operators chose to condemn the miners to ignorance. Today the ragged pack gropes in darkness, bitter because every hand was raised against them when help was still possible, despairing now that their bungled industry can no longer give them work or bread.

II

STRIKE MEETING—1931

THE one strong labor leader developed in the mountains is Frank Keeney. For twenty years he has fought for a union, first as a district leader of the United Mine Workers, today as head of his own creation, the West Virginia Mine Workers. The operators know Keeney mainly in field action against themselves. They refuse to meet him in discussion. Those who have never seen Keeney imagine a smell of brimstone.

In appearance Keeney differs from the lanky, hollow-eyed miners who lounge in endless talk in the shabby anteroom of his office in Charleston. His square Irish face has pugnacity and purpose, the battle face of a rugged, intense man. His manner can be quiet and persuasive, for he also fights with words. On his wall hang posters from MacDonald's Labor campaigns in England. Keeney's thought ranges beyond his mountains. He has armed himself with knowledge in every subject touching his own campaigns—with law that he may hinder evictions and get boys out of jail, with politics that he may harass hostile officials, with world labor movements that he may inspire his people with a goal. Keeney takes no pains to make himself popular with the operators and the people of Charleston.

Keeney is native to the hills. He worked his way up from the pits into United Mine Worker councils in

the years preceding the War. For ten years he was regular, being in 1924 the district head of 42,000 West Virginia miners. Then he broke with John L. Lewis, International President of the United Mine Workers, on the latter's policy of "no backward step."

Keeney was right. This was an inflexible policy, a relic of blind militancy in a period when economic reality demanded the coöperation of miners and operators. By his arrogant fiat Lewis won support of the fire-eaters in his union, yet pledged himself to strike, rather than arbitrate, on every occasion when a reduction in wages might be proposed. On a rising curve of prosperity this position might have won victories. When the coal industry was all too obviously on a decline, it was suicide to promise half a million men that they would never have to retrench from boom wages. The next five years saw the defeat of the national union.

West Virginia returned to chaos. Keeney watched his former district collapse through the same blunder which had ruined his personal career. He laid low until 1930, when actual hunger began to stalk the hills and the miners were ready for any thrust to relieve the agony of underemployment. Keeney sent secret agents up the creeks to organize an independent union, his West Virginia Mine Workers. By the Spring of 1931 he had signed up 18,000 members.

The antipathy of Charleston people for the miners goes deeper than a personal exasperation at having lost money in coal mining. It is rooted in a fear of actual invasion of the town by rebellious miners. During the Harding Administration an armed march had instilled outraged surprise into comfortable people. The miners and the law were in the middle of a pitched battle on a

mountain top when a Washington official arrived by airplane with a command for the miners to return home. The promises inducing them to do so were forgotten as soon as the crisis was past.

Now, in March 1931, Charleston's poor opinion of miners was confirmed when Keeney led 600 hunger marchers to the Governor's Mansion, next to the magnificent marble Capitol building recently completed on Mr. Cass Gilbert's designs. Governor Conley faced the mob with the State Constitution in his hand, and read extracts to show that it was not within the Executive power to help them. He did, however, hand them $10 from his own pocket. They were not grateful.

The dirty tatterdemalions marched past the pretentious brick homes of Kanawha Street. They swarmed into the business district. Keeney remarked that Charleston stores were bursting with foodstuffs, and suggested that plate glass windows were breakable. The Sheriff stepped into the breach. He had always treated the miners fairly; they knew it, and obeyed his order against violence.

They returned home and went on strike.

"We would rather starve fighting than starve working," they told each other to buck up courage in the face of odds against the strike's success. Keeney, who had taken the sane stand against the "no backward step" policy during the prosperous years, now found himself striking against operators who could no longer afford to pay decent living wages. Many operators, secretly regretting the lack of a union to stabilize the industry, were frightened at the demands which a new union might make in these bleak times.

Keeney had a $100,000 strike fund supplied by

Northern liberals. His strategy was to strike in July in order to embarrass the mines at the time when they would be filling orders for Great Lakes bunker coal. It was his bad luck that the Lakes contracts went elsewhere that summer. The operators, with nothing to lose from a labor shortage, began wholesale evictions of strikers' families. The refugees moved into tent colonies. In eight weeks the union fund was spent. The strike was broken.

Keeney publicly admitted defeat. Unlike outside union organizers, who often vanish from a strike area when disaster looms ahead, Keeney rode up the creeks on empty food trucks to tell his people that he had failed. Because he did not shirk this, his power among the miners is greater today than ever. They feel he will not let them down.

The operators rubbed salt in the wound. They continued evictions after the strike was over; they blacklisted the ringleaders. The miners made a second hunger march on Charleston. This time they faced militia machine guns at the bridgehead. Charleston had remembered that unpalatable mob marching through its streets. It recalled Kenney's disrespect for plate glass windows.

On a sodden day in November, three months after the end of this strike, I went to hear Keeney speak at a meeting at Ward, a bitterly contested camp where the evicted strikers had set up a tent colony on the flats of Kelly's Creek. Keeney was there to tell them that an eviction notice to leave the flats had been defeated in the courts.

Smoke from purloined coal rose from stove pipes and hung low in the rain-drenched air. The prospect

They still make their living from his 300 acres, seven of his children, with their children.

The operators, with nothing to lose from a labor shortage, began evictions. The refugees moved into tent colonies.

was dreary, but the inhabitants put up a show of cheer as they gathered around Keeney.

"How's Squatterville look to you today, Frank? Better'n being a scab, ain't it?"

"Dave there ain't so set up with his tent. Durn fool rubbed soap on it thinkin' it'd shed rain, and he's near swamped."

"If I had a stove I'd like my tent better'n a company house."

"Frank, the company's making the scabs load twenty-five hundred pounds to the ton now. Hope they make 'em load three thousand . . . that'll bring 'em out to join us."

The meeting was in a schoolhouse across the road. The miners squeezed themselves grotesquely into the child-size desk seats. Steam rose from their wet clothes. There were only two overcoats among them. The teacher's desk had a smooth hickory bat on which a paddled child had chalked the word "Unmercifully."

The "Tent Colony Men's Choir" were asked to render a selection. Six sheepish miners grouped themselves on the platform and sang in small embarrassed voices:

> ". . . Solidarity forever,
> For the union makes us free."

Keeney spoke:

"One day there will be no more gun men, no tent colonies, because right now you people are going through what you are. But it's a long shot; don't forget that.

"Are we right or wrong? No man can stand up and

justify conditions. Things always get unbearable when miners have no right to a voice. If you want protection you must have an organization of your own. Many miners don't understand what a union is; but the boss understands. He throws up blockades to make it impossible, unless people like you are made out of steel. That's what you men are made of who stick to the West Virginia Mine Workers. We've had our parades, songs and our strike—and we got left damned good. Nothing left but debts and the memory of defeat. The greatest thing you have done is to stick together and take it on the chin.

"Who are you, you dirty despised people who can't walk into Charleston because you'd give them a disease? That's what they say. You earn America's money. It's no disgrace to dig coal. Coal makes civilization possible. You ought to know that. Quit hanging your heads. Go down to Charleston and don't be ashamed of wearing overalls.

"Don't tell me that the miners of Ward are all ignorant. Nor don't tell me that you're all capable and would know how to run a coal mine if the boss gave it to you. That's because we tell ourselves we're coal miners and don't know how to do anything except dig coal.

"What does your old age mean to you—you paupers! Your town is full of cripples, products of the industrial system. . . . We've got to have songs, got to have fun, to learn things. Or else what will we have to look back at when we come to die? When you're going through it—living in your tent at Ward—it doesn't sound like that. But when you come to the end of life you can say 'I tried. I suffered. I didn't go back.' If

you keep it up all year, next year you may find a different attitude. If not, you're going to get just what the operators have always given you.

"Whether it's a Democratic or a Republican State, labor is getting evicted, gun men are made public officials, children are starved unless charity sees fit that they may live. The Republican Governor gave ten dollars to feed six hundred hungry mouths. The Democratic County Court says that miners haven't any rights except what their employers care to give them. Don't look to them for mercy.

"Industrial slavery is a greater menace to organized society than chattel slavery ever was. The owner of a black slave had to put a roof over his head and give him enough to eat. The industrial slave has no protection. The statesmen, instead of abolishing the evil, are trying to patch it up, just as the ante-bellum statesmen tried to patch up chattel slavery. Nowadays they are patching the patches.

"Let me show you. Suppose twelve men stake off a piece of property and each takes title to a section. It is necessary to have water. One man finds a spring on his section. He says 'This is mine. I'm going to set up a water company and tax you.' This fellow corners all the money. The rest can't drink because they can't pay for it any longer. So the eleven get together and say: 'This is a God-given right. The water is ours. God Almighty put it here for humanity.' But the man with the spring undertakes to prevent this—just as those damned mine companies prevent you. I tell you—as long as you don't get together for the common use of things, you'll be in this fix.

"Does that make you understand what you're up

against? If I was able to work and couldn't get work and my family was starving, I'd kick a window through and take food."

A chorus of "So would I" met this.

"Before you permit your children to starve, take what you need," Keeney added. "The West Virginia Mine Workers are coming back to former strength, defeated but not vanquished."

The meeting was over. Men, women and children filed out quietly and returned to their tents. Perhaps they were heartened to stick it out for the cause of unionism; or perhaps their passive resistance comes from having nowhere else to live, nor any mine which would give the men work. It is hard to say, for they are undemonstrative.

Frank Keeney, at all events, cannot be brushed aside as a discredited failure. The succeeding winter spawned much unrest. Since that tent colony meeting, Keeney has built up his union to greater size than before the strike. He has a Labor Party, organized on a state socialism platform. He is not a Communist. When the Communist strikers in Kentucky offered an alliance with their union, Keeney turned them down.

It is useless to ask partisans to look calmly upon Frank Keeney. He is too much alive for comfort. He is called "a dangerous radical," "a damned Socialist," "a man with whom honest men cannot deal without contamination." The last charge is just, for his personality is persuasive.

The trouble with Keeney is his persistent attachment to his aims, letting no man stand in their way. That, in the mountains, necessarily implies a violent man.

Yet it is difficult to understand how Keeney could

be anything else. His devotion to the miners, and his refusal to be corrupted from their cause, are not in themselves qualities which anyone can condemn. Nevertheless they are tarred with the same brush as his disrespect for others' property. He was forced into this mold, and now he must remain as he has been made. It is no longer possible to tell him that a strike is not a useful weapon against economic facts. He throws up his hands and says:

"What the hell are you going to do when nobody knows any other language?"

The answer is difficult. Radicalism is spreading in Keeney's valleys. Men are still being evicted for joining the union. There have been men cut off from local Red Cross aid for the same reason.

Keeney's union is against the United Mine Workers; the United Mine Workers are against the National Miners Union of Kentucky, and it in turn is against both. The operators of the Kanawha field are against each other, and the Kanawha field is against the Northern ones. Such tiny conglomerates of refugees as the Ward tent colony are islands in a stormy sea.

III

KENTUCKY—1932

THE trouble started in Harlan. That County is all mountains. Not very far away is the Blue Grass—the "dark and bloody ground" of Indian warfare—where the buffalo and elk of Boone's day are now supplanted by sleek horses and sheep, nibbling tender grass in security. Harlan is an eon away from the Blue Grass in manner of life. Its pigs are skinny, its cows dry. Human beings go hungry here. In the pioneer days their ancestors might have taken up the Blue Grass acres now preëmpted by racing stables. They preferred the freedom of the hills. It was a poor choice.

The region was untamed until 1911, when the first mine opened and the railroad was laid. Big corporations discovered the 48-inch Harlan seam. Andrew Mellon, Henry Ford, Samuel Insull, U. S. Steel, Detroit Edison and International Harvester opened mines here. The responsibility of ownership is theirs, although the management is sufficiently in local hands to give it a characteristic Kentucky flavor. The technique of handling labor was developed on the spot. If the details of disputes are reminiscent of mine warfare elsewhere, that merely shows how the pattern repeats itself when naïve men work for those armed with civilization's executive power.

Patriotism, religion and the resolve to be prosperous

are esteemed by the people of Harlan with a whole-souled fervor. All three enter as motives in the coal struggle—patriotism as the weapon against outside interference, religion as proof that atheist radicals cannot be treated too harshly, business as a spur to win sectional trade advantages.

Harlan is proud of its recent pioneer past. Judge H. H. Howard, grandson of the first white man born in the County, tells of his own boyhood when people depended on game, fish and garden crops to get their food, when clothes were spun at home, and the only cash came from the sales of pelts, ginseng and wool to traders in Virginia. In Judge Howard's boyhood all homes were log cabins. Quilting parties, log rollings, corn-shuckings and funerals were the social gatherings. Fifty years ago the entire assessed value of Harlan County was $10,000.

