

It Can't Happen Here (Signet Classics)

By Sinclair Lewis

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“The novel that foreshadowed Donald Trump’s authoritarian appeal.”—Salon

It Can’t Happen Here is the only one of Sinclair Lewis’s later novels to match the power of *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Arrowsmith*. A cautionary tale about the fragility of democracy, it is an alarming, eerily timeless look at how fascism could take hold in America.

Written during the Great Depression, when the country was largely oblivious to Hitler’s aggression, it juxtaposes sharp political satire with the chillingly realistic rise of a president who becomes a dictator to save the nation from welfare cheats, sex, crime, and a liberal press.

Called “a message to thinking Americans” by the *Springfield Republican* when it was published in 1935, *It Can’t Happen Here* is a shockingly prescient novel that remains as fresh and contemporary as today’s news.

With an Introduction by Michael Meyer
and an Afterword by Gary Scharnhorst

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It Can't Happen Here (Signet Classics) By Sinclair Lewis Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #491 in Books
- Published on: 2014-01-07
- Released on: 2014-01-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.50" h x .88" w x 4.25" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 416 pages

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Editorial Review

Review
“Written at white heat.”—*Chicago Tribune*

“Not only [Lewis's] most important book but one of the most important books ever produced in this country.”—*The New Yorker*

About the Author
The son of a country doctor, **Harry Sinclair Lewis** (1885–1951) was born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota. His childhood and early youth were spent in the Midwest, and later he attended Yale University, where he was editor of the literary magazine. After graduating in 1907, he worked as a reporter and in editorial positions at various newspapers, magazines, and publishing houses from the East Coast to California. He was able to give this work up after a few of his stories had appeared in magazines and his first novel, *Our Mr. Wrenn* (1914), had been published. *Main Street* (1920) was his first really successful novel, and his reputation was secured by the publication of *Babbitt* (1922). Lewis was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* (1925) but refused to accept the honor, saying the prize was meant to go to a novel that celebrated the wholesomeness of American life, something his books did not do. He did accept, however, when in 1930 he became the first American writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. During the last part of his life, he spent a great deal of time in Europe and continued to write both novels and plays. In 1950, after completing his last novel, *World So Wide* (1951), he intended to take an extended tour but became ill and was forced to settle in Rome, where he spent some months working on his poems before dying.

Michael Meyer, PhD, a professor of English at the University of Connecticut, previously taught at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the College of William and Mary. His scholarly articles have appeared in such periodicals as *American Literature, Studies in the American Renaissance,* and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. An internationally recognized authority on Henry David Thoreau, he is a former president of the Thoreau Society and the coauthor of *The New Thoreau Handbook*, a standard reference. His first book, *Several More Lives to Live: Thoreau’s Political Reputation in America,* was awarded the Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize by the American Studies Association. In addition to *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, his edited volumes include *Frederick Douglass: The Narrative and Selected Writings*.

Gary Scharnhorst is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at the University of New Mexico, editor of *American Literary Realism*, and editor in alternating years of *American Literary Scholarship*.

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SINCLAIR LEWIS

IT CAN’T
HAPPEN HERE

With an Introduction
by Michael Meyer
and a New Afterword
by Gary Scharnhorst

Table of Contents

Introduction

Sinclair Lewis enjoyed a brilliant career in the 1920s portraying and satirizing what he regarded as the mediocrity, materialism, corruption, and hypocrisy of middle-class life in the United States. His five major novels of the twenties—*Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), *Elmer Gantry* (1927), and *Dodsworth* (1929)—were all bestsellers that served to hold a mirror up to the parochialism and provincialism of that decade. A good many Americans winced at their own reflections in those novels, but they eagerly bought Lewis's iconoclastic books, because, however much they flinched at his representations of their middle-class lives, they were finally snugly, if not smugly, comfortable in the economic security that produced their prosperous confidence.

After the stock market crash of 1929, however, there wasn't much left of the middle class of the early 1930s. Many who were previously solid, respectable breadwinners found themselves on bread lines, soup lines, and relief rolls. "Normalcy," a twenties password synonymous with security, gave way to the "jitters" as profitless corporations laid off millions of workers who drifted across the country like Oklahoma farm dust. The popular song and exuberant theme of the twenties "Ain't We Got Fun" changed its tune to "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" during the Great Depression. Although Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first inaugural address in 1933 promised a New Deal, he also let his countrymen know what the score was in grim tones:

Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

Not surprisingly, the middle class was no longer interested in being discounted by bankers or by satirists. Lewis had to find new material.

Given the stormy economic and social climate of the early 1930s, Lewis had plenty of other topics to consider that were more relevant than middle-class predispositions to be foolish and venal. He found a ready-made plot in the nervous undercurrent that accompanied the volatile politics of the period. With the rise of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in Europe and the alarming popularity of a variety of demagogues from both the left and right in the United States, there was widespread concern that the country could be taken over by a fascist dictatorship. Lewis placed these fears at the center of *It Can't Happen Here*.

Published in October of 1935, the novel gave shape to the free-floating anxieties that had consumed worried citizens for several years as the country stumbled through economic turmoil desperately seeking solutions. Lewis was intimately familiar with these concerns because Dorothy Thompson, his second wife, had interviewed Hitler as a foreign correspondent in Berlin and had written a series of articles between 1931 and 1935 warning Americans about the Nazi propaganda machine that masked the vicious persecution of Jews and the growing number of concentration camps designed to annihilate them. In addition to what he heard at his breakfast table, Lewis was very much aware of the many debates swirling around him in newspapers, journals, and books. In September of 1934, for example, *The Modern Monthly* featured a symposium titled "Will Fascism Come to America?" that featured a number of leading intellectuals such as Theodore Dreiser, Norman Thomas, Charles A. Beard, and Waldo Frank debating the question, and in early 1935, the *Nation* ran a series of articles on "forerunners of American Fascism." Although Lewis is often credited with coining the phrase "it can't happen here," Herschel Brickell points out in his review of the novel in *North American Review* (December 1935) that the book actually "takes its title from the typical American remark concerning

the possibility of a dictatorship in this country" (a quick search of the Internet demonstrates that the phrase continues to be used by a wide range of political perspectives to evoke the various tyrannies Lewis describes). Echoing Brickell, another contemporary reviewer, Benjamin Stolberg, aptly notes that the novel "has successfully plagiarized our social atmosphere" (*Books*, October 1935). Lewis's take, however, is that it *can* happen here.

The threat of fascism in America captured his readers' attention. *It Can't Happen Here* quickly became a national bestseller (more than 320,000 copies were sold), and it has become by now part of the same thirties' social and political fabric that Lewis wove into the novel. While Lewis's contemporaries were thirsty for the "successfully plagiarized" details about the 1930s that saturate the novel, twenty-first-century readers may sometimes feel as if they're in over their head owing to the book's deep topical nature. The novel is a kind of Sears, Roebuck catalogue of early 1930s American political figures, events, and movements both central and peripheral to the decade's issues. Scores of historical figures populate the book, such as Huey Long, Father Charles Coughlin, William Randolph Hearst, Upton Sinclair, William Allen White, Mike Gold, and for a remarkable example, thirteen actual working journalists whose names appear on page 219. Although lots of these names are perhaps unfamiliar to many readers today, Lewis's plot and characterizations are not wholly dependent upon historical knowledge for readers to understand and appreciate the novel's conflicts. The names, as well as political events and movements, certainly form the major portion of the book's highly detailed political scenery, but there's little, if any, doubt about how Lewis wants us to think about them.

Although Lewis's protagonist, Doremus Jessup, is "a mild, rather indolent and somewhat sentimental Liberal" (p. 46) who is slow to respond to the rise of an American version of a fascist dictatorship, Lewis responded quickly and intensely to the fascist threats he saw all around him. He wrote and revised the entire novel in fewer than four months while he summered in Vermont in 1935. His preparation for the book took longer than its writing; he had been simmering with materials for several years as he recognized with increasing alarm the dangers that threatened democratic institutions. Unfortunately, his writing displays the haste in which he wrote—and so do the book's reviews. R. P. Blackmur laments that "there is hardly a literary question that it does not fail to raise and there is hardly a rule for the good conduct of novels that it does not break" (*Nation*, October 1935). Despite the many reviewers who complained about the novel's loose melodramatic plot, flat and even corny characters, weak clichéd dialogue, padded political discourse, awkward sentimentality, and heavy-handed satire and irony, many also judged the book to be a timely caveat and applauded its propagandistic value against fascism. Clifton Fadiman pronounced it to be "one of the most important books ever produced in this country" (*New Yorker*, October 1935), a book that all Americans should read to help save the country from impending political failures and potential tyrannies.

