

COMMENT—AND DISCOMMENT

The staid and serene Wall Street Journal announces that residents of one community in New York, presumably a fashionable community, for the Journal has never been known to take an interest in any other kind—are inaugurating the old-fashioned sewing bee. Housewives are holding community parties, where women gather several times a week to make clothes for which they otherwise would have to pay high prices. All this is a direct slap at the high cost of living, and we have our doubts as to its efficacy, for nine out of ten of these women will never make more than one dress, and ten to one the housemaid or the cook will wear that one. The ordinary dressmaker has hard work making garments nifty enough to suit her customers, and the ordinary housewife is hopelessly outclassed. The department stores can furnish the cheaper house dresses at less cost than they can be made, in the back parlor, and the home artist cannot, save in exceptional cases, make the better class of clothing well enough to pass the critical inspection of her feminine neighbors. Besides, the sterner sex is better educated as to clothes than it was ten years ago. It strikes us that some other way will be found, sooner or later, to combat the high cost of living.

In other cities, workingmen are forming organizations and beginning to operate retail stores. It all works out simply enough on paper, and the proposition is usually tackled with a great deal of enthusiasm, which begins to wane as soon as they begin to learn something about the ins and outs of business, especially the fact that there is a certain risk which must be met. So long as a bunch of men buy a few staples in large lots from the wholesale houses, everything is lovely, but when the average workman, without business experience, starts in to conduct a business, it isn't long before he learns that buying at wholesale prices and selling at the same prices will leave a big deficit. Considering wholesale prices, consumers can buy groceries in Alliance cheaper than most places in the state, and the same thing is true in other lines of business—even printing. The fact is that Alliance stores do a tremendous volume of business, and this means, where competition is as keen as it is here, that lower prices are charged.

In the eastern states, consumers' leagues are raising Cain generally, and some folks give them credit for lowering prices. They have begun as neighborhood organizations who conducted private boycotts against dealers who charged exorbitant prices, but of late they have been making co-operative purchases direct from the farms and manufacturers. The real difficulty with these leagues is that they deal with so small a portion of the problem, and that they hit the retailer hard, when the retailer is only handing on the buck that has been passed to him by the wholesalers. It's not fair to expect a merchant to carry a large stock, assume all the risk of doing business, and furnish the consumers' leagues with nine-tenths of what they purchase, and then have the league members purchase the other tenth direct. The retailer is entitled to a profit, and you will find, in nine hundred ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, he is satisfied with a small profit. It is no bed of roses these days, this being in business, and if you trouble to look it up, you'll find that the proportion of failures among retailers is greater than ever.

The cost of living must come down, of course, and the problem is to find the place to begin. One man says the retailers are making the gouge; another insists that it is the wholesalers, and a third that it is the manufacturer. Still another will argue that the high cost of living is due to the laborer, who retorts that without high wages he can't possibly pay bills. He can prove, by a comparison of prices, that at \$30 per week he is really making less than he was in the palmy days when he supported a family of five on a wage of \$15.

Another explanation is that the high cost of living is not due to any of these causes, but to the luxury-loving proclivities of the people themselves, who are not content with blue denim clothes, but want velvet. This is more or less tommyrot, of course, for all the manufacturers have to do is to follow the demand, and it doesn't cost any more, aside from the material, to manufacture silk stockings than the cotton variety, for the same knitting machines, manned by the same laborers, do the work in the same time. In the meantime, the prices are mounting steadily, although the government authorities, with fair price committees and watchdogs to see that food hoarders and profiteers are nailed, are making some headway.

Our barber, who is a well read man—all barbers are—is convinced that a man who will attempt to sup-

port a family on the wages barbers get these days is nothing less than a blinking idiot, or words to that effect. His idea is that the whole problem will be solved by a tremendous panic, which will knock the bottom out of everything. He is looking for it any day now, and thinks that after five or six months of panic, the atmosphere will be all cleared and a new era begin. He doesn't really believe that he will ever be able to buy beef-steak again at the rate of two pounds for a quarter, but he has a sneaking hope that when the glad day comes, he'll have at least a nickel left over after the bills are paid. He's fond of this near beer, though he says it's really far away—but he hasn't been able to gratify his thirst for the last six months without a feeling that he's taking the shoes right off his children's back.

A stranger with a low, melodious voice confided to us the other day that he knew of one way to meet the rising costs. He said that he didn't see any reason why a man should undertake to support a woman in times when he can't buy food and clothing for himself on his salary. He is wondering if there won't be a falling off in marriages and an increase in the number of husbands who leave in the dead of night for parts unknown without leaving any address. He assured us that he wasn't married, but he had a sort of tamed look that made us wonder. We give this solution to you as it was given us, without money and without price, and without recommendation. It seems to us to be rather an extreme measure, and we think that other plans should be tried first.

You will wonder, of course, just how a name like "Comment and Discomment" came to be chosen for this column. It all dates back to the days before the war, when the writer was working with his father and three or four brothers on the Hamilton County Register, the best paper published in Aurora, Nebraska, and as a country weekly second only to what we expect to make of The Herald. There was a barber in that town who, like most barbers, sought to entertain his customers while he shaved them for fifteen cents or cut their hair for two-bits. You can tell from these prices that it happened some time ago. At any rate, the adman of The Register dropped in to have his whiskers punched in, and among the choice bits of information that the barber told him was this, delivered as only a barber could say: "Of course," he said, "you hear lots of comments—and some discomments, too—these days, but from

what I can gather, The Register is the best paper in the county."

Have you ever been disillusioned, that is, those of you who have not been married? Here's a letter from a job written to a friend in Guam, Marianne Islands, after he had received a discharge from the navy: "At last I am ready to believe I am out of the navy. I am paying four bits for soft collars and otherwise feel the hard strains of the cost of living. It's a great thrill I get, Swede, to receive trading stamps with my small stores. I arrived here on July 3, four days after the Wop, and had to wear my regimentals until after I was paid off on the ninth. I guess the neighbors all thought I was giving them a chance to look me over. I hardly budged out of the house until I had civies. Now I don't like to walk around in them because they feel so blamed strange. It was terrible.

The folks insisted that I have a picture made and that is one thing that I hate, but there was no use arguing. I went to Sid Whiting and the idiot worked around on me for about an hour. The proofs came out this morning. Oy, you should see them! You know, it is a deuce of a job trying to look intelligent, nonchalant, pleased, yet sedate and austere. The pictures don't make me look like that at all. I have a bored look like a fly were crawling down my back and a morbid smile as if I were refusing a generous offering of cheese-cake. They'll be fine to scratch matches on.

"You doubtless remember how many pretty, nay beautiful girls formerly abounded here. Well, they're somewhere else now. It's terrible. Perhaps the hot weather is keeping them in. All I have seen so far is a lot of prairie hens.

"Now that I have been here and become readjusted to everything again, I wish I were back in Frisco. I can't give any idea of how dead everything is here. Down-town it is crowded all day, but just as soon as the 5 p. m. whistle blows it looks like a newly opened graveyard. I don't know what the people do with their money. I guess it goes for war taxes. When I bought my civies on July 9th the salesman in Wolf's said there was a fifteen cent war tax on two pairs of sox—each. I asked him what for and he showed me a card where sox were classed as a "Luxury."

Grass widowhood saves a woman lots of trips to the cemetery.

Many people think the world has gone crazy, but most folk have lucid moments three times a day—breakfast, dinner and supper.

A new altitude airplane record of 30,300 feet has been made, but they didn't get up in the air as far as some of the congressmen.

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