It is not at all extraordinary that the sudden arrival of coal wealth should fire Harlan ambitions. One decade gave them a modern way of living. The identification of mountain qualities with this success appears in the motto of the Harlan County Coal Operators Association:

> "Her progress as rapid as the rushing of the majestic Cumberland—her honesty as rugged as the peaks of her stately mountains—her ideals as lofty as the tall pines of her sheltering forests—her industry as unselfish as her desire to promote the welfare of her County and her State—that's HARLAN COUNTY."

This pæan was written when Harlan was very prosperous. Since then the Northern fields went open shop and destroyed Harlan's low wage advantage;

hydroelectric plants in the South decreased the need for Harlan coal, and freight rate differentials went against Harlan in a falling coal market. Today the County has twice as many miners as it can servicably employ. Harlan faces an extremely lean future.

The sharpness of this disappointment found an outlet in scolding the visiting meddlers. In a contribution to *The Harlan Daily Enterprise,* one G. D. Vowel has this to say:

> "Friends, the tocsin of war has been sounded. The enemy is right here in our midst. Are you prepared to stand by our country, our homes and all our American institutions that we hold so dear to our hearts? Let me repeat, yes, the tocsin of war has been sounded and every true American has a duty to perform, which is loyalty to all our American institutions. Are we ever going to let the Communist flag float above our American Flag? Here is a small verse I have composed which I hope you will learn to sing. Sing it to the tune of 'My Maryland':
>
> "The traitors now are upon our soil
> Ye Kentuckians, ye Kentuckians.
> Shall we stand by and see our land run by them,
> Ye Kentuckians, ye Kentuckians.
> But shall we not rise, one and all,
> Ye Kentuckians, ye Kentuckians,
> And run the traitors from our land,
> Ye Kentuckians, ye Kentuckians."

While slightly repetitious, Mr. Vowel's emphasis is clear.

The easily understood drive against Communists is not, however, Harlan's only exercise for its convictions on patriotism, religion and business. All these appear

in an intra-Harlan dispute last winter between Mayor L. O. Smith and Chief of Police Harmon Noe. The latter, in a public statement, alleged:

> "It is my conception that an intelligent high type of citizenship, as our city is, ought to be able to look on their Mayor with admiration and respect. Whether they have been able to do that under the present administration I would say let the people themselves decide."

After a dark reference to the Mayor's "domestic affairs and troubles which is well-known to the people of Harlan," Chief of Police Noe lays his case before "the religious and moral influences and those interested in the city." He asserts his wish to "promote the churches, schools and everything that would make our town a better place," and winds up with the telling stroke that he is "doing all that I can to bring visitors to our city in order that we might have more business."

It is needless to add that the visitors encouraged by Chief of Police Noe are cash-and-carry tourists, not coal investigators. Editorially, *The Daily Enterprise* commented sadly: "Millions are spent yearly by tourists, but very little finds its way to Harlan County because little inducement is given tourists to travel this way."

A more startling breach among Harlan officials occurred later in the Spring. Judge D. C. (Baby Face) Jones and Sheriff Blair, linked by all commentators as the die-hard allies against unionism, actually split so finally over a political appointment that Sheriff Blair called in his seventy deputy sheriffs and cancelled their commissions to act as mine guards. That withdrawal

of the right of a company mine guard to have the legal status of deputy sheriff is something which the force of liberal opinion was never able to accomplish. In the words of the old Kentucky verse:

". . . And Politics the damnedest
In Kentucky."

Harlan is a contentious town, and a sentimental one. How badly an honest love of a countryside can fare when confused with worldly issues appears in a eulogy to Harlan carried by *The Daily Enterprise,* of which these few extracts:

"The coal operators, bitterly and falsely maligned and abused by Red agitators, Communistic speakers and irresponsible news writers, are, in the main, responsible for the progress of Harlan County. . . . Standing there above the clouds and looking into miles of space, our mind went back to Bible days and there came before us the description of the mountain upon which Moses went to talk with God, and we thought that here in the hills of Kentucky there is a peak similar to that of Mount Sinai. If you have never been there, lay aside your rush for pleasure and go look at the indescribable work of the Almighty. You will then have a far better opinion of those men and women who live close to God and commune with Him every day in the playground of nature up in the hills of Harlan County."

"We hear a great deal of criticism of Harlan County; we hear much of the coldbloodedness of her people; of their desire to gain wealth at the cost of the life-blood of her citizenship, but after meeting many of these people —some of them miners wearing their caps over their blackened faces and others of that type who lead—and

saw the spirit of goodwill prevailing between the man in overalls and the man in fine clothes; we were forced to believe that most of the stories we have read are the vaporings of writers who have never been behind the scenes in that much-maligned territory. . . . These coal men will settle their own affairs if the 'carpet-baggers' from other States will keep their hands off."

It is not true, however, that the operators can extricate themselves, nor that the miners are merely down on their luck for the moment. They are an unhappy people. A peculiarly rank smell seeps from beneath attempts to gloss this over.

The above quotations from Harlan's apologist are not quite fair to the class which actually runs things there. The operators are less naïve, although their stand is no less inflexible. They believe in paternalism, and mean to retain it in the teeth of opposition from any source. Some of these paternalists are decent men, trying to patch the machinery. Their help will be necessary to any remedy that may be applied; it is absurd to antagonize them beyond reconciliation. Other operators are hard-boiled; a few are mean-spirited.

This was known to Theodore Dreiser. He preferred to ignore it. Hostility was his only point of contact with the local rulers. Consequently they used against him that same weapon which arms them in labor troubles, the syndicalism law. It was passed in 1920, the year when radical-baiting was popular under A. Mitchell Palmer. Stripped of some of its legal redundancy, it reads:

"Any person who, by word of mouth or writing, advocates the propriety of doing any act of violence

as a means of establishing any political ends, change or revolution; or who publicly displays any printed matter suggesting the doing of any act of physical violence, the destruction of or damage to any property as a means of bringing about any political revolution, or who shall attempt to justify by word of mouth, or voluntarily assembles with any society which advocates physical violence as a means of accomplishing any political ends is guilty of a felony and upon conviction thereof shall be punished by imprisonment in the state penitentiary for a term of not more than twenty-one years, or by a fine of not more than $10,000, or both."

It is possible under succeeding sections of the law to send a man to jail for twenty-one years for possession of a picture advocating direct action to change the form of government of the State of Kentucky, or to hang him if anyone is killed by reason of any violation of the act.

There was a certain grandeur in the rush of a literary Don Quixote against the insensitive flaying arms of a Kentucky legal windmill. Dreiser has lived in poverty for most of his life. He is at his best when describing the emotions of poor people when tempted by garishness. If he had approached Harlan people in the creative mood of "Sister Carrie," he might have written something to be remembered long after the last load of Harlan coal has been mined. But Dreiser today is a bitter man. He is sickened by observing decades of injustice with the sensitized vision of an artist. When in the coal fields he closed his eyes to everything except the most dire wretchedness his guides could find for him. He snubbed the rather racy individuals who run things in those parts, and consequently they besmirched

him with an immorality charge wholly irrelevant to the issue. This confirmed Dreiser's preconceived opinion of them. He was satisfied, for he had come to make war. His only contribution was to call the attention of the nation to the plight of the miners. In the field itself the result of his visit was an orgy of hopefulness, followed by an abortive strike. Today the miners are in a worse position than they were before Dreiser arrived.

The Dreiser foray set the pace for intervention in Kentucky during the distressed year of 1932. Some who followed him were: Edmund Wilson, foremost American authority on Marcel Proust; Malcolm Cowley, literary critic; John Dos Passos and Waldo Frank, novelists; Charles Rumford Walker, author; Harold Hickerson, playwright. The industrial thinking of these writers leans toward changing horses and dumping the rider into the stream. Some of them, as Charles Rumford Walker, know how it feels to work long hours under dangerous conditions. All insist that half-way measures have failed.

The impact of their opinions on Kentucky coal operators could have been forecast. The point to be traced here is what happens to opinions when they are removed from the printed page and put into action in labor warfare.

The "Battle of Evarts," on May 5, 1931, began the Harlan war, just as the "Matewan Massacre" began the Mingo trouble a decade earlier. Conditions were identical. Agents of the United Mine Workers were organizing in the field. The operators were evicting miners who joined. Armed deputies ranged the countryside. One day the miners took shotguns, squirrel rifles

and pistols out of hiding. Singly they wandered toward a hillside near the "independent town" of Evarts, built on land not owned by the coal companies. A carload of deputies approached. Jim Daniels, blatant threatener of miners, sat on the front seat holding a rifle. The deputies saw the line along the road and left their car.

Who fired the first shot? This is always given great importance, and never solved. The first report of the shooting to reach Harlan was that twelve men were killed. When officers arrived there were only four bodies on the roadside—Jim Daniels, two other deputies and a miner. Witnesses later told of wounded men passing their homes. Secretly the miners had gathered; as silently they stole away, certain that discovery of their wounds would mean indictments for murder. A hunter later confessed that he had found a body in the brush on the hill above the battle, probably that of a miner abandoned because no one dared search for the place where he had crawled away to die. One year later the hunter gave to the Sheriff's office the severed head, hands and feet of the dead miner, saying that he had cut them off and preserved them in chemicals. Why he gathered these relics he failed to explain, but the year of silence he ascribed to his fear of vengeance.

"We have always believed that more than one miner was killed in the battle of Evarts," Sheriff Blair commented. "We were told that several dead men were buried by their comrades to keep officers from knowing how many were killed."

Harlan has no conception that the law is an even-handed instrument to serve everyone. The miners call any officer "the law," and think of both the man and

the abstraction as their enemies. The deputy who has killed a miner knows that his own life is likely to be short, and so tries to raise his score for the protection which a bad reputation affords.

Forty-four miners were indicted for the murder of the deputies at Evarts. One by one they were put on trial, thus allowing months of murder hearings to keep the animosity alive. When "Big Cigar" Phillips, a negro miner, received the third sentence of life imprisonment to be given for the murder of Jim Daniels, the Harlan prosecutor remarked:

"I've always had faith in Harlan County juries."

The twelve men who convicted Phillips had heard that "there never was a more hideous crime in the annals of Kentucky than the cold-blooded murder of Jim Daniels . . . an act that has brought disgrace to the mountain people of Kentucky . . . a verdict of warning must be written against the murderer, who would turn the mountain streams red with human blood."

It was six months after the Evarts fight that Dreiser appeared in the County. Meanwhile the Communists had selected it as one of those powder boxes where a well placed fuse can blow a hole in the Capitalist System. The trouble had been started by the United Mine Workers, considered by the Communists as allies of capital. Now the National Miners Union carried on the fight, with complete Communist backing but with a strategic desire to soft-pedal that fact with the simple-minded miners until a victory should be won.

Dreiser made his headquarters in the hotel at Pineville, seat of Harlan's neighbor, Bell County. The National Miners Union arranged that he listen to the

personal stories of men who had been tied to trees and flogged, of women whose men had been killed and homes raided. The novelist hourly grew more enraged. He sent scathing accusations of Harlan and Bell officials to the outside world. A local wit placed toothpicks against his door, claimed that they were undisturbed in the morning, and inferred that a young woman visitor of the evening before must have remained there all night. The courts made this a public charge, forcing the novelist into the defense that he did "enjoy the companionship of ladies" but that it would have been impossible for him to be guilty of adultery as charged in the warrant. The oldest of badger games had proved its worth.

In demanding a Congressional investigation of the mine fields Dreiser said:

"It is the usual American line-up of capital versus labor, with everything on one side and nothing on the other but two bare hands. It is a very aggravated case here, because of the very gallant temperament of the Kentuckians."

The latter took heart upon seeing their cause championed by a person of such obvious importance. The mountaineers had never before heard of Dreiser, and many imagined him able to accomplish practical matters such as getting them food and higher wages. Thousands joined the National Miners Union on the promise that they would be supported with outside supplies during the impending strike.

Harlan was getting too hot for the organizers. They moved headquarters to Pineville and there, on December 13th, held a meeting to call a strike for the first day of the new year.

County boundaries mean more in the mountains than in flat country. Harlan and Bell, although they own habits and prejudices common to the hill country, are unlike in some respects which outside investigators failed to distinguish. Harlan is new and violent, with a feeling of importance from connections with the great corporations who own most of the mines. Harlan saw no need for welfare work when wages were high. Now that distress had arrived there was no one with the faintest notion of how to go about administering relief.

Bell County, lying to the South, is the older settlement. Time has somewhat mellowed the miner-operator relationship. No one was killed in the County during the strike months. Bell has full-time health and welfare workers. The majority of the mines are owned locally. The coal seams are less valuable than Harlan's, and many are worked out. The near depletion of its one source of money has given Bell County a resignation which Harlan lacks. Pineville citizens cannot always be counted on to act as a unit with the operators.

This did not seem to be the case to Waldo Frank and the outsiders who were rushed out of the County with such parting thumps on the head as Harlan hotspurs might have been proud to administer. It would have surprised the ousted investigators to learn that many Pineville people hated the blackguard method as much as they did.