In March of 1935, two months before Sinclair Lewis began writing *It Can't Happen Here*, Walter Lippmann lamented in a popular magazine that the United States had "come to a period of discouragement. . .. Pollyanna is silenced and Cassandra is doing all the talking." There was much for Cassandra to talk about: the administration of the New Deal seemed hopelessly bogged down and the fierce strident polemics of popular leaders such as Huey Long and Father Coughlin seemed to speak more directly than the president to the poor, the dispossessed, the frustrated, and the angry. Neither the Louisiana Kingfish nor the populist radio priest freighted their remedies for the country's ills with feasible ideas or coherent programs. Immediate solutions were too important to be burdened with details and troublesome facts; it was enough for Long simply to announce the justice of a $5,000 "homestead allowance" coupled with an annual income of at least $2,000 for every American family. The Kingfish was long on proposals but short on perceiving potential problems: "Who cares," he said, "what consequences may come following the mandates of the Lord, of the Pilgrims, of Jefferson, Webster and Lincoln? He who falls in this fight falls in the radiance of the future."

The liberals who worried about the possible consequences that attended this future brave new world were

particularly wary because the Old World had already produced Hitler and Mussolini. Fascism was becoming fashionable, a fact manifested by the Brown Shirts, Black Shirts, Khaki Shirts, White Shirts, and Silver Shirts—complete with matching boots—that came out of closets all over Europe and the United States. In October of 1935, the month *It Can't Happen Here* was published, William Randolph Hearst encapsuled the problem with a statement that delighted shirt makers but terrified liberals. He counseled his fellow citizens: "Whenever you hear a prominent American called a 'Fascist,' you can usually make up your mind that the man is simply a LOYAL CITIZEN WHO STANDS FOR AMERICANISM."

Lewis transforms this advice into a warning in his novel by showing how Americans elect as their president Berzelius Windrip, a folksy New England version of the dictatorial Kingfish who ushers in a fascistic regime of suppression, terror, and totalitarianism—all draped in red, white, and blue bunting. Invoking the highest patriotic principles, Windrip disguises his fascism in the historical trappings of the Republic; his Gestapo, for example, is called the Minute Men. Lewis projects a dire version of the immediate future—the story begins in 1936 and ends in 1939—by creating fictional equivalents of the trepidations liberals experienced in the mid-thirties. Although Lewis looks to the future for the actualization of what liberals feared might happen, he turns to the past for the antidote to a poisoned America. To combat Windrip's deceptive use of a past that is employed to corrupt the present, Lewis draws upon a national heritage of individualistic and democratic values in order to redeem the country from the fascism masquerading in a patriotic costume.

There is a distinct nostalgic quality to Lewis's hero, Doremus Jessup, born in 1876, an independent, liberal Vermont newspaper editor who stands up to Windrip's vicious regime. Lewis proudly presents him as a nineteenth-century individualist rather than a twentieth-century automaton. He sports a beard, which his detractors say makes him "high-brow," "different," and "artistic" instead of one of the boys. His reading confirms their suspicions about his beard; he subscribes to, among other things, the *Congressional Record*, the *New Yorker*, *Time*, the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *New Masses*. Although Jessup is more articulate and more liberal than most of Lewis's protagonists, he is confronted with essentially the same kind of phenomena, even if more extreme, that chronically thwart and deny the individual in Lewis's fiction. At various opportune moments in the novel, Lewis uses Jessup as a spokesman to denounce and satirize the DAR, the KKK, Aimee McPherson, Mary Baker Eddy, Billy Sunday, Father Coughlin, William Jennings Bryan, Huey Long, Tammany graft, Chicago gangsters, Prohibition, lynchings, anti-Semitism, racism, militarism, concentration camps, torture, and political assassinations. Jessup's announced values are not fundamentally different from some of Lewis's other famous characters. Whether the vague dissatisfactions festering in George F. Babbitt, the unrealistic impulses toward reform fluttering in Carol Kennicott, or the linear, though uncertain, determination of a Martin Arrowsmith, Lewis's most interesting characters want, as Carol Kennicott puts it in *Main Street*, "a more conscious life, we're tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists." Lewis clearly admired and identified with Jessup—so much so that he played the role of Jessup in a dramatic adaptation by the South Shore Players in Cohasset, Massachusetts, one of many of the play's productions sponsored by the Federal Theater Project throughout the country in the wake of the novel's popularity.

Jessup is a nineteenth-century styled individualist who has fallen into history; he's fallen into a world in which his allegiance to predominant American values such as self-reliance and independence mark him as a political subversive. Recalling the achievement of men such as Thaddeus Stevens and Stephen A. Douglas, he compares them to what he describes as "the wishy-washy young people today," and he wonders aloud

if we're breeding up any paladins like those stout, grouchy old devils?—if we're producing 'em anywhere in New England?—anywhere in America?—anywhere in the world? They had guts. Independence. Did what they wanted to and thought what they liked, and everybody could go to hell.(p. 13)

Jessup subscribes to these values, and though they are implicitly subversive in a politically repressive

atmosphere, Lewis describes him as understanding himself too well to consider himself a left-wing radical; instead he is a tentative liberal who basically wants to be left alone to enjoy his small-town life and newspaper work.

One of the few calm and contented moments of the novel consists of a gathering of Jessup's family and friends for a country picnic where "there was nothing modern and neurotic," writes Lewis, "nothing savoring of Freud, Adler, Marx, Bertrand Russell, or any other divinity of the 1930's" (p. 38). From the perspective of the complex, mechanized, modernized, psychologized, and homogenized thirties, Jessup longs for an era now lost. There is no going back to the past, a fact that makes it doubly attractive and no less important to Jessup—or to Lewis. Yet Jessup's sense of "social duty" (p. 104) does not permit him to ignore the present, nor does he abandon the past because finally it will be a means by which he will attempt to reshape the present.

Jessup's sense of social duty is informed by his individualism. He does not believe in collective modes of reform because he views them as absolutist and dogmatic, and he objects to any group insisting that it has the final and perfect solution for society's ills. Neither "Fascists," "Communists," "American Constitutionalists," "Monarchists," nor "preachers" have the answer, because, according to Jessup, "There is no Solution! There will never be a state of society anything like perfect!" (p. 112). He reflects Lewis's own values when he insists that "All the Utopias—Brook Farm, Robert Owen's sanctuary of chatter, Upton Sinclair's Helicon Hall—and their regulation end in scandal, feuds, poverty, griminess, disillusion" (p. 114). And when they don't immediately end in failure such collective activities are perilous for individualists because they may turn fanatical and violent:

Blessed be they [thinks Jessup] who are not Patriots and Idealists, and who do not feel they must dash right in and Do Something About It, something so immediately important that all doubters must be liquidated—tortured—slaughtered! Good old murder, that since the slaying of Abel by Cain has always been the new device by which all oligarchies and dictators have, for all future ages to come, removed opposition! (p. 114)

* * *

Jessup, like Lewis, shrinks from political activism and believes that a man minding his own business rather than insisting upon saving the masses is a true idealist.

Lewis's attraction to this kind of individualism is evident in a 1937 review he wrote for *Newsweek* of an edition of Henry Thoreau's *Walden*, another Yankee who minded his own business (mostly). Lewis entitled the review "One-Man Revolution," a title particularly aimed at the collectivist reforms of that decade. This is the first sentence of the piece:

Once upon a time in America there was a scholar who conducted a one-man revolution and won it.

There is hardly anything in all of Lewis's fiction as direct and as happy as that—not in forty years of writing. For Lewis, Thoreau's success has almost a fabulous quality to it ("Once upon a time") and Lewis is grateful for the story while implicitly identifying with him. In the context of the late thirties, when America was menaced by Italy, Germany, and Japan, Lewis suggests making Thoreau the "supreme Duce" as an answer to those imposing forms of oppression. Jessup shares this supremely independent perspective but discovers that as conditions grow worse, as individuals become more frequent targets of Windrip's goons and bullies, he must take a stand.

Although Jessup's family and friends urge him to keep a low profile and not publish an editorial condemning the outrages of Windrip's regime, his mistress, Lorinda Pike, an activist, supports him. Once the editorial

appears, Jessup is immediately hauled off to jail, where he reconsiders his earlier negative attitudes toward violence and wonders if his own conscientious respectability—that is, minding his own business—hasn't been one of the primary reasons why fascism has succeeded in America. It is, he thinks, the Jessups "who have let the demagogues wriggle in, without fierce enough protest" (p. 186).

