Baltimore Evening Sun
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Marginal Notes

Wars Upon the Free Lunch

The saloonkeepers of Cincinnati, a town upon the Ohio River opposite Covington, Ky., are face to face with a new and inhuman statute proscribing that American favorite, the free lunch and a large number of them, to get around it, have adopted the ingenious device of selling the lunch and giving away the beer. This device, which would do honor to the oblique virtuosity of a Standard Oil barrister, is proving very effective. The police are baffled and the hungry are fed. Practically, the Cincinnati saloonkeepers are making faces at jurisprudence, but technically, they are innocent of any wrongdoing. The situation is a familiar one in this, our fair republic. We have no law so bitter that skillful advocates cannot sweeten it with their chicanery.

In Baltimore a similar law is opposed in a far less artistic and fashionable manner. The saloonkeepers of this town, in a word, merely violate the law, without effort to gloss or legalize their crime, and if it were not for the complaisance of the police, a good many of them, it is likely, would be languishing in dungeons. Fortunately for them, the police are with them and have authority, under our system of government, to protect them. No law becomes effective in Baltimore until it has been officially ratified by the sergeant on the beat. If it meets his notion of justice, he enforces it; but if on the contrary it strikes him as harsh and absurd, he quietly repeals it. The law against free lunch, like the laws against fowling, has been thus repealed by the constabulary.

In the matter of the free lunch it is very probable that the public is with the saloonkeepers and the gendarmes. Despite the clear illegality, and, what is worse, the obvious immorality of the act, a large number of Baltimoreans think it pleasant to eat a cube of Sweitzer cheese, a segment of Bismarck herring or an arc of pretzel with every glass of beer they consume. This custom, no doubt, is a lingering trace of barbarism, like the custom of chewing tobacco, so popular with the judiciary, and that of marching in parades. As we grow more civilized and refined we will gradually abandon it, but at the moment it seems to be too deeply rooted to be shaken by any law, however drastic.

Bad Poetry About King Edward

Atrocious “poems” upon the death of King Edward continue to appear in the periodicals which go in for that sort of thing. The English penny weeklies are heavy with elegies and laments, monodies and croons. And on this side of the water the Boston *Evening Transcript*, a paper which devotes much space and attention to bad poetry by both white and colored rhapsodists, prints among other things a series of six sonnets upon Edward’s funeral. They are

entitled “London—After the King’s Burial,” and bear the signature of C.E.W. Stone, whoever he may be.

Mr. Stone says that, on the death of the king, “a wild rain of weeping” swept the British Isles, and that the city of London fell “into a swoon, with thudding heart,” and “seemed to reel and sway as if built on sand.” From these alarming records of physiological and meteorological disturbance, he proceeds to a consideration of Edward’s place in history and of his probable fate in the hereafter. Apparently, he has no doubt that the king is now in Paradise. As a matter of fact, he says so in so many words, to wit:

> He went from cares of state and war’s alarms,
> From problems, doubts and life’s vexed harmonies
> Into the rapture of eternal calms;
> And summer, summer wraps the bed he lies
> While in his royal hand may shine the palms
> They only pluck who wander Paradise.

It would be difficult, indeed, to find worse poetry than this. The rhyming of “alarms” and “calms,” and of “harmonies,” “lies” and “Paradise” is bad enough, but worse still are the “vexed harmonies” (a reminiscence of Dr. Strauss?), the doubling up of “summer” to make a bad line, the “shining” palms (ye gods!) and “the bed he lies” (in, or on?). And yet the *Transcript* gives more than half a column of space to this banal stuff, and is apparently proud of the privilege of printing it.

Bacteriology Versus Arithmetic

If the advance notices sent out by the publishers are to be believed, some astonishing things are contained in a new book called “The Health of the City,” by Hollis Godfrey. According to Mr. Godfrey, “25 tons of iron and steel are ground into powder in the New York subway every month,” and “in every grain of this dust there are from 500,000 to 2,000,000 bacteria.” Let the first statement pass. It may be true and it may not be true. The Lord only knows. But the zoological gardens of the world will probably be very eager to get samples of steel dust bearing 2,000,000 bacterial to the grain.

How large is the average grain of dust? According to those who should know, the gay motes which dance along a sunbeam vary from 1/1000th to 1/500th of an inch in diameter. Let us be generous and assume that a mote of steel is a good deal larger, say four times as large. That brings its diameter up to 1/250th of an inch. If it were still larger it would scarcely float in the air, and in consequence no one could breathe it in and its cargo of bacteria, unless they went voyaging on their own account, would do no harm.

Well, assuming it to be 1/250th of an inch in diameter, it follows that its bulk must be 1/15,625,000th of a cubic inch. How many germs is it possible to crowd into 1/15,625,000th of a cubic inch? Let us consider the germs of tuberculosis first. Taking them small and large, the young with the old, the consumptive with the dropsical, they are about 1/10,000th of an inch long. That is to say, every germ requires a space of 1/1,000,000,000,000th of a cubic inch to turn about in and frisk its tail. Now, how many such spaces are to be found in a space of 1/15,625,000th of a cubic inch? The answer is exactly 64,000—a good deal less, it will be noticed, than 2,000,000 or even 500,000.

But the bacillus of tuberculosis is a comparatively small germ. The typhoid germ, for example, is usually much larger, and sometimes it is no less than 1/2,500th of an inch in length. The germ of tetanus or lockjaw is larger still. Its actual body is sometimes fully 1/5,000th of an inch in diameter. Let us imagine a grain of dust made up entirely of tetanus germs. How many would it contain? A brief examination shows that the number would be just 8,000.

But Mr. Godfrey may answer here that I have not been fair in my figures. It is true enough, he may say, that the average tuberculosis germ is 1/10,000th of an inch long, but it is equally true that the tuberculosis germ is a thin rod and that, whatever its length, its thickness is sometimes no more than 1/75,000th of an inch. This answer would be sound enough if it were the custom of germs to lay cheek by jowl throughout the whole area of their medium, like sardines in a can. But germs, like all other living organisms, require a certain amount of elbow room. If they were jammed together they would probably quickly starve to death. In point of fact, the space they actually occupy in a hanging drop or any other medium is always a great deal smaller than the space they do not occupy. Even when they lie in clusters or chains there is always a lot of room between the groups. In other words, a globule of water capable, let us say, of holding 500,000,000 germs never, in actuality, holds more than, say 100,000,000.

Incidentally Mr. Godfrey's astonishing figures take no account whatever of the space occupied by the steel itself in his specks of steel dust. If it is a fact that 23 tons of steel are ground into dust every month, then there must be an appreciable amount of steel, however slight, in every grain of dust, and the space it occupies must crowd out a number of germs. If we assume that the steel occupies half of the space and that there are, as Mr. Godfrey suggests, 2,000,000 tuberculosis germs in each grain, then it follows that each grain must occupy a space of 1/250,000th of a cubic inch. That would make the diameter of a typical grain about 1/64th of an inch. It would take an enormous blast to keep steel grains of that size suspended in the air. It would be easy in truth to count them with the naked eye and to pick them up with the naked fingers and if one of them got into Mr. Godfrey's eye he would probably judge it to be at least a foot in diameter.

(Source: Parks Library Media Center, Iowa State University, Microfilm Collection)