It was the vocal majority in Pineville which acted against the investigators as dangerous fomenters of trouble. Their spokesman was the County Attorney, Walter B. Smith. He was born on Stinking Creek, over the County line, son of a Baptist preacher whose dis-

like of dogs led him to shoot any wandering within range. "Walter B.," as he is locally known, was raised on mountain farms, having the same sort of boyhood as many of the miners he now came to admonish so severely for their ultimate good. The miners helped elect him at the age of twenty-seven as Bell County's youngest public prosecutor. He has a chill blue eye, a flow of oratory, a flair for telling mountain stories and an inherent good nature which he tries to subdue as the elected scourge of evil machinators trying to tear down the American emblem and nail the Red Flag of Russia to a flagpole wet with the blood of 100 percent defenders. "Walter B.," in fact, is the perfect pattern of a rising young Kentucky politician. But in the eyes of more liberal Kentuckians he has harmed his career by a too passionate championship of coal men prone to drag the Red Flag as a red herring across their own trails. He is described here as the type of opposition which Northern liberals chose to defy on its own home grounds.

The fact that the National Miners Union was Communist gave the Pineville opponents of every labor union their perfect chance to fight this one in the name of all that is sacred in American life.

An honest labor strategist, resolved to win a union victory for the miners, would have scorned to call a strike in Kentucky during the winter of 1932. Many operators faced bankruptcy; and the poorer an operator becomes the stronger is his resolve that no union shall add to his troubles. As soon as the National Miners Union called the strike, several owners closed their mines for good, pleased with an excuse to fire miners who were not making money for them. One

owner turned over his dilapidated mine to his men, who shared in all earnings and managed to make thirty cents a day each. The die-hards, however, made ready to meet this Red thrust.

The conventional strike cartoon shows the coal operator as a gross rich man caught in some hostile act toward starveling miners. The impression is that the mine owner is a special breed of human being, quite lacking the pity and the weaknesses of other men. The truth is less dramatic. Usually the operators are ordinary business men, rather badly frightened by the double threat of financial and physical danger. Too easily they turn to the protection of legal procedure and hired gun men. Then the cartoon is likely to become justified.

In Pineville there were some operators on friendly terms with their miners; there were ministers who had spent years trying to improve mine conditions; merchants who dislike labor troubles because trade is driven away; politicians who temper their remarks out of regard to the future miner vote. It was an entirely human situation.

Prosecutor Smith, with substantial town backing, eloquently denounced the Red invaders. He raided the National Miners Union headquarters and arrested several organizers on the ground that the Communists were corrupting innocent miners of pure Anglo-Saxon blood. The grapevine telegraph sent a message through the mine valleys that the jailed leaders were to be delivered forcibly on the day of their court hearing.

Several thousand mountaineers, men, women and children, straggled into Pineville and began a march around the Courthouse Square. That Square has known

violence. Within the year wounded men had staggered out of the Courthouse and died on the lawn, merely as a by-product of a tense trial.

Prosecutor Smith telephoned to Harlan and Middlesboro. Carloads of deputies arrived to augment the fifty local ones already circulating through the crowd. The jail was enfiladed by two machine guns hidden on porches across the street. The setting was perfect for bloodshed.

Instead, the miners blew off steam in a thing they love—a great public speakin'. Holy Roller preachers mounted the Courthouse steps and led the crowd in those barbaric prayers and songs whose rhythmic crescendos of emotion drain the heart of a need for action. The exhortations to violence ended in a revival meeting. The miners went home after a highly enjoyable day.

Tension still held the region. There were two more abortive marches on Pineville. The miners had cause to make a demonstration. Their larders were empty, children nearly naked, hired homes only safe over their heads from one day to the next, and the chance to earn a living was denied them. They no longer cared whether it was the collapse of coal mining or the operators' opposition which kept them from work. The strike leaders were telling them to hold out. Victory was sure. Already supplies of food and clothing were being smuggled in at night by truck from Knoxville. The mysterious outside world was going to support their strike.

The arrival in February of Waldo Frank's party, bringing milk and moral support, helped to confirm this impression. But Pineville vigilantes rustled Frank

out of the State at night, turned out the automobile lights at the top of Cumberland Gap, hit Frank and Allan Taub on the head, and later made jokes about how the two fell out and beat each other severely. The outraged writers were forced to carry their fight to the newspapers, a battleground too remote from the fields to affect the happiness of miners.

Harlan cheered the conduct of its neighbors in Bell County. The state of mind may be seen in an editorial in *The Harlan Enterprise,* headed "Purely a State Matter":

> "One Waldo Frank, author, and a man named Taub, appeared before three United States Senators yesterday at Washington, relating their experiences in Bell County and asking for a Congressional investigation of conditions in the coal fields of Harlan and Bell Counties. . . . If Congress is clothed with such authority and powers over States, let it investigate those sweet-scented geraniums that parade about the country, especially into the industrial centers of States, fomenting trouble, creating discord among laboring people who want to work on behalf of their families, by making their incendiary speeches and thrusts upon God, and deport these canines back to where they properly belong—Russia—or some other kindred place.
>
> "*The Enterprise* wants to congratulate the citizens of Pineville in exterminating these so-called meddlers from their midst, just as it surely would have been done had these marplots made Harlan County the intended visit, so much heralded by their sympathetic press."

The Harlan editor who wrote that is a genial little man trying hard to please local opinion and keep his advertising columns filled. When I entered his office

he first mistook me for a deputy sheriff, a flattering tribute to the black hat I had acquired as more suitable in those parts than a New York felt. The editor's public rancor arises from the common inability to distinguish between shades of liberal opinion. In Harlan a mild pink appears as deep red. The editor might have saved his eloquence against Waldo Frank's group and concentrated on the authentic Communists behind the strike.

Three days before the Harlan editorial was printed, and on the day when Waldo Frank was ushered out of Pineville, the first American communist to be killed in a labor war died in Barbourville, Knox County. He was Harry Simms, a nineteen-year-old blond youth, born Harry Hersh in Springfield, Mass. He had gone through the Communist schooling, learned field tactics in a New England mill fight, and was now acting as an agent of both the Young Communist League and the National Miners Union.

Harry Simms was a handsome boy, on fire with young enthusiasm for his cause, and popular with the mine women for the ways he had with their children. The night before he was shot he spoke at a secret meeting in Pineville, crossing early next morning into Knox County to tour the mines there with another organizer.

Coal lands are strictly private property. The owners can hire guards to keep off any trespassers they wish. Harry Simms was not a welcome visitor. He was shot in the stomach by a deputy sheriff mine guard, and died that night. The guard, Arlin Miller, was freed of blame at the examining trial, it being proved to the satisfaction of the court that he shot in self-defense.

This was fuel for the Communists.

"Not only have they murdered Harry Simms," they announced in a strike bulletin, "but at a meeting of coal operators and business men in Pineville, Monday, they decided to raid the Bell County jail and murder strike leaders held there."

The Communist leaders in New York decided that Harry Simms might make as appealing a martyr to world revolution as Jack Reed. They brought his body to New York, paraded it through the streets and on February 17th laid it in state on the prize-fight ring of the Bronx Coliseum. Being in New York at the time, I trailed into the Coliseum with the swarthy little men and women, mostly needle trades workers, who make up the body of American Communism.

Floodlights accented the red carnations banked on the gray coffin of Harry Simms. Young Communist boys and girls formed a guard of honor around it, standing rigid for ten minute watches until a relief squad exchanged places with closed fists raised in salute. A gigantic picture of Comrade Simms surveyed his mortal effigy. Red banners called on Communism to supply 1,000 members to take his place.

As each speaker arose, a solid section of infant Communists united in a treble cheer. Mention of the names Rockefeller and Morgan was a signal for loud booing. A collection was taken up to support the Kentucky strike.

Seven Kentucky miners, imported for the occasion, sat stolidly on the platform, with their cap lamps making a brilliant patch of acetylene flames. They spoke of hunger and of how they did not have to get up to let in the dog because a whistle would bring him through any one of several cracks in their capitalist-

built shacks. A miner shivered the crowd with repetition of the phrase—"and that's the kind of conditions us miners face." William Z. Foster ended the speaking with descriptions of how cravenly the bourgeosie acted when confronting workers' courts in Russia.

There were many thousands at Harry Simms' funeral, all breathing sedition, yet in a formalized manner not unlike any conservative political gathering. Outside on the sidewalk a police squad swung their sticks in bored unconcern. Next morning a back page newspaper account said that "Several hundred Communists heard their leaders pay tribute to Simms, who was incorrectly referred to in *The New York Times* yesterday as a Negro union organizer." New York, which Kentucky visualizes as a suburb of Moscow, would not even pay the Communists the compliment of taking them seriously.

The fact is that American Communist leaders know well enough that Soviet Russia, fountain head of their hopes, is not at all anxious for present world revolution. In the next generation, perhaps, when this five year plan and another and another have welded Soviet invulnerability. At present the American branch of the Party is being given just enough encouragement from Moscow to keep the idea alive. Harry Simms was martyr—not to a lost cause—but to a soft-pedaled one.

It would never suit the Kentucky vigilantes to belittle Communism. They puffed the frog up to bull size. On the day Simms was killed they arrested one Doris Parks, strike organizer, and thrust her into Pineville jail with the others. Her hearing was made public, not without the idea that she would outrage local opinion. In this she proved no disappointment.

County Attorney Walter B. Smith conducted her examination. The following excerpts are from *The Pineville Sun's* account:

"Do you believe in any form of religion?" Attorney Smith asked.

"I believe in the religion of the workers. These workers here have relied on your religion for bread and butter, and now they are starving and you ask these workers to believe in religion," Miss Parks answered.

"Does your party propose to take over private property for their own use?" she was asked.

"They intend to take over everything for their own use," was the answer.

"How?"

"Simply walk in and take it."

"And if you find resistance to entering private homes and property?"

"It'll be just too bad for you," was the comely Communist's reply.

"Take a look at the starved faces of the miners. Then you ask them to rely on religion and God," was another comment. "When I was twenty I learned that the unions are not enough and that you only get a few more crumbs of the loaf, while the workers produce the whole loaf."

"Do you believe the Bible and that Christ was crucified?" she was asked.

"I affirmed, didn't I, that I believe only in the working class and their right to organize and to teach them that they can be led out of this oppression by the Communist Party."

More far-reaching than the shock to Pineville feelings, this testimony made public acknowledgment that

the Communists do not believe in God. This rumor had been circulating among the intensely religious miners. Many had refused to believe that they had joined a godless union. But evidence was accumulating. Several miners, with lay preachers among them, had been sent to Northern cities to learn Communist tenets in order to return as missionaries to their people. Now some of these began returning, not as Red propagandists but as horrified Baptists who had been told that they must renounce their God. Pineville officials welcomed the prodigals, and urged them to make public confession. Several did. Logan Doan's statement is typical:

> "I was in Chicago five weeks. . . . They said in a meeting 'To Hell with your God, we don't want anything to do with Him, we can make Jesus Christ at 10c a day and make more money than American people are making with Jesus Christ.' You are not allowed to name God's name in any way. They believe and said in their meetings that they just as leave their girls to marry a negro as a white man, let their girls be pleased. I went to a meeting there with 10,000 Soviets there in the meeting and they had the Red Flag in there and waved it over my head. They sang their Soviet songs, and said Lenin is the head of the Soviet Government and he has been dead since 1924, and this is 1932, and they have been out of a leader since. They said that Heaven is in Russia and that Hell is here in the United States, and that it wouldn't take them but 24 hours to throw the White House in the river. They are soliciting $1,000 a day for the miners here and the miners are not getting any of it; they are soliciting clothing and they pick it over and just send the old rags down here. I am a God fearing man and I will sacrifice my life before I will go under the government

they are trying to make me go under. . . . They said they ought to come down here and bring a mob and get these prisoners out of jail.

H. L. Doan

Subscribed and sworn to before me by H. L. Doan, this February 11th, 1932.

RUTH WITHERS

Official Court Reporter Bell Circuit Court."

It is unlikely that anyone had to apply pressure to wring that statement out of Logan Doan. I myself have had convincing proof from many miners that the strike was broken less by guns and whips than by the rock-ribbed fundamentalism of the miners. Some Communist organizers remained through the Spring to sign up members for the Party among those not finicky on the religious issue. They had considerable success among the adolescents.

Pineville knew that the strike was over, but the outside world did not. The wave started by Dreiser now sent a frothy backwash into Kentucky. Busloads of college students, probably the most inane investigators who ever went sight-seeing on a labor battlefield, now provided the local irritations which the Communists could no longer stir.

Cleon K. Calvert, coal lawyer and adviser of Walter B. Smith, found himself "Chairman of the Executive Committee of College and University Students named (by themselves) to provide a welcome for the delegation." This rather over-blown show of hospitality suddenly vanished when Mr. Calvert and associates of his committee made the remarkable discovery that the visiting students were not duly accredited investigators of their respective colleges. The welcome was aban-

doned. The students were taken to the Tennessee border and told not to come back. A later student group, entering with the advertised intention to test freedom of speech, were tied to trees and whipped.

Prosecutor Smith repudiated this whipping, with regrets that absence from the County prevented his taking action against it. "Walter B.," however, had failed to catch that precise moment when a show of liberalism might have expunged the memory of high-handed dealings from the Kentucky record.