Despite these reflections Jessup is extraordinarily wary of taking any extreme action. He had been brought up to revere Abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips and Harriet Beecher Stowe, but "his father had considered John Brown insane and a menace" (p. 117). Jessup's liberal roots firmly place him in a relatively passive and pacifistic political tradition. Even after his son-in-law is taken out to be shot and Jessup hears of grotesque atrocities including mass executions and concentration camp horrors, he only reluctantly agrees to light out for the territory ahead—Canada is once again the goal of a new "underground railroad" where Americans seek refuge from slavery. But his effort to escape with his family is unsuccessful and he returns enraged, muttering, "Now I know why men like John Brown became crazy killers" (p. 234). On the heels of his failure to escape, he returns home to find his son justifying book burnings and the violent suppression of dissenters. Jessup is outraged by his son's bland rationale that "you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs" (p. 238), and he promptly throws him out. After much chronic indecisiveness and resolutions undercut by irresolution—precisely the strategies Lewis uses in the plots and characterizations of *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Arrowsmith*—Jessup is moved to action and works to publish the *Vermont Vigilance*, a seditious underground paper that exposes the villainy and corruption of the American Corporate State and Patriotic Party. Jessup's widowed daughter enthusiastically tucks these pamphlets inside copies of the *Reader's Digest* at the drugstore, while his younger daughter serves as a secret agent in the enemy camp and fends off lewd advances.

On July 4, 1938, with a terrible thunderstorm as the background, the Minute Men descend upon Jessup's house, wreck it, and take him away to a concentration camp, where he is nearly beaten to death. As a result of enduring the horrible conditions of the camp, Jessup feels a sense of camaraderie with the other prisoners and what Lewis describes as a "murderous hatred of their oppressors so that they, men of peace all of them, would gladly have hanged every Corpo, mild or vicious. Doremus understood John Brown much better" (p.312). But that camaraderie does not mean that he is prepared to become a communist and abandon his individualism. "What I want," says Jessup, "is mass action by just one member, alone on a hilltop. I'm a great optimist. . .. I still hope America may some day rise to the standards of Kit Carson" (p. 311). Eventually, Jessup escapes from the camp and he works for the underground again, this time as a secret agent in Minnesota coordinating raids against the Minute Men posts. Although he is engaged in an organized response to fascism, he remains ideologically aloof, conducting what is essentially a one-man revolution. Jessup, writes Lewis, "saw now that he must remain alone, a 'Liberal,' scorned by all the noisier prophets for refusing to be a willing cat for the busy monkeys of either" fascism or communism (p. 359). He participates in the popular rebellion against the Corpo regime but the values he fights for are associated with the individual rather than with collective action: "I am convinced," he insists, "that everything that is worth while in the world has been accomplished by the free, inquiring, critical spirit, and that the preservation of this spirit is more important than any social system whatsoever" (p. 359).

To many readers in the 1930s, this essentially nineteenth-century evocation of self-reliant virtues was attractive, but it provided only the vaguest kind of political solutions to pressing political issues. Lewis's response to a potential fascist dictatorship offered no specific remedies; this was, however, not a fault but a strategy, because he was writing a satirical novel rather than a five-year plan framed by an inaugural address. Instead, he successfully aroused a generation of Americans to the dangers that swirled around them. Many of his readers recognized that though his answers to contemporary political issues might have been provisional, the questions he raised about liberty and justice remain perennial. He believed that dissent—even a cranky, erratic, eccentric, old-fashioned version of it—was not disloyalty but at the heart of an American democratic identity. Engulfed in the complexities and vulnerabilities of our post-September 11 world, Americans of

nearly all political persuasions are likely to find that *It Can't Happen Here*, though firmly anchored in the politics of the 1930s, surfaces as a revealing and disturbing read.

—MICHAEL MEYER

1

THE HANDSOME DINING ROOM of the Hotel Wessex, with its gilded plaster shields and the mural depicting the Green Mountains, had been reserved for the Ladies' Night Dinner of the Fort Beulah Rotary Club.

Here in Vermont the affair was not so picturesque as it might have been on the Western prairies. Oh, it had its points: there was a skit in which Medary Cole (grist mill & feed store) and Louis Rotenstern (custom tailoring—pressing & cleaning) announced that they were those historic Vermonters, Brigham Young and Joseph Smith, and with their jokes about imaginary plural wives they got in ever so many funny digs at the ladies present. But the occasion was essentially serious. All of America was serious now, after the seven years of depression since 1929. It was just long enough after the Great War of 1914-18 for the young people who had been born in 1917 to be ready to go to college. . .or to another war, almost any old war that might be handy.

The features of this night among the Rotarians were nothing funny, at least not obviously funny, for they were the patriotic addresses of Brigadier General Herbert Y. Edgeways, U.S.A. (ret.), who dealt angrily with the topic "Peace through Defense—Millions for Arms but Not One Cent for Tribute," and of Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch—she who was no more renowned for her gallant anti-suffrage campaigning way back in 1919 than she was for having, during the Great War, kept the American soldiers entirely out of French cafés by the clever trick of sending them ten thousand sets of dominoes.

Nor could any social-minded patriot sneeze at her recent somewhat unappreciated effort to maintain the purity of the American Home by barring from the motion-picture industry all persons, actors or directors or cameramen, who had: (a) ever been divorced; (b) been born in any foreign country—except Great Britain, since Mrs. Gimmitch thought very highly of Queen Mary, or (c) declined to take an oath to revere the Flag, the Constitution, the Bible, and all other peculiarly American institutions.

The Annual Ladies' Dinner was a most respectable gathering—the flower of Fort Beulah. Most of the ladies and more than half of the gentlemen wore evening clothes, and it was rumored that before the feast the inner circle had had cocktails, privily served in Room 289 of the hotel. The tables, arranged on three sides of a hollow square, were bright with candles, cut-glass dishes of candy and slightly tough almonds, figurines of Mickey Mouse, brass Rotary wheels, and small silk American flags stuck in gilded hard-boiled eggs. On the wall was a banner lettered "Service Before Self," and the menu—the celery, cream of tomato soup, broiled haddock, chicken croquettes, peas, and tutti-frutti ice-cream—was up to the highest standards of the Hotel Wessex.

They were all listening, agape. General Edgeways was completing his manly yet mystical rhapsody on nationalism:

". . .for these United States, alone among the great powers, have no desire for foreign conquest. Our highest ambition is to be darned well let alone! Our only genuine relationship to Europe is in our arduous task of having to try and educate the crass and ignorant masses that Europe has wished onto us up to something like a semblance of American culture and good manners. But, as I explained to you, we must be prepared to defend our shores against all the alien gangs of international racketeers that call themselves 'governments,' and that with such feverish envy are always eyeing our inexhaustible mines, our towering forests, our titanic

and luxurious cities, our fair and far-flung fields.

“For the first time in all history, a great nation must go on arming itself more and more, not for conquest—not for jealousy—not for war—but for *peace*! Pray God it may never be necessary, but if foreign nations don’t sharply heed our warning, there will, as when the proverbial dragon’s teeth were sowed, spring up an armed and fearless warrior upon every square foot of these United States, so arduously cultivated and defended by our pioneer fathers, whose sword-girded images we must be. . .or we shall perish!”

The applause was cyclonic. “Professor” Emil Staubmeyer, the superintendent of schools, popped up to scream, “Three cheers for the General—hip, hip, hooray!”

All the audience made their faces to shine upon the General and Mr. Staubmeyer—all save a couple of crank pacifist women, and one Doremus Jessup, editor of the Fort Beulah *Daily Informer*, locally considered “a pretty smart fella but kind of a cynic,” who whispered to his friend the Reverend Mr. Falck, “Our pioneer fathers did rather of a skimpy job in arduously cultivating some of the square feet in Arizona!”

* * *

The culminating glory of the dinner was the address of Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, known throughout the country as “the Unkies’ Girl,” because during the Great War she had advocated calling our boys in the A.E.F. “the Unkies.” She hadn’t merely given them dominoes; indeed her first notion had been far more imaginative. She wanted to send to every soldier at the Front a canary in a cage. Think what it would have meant to them in the way of companionship and inducing memories of home and mother! A dear little canary! And who knows—maybe you could train ‘em to hunt cooties!

Seething with the notion, she got herself clear into the office of the Quartermaster General, but that stuffy machine-minded official refused her (or, really, refused the poor lads, so lonely there in the mud), muttering in a cowardly way some foolishness about lack of transport for canaries. It is said that her eyes flashed real fire, and that she faced the Jack-in-office like Joan of Arc with eyeglasses while she “gave him a piece of her mind that *he* never forgot!”

In those good days women really had a chance. They were encouraged to send their menfolks, or anybody else’s menfolks, off to war. Mrs. Gimmitch addressed every soldier she met—and she saw to it that she met any of them who ventured within two blocks of her—as “My own dear boy.” It is fabled that she thus saluted a colonel of marines who had come up from the ranks and who answered, “We own dear boys are certainly getting a lot of mothers these days. Personally, I’d rather have a few more mistresses.” And the fable continues that she did not stop her remarks on the occasion, except to cough, for one hour and seventeen minutes, by the Colonel’s wrist watch.

But her social services were not all confined to prehistoric eras. It was as recently as 1935 that she had taken up purifying the films, and before that she had first advocated and then fought Prohibition. She had also (since the vote had been forced on her) been a Republican Committeewoman in 1932, and sent to President Hoover daily a lengthy telegram of advice.

And, though herself unfortunately childless, she was esteemed as a lecturer and writer about Child Culture, and she was the author of a volume of nursery lyrics, including the immortal couplet:

All of the Roundies are resting in rows,

With roundy-roundies around their toes.

But always, 1917 or 1936, she was a raging member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The D.A.R. (reflected the cynic, Doremus Jessup, that evening) is a somewhat confusing organization—as confusing as Theosophy, Relativity, or the Hindu Vanishing Boy Trick, all three of which it resembles. It is composed of females who spend one half their waking hours boasting of being descended from the seditious American colonists of 1776, and the other and more ardent half in attacking all contemporaries who believe in precisely the principles for which those ancestors struggled.

The D.A.R. (reflected Doremus) has become as sacrosanct, as beyond criticism, as even the Catholic Church or the Salvation Army. And there is this to be said: it has provided hearty and innocent laughter for the judicious, since it has contrived to be just as ridiculous as the unhappily defunct Kuklux Klan, without any need of wearing, like the K.K.K., high dunces' caps and public nightshirts.

So, whether Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch was called in to inspire military morale, or to persuade Lithuanian choral societies to begin their program with "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," always she was a D.A.R., and you could tell it as you listened to her with the Fort Beulah Rotarians on this happy May evening.

She was short, plump, and pert of nose. Her luxuriant gray hair (she was sixty now, just the age of the sarcastic editor, Doremus Jessup) could be seen below her youthful, floppy Leghorn hat; she wore a silk print dress with an enormous string of crystal beads, and pinned above her ripe bosom was an orchid among lilies of the valley. She was full of friendliness toward all the men present: she wriggled at them, she cuddled at them, as in a voice full of flute sounds and chocolate sauce she poured out her oration on "How You Boys Can Help Us Girls."

Women, she pointed out, had done nothing with the vote. If the United States had only listened to her back in 1919 she could have saved them all this trouble. No. Certainly not. No votes. In fact, Woman must resume her place in the Home and: "As that great author and scientist, Mr. Arthur Brisbane, has pointed out, what every woman ought to do is to have six children."

At this second there was a shocking, an appalling interruption.

One Lorinda Pike, widow of a notorious Unitarian preacher, was the manager of a country super-boarding-house that called itself "The Beulah Valley Tavern." She was a deceptively Madonna-like, youngish woman, with calm eyes, smooth chestnut hair parted in the middle, and a soft voice often colored with laughter. But on a public platform her voice became brassy, her eyes filled with embarrassing fury. She was the village scold, the village crank. She was constantly poking into things that were none of her business, and at town meetings she criticized every substantial interest in the whole country: the electric company's rates, the salaries of the schoolteachers, the Ministerial Association's high-minded censorship of books for the public library. Now, at this moment when everything should have been all Service and Sunshine, Mrs. Lorinda Pike cracked the spell by jeering:

"Three cheers for Brisbane! But what if a poor gal can't hook a man? Have her six kids out of wedlock?"

Then the good old war horse, Gimmitch, veteran of a hundred campaigns against subversive Reds, trained to ridicule out of existence the cant of Socialist hecklers and turn the laugh against them, swung into gallant action:

"My dear good woman, if a gal, as you call it, has any real charm and womanliness, she won't have to 'hook' a man—she'll find 'em lined up ten deep on her doorstep!" (Laughter and applause.)

The lady hoodlum had merely stirred Mrs. Gimmitch into noble passion. She did not cuddle at them now.

She tore into it:

“I tell you, my friends, the trouble with this whole country is that so many are *selfish*! Here’s a hundred and twenty million people, with 95 per cent of ‘em only thinking of *self*, instead of turning to and helping the responsible business men to bring back prosperity! All these corrupt and self-seeking labor unions! Money grubbers! Thinking only of how much wages they can extort out of their unfortunate employer, with all the responsibilities he has to bear!

“What this country needs is Discipline! Peace is a great dream, but maybe sometimes it’s only a pipe dream! I’m not so sure—now this will shock you, but I want you to listen to one woman who will tell you the unadulterated hard truth instead of a lot of sentimental taffy, and I’m not sure but that we need to be in a real war again, in order to learn Discipline! We don’t want all this highbrow intellectuality, all this book-learning. That’s good enough in its way, but isn’t it, after all, just a nice toy for grownups? No, what we all of us must have, if this great land is going to go on maintaining its high position among the Congress of Nations, is Discipline—Will Power—Character!”

She turned prettily then toward General Edgeways and laughed:

“You’ve been telling us about how to secure peace, but come on, now, General—just among us Rotarians and Rotary Anns—’fess up! With your great experience, don’t you honest, cross-your-heart, think that perhaps—just maybe—when a country has gone money-mad, like all our labor unions and workmen, with their propaganda to hoist income taxes, so that the thrifty and industrious have to pay for the shiftless ne’er-do-wells, then maybe, to save their lazy souls and get some iron into them, a war might be a good thing? Come on, now, tell your real middle name, Mong General!”

Dramatically she sat down, and the sound of clapping filled the room like a cloud of downy feathers. The crowd bellowed, “Come on, General! Stand up!” and “She’s called your bluff—what you got?” or just a tolerant, “Attaboy, Gen!”

The General was short and globular, and his red face was smooth as a baby’s bottom and adorned with white-gold-framed spectacles. But he had the military snort and a virile chuckle.

“Well, sir!” he guffawed, on his feet, shaking a chummy forefinger at Mrs. Gimmitch, “since you folks are bound and determined to drag the secrets out of a poor soldier, I better confess that while I do abhor war, yet there are worse things. Ah, my friends, far worse! A state of so-called peace, in which labor organizations are riddled, as by plague germs, with insane notions out of anarchistic Red Russia! A state in which college professors, newspapermen, and notorious authors are secretly promulgating these same seditious attacks on the grand old Constitution! A state in which, as a result of being fed with these mental drugs, the People are flabby, cowardly, grasping, and lacking in the fierce pride of the warrior! No, such a state is far worse than war at its most monstrous!

“I guess maybe some of the things I said in my former speech were kind of a little bit obvious and what we used to call ‘old hat’ when my brigade was quartered in England. About the United States only wanting peace, and freedom from all foreign entanglements. No! What I’d really like us to do would be to come out and tell the whole world: ‘Now you boys never mind about the moral side of this. We have power, and power is its own excuse!’

“I don’t altogether admire everything Germany and Italy have done, but you’ve got to hand it to ‘em, they’ve been honest enough and realistic enough to say to the other nations, ‘Just tend to your own business, will you? We’ve got strength and will, and for whomever has those divine qualities it’s not only a right, it’s a *duty*, to use ‘em!’ Nobody in God’s world ever loved a weakling—including that weakling himself!

“And I’ve got good news for you! This gospel of clean and aggressive strength is spreading everywhere in this country among the finest type of youth. Why today, in 1936, there’s less than 7 per cent of collegiate institutions that do not have military-training units under discipline as rigorous as the Nazis, and where once it was forced upon them by the authorities, now it is the strong young men and women who themselves demand the *right* to be trained in warlike virtues and skill—for, mark you, the girls, with their instruction in nursing and the manufacture of gas masks and the like, are becoming every whit as zealous as their brothers. And all the really *thinking* type of professors are right with ‘em!

“Why, here, as recently as three years ago, a sickeningly big percentage of students were blatant pacifists, wanting to knife their own native land in the dark. But now, when the shameless fools and the advocates of Communism try to hold pacifist meetings—why, my friends, in the past five months, since January first, no less than seventy-six such exhibitionistic orgies have been raided by their fellow students, and no less than fifty-nine disloyal Red students have received their just deserts by being beaten up so severely that never again will they raise in this free country the bloodstained banner of anarchism! That, my friends, is NEWS!”