Walter B. is an effective public prosecutor, very young and fiery, and exceedingly fond of winding up in one of those oratorical bursts, so beloved of criminal lawyers everywhere, and brought to the flower of perfection in Southern courts. When he heard that the American Civil Liberties Union was about to descend on investigation-ridden Pineville, he sat down to compose a brilliant diatribe, a scorcher that would raise the blood pressure of any jury. It took the form of a letter to Arthur Garfield Hays. Instead of burning the composition in the cold light of morning, Walter B. was still under the influence of his own eloquence and released it to the press.

> "It seems a funny thing," he began, "to hear one who is the head of an organization, the purpose of which is the overthrow of the government and the constitution, setting up such an awful clamor about constitutional rights, such as freedom of speech and of the press. . . . If a mad dog has a constitutional right to run rampant in Bell County, biting people and scattering hydrophobia, then the American Civil Liberties Union has the same right. But—just as we would suppress the mad dog, we will suppress this un-American Union. . . .

"The people of Bell County are fundamentalists in politics, religion and social economics. They are perfectly satisfied with the Government of the United States as it is now administered. They have very little sympathy with the isms, the theories and the imaginative hysteria of New York. They are but little impressed by Theodore Dreiser's bawling about 'Tragedy,' or with the cackling of your Union over 'freedom of speech' and 'freedom of the press' and 'freedom of movement.' We also believe in those fundamentals of liberty, but we believe that 'freedom of speech' should be limited by a man's knowledge of what he talks about. . . .

"However, since you seem to be interested in pursuing liberty, we hope you will allow nothing to stand in the way of your promised visit. . . . All roads lead to Pineville, and some lead from it. . . .

"So we hope that you will soon end your professional charges, that do now seem to so easily beset you, and come down to Old Kentucky 'where every prospect pleases and only man is vile'."

Walter B.'s pastor, the Rev. L. C. Kelly of the First Baptist Church, disapproved of the public statements of his now nationally-known parishioner. When Walter B. went to church on the following Sunday evening he was forced to listen to criticism of his own tactics.

"Through defending the law by violence we break down the spirit of the law," said the Reverend Kelly. "The deadliest, dirtiest, darkest, meanest menace that confronts our land today is the disposition of every man to be a law unto himself. The alternative is the Christian way—Serpent wisdom and the guilelessness of a dove. Take for instance the organized miners and the organized coal operators. Suppose they could form

a mutual coöperative Miners Union, where both sides could meet and frankly face the problems as one sided, not two sided. Let them together agree to put a price on mined coal that will pay the operator a just income on his investment and a wage that will enable the coal loader to have a living wage, and the consumer to have a fire. . . . If leaders of Christian thought had stood for this all the years in these mountains, instead of meeting every exigency with the spirit of the flesh, we would have had a new day."

To lecture the County Attorney, and to suggest the formation of a miners' union in Kentucky, is not alone a proof of the Reverend Kelly's personal courage. It also demonstrates the existence of enlightened opinion in a region which partisans paint as wholly black. It suggests the possibility of arming local courage with support against the blatant reactionaries, pushing the latter out onto such precarious limbs that they will drop off of themselves.

The Civil Liberties group never entered Harlan and Bell Counties to test freedom of speech. It appealed to State officials at Frankfort for an injunction against hindrance of their rights while visiting Kentucky. Upon being coldly received at Frankfort the group members made a feint toward Pineville and were met at the Bell County line by a deputation of citizens. Face to face with the Civil Liberties Union in the flesh, the advocates of the mad dog treatment toned down their belligerency. Some even shook hands with the enemy. It was made clear to the visitors that entrance into the County would put their lives in danger. Of course Bell County officials would do everything in their power to protect them, but the miners were so outraged at

betrayals by former visitors that no one could control their probable violence.

These same officials, if the argument had suited, would have been the last to admit their inability to keep the miners in hand. Had they not done so all winter?

Their bluff worked, partly because doubt about the good results of another invasion had been raised in the minds of some of the Civil Liberties members. It was just as well. A decision for civil rights means little if the offender has to be taken by the scruff of the neck and shaken until unwilling lip service is given.

Much prejudice against Kentucky was stirred in the mind of the American public during these troubles last winter by the repeated accusation that the operators were starving children to death through refusal to allow outsiders to bring food into the district. Such inhumanity seemed incredible, as indeed it was.

It is a fact that the Communist food trucks had to run a blockade; but it is likewise true that 2,000 mine children in Harlan and Bell Counties were being fed every day of the strike months by an outside organization, the American Friends Service Committee of Philadelphia.

It did not suit the aims of angry partisans to admit that this relief was being given, and, since the Quakers themselves said little about it, the country at large never heard of it. Some radicals, informed in private conversation of the Quaker feeding, were skeptical.

"They are not feeding the children of striking miners."

"Yes, those too."

"Not in places like Evarts."

"They have a big feeding center there."

The Quakers did it through what they themselves dubbed "middle aged diplomacy"—a state of mind which assumes that a goal can be so important that it is worth while conciliating people to attain it. The Quaker goal was to feed hungry children. Nothing else mattered. They outfaced hostility and suspicion until they convinced the community of the extraordinary fact that they had no motive beyond making sure that the children didn't go to school barefoot and had something to warm their insides.

An example of their diplomacy occurred late in the Spring. The Arkansas students, those who had been whipped out of the County, sent two donations after they left, a small one to the Pineville Welfare League and a larger one to the Quakers. Knowing that the students were primarily interested in the striking miners, the Quakers handed their check to the Pineville Welfare head with the request that it be spent on the families of blacklisted miners. The money was accepted under these terms. The students, unable themselves to stir more than Pineville's brutality, finally were able to express their goodwill through the medium of the Quakers. What Walter B. Smith's parson had called "serpent wisdom and the guilelessness of a dove" was already making itself felt in this hard-bitten land.

Harlan and Bell were only two of the thirty-eight coal Counties in which the Quakers carried out their relief program last winter. The strike area, however, best illustrates the effect of their conciliatory attitude. In the fall a Harlan citizen had suggested as his relief program that the Sheriff be paid to take all surplus mine families and dump them across the County line.

Harlan and Bell later learned many things by watching the Quakers in action.

The Quaker opinion that strife solves no questions is less dramatic than the opinions which clashed between the operators and the invading radicals, and, by the same token, this passive Quaker philosophy made less stir in the community. Nevertheless, before the Quaker feeding ended in June, they had persuaded many operators to let their miners plant vegetable gardens, and had started local committees for the rehabilitation of surplus miners.

Harlan and Bell today are not wholly liberalized communities. Perhaps the Quakers' one winter in the fields did no more than clear away some prejudices which were clogging the springs of local charity. But this was more than any other outside group accomplished.

In the main the American radical approach to the labor problem maintained its amateur standing. The coal situation is quite typical of that dilemma which Spengler considers indicative of the doom of Western civilization. The permanent decrease in the need for coal has left hundreds of thousands of surplus people whose able bodied members know no other way to make a living. There will be starvation, bitterness and warfare in the hills next winter, and the next and the next, until science and social planning can give them work, and birth control can relieve the intolerable pressure of unwanted children.

Meanwhile America remembers the Dreiser toothpick anecdote, and does not know about the Quakers. If we really are bent on setting our national house in order, there is much to clean up in the coal cellar.

QUAKERS INTO ACTION

Plagued by a Concern

"Duty"

I

PLAGUED BY A CONCERN

CHARITY suffereth long and is kind. But charity is degrading when givers are smug and receivers obsequious. Charity must indeed be kind, so kind that the needy do not recognize it. This holds whether the Government is voting unemployment relief or a kindly old lady is handing a dime to a tramp. There is always a chance to make a mistake.

The world depression developed a new conception of social work. For the first time the United States faced the possibility of mass starvation. As the curve of stock prices went down, the curve of interest in relief rose. America, the Prodigal Son, had wasted its substance in riotous living; then had come to learn something of essentials through sharing the husks with the hogs.

The great gain from this unpleasant experience was a clear recognition that ethics still have power in a practical age. In agrarian China an isolated hundred thousand people may starve without other sections being affected. But in an integrated machine civilization it is not possible for one group of workers to slide down hill without tugging at the security of all the others. Helping one's neighbor, on a national scale, has become more than the careless gratuities of people who spare a little of their surplus store in order to avoid the distaste of watching others suffer.

The so-called "national plans" were a result of this new interest in self-preservation. Wall Street began to broach plans smacking curiously of state socialism. The plans were intelligent enough, but they were too grandiose for application to a badly battered industrial system.

An aviator, valuing his life, does not philosophize about the design of the plane before taking it into the air. He gives it a detailed inspection. If a wire does not strum at taut pitch, he tightens it. If an aileron jams, he fixes it. He may wish he had a better model, but he is not taking chances on this one.

In like manner, much tinkering must be done in every basic American industry before the whole can run harmoniously.

Coal mining is the most defective unit in the United States. At the same time it offers the best test case of what ethics can do when applied to an industrial problem—this thanks to those Quakers who spent the winter of 1931–32 carrying their conciliatory spirit into the embattled camps of the coal fields.

Quaker goodwill has a deceptive simplicity. It stems from the belief that "there is something of God in every man." As a passive idea this is not original, but the Quakers make it so by taking it literally. They hold that the object of life is to bring out this absolute value in every human being.

Once this is wholly accepted, religion and life become the same thing. Two hundred and seventy-five years ago George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, made himself a contemporary nuisance by carrying his ideas to logical conclusions. He was thrown into jail for preaching against war. While in Derby

Jail he wrote his judges a criticism of the practice of hanging a man for petty theft, and urged on them the necessity of speedy trials for all offenders. Every move made by George Fox developed what we recognize today as a liberal idea, although with him they were merely "concerns" prompted by the urge to cultivate the something of God in man.

Fox wove another thread into Quaker character.

"In fairs," he said, "I was made to declare against their deceitful merchandize, and cheating and cozening; warning all to deal justly, to speak the truth, to let their Yea be yea, and their Nay be nay."

From this moral intent sprang worldly advantage. The reputation of Quaker merchants for fair dealing brought them trade, so much so that some restricted their operations rather than expose themselves to the danger of riches.

Moral concern and economic shrewdness persist in Quaker history. William Penn's just treatment of the Indians, and his policy of religious tolerance, did no harm to the young colony of Pennsylvania. A like attitude has given much power to Penn's successors.

We are accustomed to reckon the religious motive as greatly weakened in modern life. This is not true either of the Quakers or of the Southern mountaineers. Contrast the two.

The Calvinist doctrine holds that a supreme God impresses His will on humanity. Nothing man can do will alter the destinies of God. It is a passive philosophy. Translated into life by the fundamentalist miners of the Blue Ridge, it kills the impulse to change conditions. Also, the coal operators, whether they realize it or not, fit themselves into the theocratic scheme

through assuming the power of destiny over their miners. Politics and business are both given the sanction of religion by means of an easy identification of privilege with God's will.

The Quaker concept, on the other hand, is dynamic. It does not rely on inflexible doctrines from the Scriptures. God is alive, and can be consulted on the proper course of action in contemporary dilemmas.

There is a very practical difference between the Calvinist oligarchy of the elect and the Quaker democracy of individuals made equally valuable by common possession of divine attributes. Once the Quakers accepted a "concern" for the coal fields, they knew that the beliefs by which they live would be at odds with those of the region. The operators, however, never discovered that they were engaged in crossing philosophic swords. The Quakers, intent on their job, kept their social thinking to themselves, so that the coal fields saw in their actions only that simple goodwill of which George Fox spoke:

"With the lace that we formerly had hung upon our backs that kept us not warm, with that we could maintain a company of poor people that had no clothes."

The Salvation Army might express similar sentiments, but the Salvation Army will never affect machine age thinking. The Quakers very possibly may. The Society of Friends banished slave-holding among their members sixty years before the United States came round to it. Their conviction that every man has a life to live, even if he be a coal miner, is just as radical in its suggestion of change in contemporary practices as were their ideas on slavery in the late 18th Century. The Quakers have been uncanny social

prophets. It may be possible that they are right in this.

Their coal mining adventure in the Blue Ridge last winter was directed by the American Friends Service Committee of Philadelphia, the executive arm of the Quaker creed. Its field workers are no amateurs in relief. During the War many of these passionate pacifists had exposed themselves to shell fire while evacuating the inmates of hospitals or helping French peasants on farms near the lines. After the Armistice they did a characteristic bit of rehabilitation.

Near Verdun the A. E. F. had vast supply dumps which were too bulky to transport home. The Quakers bought acres of tools and materials at a ridiculously low price, re-sold them to peasant farmers for a fraction of their worth and still cleared enough money to build a maternity hospital at Châlons, which they endowed for ten years and presented to the Department of the Marne.

Everyone gained by that transaction, particularly the German war prisoners who did the work of assorting the dump materials. The Quakers had borrowed the prisoners from the French Army, with the understanding that no fire arms would be used to guard them and that, if one German escaped, the others would be at once returned. They worked well for these strange Americans, and therefore were all the more worried when, after the job was done, they were lined up for photographs and asked their home addresses. This seemed ominous to the prisoners, who faced the camera as though it were a firing squad.