* * *

As the General sat down, amid ecstasies of applause, the village trouble maker, Mrs. Lorinda Pike, leaped up and again interrupted the love feast:

“Look here, Mr. Edgeways, if you think you can get away with this sadistic nonsense without——”

She got no farther. Francis Tasbrough, the quarry owner, the most substantial industrialist in Fort Beulah, stood grandly up, quieted Lorinda with an outstretched arm, and rumbled in his Jerusalem-the-Golden basso, “A moment please, my dear lady! All of us here locally have got used to your political principles. But as chairman, it is my unfortunate duty to remind you that General Edgeways and Mrs. Gimmitch have been invited by the club to address us, whereas you, if you will excuse my saying so, are not even related to any Rotarian but merely here as the guest of the Reverend Falck, than whom there is no one whom we more honor. So, if you will be so good—— Ah, I thank you, madame!”

Lorinda Pike had slumped into her chair with her fuse still burning. Mr. Francis Tasbrough (it rhymed with “low”) did not slump; he sat like the Archbishop of Canterbury on the archiepiscopal throne.

And Doremus Jessup popped up to soothe them all, being an intimate of Lorinda, and having, since milkiest boyhood, chummed with and detested Francis Tasbrough.

This Doremus Jessup, publisher of the *Daily Informer*, for all that he was a competent business man and a writer of editorials not without wit and good New England earthiness, was yet considered the prime eccentric of Fort Beulah. He was on the school board, the library board, and he introduced people like Oswald Garrison Villard, Norman Thomas, and Admiral Byrd when they came to town lecturing.

Jessup was a littlish man, skinny, smiling, well tanned, with a small gray mustache, a small and well-trimmed gray beard—in a community where to sport a beard was to confess one’s self a farmer, a Civil War veteran, or a Seventh Day Adventist. Doremus’s detractors said that he maintained the beard just to be “highbrow” and “different,” to try to appear “artistic.” Possibly they were right. Anyway, he skipped up now and murmured:

“Well, all the birdies in their nest agree. My friend, Mrs. Pike, ought to know that freedom of speech becomes mere license when it goes so far as to criticize the Army, differ with the D.A.R., and advocate the rights of the Mob. So, Lorinda, I think you ought to apologize to the General, to whom we should be grateful for explaining to us what the ruling classes of the country really want. Come on now, my friend—jump up

and make your excuses."

He was looking down on Lorinda with sternness, yet Medary Cole, president of Rotary, wondered if Doremus wasn't "kidding" them. He had been known to. Yes—no—he must be wrong, for Mrs. Lorinda Pike was (without rising) caroling, "Oh yes! I do apologize, General! Thank you for your revelatory speech!"

The General raised his plump hand (with a Masonic ring as well as a West Point ring on the sausage-shaped fingers); he bowed like Galahad or a head-waiter; he shouted with parade-ground maleness: "Not at all, not at all, madame! We old campaigners never mind a healthy scrap. Glad when anybody's enough interested in our fool ideas to go and get sore at us, huh, huh, huh!"

And everybody laughed and sweetness reigned. The program wound up with Louis Rotenstern's singing of a group of patriotic ditties: "Marching through Georgia" and "Tenting on the Old Campground" and "Dixie" and "Old Black Joe" and "I'm Only a Poor Cowboy and I Know I Done Wrong."

Louis Rotenstern was by all of Fort Beulah classed as a "good fellow," a caste just below that of "real, old-fashioned gentleman." Doremus Jessup liked to go fishing with him, and partridge-hunting; and he considered that no Fifth Avenue tailor could do anything tastier in the way of a seersucker outfit. But Louis was a jingo. He explained, and rather often, that it was not he nor his father who had been born in the ghetto in Prussian Poland, but his grandfather (whose name, Doremus suspected, had been something less stylish and Nordic than Rotenstern). Louis's pocket heroes were Calvin Coolidge, Leonard Wood, Dwight L. Moody, and Admiral Dewey (and Dewey was a born Vermonter, rejoiced Louis, who himself had been born in Flatbush, Long Island).

He was not only 100 per cent American; he exacted 40 per cent of chauvinistic interest on top of the principal. He was on every occasion heard to say, "We ought to keep all these foreigners out of the country, and what I mean, the Kikes just as much as the Wops and Hunkies and Chinks." Louis was altogether convinced that if the ignorant politicians would keep their dirty hands off banking and the stock exchange and hours of labor for salesmen in department stores, then everyone in the country would profit, as beneficiaries of increased business, and all of them (including the retail clerks) be rich as Aga Khan.

So Louis put into his melodies not only his burning voice of a Bydgoszcz cantor but all his nationalistic fervor, so that every one joined in the choruses, particularly Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, with her celebrated train-caller's contralto.

The dinner broke up in cataract-like sounds of happy adieux, and Doremus Jessup muttered to his goodwife Emma, a solid, kindly, worried soul, who liked knitting, solitaire, and the novels of Kathleen Norris: "Was I terrible butting in that way?"

"Oh, no, Dormouse, you did just right. I *am* fond of Lorinda Pike, but why *does* she have to show off and parade all her silly Socialist ideas?"

"You old Tory!" said Doremus. "Don't you want to invite the Siamese elephant, the Gimmitch, to drop in and have a drink?"

"I do not!" said Emma Jessup.

And in the end, as the Rotarians shuffled and dealt themselves and their innumerable motorcars, it was Frank Tasbrough who invited the choicer males, including Doremus, home for an after-party.

AS HE TOOK HIS WIFE home and drove up Pleasant Hill to Tasbrough's, Doremus Jessup meditated upon the epidemic patriotism of General Edgeways. But he broke it off to let himself be absorbed in the hills, as it had been his habit for the fifty-three years, out of his sixty years of life, that he had spent in Fort Beulah, Vermont.

Legally a city, Fort Beulah was a comfortable village of old red brick, old granite workshops, and houses of white clapboards or gray shingles, with a few smug little modern bungalows, yellow or seal brown. There was but little manufacturing: a small woolen mill, a sash-and-door factory, a pump works. The granite which was its chief produce came from quarries four miles away; in Fort Beulah itself were only the offices. . .all the money. . .the meager shacks of most of the quarry workers. It was a town of perhaps ten thousand souls, inhabiting about twenty thousand bodies—the proportion of soul-possession may be too high.

There was but one (comparative) skyscraper in town: the six-story Tasbrough Building, with the offices of the Tasbrough & Scarlett Granite Quarries; the offices of Doremus's son-in-law, Fowler Greenhill, M.D., and his partner, old Dr. Olmsted, of Lawyer Mungo Kitterick, of Harry Kindermann, agent for maple syrup and dairying supplies, and of thirty or forty other village samurai.

It was a downy town, a drowsy town, a town of security and tradition, which still believed in Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and to which May Day was not an occasion for labor parades but for distributing small baskets of flowers.

It was a May night—late in May of 1936—with a three-quarter moon. Doremus's house was a mile from the business-center of Fort Beulah, on Pleasant Hill, which was a spur thrust like a reaching hand out from the dark rearing mass of Mount Terror. Upland meadows, moon-glistening, he could see, among the wildernesses of spruce and maple and poplar on the ridges far above him; and below, as his car climbed, was Ethan Creek flowing through the meadows. Deep woods—rearing mountain bulwarks—the air like spring-water—serene clapboarded houses that remembered the War of 1812 and the boyhoods of those errant Vermonters, Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant," and Hiram Powers and Thaddeus Stevens and Brigham Young and President Chester Alan Arthur.

"No—Powers and Arthur—they were weak sisters," pondered Doremus. "But Douglas and Thad Stevens and Brigham, the old stallion—I wonder if we're breeding up any paladins like those stout, grouchy old devils?—if we're producing 'em anywhere in New England?—anywhere in America?—anywhere in the world? They had guts. Independence. Did what they wanted to and thought what they liked, and everybody could go to hell. The youngsters today—— Oh, the aviators have plenty of nerve. The physicists, these twenty-five-year-old Ph.D.'s that violate the inviolable atom, they're pioneers. But most of the wishy-washy young people today—— Going seventy miles an hour but not going anywhere—not enough imagination to *want* to go anywhere! Getting their music by turning a dial. Getting their phrases from the comic strips instead of from Shakespeare and the Bible and Veblen and Old Bill Sumner. Pap-fed flabs! Like this smug pup Malcolm Tasbrough, hanging around Sissy! Aah!

"Wouldn't it be hell if that stuffed shirt, Edgeways, and that political Mae West, Gimmitch, were right, and we need all these military monkeyshines and maybe a fool war (to conquer some sticky-hot country we don't want on a bet!) to put some starch and git into these marionettes we call our children? Aah!

"But rats—— These hills! Castle walls. And this air. They can keep their Cotswolds and Harz Mountains and Rockies! D. Jessup—topographical patriot. And I *am* a——"

"Dormouse, would you mind driving on the right-hand side of the road—on curves, anyway?" said his wife peaceably.

* * *

An upland hollow and mist beneath the moon—a veil of mist over apple blossoms and the heavy bloom of an ancient lilac bush beside the ruin of a farmhouse burned these sixty years and more.

* * *

Mr. Francis Tasbrough was the president, general manager, and chief owner of the Tasbrough & Scarlett Granite Quarries, at West Beulah, four miles from "the Fort." He was rich, persuasive, and he had constant labor troubles. He lived in a new Georgian brick house on Pleasant Hill, a little beyond Doremus Jessup's, and in that house he maintained a private barroom luxurious as that of a motor company's advertising manager at Grosse Point. It was no more the traditional New England than was the Catholic part of Boston; and Frank himself boasted that, though his family had for six generations lived in New England, he was no tight Yankee but in his Efficiency, his Salesmanship, the complete Pan-American Business Executive.

He was a tall man, Tasbrough, with a yellow mustache and a monotonously emphatic voice. He was fifty-four, six years younger than Doremus Jessup, and when he had been four, Doremus had protected him from the results of his singularly unpopular habit of hitting the other small boys over the head with things—all kinds of things—sticks and toy wagons and lunch boxes and dry cow flops.

Assembled in his private barroom tonight, after the Rotarian Dinner, were Frank himself, Doremus Jessup, Medary Cole, the Miller, Superintendent of Schools Emil Staubmeyer, R. C. Crowley—Roscoe Conkling Crowley, the weightiest banker in Fort Beulah—and, rather surprisingly, Tasbrough's pastor, the Episcopal minister, the Rev. Mr. Falck, his old hands as delicate as porcelain, his wilderness of hair silk-soft and white, his unfleshly face betokening the Good Life. Mr. Falck came from a solid Knickerbocker family, and he had studied in Edinburgh and Oxford along with the General Theological Seminary of New York; and in all of the Beulah Valley there was, aside from Doremus, no one who more contentedly hid away in the shelter of the hills.

The barroom had been professionally interior-decorated by a young New York gentleman with the habit of standing with the back of his right hand against his hip. It had a stainless-steel bar, framed illustrations from *La Vie Parisienne*, silvered metal tables, and chromium-plated aluminum chairs with scarlet leather cushions.

All of them except Tasbrough, Medary Cole (a social climber to whom the favors of Frank Tasbrough were as honey and fresh ripened figs), and "Professor" Emil Staubmeyer were uncomfortable in this parrot-cage elegance, but none of them, including Mr. Falck, seemed to dislike Frank's soda and excellent Scotch or the sardine sandwiches.

"And I wonder if Thad Stevens would of liked this, either?" considered Doremus. "He'd of snarled. Old cornered catamount. But probably not at the whisky!"

* * *

"Doremus," demanded Tasbrough, "why don't you take a tumble to yourself? All these years you've had a lot of fun criticizing—always being agin the government—kidding everybody—posing as such a Liberal that you'll stand for all these subversive elements. Time for you to quit playing tag with crazy ideas and come in and join the family. These are serious times—maybe twenty-eight million on relief, and beginning to get ugly—thinking they've got a vested right now to be supported.

"And the Jew Communists and Jew financiers plotting together to control the country. I can understand how,

as a younger fellow, you could pump up a little sympathy for the unions and even for the Jews—though, as you know, I'll never get over being sore at you for taking the side of the strikers when those thugs were trying to ruin my whole business—burn down my polishing and cutting shops—why, you were even friendly with that alien murderer Karl Pascal, who started the whole strike—maybe I didn't enjoy firing *him* when it was all over!

"But anyway, these labor racketeers are getting together now, with Communist leaders, and determined to run the country—to tell men like *me* how to run our business!—and just like General Edgeways said, they'll refuse to serve their country if we should happen to get dragged into some war. Yessir, a mighty serious hour, and it's time for you to cut the cackle and join the really responsible citizens."

Said Doremus, "Hm. Yes, I agree it's a serious time. With all the discontent there is in the country to wash him into office, Senator Windrip has got an excellent chance to be elected President, next November, and if he is, probably his gang of buzzards will get us into some war, just to grease their insane vanity and show the world that we're the huskiest nation going. And then I, the Liberal and you, the Plutocrat, the bogus Tory, will be led out and shot at 3 A.M. Serious? Huh!"

"Rats! You're exaggerating!" said R. C. Crowley.

Doremus went on: "If Bishop Prang, our Savonarola in a Cadillac 16, swings his radio audience and his League of Forgotten Men to Buzz Windrip, Buzz will win. People will think they're electing him to create more economic security. Then watch the Terror! God knows there's been enough indication that we *can* have tyranny in America—the fix of the Southern share-croppers, the working conditions of the miners and garment-makers, and our keeping Mooney in prison so many years. But wait till Windrip shows us how to say it with machine guns! Democracy—here and in Britain and France, it hasn't been so universal a sniveling slavery as Naziism in Germany, such an imagination-hating, pharisaic materialism as Russia—even if it has produced industrialists like you, Frank, and bankers like you, R.C., and given you altogether too much power and money. On the whole, with scandalous exceptions, Democracy's given the ordinary worker more dignity than he ever had. That may be menaced now by Windrip—all the Windrips. All right! Maybe we'll have to fight paternal dictatorship with a little sound patricide—fight machine guns with machine guns. Wait till Buzz takes charge of us. A real Fascist dictatorship!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" snorted Tasbrough. "That couldn't happen here in America, not possibly! We're a country of freemen."

"The answer to that," suggested Doremus Jessup, "if Mr. Falck will forgive me, is 'the hell it can't!' Why, there's no country in the world that can get more hysterical—yes, or more obsequious!—than America. Look how Huey Long became absolute monarch over Louisiana, and how the Right Honorable Mr. Senator Berzelius Windrip owns *his* State. Listen to Bishop Prang and Father Coughlin on the radio—divine oracles, to millions. Remember how casually most Americans have accepted Tammany grafting and Chicago gangs and the crookedness of so many of President Harding's appointees? Could Hitler's bunch, or Windrip's, be worse? Remember the Kuklux Klan? Remember our war hysteria, when we called sauerkraut 'Liberty cabbage' and somebody actually proposed calling German measles 'Liberty measles'? And wartime censorship of honest papers? Bad as Russia! Remember our kissing the—well, the feet of Billy Sunday, the million-dollar evangelist, and of Aimée McPherson, who swam from the Pacific Ocean clear into the Arizona desert and got away with it? Remember Voliva and Mother Eddy?. . .Remember our Red scares and our Catholic scares, when all well-informed people knew that the O.G.P.U. were hiding out in Oskaloosa, and the Republicans campaigning against Al Smith told the Carolina mountaineers that if Al won the Pope would illegitimatize their children? Remember Tom Heflin and Tom Dixon? Remember when the hick legislators in certain states, in obedience to William Jennings Bryan, who learned his biology from his pious

old grandma, set up shop as scientific experts and made the whole world laugh itself sick by forbidding the teaching of evolution?. . .Remember the Kentucky night-riders? Remember how trainloads of people have gone to enjoy lynchings? Not happen here? Prohibition—shooting down people just because they *might* be transporting liquor—no, that couldn't happen in *America*! Why, where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours! We're ready to start on a Children's Crusade—only of adults—right now, and the Right Reverend Abbots Windrip and Prang are all ready to lead it!"

"Well, what if they are?" protested R. C. Crowley. "It might not be so bad. I don't like all these irresponsible attacks on us bankers all the time. Of course, Senator Windrip has to pretend publicly to bawl the banks out, but once he gets into power he'll give the banks their proper influence in the administration and take our expert financial advice. Yes. Why are you so afraid of the word 'Fascism,' Doremus? Just a word—just a word! And might not be so bad, with all the lazy bums we got panhandling relief nowadays, and living on my income tax and yours—not so worse to have a real Strong Man, like Hitler or Mussolini—like Napoleon or Bismarck in the good old days—and have 'em really *run* the country and make it efficient and prosperous again. 'Nother words, have a doctor who won't take any back-chat, but really boss the patient and make him get well whether he likes it or not!"

"Yes!" said Emil Staubmeyer. "Didn't Hitler save Germany from the Red Plague of Marxism? I got cousins there. I *know*!"

"Hm," said Doremus, as often Doremus did say it. "Cure the evils of Democracy by the evils of Fascism! Funny therapeutics. I've heard of their curing syphilis by giving the patient malaria, but I've never heard of their curing malaria by giving the patient syphilis!"