The photographs went by couriers to their homes in Germany, together with wages for each day that the

men had worked on the dumps. Many German wives learned for the first time that their husbands were living and would return. They learned that the enemy were human beings who brought badly needed money and said that Fritz was looking well. Here was his latest photograph.

This was preliminary to the work the Quakers did in Germany three years later. Undernourishment from the Allied blockade had progressed into outright starvation. No horrors comparable to that year in Germany are as yet known in the Blue Ridge. The peak of Quaker feeding reached more than a million German children a day. In 1924 the deflation of the mark again brought starvation. The Quakers returned, this time feeding 1,200,000 children a day. Germany still remembers that balm poured on its agony.

Austria also knew the Quakers, at a time when women would rush into the street to cut slices from a killed cavalry horse while the bullets of the fight were still flying.

In Poland the Quakers bought 1,000 horses from the Polish Army and used them to plow devastated farm lands. They persuaded the peasant women to form sewing groups, supplied them with wool, and sold their embroidery in America at a profit to the sewers. The same sort of rehabilitation was done in Russia, where the Soviets allowed Quaker workers to remain all through the national disorders and up to the year 1931.

Diplomacy, and a flair for keeping one's head under strange circumstances, were essential to carry isolated groups of American social workers over the hurdles of foreign prejudices and war rancors. Even then the

missions might have failed, had it not been for the fact that the Quakers do not impose their creed on those they help. That is logical, for the creed is one of action and speaks for itself.

The late Kenneth Grahame might have cast Quakers in action as a party of beavers off for a picnic, intent on enjoying themselves but unable to resist the temptation to do some hard work. Those Quakers who have seen the most misery are least sentimental about it. They are affected, but they have their own lives to live, and do it with gusto.

One of them, a middle-aged woman, found herself caught between trains in Turkestan. She scraped acquaintance with a peasant girl and was asked home to one of those interminable Russian birthday feasts. The host suggested a walk, and that it would be wise for the Quaker to leave her passport behind. This she refused. The appearance of dirty work afoot was heightened when the whole party trooped across miles of meadow toward the Volga. Here they stripped, men and women, preparatory to Russian mixed bathing. Suddenly it came over the Quaker that these were kindly people, not Red brigands. She too undressed, tied her passport into her stocking and around her head, and proceeded to swim up and down the Volga shouting hilariously:

"I'm a member of the Arch Street Meeting!"

Such were the people who organized the field work in the mine areas last winter. They did what had never entered their minds as a possibility—used their European experience in behalf of hungry children in the United States.

One more Quaker experience abroad has an im-

portant bearing on the American mine question. Consider this statement:

"The industry which brought the town into being has passed like a great wave, leaving it stranded in ugliness and desolation, with no apparent hope for the future. Not only is there this difficulty of material conditions, but a further one of attitude of mind and outlook. The years of unemployment and strain, followed by the lowering of morale caused by widespread relief, have had their effect on a people once sturdy, independent and self-respecting. . . . The population consists almost wholly of miners."

The people of that town were not originally American hill billies, but Welsh shepherds and farmers. The description is of Brynmawr, Wales, in 1926. English miners in that year were going through what our miners are now experiencing, with the difference that the English Government did something about it.

The identical condition of surplus miners existed in England. The Government moved more than 70,000 of them into other sections and other industries. Bachelors were sent to unemployment camps to keep up their morale. The remaining people were saved from utter distress by the dole and old age pensions. England could not prevent a falling coal market, but she did refuse to let her people sink into an abyss. Little can be said of the United States Government in this respect. It made a coal survey in 1923, reported shocking conditions even then, but took no action.

The connecting link between the English and the American situation is the fact that the Quakers of the respective countries chanced to become plagued by the same "concern" for miner rehabilitation. At Brynmawr

the English Quakers taught the idle miners and their wives how to make rugs and furniture, weave, knit stockings and raise poultry. They founded a boot factory and made it pay. Some of their projects were backed financially by the Lord Mayor's Fund; all had the enthusiasm of every miner in the district. Eventually they organized fifty miners' clubs for games, concerts and those philosophic arguments beloved of the Welsh.

Imagination balks at the picture of a Kentucky miner group gathering for intellectual conversation. There would be more tobacco juice than discussion, with the added possibility of a shooting to enliven the evening. Our miners have a raciness of their own. No one wishes to stamp it out into a flat culture. But the fact remains that American mountaineer-miners have no stimulus whatsoever to their natural talents. They have no sports, so they shoot. They love talk, but have a thin pabulum to chew.

American Quakers knew all about the Brynmawr venture. Some of their relief workers in Europe had observed it.

In the fall of 1931 President Hoover called the American Friends Service Committee heads to Washington and asked if they would undertake to feed miners' children in the Blue Ridge. Mr. Hoover mentioned that Grace Abbott, in charge of the Children's Bureau, had reported grave conditions there. A fund of $225,000 would be available from the American Relief Administration reserves, surplus money collected originally to feed children in post-War Europe.

The Quakers went back to Philadelphia and put the project before a Meeting. The silences at a Quaker

meeting are more eloquent than most oratory. The tongue is quiet and the mind released to speculation. There is a natural restraint against interrupting the dynamic hush with a trite remark. Each by himself, in silence, weighed the implications of applying the doctrines of George Fox to an industrial tangle. Someone expressed a concern. Within a few days Quaker automobiles were threading through the coal valleys to find the worst spots, and operators were receiving their first calls from people with something to give.

A thousand dirt roads led up a thousand valleys to the coal mines where scrawny children needed food. How decide which ones to try? How reach the children without spending milk and soup money on transportation? The Quakers established units in various County seats. An over-seas worker, woman or man, usually directed the unit, with a pair of youngsters from Swarthmore or Haverford as helpers. They chose the mountain schools as the places where the most needy children could be found with least difficulty. They won over the schoolteachers, set up cook stoves in the schools, persuaded miners' wives to cook the meals and wash the dishes. They wheedled milk truck drivers to leave their regular routes and make daily deliveries, even on the drivers' holidays, at outlandishly remote schoolhouses.

In many instances they met with opposition from the operators. These did not like outsiders. Besides, it was bad for the credit of the company to admit that the miners weren't earning enough to feed their families. Some operators, used to the sight of poverty, did not know what condition the children were in.

In time most of the operators were won over. They donated the use of empty houses; they ordered the

mine doctors to weigh the children as a rule-of-thumb test of undernourishment. Those operators who did not become firm friends of the Quakers at least came to tolerate them as amiable idiots who must have some ulterior motive back of this feeding business, but who managed to avoid being discovered. By the end of the Spring, when the need was greatest, many operators came to the Quakers of their own accord, telling of distress which they were unable to handle.

During the peak month, April 1932, the Quakers were feeding 39,000 children a day and giving milk to an additional 3,000 nursing mothers and pre-school children. During their eight months in the field they distributed tens of thousands of garments and shoes. Nearly six hundred mine camps, scattered in thirty-nine coal Counties in the States of West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Maryland, learned that the outside world was not totally indifferent to their distress.

The relief fund could only be spent on feeding miners' children. It was satisfying to watch them add weight and sparkle, but difficult to see their parents the more lean-jowled and ragged by comparison. A general appeal for the adults brought $100,000 in cash, in addition to fifty tons of clothes sent to the fields. Firms contributed freight carloads of evaporated milk and hundreds of pounds of chocolates. Ohio farmers piled their trucks with produce and drove all night to bring food to the miners. Lacking the initiative of either industry or Government, the tragic need was met at haphazard by sympathetic outsiders.

A milk ration for a tubercular woman; an overcoat for a discouraged and shivering man; a bushel of pota-

toes for a hungry family—these gifts are trifles in a going civilization, but when it breaks down they become gigantic benefactions. For all they did, the Quakers could no more than temporarily ease the misery of the miners; yet every contact established a good will which survives.

Behind the active program of feeding and clothing ran a constant undercurrent of thought on permanent rehabilitation. This appeared as early as November when a meeting was called to bring the scattered field units into Logan for an exchange of ideas.

One of the members of the Quaker rehabilitation unit in Russia had recently returned to her own country and had found men living under hardships which the Soviet peasants no longer suffer.

"One of our worst towns," she told the meeting, "is built over an abandoned mine, so that people's porches occasionally drop into mine holes. The school building, where we are feeding the children, is on the top of a hill reached by an incredible road of 'yellow dog' clay—stuff that goes slithery when wet. I saw a woman patching in front of her house with ashes. She admitted the road was not perfect: 'Yesterday a fellow's car fell through a mine hole and all you could see was the top of it.' The best patching material is 'red dog,' a shale taken from the mine slag dump. We put sixty-five men to work surfacing two miles of road with red dog, and they did it willingly for the hire of a few old clothes and rations which cost us ninety cents a week each.

"The men are keen to work, mainly in some sort of mechanics. If we could get good workers to live there with the miners, they could remake the communities on very little money. In places where houses are al-

most rent-free the people could be self-supporting in the course of a year or two. And they would be able to compete with moonshine-making as a life work. The old miners and cripples, too, must be given something to do with their hands in order to stave off the dry-rot of idleness. Amusements—radio and movies—can help there."

Mary Kelsey, also familiar with relief abroad, drew on her English mining experiences to point the close parallel with the Blue Ridge. She said:

"In 1926 the situation in the Welsh coal mines was analogous to the present one here. There had been a huge prosperity and exactly the same collapse. The mines were completely unionized, but when an industry is declining there cannot be prosperity wages, there can be no real help from the industry itself.

"Mining in England is the aristocrat of labor. Their equipment is extraordinary; we have nothing here comparable to their pit-head locker rooms and shower baths; our miners' houses are at best hovels compared to theirs. It is a commonplace for miners' children to go to the University of Cardiff. One man told me: 'My uncle took honors in Greek. He goes down into the pit every day.'

"Nevertheless, when the 1926 strike broke, these people had no real conception of the economic situation. They were sure of the justice of their cause. They organized soup kitchens. They said: 'We'll stick it out until the grass grows over the pits.' After a year of that, the brutal fact began to come home that the economic situation would not turn, that they could not win. A complete change came over them. Dumb, dull misery clouded them all. They walked about with

bowed heads. They were beaten. Yet their situation was infinitely better than that of the American miners at the present moment. For the dole and old age insurance gives them a certain assurance that the wolf won't stalk past their doorways.

"These people, like the mountaineer-miners of Kentucky and West Virginia, used to be farmers. They are intensely pious. Formal religion used to be the center of their lives. Their singing is emotional and stirring. Since the strike their center of interest has shifted from the religious temple to the labor hall. That is the rallying point of a highly intellectual life, the welder of a sense of wrong and a conviction of the justice of their cause. When I was there they were getting money from Soviet Russia, and along with this a very slanted sort of economics, not always of a temperate brand.

"Into this situation came a Quaker couple who believed that bitterness is the strongest anti-social factor. They tried to pull out this thorn. They introduced cobbling, which in itself was not important except that it won the miners' confidence.

"Nothing is more depressing than the climate of South Wales, with the short winter days dwindling to four hours of daylight in the narrow valleys. There is the gray haze of soft coal, eternal rain and an impossibility of keeping the cold out of your marrow. The light in this gloom is a fierce independence of thought. Lecturers from Cardiff and Oxford do not talk down to these people—they give their best thought. I remember a discussion of forty miners on freedom: 'There are two freedoms,' said one of them, 'a freedom of the soul and a freedom of the body.' An old miner spoke

up: 'But moral freedom can only be gained by martyrdom.' Arthur Charles, poet and miner, broke in sharply with: 'It's because we're afraid of martyrdom that we are not free.'

"There is sincerity and the deep roots of culture in the Welsh miners. Our Southern miners are of a stock which has a native wisdom and independence in the bone. I think they deserve to have their cultural roots fertilized."

Here, in practical application, is the Quaker tenet of "something of God in every man." But there is no idea to bring lecturers from Harvard to stimulate the minds of the mountaineers. The fundamental business of sustaining life must come first. In the Quaker program, relief of distress represents this factor; mental rehabilitation is a by-product.

There were never more than fifty Quakers in the fields. The leg work and diplomacy required for the primary relief job took all their time, so that the rehabilitation thread was perforce woven into the daily routine. They carried an odd assortment of business suits, silk dresses, underwear and even Prince Alberts —sent them from the North—to shacks in the mine valleys and instructed the miners' wives in reshaping them for their offspring. The women loved the sociability of the sewing groups and responded eagerly to the chance to do something with their hands as an alternative to brooding at home. Moreover, their children went proudly to school in warm and not too absurd clothes. Pride and cheerfulness took the place of despair and sullen silence.

Some of the men were handed discouraged and soleless shoes and asked to cobble them into shape. If the

discarded brogans of a Boston business man were too long for a miner's boy, the amateur cobbler cut off the toes and sewed them square. The result was not Bond Street, but they shed the ooze and prevented chilblains.