"Think that's nice language to use in the presence of the Reverend Falck?" raged Tasbrough.

Mr. Falck piped up, "I think it's quite nice language, and an interesting suggestion, Brother Jessup!"

"Besides," said Tasbrough, "this chewing the rag is all nonsense, anyway. As Crowley says, might be a good thing to have a strong man in the saddle, but—it just can't happen here in America."

And it seemed to Doremus that the softly moving lips of the Reverend Mr. Falck were framing, "The hell it can't!"

3

DOREMUS JESSUP, editor and proprietor of the *Daily Informer*, the Bible of the conservative Vermont farmers up and down the Beulah Valley, was born in Fort Beulah in 1876, only son of an impecunious Universalist pastor, the Reverend Loren Jessup. His mother was no less than a Bass, of Massachusetts. The Reverend Loren, a bookish man fond of flowers, merry but not noticeably witty, used to chant "Alas, alas, that a Bass of Mass should marry a minister prone to gas," and he would insist that she was all wrong ichthyologically—she should have been a cod, not a bass. There was in the parsonage little meat but plenty of books, not all theological by any means, so that before he was twelve Doremus knew the profane writings of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Tennyson, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Tolstoy, Balzac. He graduated from Isaiah College—once a bold Unitarian venture but by 1894 an interdenominational outfit with nebulous trinitarian yearnings, a small and rustic stable of learning, in North Beulah, thirteen miles from "the Fort."

But Isaiah College has come up in the world today—excepting educationally—for in 1931 it held the Dartmouth football team down to 64 to 6.

During college, Doremus wrote a great deal of bad poetry and became an incurable book addict, but he was a

fair track athlete. Naturally, he corresponded for papers in Boston and Springfield, and after graduation he was a reporter in Rutland and Worcester, with one glorious year in Boston, whose grimy beauty and shards of the past were to him what London would be to a young Yorkshireman. He was excited by concerts, art galleries, and bookshops; thrice a week he had a twenty-five-cent seat in the upper balcony of some theater; and for two months he roomed with a fellow reporter who had actually had a short story in *The Century* and who could talk about authors and technique like the very dickens. But Doremus was not particularly beefy or enduring, and the noise, the traffic, the bustle of assignments, exhausted him, and in 1901, three years after his graduation from college, when his widowed father died and left him $2980.00 and his library, Doremus went home to Fort Beulah and bought a quarter interest in the *Informer,* then a weekly.

By 1936 it was a daily, and he owned all of it. . .with a perceptible mortgage.

He was an equable and sympathetic boss; an imaginative news detective; he was, even in this ironbound Republican state, independent in politics; and in his editorials against graft and injustice, though they were not fanatically chronic, he could slash like a dog whip.

He was a third cousin of Calvin Coolidge, who had considered him sound domestically but loose politically. Doremus considered himself just the opposite.

He had married his wife, Emma, out of Fort Beulah. She was the daughter of a wagon manufacturer, a placid, prettyish, broad-shouldered girl with whom he had gone to high school.

Now, in 1936, of their three children, Philip (Dartmouth and Harvard Law School) was married and ambitiously practicing law in Worcester; Mary was the wife of Fowler Greenhill, M.D., of Fort Beulah, a gay and hustling medico, a choleric and red-headed young man, who was a wonder-worker in typhoid, acute appendicitis, obstetrics, compound fractures, and diets for anemic children. Fowler and Mary had one son, Doremus's only grandchild, the bonny David, who at eight was a timid, inventive, affectionate child with such mourning hound-dog eyes and such red-gold hair that his picture might well have been hung at a National Academy show or even been reproduced on the cover of a Women's Magazine with 2,500,000 circulation. The Greenhills' neighbors inevitably said of the boy, "My, Davy's got such an imagination, hasn't he! I guess he'll be a Writer, just like his Grampa!"

Third of Doremus's children was the gay, the pert, the dancing Cecilia, known as "Sissy," aged eighteen, where her brother Philip was thirty-two and Mary, Mrs. Greenhill, turned thirty. She rejoiced the heart of Doremus by consenting to stay home while she was finishing high school, though she talked vigorously of going off to study architecture and "simply make *millions,* my dear," by planning and erecting miraculous small homes.

Mrs. Jessup was lavishly (and quite erroneously) certain that her Philip was the spit and image of the Prince of Wales; Philip's wife, Merilla (the fair daughter of Worcester, Massachusetts), curiously like the Princess Marina; that Mary would by any stranger be taken for Katharine Hepburn; that Sissy was a dryad and David a medieval page; and that Doremus (though she knew him better than she did those changelings, her children) amazingly resembled that naval hero, Winfield Scott Schley, as he looked in 1898.

She was a loyal woman, Emma Jessup, warmly generous, a cordon bleu at making lemon-meringue pie, a parochial Tory, an orthodox Episcopalian, and completely innocent of any humor. Doremus was perpetually tickled by her kind solemnity, and it was to be chalked down to him as a singular act of grace that he refrained from pretending that he had become a working Communist and was thinking of leaving for Moscow immediately.

* * *

Doremus looked depressed, looked old, when he lifted himself, as from an invalid's chair, out of the Chrysler, in his hideous garage of cement and galvanized iron. (But it was a proud two-car garage; besides the four-year-old Chrysler, they had a new Ford convertible coupe, which Doremus hoped to drive some day when Sissy wasn't using it.)

He cursed competently as, on the cement walk from the garage to the kitchen, he barked his shins on the lawnmower, left there by his hired man, one Oscar Ledue, known always as "Shad," a large and red-faced, a sulky and surly Irish-Canuck peasant. Shad always did things like leaving lawnmowers about to snap at the shins of decent people. He was entirely incompetent and vicious. He never edged-up the flower beds, he kept his stinking old cap on his head when he brought in logs for the fireplace, he did not scythe the dandelions in the meadow till they had gone to seed, he delighted in failing to tell cook that the peas were now ripe, and he was given to shooting cats, stray dogs, chipmunks, and honey-voiced blackbirds. At least twice a day, Doremus resolved to fire him, but—— Perhaps he was telling himself the truth when he insisted that it was amusing to try to civilize this prize bull.

Doremus trotted into the kitchen, decided that he did not want some cold chicken and a glass of milk from the ice-box, nor even a wedge of the celebrated cocoanut layer cake made by their cook-general, Mrs. Candy, and mounted to his "study," on the third, the attic floor.

His house was an ample, white, clapboarded structure of the vintage of 1880, a square bulk with a mansard roof and, in front, a long porch with insignificant square white pillars. Doremus declared that the house was ugly, "but ugly in a nice way."

His study, up there, was his one perfect refuge from annoyances and bustle. It was the only room in the house that Mrs. Candy (quiet, grimly competent, thoroughly literate, once a Vermont country schoolteacher) was never allowed to clean. It was an endearing mess of novels, copies of the *Congressional Record*, of the *New Yorker*, *Time*, *Nation*, *New Republic*, *New Masses*, and *Speculum* (cloistral organ of the Medieval Society), treatises on taxation and monetary systems, road maps, volumes on exploration in Abyssinia and the Antarctic, chewed stubs of pencils, a shaky portable typewriter, fishing tackle, rumpled carbon paper, two comfortable old leather chairs, a Windsor chair at his desk, the complete works of Thomas Jefferson, his chief hero, a microscope and a collection of Vermont butterflies, Indian arrowheads, exiguous volumes of Vermont village poetry printed in local newspaper offices, the Bible, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, Science and Health, Selections from the Mahabharata, the poetry of Sandburg, Frost, Masters, Jeffers, Ogden Nash, Edgar Guest, Omar Khayyám, and Milton, a shotgun and a .22 repeating rifle, an Isaiah College banner, faded, the complete Oxford Dictionary, five fountain pens of which two would work, a vase from Crete dating from 327 B.C.—very ugly—the World Almanac for year before last, with the cover suggesting that it had been chewed by a dog, odd pairs of horn-rimmed spectacles and of rimless eyeglasses, none of which now suited his eyes, a fine, reputedly Tudor oak cabinet from Devonshire, portraits of Ethan Allen and Thaddeus Stevens, rubber wading-boots, senile red morocco slippers, a poster issued by the *Vermont Mercury* at Woodstock, on September 2, 1840, announcing a glorious Whig victory, twenty-four boxes of safety matches one by one stolen from the kitchen, assorted yellow scratch pads, seven books on Russia and Bolshevism—extraordinarily pro or extraordinarily con—a signed photograph of Theodore Roosevelt, six cigarette cartons, all half empty (according to the tradition of journalistic eccentrics, Doremus should have smoked a Good Old Pipe, but he detested the slimy ooze of nicotine-soaked spittle), a rag carpet on the floor, a withered sprig of holly with a silver Christmas ribbon, a case of seven unused genuine Sheffield razors, dictionaries in French, German, Italian, and Spanish—the first of which languages he really could read—a canary in a Bavarian gilded wicker cage, a worn linen-bound copy of *Old Hearthside Songs for Home and Picnic* whose selections he was wont to croon, holding the book on his knee, and an old cast-iron Franklin stove. Everything, indeed, that was proper for a hermit and improper for impious domestic hands.

Before switching on the light he squinted through a dormer window at the bulk of mountains cutting the welter of stars. In the center were the last lights of Fort Beulah, far below, and on the left, unseen, the soft meadows, the old farmhouses, the great dairy barns of the Ethan Mowing. It was a kind country, cool and clear as a shaft of light and, he meditated, he loved it more every quiet year of his freedom from city towers and city clamor.

One of the few times when Mrs. Candy, their housekeeper, was permitted to enter his hermit's cell was to leave there, on the long table, his mail. He picked it up and started to read briskly, standing by the table. (Time to go to bed! Too much chatter and bellyaching, this evening! Good Lord! Past midnight!) He sighed then, and sat in his Windsor chair, leaning his elbows on the table and studiously reading the first letter over again.

It was from Victor Loveland, one of the younger, more international-minded teachers in Doremus's old school, Isaiah College.

* * *

DEAR DR. JESSUP:

("Hm. 'Dr. Jessup.' Not me, m' lad. The only honorary degree I'll ever get'll be Master in Veterinary Surgery or Laureate in Embalming.")

A very dangerous situation has arisen here at Isaiah and those of us who are trying to advocate something like integrity and modernity are seriously worried—not, probably, that we need to be long, as we shall probably all get fired. Where two years ago most of our students just laughed at any idea of military drilling, they have gone warlike in a big way, with undergrads drilling with rifles, machine guns, and cute little blueprints of tanks and planes all over the place. Two of them, voluntarily, are going down to Rutland every week to take training in flying, avowedly to get ready for wartime aviation. When I cautiously ask them what the dickens war they are preparing for they just scratch and indicate they don't care much, so long as they can get a chance to show what virile proud gents they are.

Well, we've got used to that. But just this afternoon—the newspapers haven't got this yet—the Board of Trustees, including Mr. Francis Tasbrough and our president, Dr. Owen Peaseley, met and voted a resolution that—now listen to this, will you, Dr. Jessup—"Any member of the faculty or student body of Isaiah who shall in any way, publicly or privately, in print, writing, or by the spoken word, adversely criticize military training at or by Isaiah College, or in any other institution of learning in the United States, or by the state militias, federal forces, or other officially recognized military organizations in this country, shall be liable to immediate dismissal from this college, and any student who shall, with full and proper proof, bring to the attention of the President or any Trustee of the college such malign criticism by any person whatever connected in any way with the institution shall receive extra credits in his course in military training, such credits to apply to the number of credits necessary for graduation."

What can we do with such fast exploding Fascism?

VICTOR LOVELAND.

* * *

And Loveland, teacher of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit (two lone students), had never till now meddled in any politics of more recent date than A.D. 180.

* * *

“So Frank was there at Trustees’ meeting, and didn’t dare tell me,” Doremus sighed. “Encouraging them to become spies. Gestapo. Oh, my dear Frank, this is a serious time! You, my good bonehead, for once you said it! President Owen J. Peaseley, the bagged-faced, pious, racketeering, damned hedge-schoolmaster! But what can I do? Oh—write another editorial viewing-with-alarm, I suppose!”

He plumped into a deep chair and sat fidgeting, like a bright-eyed, apprehensive little bird.

On the door was a tearing sound, imperious, demanding.

He opened to admit Foolish, the family dog. Foolish was a reliable combination of English setter, Airedale, cocker spaniel, wistful doe, and rearing hyena. He gave one abrupt snort of welcome and nuzzled his brown satin head against Doremus’s knee. His bark awakened the canary, under the absurd old blue sweater that covered its cage, and it automatically caroled that it was noon, summer noon, among the pear trees in the green Harz hills, none of which was true. But the bird’s trilling, the dependable presence of Foolish, comforted Doremus, made military drill and belching politicians seem unimportant and in security he dropped asleep in the worn brown leather chair.

4

ALL THIS JUNE WEEK, Doremus was waiting for 2 P.M. on Saturday, the divinely appointed hour of the weekly prophetic broadcast by Bishop Paul Peter Prang.

Now, six weeks before the 1936 national conventions, it was probable that neither Franklin Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Senator Vandenberg, Ogden Mills, General Hugh Johnson, Colonel Frank Knox, nor Senator Borah would be nominated for President by either party, and that the Republican standard-bearer—meaning the one man who never has to lug a large, bothersome, and somewhat ridiculous standard—would be that loyal yet strangely honest old-line Senator, Walt Trowbridge, a man with a touch of Lincoln in him, dashes of Will Rogers and George W. Norris, a suspected trace of Jim Farley, but all the rest plain, bulky, placidly defiant Walt Trowbridge.

Few men doubted that the Democratic candidate would be that sky-rocket, Senator Berzelius Windrip—that is to say, Windrip as the mask and bellowing voice, with his satanic secretary, Lee Sarason, as the brain behind.

Senator Windrip’s father was a small-town Western druggist, equally ambitious and unsuccessful, and had named him Berzelius after the Swedish chemist. Usually he was known as “Buzz.” He had worked his way through a Southern Baptist college, of approximately the same academic standing as a Jersey City business college, and through a Chicago law school, and settled down to practice in his native state and to enliven local politics. He was a tireless traveler, a boisterous and humorous speaker, an inspired guesser at what political doctrines the people would like, a warm handshaker, and willing to lend money. He drank Coca-Cola with the Methodists, beer with the Lutherans, California white wine with the Jewish village merchants—and, when they were safe from observation, white-mule corn whisky with all of them.

Within twenty years he was as absolute a ruler of his state as ever a sultan was of Turkey.

He was never governor; he had shrewdly seen that his reputation for research among planters-punch recipes, varieties of poker, and the psychology of girl stenographers might cause his defeat by the church people, so he had contented himself with coaxing to the gubernatorial shearing a trained baa-lamb of a country schoolmaster whom he had gayly led on a wide blue ribbon. The state was certain that he had “given it a

good administration," and they knew that it was Buzz Windrip who was responsible, not the Governor.

Windrip caused the building of impressive highroads and of consolidated country schools; he made the state buy tractors and combines and lend them to the farmers at cost. He was certain that some day America would have vast business dealings with the Russians and, though he detested all Slavs, he made the State University put in the first course in the Russian language that had been known in all that part of the West. His most original invention was quadrupling the state militia and rewarding the best soldiers in it with training in agriculture, aviation, and radio and automobile engineering.

The militiamen considered him their general and their god, and when the state attorney general announced that he was going to have Windrip indicted for having grafted $200,000 of tax money, the militia rose to Buzz Windrip's orders as though they were his private army and, occupying the legislative chambers and all the state offices, and covering the streets leading to the Capitol with machine guns, they herded Buzz's enemies out of town.

He took the United States Senatorship as though it were his manorial right, and for six years, his only rival as the most bouncing and feverish man in the Senate had been the late Huey Long of Louisiana.

He preached the comforting gospel of so redistributing wealth that every person in the country would have several thousand dollars a year (monthly Buzz changed his prediction as to how many thousand), while all the rich men were nevertheless to be allowed enough to get along, on a maximum of $500,000 a year. So everybody was happy in the prospect of Windrip's becoming president.

The Reverend Dr. Egerton Schlemil, dean of St. Agnes Cathedral, San Antonio, Texas, stated (once in a sermon, once in the slightly variant mimeographed press handout on the sermon, and seven times in interviews) that Buzz's coming into power would be "like the Heaven-blest fall of revivifying rain upon a parched and thirsty land." Dr. Schlemil did not say anything about what happened when the blest rain came and kept falling steadily for four years.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Russell Carson:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book allowed It Can't Happen Here (Signet Classics)? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have different opinion?

Stephen Hilton:

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Rebecca West:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book may be option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to try out look for book, may be the guide untitled It Can't Happen Here (Signet Classics) can be fine book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

Gilbert Phillips:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. One particular activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition info. Even you love It Can't Happen Here (Signet Classics), you are able to enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still would like to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout men. What? Still don't understand it, oh come on its called reading friends.

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