Chair-making and quilting were started in empty houses as the genesis of home industries. The workers were paid in food; their hickory chairs and "Wedding Ring" patterns were sold in the North to pay for it.

The operators began to appreciate the sound economic sense in this. If the miners could earn money through handicrafts, or save money by exchanging home-made articles among themselves, they would have an income to supplement the admittedly inadequate mine wages. In this view the operators cannot be accused of selfishness. If pity for the miners does not inspire them, they at least would like to pay higher wages in order to stave off revolt. No operator wants to pay less than a living wage, as most of them are now compelled to do. Over and above a living wage, the matter becomes one of controversy. For some years to come that is not likely to become a great issue in coal mining. The task of this decade is to prevent starvation and revolution.

In the Spring of 1931 a group of observant operators met in Washington to consider this phenomenon of Quaker intervention in their bailiwick. They found that they liked it. In a queer way these outsiders had hit upon an idea which they themselves had been too busy, too hard-pressed, to originate. They wished that they might back the Quakers in a broad rehabilitation program. Since most of them reported that their companies were in red ink, the plan ended on the wish.

Quaker resources are not great enough to carry on.

The Quakers proved that the people turn naturally to handicrafts.

The result was not Bond Street, but it prevented chilblains.

Any effective program must be beyond private means. The Quakers were able to establish couples permanently in several key towns, as a means of field study on rehabilitation and as a nucleus of a possible second relief campaign. There the matter rests.

Is it, perhaps, a function of Government to see the workers of a ruined industry through their worst period, and to do the planning for them which their bankrupt employers will fail to do? If America is committed to a delicately adjusted machine civilization, the answer must be yes. Such is our present state, however, that each basic industry has to be cleaned up singly before it can be fitted into a national plan.

II

"DUTY"

In a remote valley of West Virginia is the small community of Duty, taking its name from the family which first settled there. In appearance and character it is like any other mountain town. There is a creek, a railroad track, a schoolhouse and a string of wooden houses. All its people are ridden by poverty, some by sickness and a few by crime. Duty likewise has the normal quota of personal hopes for happiness, the sum of them equaling, as in other towns, the number of inhabitants.

The only thing to distinguish Duty is the fact that the Quakers concerned themselves with its affairs for eight months, and incidentally made a day-by-day record of the internal life of the town, something which casual eyes usually miss.

It would hardly be pertinent to pry into the intimacies of these people were it not for the chance Duty offers to watch Quakers in action. All Quakers differ in personality, as much as do Episcopalians or believers in the law of gravity. In the hands of one Quaker group, Duty might have been treated with matter-of-fact efficiency. In the hands of Mary Kelsey and her helpers, Margaret Paxson and Charles Tatum, it was treated with what might be called romantic efficiency.

The following story of Duty, from its discovery in October until the Quaker withdrawal in June, was pieced together from the routine daily reports sent by Mary Kelsey to the Philadelphia office of the American Friends Service Committee. . . .

*

The destitution of the little camp Duty, which we visited in the morning, we saw repeated many times on our afternoon rounds. We will see that there are no households actually without food. Clothing still remains a problem. The question of transportation is terrific. We have to cross two mountains on the way. . . .

*

One cheerful thing has happened. The young girl at Duty, who is going to have an illegitimate baby, is really to get into the home at Wheeling, and we expect to drive her over there some week-end. The poor child was almost desperate when I first saw her. . . .

*

With the coöperation of a magnificent citizen of Duty we are going to get a fence to keep those horses at bay. Mrs. Wimmer says they "stomp dreadful." And we are going to get chair-making started. H—— will ask the superintendent of the mine for permission to cut the lumber. All the men are ready to take payment in kind, and with the proceeds of the chairs we hope to buy more provisions.

We find that we can get Hignite and his son, who both have trachoma, into a hospital in Kentucky where they will care for them gratis; and the home in Wheel-

ing is going to take Florence Cary in spite of the fact that an accidental baby six years old, which she failed to mention, has been discovered. The home has been perfect about her. They had a special meeting and decided to make an exception in her case. I had a talk with her today and really feel that there is good stuff in her.

So we are feeling happy about Duty, and Duty is feeling very differently than it did. . . .

*

I hope that there will be news before long of wheat or money or something for adult feeding. I can't imagine what would be happening there without our intervention. . . . I talked with the boss today, a sort of Simon Legree, with no sense of responsibility to these people, about cutting the wood for the chairs, and I am to see him next week for a final answer. One little chair has been made. . . .

*

We left poor Florence Cary at the home in Wheeling, and I hope that she will be happy there. The matron seemed sympathetic. And the babies were beautifully tended in a white nursery such as Florence, I am sure, never saw before.

But it was a dreadful ordeal she went through, leaving everything that was familiar, and going out to an unknown world where she had pledged herself to stay for a whole year. I couldn't help feeling respect for the girl's courage. She never once spoke of herself with self-pity, though it was obvious that she was terrified when we left her. . . .

*

We had set aside today to take Hignite and Jimmy to the trachoma hospital at Richmond, Kentucky. We were caught in a storm on our way back from McDowell last night, but had no idea how much water had fallen until we got out on the roads. We found any number of small wash-outs, and Pigeon Creek had turned into a torrent. But we reached our journey's end without trouble, though we did not ford the stream and to reach Hignite's house it was necessary to follow a cowpath over the hill behind.

The family had hardly expected us to come on account of the weather, of which they had a very serious sample in their flimsy little hut, with the railroad track in front turned into a roaring cataract. We were greeted as old friends, and went over every article of Hignite's and Jimmy's wardrobes to discuss their suitability. Jimmy was beaming with joy, so far as his poor blinking eyes would permit. He kept saying: "Then I can go to school," as though that were the greatest joy life could offer, though when he heard we would be driving two hundred miles by motor he seemed to feel that that might be equally delightful.

Before leaving we had a consultation with Simon Legree, who has suddenly awakened to the situation and offers to give us all the wood we need for the fence and to lend us his truck for the roadbuilding. Apparently he is really good to his men, and I did him a great injustice when I called him a slave-driver. . . .

*

The really great event of the day was the tea party at Duty. Twenty-four women appeared, including Mrs. Hignite, who had begun her bed quilt last night

and sat up until one o'clock working on it. She was beaming with joy because she had heard that both Hignite and Jimmy are getting on well at the hospital; one of Hignite's eyes has already improved. Jimmy was having the time of his life. . . .

*

In an hour we have to go down to the railway station to receive what remains of Florence Cary and her baby. Tomorrow they will go back to Duty for the last time. It's only about six weeks since we drove Florence to Wheeling. I am still glad that she went, but it is painful for us all. We had begun to feel that she was our special charge. . . .

*

Duty will never forget today, nor will this group of Friends. We saw Florence Cary, who left her home six weeks ago as an outcast, come back to a triumph that her most fantastic dreams could not have imagined. It was a glorious Spring day, clear and bright and warm, and as we four drove up the valley we could see the crowd assembled for the funeral. There was a hillock in the middle of the valley, and for the first time I noticed headstones of others buried there before her. A pair of mules hitched to a cart brought the coffin from her father's house.

There must have been two hundred people. Almost all the men were in overalls, and the women wore what they could, some with handkerchiefs on their heads. There were any number of children. Everyone was gathered around Florence's coffin. Her preacher brother was praying as we came up. He was very

emotional and rather painful, but the preacher who gave the sermon was more restrained.

I am afraid my thoughts wandered to observe how fine the mountain stock is. There were several old men with long gray mustaches and hawk noses, and beautiful from the point of view of physique. One of them, six feet three, in high laced boots with the bright green band that the mountaineers love, a checked shirt, baggy breeches and a staff in his hand, stood near us, and we agreed afterwards that he was a perfect example of what the mountaineer under proper conditions should and would be. He has a clear-cut face, heavily lined, and a grizzled head which gave him great dignity. The young girls have beauty too, but they fade when they are still young. Life is too hard for them.

The preacher startled us with his opening words. He said that Florence Cary, who lay there before them, had not lived a perfect life. But, he said, some people called Quakers had come along and had acted as Jesus acted with the woman who was accused of her neighbors; that they had refused to condemn the girl. And because of that her whole life had been changed. He begged the attentive crowd not to be cruel in their judgment of their neighbors. He was ungrammatical and he was crude, but he was moving.

At the end a lot of people came and shook hands with us, and we felt that Duty had accepted us. But we found ourselves wondering whether it would be possible to maintain our reputation.

There was one happy note in the gathering. Hignite got back from Richmond yesterday, looking like another man. He and his wife stood holding hands on the outskirts of the crowd, and not even Florence Cary's

death could take the radiance from Mrs. Hignite's face. Probably the thought that it was through her direct appeal that we had first gone to see Florence, and that the apotheosis we were witnessing was in a measure her doing, added to her happy look. I remember her saying that very first day, when she called me in to see Florence huddled like a hunted animal behind the stove in her kitchen: "It doesn't matter what a woman's done. She's a human being."

It was wonderful to see Hignite walking freely down the hill. One eye is gone, but he is seeing better every day with the other. Jimmy must stay on for some weeks, but in the end he should be completely cured. . . .

*

After the meeting was over I spent a painful half hour in walking to one of the shacks far up the hollow, the shack which incidentally harbors the camp moonshiner and his family of fourteen people, and there inspecting four hernias. There are three others in the same family, but they were away. In the war days we had wonderful medical and dental care for our French refugees. Is there any possibility of anything of that kind for our people? Every time I go to Duty I see the need of it more clearly. . . .

*

There was another meeting at Duty today, so large that we wondered where all the people came from. Five women brought quilts to hold up in turn for inspection. It was like a county fair. There were also a whole series of toy chairs and beds, some of them really beautiful. We are hugging ourselves with joy,

because we have been told so often that it is impossible to get these people to come to meetings, and we can triumphantly disprove any such statements in the future. We really feel that we have a basis for work in adult education in these hopeful beginnings of handicrafts. Although of course we would have to begin with much caution and without any suggestion that education was the intent. . . .

*

Peggy went to Duty today to deliver some material for a quilt and came back with the sad news that the son of one of our quilters had just been arrested for stealing thirty-four hens and a goose, and for being found with a hip flask and a suitcase full of moonshine hidden under the railroad bridge. Did I tell you too that some time ago our friend O—— ran amok, burned all the furniture in the house and drove his family away before him, heaven knows where? The poor things. The wonder is that it doesn't happen more often. . . .

*

There is great excitement in Duty just now over the arrival of Mrs. Hignite's first grandchild, in their shack along with all the rest of the family. Mrs. Hignite invited us all to see the new prodigy. We went en masse, carrying one of the layettes which arrived a while ago. I wish you could have seen the pleasure that it brought. The two-days' mother was lying in a big bed surrounded by countless small sisters and brothers and innumerable neighbors, all intent on the

mite of a baby, which does not weigh over three pounds.

The young father opened the bundle and carried every garment with great pleasure and pride to his wife, although the poor thing was so ill and weak that she could hardly speak. Imagine having a baby in a shack with six small brothers and sisters, a father and mother—the latter to have one of her own before long—and a young husband hovering around. Mrs. Hignite was quite surprised when I suggested that Roxy was perhaps having too much company.

We are afraid that the work can only run a short time at Duty, carrying it until the gardens are bearing; but it will do nothing towards helping them over next winter. The pay is about $2.50 a day, but they have to buy their food at the company store, and with large families that leaves practically no margin for anything else. . . .

*

By far the most important news today is the moving fact that Mrs. Hignite's new grandson has been named after Charles. He (Charles) is going about with a look of imperfectly concealed pride, and we others all have our noses out of joint. But Simon Legree promises Peggy that the next girl born in the camp will be named after her, and there are indications that we may all be honored before long.

*

Our deepening familiarity with Duty is bringing some startling revelations. The charming motherly

woman who makes quilts for us, and is tenderness itself toward her painfully defective child, shot one of her neighbors five times not long ago, each shot taking effect, so that a moment later the man died on the railroad track in front of her house. She was tried for murder, but as a matter of fact the man had come to her house with a revolver, threatening vengeance after a quarrel among the children.

And, worse still, the young coal miner seeking a job, who slept in our kitchen a night or two ago, is actually under indictment on goodness knows how many counts, for goodness knows what crimes, and we ignorantly helped him out of the County which is seeking his apprehension. Furthermore I brought him a pair of shoes today while still in ignorance, having thought him very charming. . . .

*

Things are getting far less strenuous with the closing of the schools, but it is puzzling to know what course to take in respect to continuance of the feeding. Every day of it makes the people more dependent, but the cessation of feeding must result in real suffering. We try to comfort ourselves by saying that these people have always lived on a very low standard, but it's cold comfort. . . .

*

Incidentally, young Jimmy Hignite went back to his family today with his sight restored, and bursting with delight to be back among his own people.

WAYS OUT

I

SHORT-COMINGS OF A NOBLE IMPULSE

A KENTUCKY urchin of three taught me a lesson with a rock. We were driving into a deserted camp to talk to some miners' wives. The child stood by the side of the road. When we came opposite, she let fly a sizable rock and caught the car amidships. We stopped.

"Don't you know you shouldn't throw stones at people?"

Angry at her good aim, I suppose that I expected a show of remorse at this reproof. Perhaps she would curtsey to the gentlemen who had so kindly come to interest themselves in her mother's affairs. . . . The child glared with round-eyed hostility and picked up another rock. We moved on.

Something of the same reaction shows in a field note written by a Quaker worker at the end of a discouraging day.

"In the morning," she reported, "I rounded up the potatoes required at M——. Every time we go there we get more disgusted with the place. About six families have made no attempt to start vegetable gardens, their excuse being an injunction of the landlord's to effect their removal from his houses. These families are a disreputable bunch, murderers, moonshiners, etc., and they have all banded together to fight the injunction.

When I asked them where they were expecting to move, they answered in chorus: 'Oh, we don't expect to move at all.' But to my suggestion that—such being the case—they get busy and make gardens, there was only silence. There are the worst cases of pellagra here of any I have yet seen."

Such incidents are healthy reminders that the charitable impulse must at times come up hard against ingratitude. It is, in fact, a good thing if irritation at the ingrates can raise a doubt about gratitude itself as a first class human instinct.

We are all limited in the help we can give each other, even in intimate relationships. It follows that attempts to help masses of people must fail in proportion as understanding is spread thinly over a wider field. The act of giving a hungry man something to eat is an unquestioned benefit to him. But if the donations are repeated until he comes to rely on them, and is angry at their discontinuance, then he has been harmed.

Likewise, it requires a high degree of balance in the giver, lest the desire to help degenerate into a pleasure in power over the recipient. The belligerent little Kentuckian had much the better of our argument.

However, there are issues beyond her horizon which make it imperative to run through her rock barrage and not stop to deliver moral lectures. Consider her, not as an unmannerly child, but as a symbol of all the ignorance and poverty from which the mass of humanity has made so slow an ascent over the course of centuries. Much of that misery was caused by needless cruelty. For instance, five hundred years ago it was common practice to emasculate a criminal before hang-

ing him. Today the beating of a criminal under police third degree arouses a storm of public anger. Cruelty for its own sake is being trained out of the human mind. We don't want it back. It might bring personal pain.

Ethics, of course, had a part in that change, yet more and more clearly we are coming to see that charity toward others is a protection of ourselves. Thus, the agony of the victims of machine civilization is something we wish to alleviate both from charitable considerations and because this sore spot may infect us.

This is fully understood by the American people. It is only necessary to listen to political promises and relief organizers to realize how fervently the United States would like to make everybody happy. But the impulse loses effect because of our sentimental adherence to the idea that all unfortunates must be objects of charity.

There should be no shame in confessing that helping other people is an exciting social experiment in self-preservation, not a gesture for which we expect gratitude.

A current side-track in the wrong direction is that great American invention, the sob-story. This is used legitimately in such journalistic charities as "The Hundred Neediest Cases," by which *The New York Times* annually obtains direct aid for the poor. But in general the pleasure in reading about other people's troubles has been picked up by the press as a valuable filip to reader interest. The typical sob-story is an aid to newspaper circulation rather than to the sufferers whose misery is exploited.

In labor disputes the sob-story does yeoman service.

From the coal fields last winter many tales of woe were circulated to prove this or that case. Sincere enough in intent, they were picked up by newspapers as isolated bits of sensationalism, and were read by a public which did not know how to go about correcting the matter.

A few readers, touched by stories of want and oppression, sent money and clothes to the mine fields. That was sheer gain; but it was counteracted by the annoyance of a larger public which suspected the propagandist aims of the tellers.

"Let them stew in their own juice. I'm sick of the miners," remarked the editor of a news weekly last winter. In the back of his head was a conviction that coal miners would forever be boring his readers with their monotonous calamities.

So they will, unless intelligent remedies are substituted for sob-stories.

Examine a specimen tale from the coal fields. It is a true story:

The family's two beds were jammed together, head-to-head, in a small room. During the course of one night a fourth child was born to the mother on one bed, while the father died of typhoid fever on the other. The widow sold her cow for $9 to pay the funeral expenses. She was already in debt to the grocery. She faced life with no means of income, with four small children to feed, and in a community where everyone else was too poor to help her.

What good does it do to tell the story? Will any outsiders help the woman? . . . Then they must help tens of thousands like her. The job is too big for private charity. Moreover, it may not even lie in the province

of charity, taking charity in the old sense of personal aid to the deserving poor. This is no situation where the Squire can order a pot of beef tea taken to old Gaffer Jones. It is a broad scale industrial problem, where the motive should be the reëstablishment of workers on a self-reliant basis. Any other approach is degrading.

This need not shut out human relationships. In fact, no geared plan can move without those impulses by which man has always regulated his affairs.

The Quakers came to respect the miner people as human beings, coming as close to them as outsiders can be. Their contacts had none of the hardness which class propaganda brings out. They did not tell the miners that they were tragic slaves of a crooked industrialism. Instead they moved in an atmosphere of genial good spirits, changing the mountaineers' fatalism into something more alive by giving them the impression that here were strangers who could drop in to talk things over as a neighbor might.

This is taking men as you find them rather than as your particular purposes would like them to be. The attitude has the merit of uncovering some of the saltiness and humor of personality which needs to be reckoned with as much as does the grim side of their lives. Something of this appears in the routine field notes written as reports of the Quaker workers to their Philadelphia office:

"If you go in innocently and ignore the sometimes obvious presence of liquor, and in some cases the suspicion of the man of the house, in no time at all they are your friends and everyone up the holler is clamoring for a visit too."

"Two of the women found that a copperhead snake had wound itself around a large white pitcher with its head stuck through the handle. One woman suggested using the shotgun, but the other one said she did not like the way it kicked. So she took the pistol and shot the snake five times through the head—killed it but did not break the pitcher. We expect to keep on friendly terms with that woman."

"Mrs. Hall reports that everything is serene now between the two camps. The daily presence of the 'law' seems to have the desired effect. The children are being orderly too. There is a certain humor in the spectacle of the officer, with cartridge belt and dangling revolver, marshaling these little children into line before they enter a Quaker feeding center."

"I had my first real touch of local suspicion and hard feeling yesterday. I had a toothache. The dentist politely asked me where I came from, but when he heard 'New York' he snapped at me: 'Are you with the Dreiser committee?' I quickly assured him I had no such connections, whereupon he stuffed my mouth full of cotton, jabbed the drill into my mouth and began to air his opinions."

"This morning we took the truck with a load of potatoes to B——. This is a pretty hard place to distribute in as nearly all the people are great liars, even the operator. However, I think we managed to be fair. A few of them may have skinned us, but most of the people really needed the potatoes.

"When we got there none of the people had appeared. This, by the way, is our toughest camp, averaging about a murder a month. We had no horn on the truck so I got out and made the motor back-fire a few times.

They all stuck their heads out of doors and windows and in a short time we had our crowd."

"Our talk was preceded by an Eighth Grade debate on 'Which was greater, Washington or Lincoln?' The arguments ran about as follows: 'Washington was greater because he was more popular—look how the people killed Lincoln!' 'Lincoln was greater—he used to walk three miles to borrow a book, and thirty-four miles to hear a good murder trial.' Lincoln won."

"Up our hillsides we got a realization that lonely walks in unknown valleys are not wise. There are always people back somewhere in the hollows, often moonshiners and consequently suspicious. Hiking is unknown, and the sight of strangers causes uncomfortable attention. We have decided to camp always by the roadside."

"While giving out clothes today we found a boy in very poor circumstances, his father having been a sheriff and gotten killed. Later I had a queer conversation with an Eighth Grade girl named Eunice. I walked down the steep side of the mountain from the school with her and, happening to notice the condition of a boy's shoes ahead of us, remarked: 'His shoes are bad.' Said Eunice: 'Yes, his father was the sheriff and got killed.' 'Oh, then we have already fixed up his brother with clothes this morning.' 'No,' said Eunice, 'that boy's father was another sheriff.' 'Well—do all the sheriffs get killed here?' Eunice (very matter of fact) 'Generally they do.' "

"Most of these children never knew what it was to be fed properly. I chuckled at a mother today. Before we came she had thought that her boy had T.B. After eating our lunches a while he changed so much that

his mother, very worried, came to the teachers to see what could be ailing her boy because he was 'bloating.' It was merely good healthy fat and she had never known how a boy ought to look."

"I interviewed individual women to get helpers with the school lunches. There is no community spirit down here—rugged individualism is rampant. But by dint of personal appeals—and by introducing to each other people who had been neighbors for years—I finally rounded up ten who have taken on the task of preparing the meals."

. . . It is obvious that infinite tact is needed to deal with this contentious and ignorant people. Who shall take on the responsibility to teaching half a million of them the rudiments of living?

The outside world winces helplessly at their woes, or puts them out of mind. Charity can be no more than a make-shift. Vocational training and health education cost too much money for any private agency to supply. The moral nature of man cannot be sustained on thin air. As a first step the miners must be placed on an economic basis.

And who will come to the aid of the bankrupt operators? No campaigns have been started to relieve their distress. Some of them are penniless and hungry. Others are fighting to keep their mines open and their men paid. Must we wait until they are all in the breadline and a vital industry is demolished?

The coal situation is a cancer, and certain to grow worse. It is bewildering alike to those involved in it and to outside observers.

Nevertheless, there are ways out.

II

INVENTORY

WHAT is left in the region to build on? There is the tottering coal industry, sole support of too many people. There are oil and natural gas wells, which employ few workers and ship most of their products and profits outside the region. There is the soil, thin and gullied by rain, yet able to give sustenance to many thousands. There are the forests, denuded of their hardwoods and at present monopolized by the coal companies for mine timbers. Lastly, there is water power to be developed on many streams, not for ambitious power projects but to turn the wheels of small local industries.

In a coal region the most likely way to relieve distress is to make money by mining coal. It is tragically absurd that a valuable commodity should be sold at a cut-throat bargain counter. Some of the economic and human factors causing this debacle have been presented in this book. There is no intention here, however, of telling coal operators how to run their affairs. They already know what they should do.

To control production is their first aim. Whether or not pools to regulate coal output can be formed depends on decision by the Supreme Court; or, if held unconstitutional, on possible changes in the Sherman law.

Rational sales practice is a second essential. Under the present system the large industrial consumers of soft coal buy it at less than it costs the operator to mine it, simply because the slack coal they use was once considered almost worthless. Someone must pay for industry's sharp bargain. That scape-goat is the small householder, whose high-cost furnace and stove coal brings in almost the only profit made in mining coal. The operators should induce industrialists to abandon an unfair advantage.

From 1920 until 1932 coal dropped from twenty-five dollars a ton to the vanishing point. Many carloads were given away last winter to save demurrage charges on railway sidings. It is impossible to run a business, or to be fair to workmen, under such fluctuations. A reasonably stable coal market is the heaven of which damned operators dream.

It is extremely significant that their conservative trade journal, *Coal Age,* came out last year with the following remarks on unionism as a stabilizing force:

> "Inherited prejudices in some fields, and bitter personal experiences in others have made the idea of a revival of unionism obnoxious to many employers. Nevertheless, unless some new formula can be found, the conclusion seems inevitable that the desired stabilization of wages and working conditions must come through a recognition and an acceptance of an outside labor organization by a sufficiently large percentage of the operators to give the wages and the working conditions so established a controlling influence in the districts where direct recognition is withheld. . . . There must be genuine partnership between capital and labor if the goal of standardized industrial relations is to be reached."

Testimony from no other source could more convincingly support the right of miners to organize. True, the chastened operators are in a pro-union mood for the sake of their own safety, but there is no harm in that motive.

The new union, which is bound to come by peace treaty or by bloodshed, will do well not to occupy itself solely with getting higher wages. In the Appalachians, for instance, its long life would be more assured through educating its members to become reasoning human beings, not prejudiced hill billies.

If the hill people could have remained as they were, I for one would have been content to leave them in their innocence, prejudiced but charming, poor but free from civilization's boredom and irritations.

That can no longer be. The machine age has changed their hill virtues into industrial vices. Nationally speaking, we have them on our hands, surplus people, misfits who cannot work peaceably in their one industry and will not be ready as skilled workmen if new industries should be introduced into the region to save it.

They very much need a union now, one which will have vision enough to train them in trades, in health and in the uses of their minds for amusement's sake.

Granted that coal mining can be stabilized and unions formed, there still remains a surplus of people who cannot be used underground. Already the pressure of hunger has sent them by tens of thousands back to the soil. In the yards of their shacks the miners have planted seeds supplied by the Red Cross and their States. The operators approve, and sometimes set aside blocks of land and lend horses to do the plowing.

A revival of frontier life is going on. Log cabins and

split rail fences are being built on cleared land. Men and boys are occasionally harnessed to drag the plows. There is barter of home-made utensils for food.

It is good that a farm people should return to the soil. The trouble is that they no longer have any claim to it. The coal companies own the land. For the use of it the mountaineers cannot pay rent, since they raise no money crops. Nor can they remain for long in dependence on another man's soil.

In the minds of many people in the region is the question whether the land owners should not return some of the surface rights to the miners. The main barrier lies in those share-holders in land companies, people who have never seen their property and so suppose that they might be giving away something of value by releasing the surface rights. This would not be so. The land is valueless except to those so hard-pressed that they can make it produce food. The absentee owners could afford to lease the land to miners for long periods, the lease to be cancelled if the miner moves away. In no case would the mineral rights be affected.

The owners, moreover, would benefit materially from the arrangement. The farmer-miner combination makes for stability. A man with leased land to farm could supply most of his needs from it and still be available to go underground whenever the mine was running. The companys' present responsibility for their miners' idleness and poverty could be cleared in many cases by this simple scheme.

The alternative is to keep discontented people off the land which was originally taken away from them by unsavory methods. The process still goes on. In

a courthouse square in West Virginia farms were being auctioned for taxes one day last winter. A farm was sold under the hammer for $6. There were dour expressions on most of the crowd. But one slick citizen in city clothes looked pleased. He was buying farms for a natural gas company. Good business, but an outrageous bit of social injustice.

The same holds in the case of the forest land. Without adequate fire protection, much of it goes up in smoke during the dry periods. There is beginning to be a shortage of sound timber. Reforestation is largely neglected. Those who know the facts are appalled at the wastage of what was once one of the most valuable hardwood forests on the Continent.

There is the need, and there are the idle men to meet it. The mountaineers make excellent woodsmen. Each could tend fifteen acres as an adjunct to his farm, and could make money on railroad ties and mine props. Something approaching the glorious State forests of Germany could be developed.

The innumerable mountain streams could furnish power for small wood-turning mills, providing an incentive for forestry, employment for many men, and a new source of income for the region which placed all its bets on one industry, and lost.

The Quakers proved that the people turn naturally to handicrafts. In the old log cabin there were hooks in the ceiling to which the quilting frame was drawn up each evening to make room for hickory chairs and the supper table. These homely and satisfying objects the miner people can make once more, to add warmth to their drab huts and to appease their restless hands.

Men have worked too hard and lived too meanly

at all stages of the world's history. But it remained for the machine age to give a taste of happiness to an entire people and then to leave them both in need and lacking the saving tonic of work.

No one dramatic solution can be found for these problems. The simple ways out suggested above were developed from the experience of the Quakers, of professors in the University of West Virginia and others with a practical bent.

If every measure cited is carried out, there will still be a surplus of people in the Blue Ridge. The ultimate hope is science.

III

THE CHANCE FOR SCIENCE

SCIENCE is a disturber of things as they are. For the past three decades civilization has been in a continual process of adjustment to changes wrought by new inventions. We may be certain that this period of flux is not finished.

Scientific research has made mass production possible. Behind the scenes are the laboratory workers, continually discovering how to make new products out of the most unlikely material. Wood pulp becomes rayon; curdled milk is metamorphosed into umbrella handles and fountain pens. No one can be sure that a sow's ear may not make an exceptionally fine silk purse under scientific legerdemain.

Ever since the automobile put the carriage maker out of business, every industry has felt unsafe from the possible competition of some new product of science. Accordingly, 1,600 research laboratories have been established in the United States alone, as insurance against being left behind in the race for new standards in quantity and perfection of products.

For example, a rabbit's ear, when exposed to the Coolidge cathode ray, sheds its hair and eventually grows a new coat of bright red hair. There is no red-eared rabbit industry to be upset by this device, yet the Coolidge ray performs other extraordinary acts,

such as changing the species of a plant. No one knows what its industrial application may be. Remembering that modern radio sprang from a similar tube, directors vote subsidies to their own research staffs.

Or again, the weed ramie has been spun into fabric stronger than cotton cloth. Ramie grows ten times as much bulk to the acre as cotton. Would it not disturb our national economy to have it supplant the mainstay of the South?

Labor has shared in all the shifts in industry brought about by science. The bicycle maker went into the automobile factory. The high paid glass blower learned to operate, at lower wages, a machine which does the work of forty men. The justly feared "technological unemployment" is also a child of science. It is doubtful whether we shall have enough work for all idle human hands for another decade at least, perhaps never.

The research laboratory is arbiter of our destiny. We cannot be too careful in directing its mighty force. In particular, it is wise to look to its possibilities in power, light and heat—the Three Graces of our era.

If all power used in the United States were put in terms of tons of coal burned, there would be a billion tons annual usage. In this comparison the power sources are wood, animals, wind, water, gas, oil and coal. Using this same unit, the world at large uses only two billion tons of coal power; that is, the United States uses half of the power-producing sources in the whole world. We are a civilization based on power. Coal is our greatest source of it; yet we are wasting it and have not buckled down to learn its proper uses.

As early as 1881 Sir William Siemens said:

"I am bold enough to say that raw coal should not be used as fuel for any purpose whatsoever and that the first step toward the economic production of heat is the gas retort or gas producer in which coal is converted either entirely into gas or into gas and coke."

He had in mind the loss of valuable products which float into the air whenever raw coal is burned for heat.

In the coking process of coal the following principal by-products result: gas, ammonium compounds, coal tar products and fuel oil. All are immensely useful. Coal tar alone provides aniline dyes, benzol for anti-knock mixtures with gasoline, T.N.T. for explosives, perfumes, flavoring extracts, saccharine, aspirin—a long list already and an almost endless one in prospect.

Only a fraction of one percent of all soft coal is turned into by-products, since more would flood the market. The bulk of the coal is burned in the raw state and produces such phenomena as the laying of 1,000 tons of soot each year over every square mile of Pittsburgh.

We both waste the stored up energy of millions of years and blacken our lung tissues in the process. Half a century after Siemens made his suggestion, our modern scientists are repeating it in new language. At the Third International Coal Conference, held last year, William J. Hale, of the Dow Chemical Company, remarked:

"We are all assuming that the hope of the coal industry is to raise the price of coal. It should be lowered instead. How can you do that and make the coal industry profitable? You must first ask yourselves the question—What is the future of chemistry in the

United States? That can be answered by naming two simple chemical compounds—ethylene and carbon monoxide. They hold the entire future of everything, every single thing in organic chemistry. The coal man can make all the carbon monoxide he wants at a very low expense. Therefore, it is up to him to go into the carbon monoxide and ethylene business; and if he does that, and stops forever the idea of selling coal to anybody, his future is made."

Here science touches directly on the destinies of the now bankrupt coal regions. But who is to carry out the long, patient research which will release these benefits?

At once we fall rudely against the prosaic fact that crude oil is at present so cheap that it has largely supplanted coal as a fuel, and at the same time has nipped private enthusiasm for coal research. One ambitious coal laboratory, founded before the depression by the Standard Oil Corporation, was shortly abandoned as uneconomic under the present competition of oil. If this great corporation could take such a position, it is obvious that no private industry has the patience to carry fundamental research in coal over its unproductive years.

In the long swing of industrial history this is extremely short-sighted. The canny directors of the British Empire recognized that some time since. In 1925 the British Commission on the Coal Industry reported:

"It is clear that our (England's) future as an industrial nation depends largely on a regular supply of coal at a moderate price. We consider that the careful, systematic and continued application of science to the practices of the coal mining industry is one of the

most important essentials necessary to achieve this end . . . it is essential that a really strong Research Association should be developed . . . that the industry as a whole should become imbued with the spirit of science."

The United States came to a similar conclusion six years later. With coal mining crippled by too great production, *Coal Age* in 1931 urged the development of new uses of coal, and said:

"Finding new uses for coal as a raw material for manufacturing lies in the field of scientific research. . . . It is suggested that the bituminous industry organize a Coal Research and Development Corporation."

Springing as it does from rock-ribbed conservatism, this is an amazing suggestion; but an infinitely wise one. Science is an orderly way of thought to those who embrace it. The injection of such a habit into the chaos of coal would bring incalculable returns in wealth and in human happiness.

To finance research and development, *Coal Age* proposes that the operators tax themselves one cent a ton, which would supply the venture with $3,000,000 a year. The device of a cent-a-ton tax is borrowed from English practice, which imposes a penny-a-ton tax on all coal for the benefit of the miners.

Suppose that America should adopt the idea, applying half of the levy to research and half to rehabilitate the men in the pits. How would it work?

IV

PENNY-A-TON

To TAX a declining industry for any purpose seems impolitic, and would certainly be so were the tax laid on some districts and not on others. However, the even distribution of a cent levy on every ton of coal mined can be painlessly absorbed by consumers, and without harm to operators.

That, at least, was the English experience. In 1920, when English coal mining was a sick industry, the Government still had courage to pass an Act setting up the Miners' Welfare Fund for a trial period of five and a half years. The good it accomplished in that period led to a renewal of the Act in 1925, with an additional levy on royalties to provide pit-head baths. Today the Welfare Fund is a permanent force for harmony between English mine owners and their workmen.

The plan is simple. It is administered by a general committee comprised of owners, miners and the public, with a chairman appointed by the Secretary of Mines. District committees of miners and owners are set up in mine towns. To them are allocated funds for any reasonable project they themselves select.

The general committee spends about ten percent of the fund on education and on research in health and safety. The facilities which the miners have bought

for themselves out of their share of the fund are beyond anything ever seen in an American mining community. There are playgrounds for children, tennis courts, swimming pools and soccer fields for adult recreation, and shaded parks where the old may rest. Shower baths and change rooms—inestimable aids to self-respect—are pet projects, while in one mine drinking water is piped underground to the men at work. Think about conditions underground and it becomes evident why the men chose that boon.

The money spent on the sick is a similar commentary on the simpler blessings lacking in a mine town. The Fund has built homes for convalescents, provided nursing service and hospital care, and even bought ambulances to rush the injured to operating tables.

In the 1927 report of the British Miners' Welfare Fund, Theodore Roosevelt was quoted as follows:

"Unless you use the experience of others you will spend your whole life acquiring knowledge and it will come too late to be of service."

It is not yet too late to use the experience of the English in providing those simple benefits which our own miners lack. For decades we have dealt with them according to temporary whims, being sympathetic at times with their sufferings, or disgusted with the trouble they cause. A continuing effort toward betterment, through good times and bad, is a transcendent need. It can be had at the small sum of a cent a ton.

The plan touches soothingly on every sore spot in the industry. For the first time American operators and miners would meet to work together on a noncontroversial project. In that coöperation lie the roots of a new mutual tolerance.

The necessary Government mechanism to collect the tax would itself be an asset. Data on production would result. The grievance which miners have toward false weighing of coal on the company scales would be automatically eliminated. The collecting of the tax would establish a precedent useful to the coal operators in their voluntary assessment of a cent a ton for scientific research.

There is the genesis of a national mine labor union in the collective groups which would be brought together in every mine district to work out the welfare plan. Through this the miners would learn how to handle themselves in peaceable negotiation. They would have a chance to break down that distrust of labor leadership which now stands as the barrier to recognition, by the operators, of the miners' right to organize.

In the American adaptation of the Welfare Fund less stress could be placed on soccer fields and tennis courts. American miners are dying for lack of medical care. They require instruction in skilled trades and handicrafts. They need books, and a chance for their children to prepare for the modern world into which they must grow up. The $3,000,000 a year from the cent-a-ton fund would give them this, not as charity but as a small return from the wealth which they themselves created.

The general committee, empowered to spend ten percent of the fund, would become a board of strategy in a continuous campaign to find new work for the surplus people of the mines. It could also act as a national employment bureau to send idle miners wherever they might be required in industry. It could plan for new

industrial projects in the region itself, both to give work to unneeded miners and to provide income producing industries other than coal. Then the collapse of mining need never again plunge every inhabitant into ruin.

The world has been distressed of late. Except for the unteachables, men are lit by a desire for change. Perhaps this is only because their purses are pinched; yet the urge is there, and should be made to function.

The difficulty is that the expert in his own profession—be he engineer, merchant, parson or scientist—has no experience as a coördinator of these intricate economic forces now thrown so badly out of gear. The liberal looks with sadness on the social effects of the inchoate system. But he either does not know what changes would help, or his voice is lost in the babble of partisan prejudice.

Baffled by complexity, he falls back on emotional guides, on the unsteady flame of his desire to help the victims of social disorder. It is a generous impulse, but it will not suffice.

The motivation of this book was the sight of suffering among the friendless people of the mines. They are too underfed to rebel, too cold and cheerless to shake off their passive acceptance of misery. Theirs is a state which peculiarly engages the sympathies. Therefore we have seen constant liberal gestures made in their behalf, and we have noted that the failure of these attempts has resulted, time and again, in a discouraged withdrawal of the outside allies from the mine fields.

This cycle we are certain to repeat in the Blue Ridge coal fields . . . until that moment when the generous

impulse can be made effective by gearing it to a workable and continuous agency of change.

During this winter—and the next—American newspapers will occasionally carry items telling of bloodshed at a coal tipple. In glancing at them remember that the incidents are merely surface indications of a deep despair engendered by a vast social injustice.

Profound modern issues are concealed in this prosaic penny-a-ton plan borrowed from English experience. The American people, charitable but careless, have an opportunity to act.