

ORCHARD STREET, WHEN THE MERCURY BOILS

A street of the night-blooming cereus order, unfolding at twilight, wilting with the dawn, in the vast hothouse of New York's lower East Side.

By FAIRFAX DOWNEY

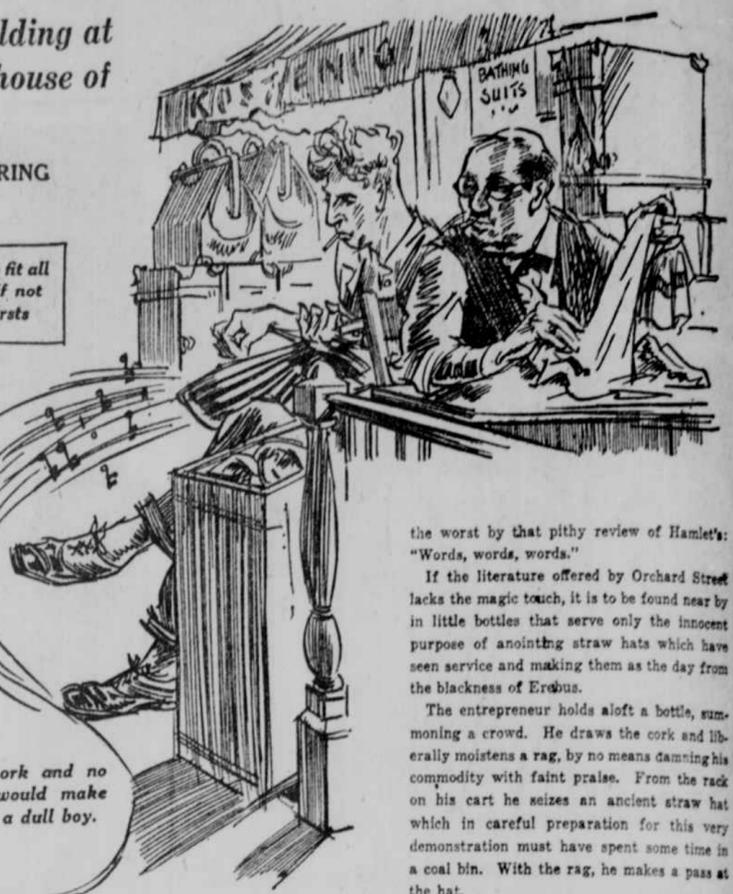
Illustrations by ALBERT LEVERING



The pushcart oculist doesn't specialize in prescription glasses.



Prices to fit all sizes—if not all thirsts



All work and no play would make Jake a dull boy.

THEY still pick fruit along Orchard Street—there is something in a name—though it's not from trees, but pushcarts. And how they do pick! Hercules back looking for twelve modern labors would first be urged to dig a little coal and run a few trains; then, to put him on his mettle, he would be told:

"The golden apples of Hesperides have been placed in the carts of Orchard Street peddlers. It is your task to obtain those apples."

It would be up to Hercules to rise very early in order to anticipate the East Side housewives, so keen to spot "value." And stranger, that he would be, he would find it was far easier to bring Cerberus out of the lower world than a bargain out of the lower East Side.

Upon a cart at a corner a great heap of cherries glows like rubies under the flickering light of an oil lamp, which illuminates also the rolling fountain of a lemonade man. The light, with mutual benefits and upkeep, has brought them in alliance, which, no doubt, they have pledged in twin beakers of the latter's brew. Perhaps they have even more in common. It may be that a glass of lemonade inspires a desire for a cherry or two to be immersed therein, or partaking of the fruit engenders a thirst most sweetly assuaged by a citrus draft. It is a device of trade which is old but always effective. Are not the most enterprising and up-to-the-moment bootleggers equipped with quantities of peanuts along with the rest of the contents of their merry packs?

Two Cents Won't Quench A Five-cent Thirst

It is a hot night and the dispenser of iced quenchers is doing the better business. It's so good that he feels justified in having a nip every now and then himself, only as a quality sampler, of course. His sign offers lemonade for 2, 3 or 5 cents, which are the monetary measures of his array of shining glasses. They look as if they had been made for the Three Bears of fairy tale fame, do those glasses. One can imagine Goldilocks slipping from all three sizes and when the Bears return to their stand being charged 10 cents, for one doesn't get things free on Orchard Street.

Across the street there is an oil painting—or that is what it should be. It is a cobbler's shop, no more than a "hole in the wall." Framed by the blackness of adjoining tenements, the living picture is lighted by a hooded electric bulb, which throws the figures into relief: three old cronies, two of them with patriarchal beards. Such is the interest of the topic, a shoe lies untouched on the lap of the cobbler. For a moment the picture might have been posed; then it is broken by gesticulations.

A patrolman, tall and spruce, has been watching, perhaps with artistic enjoyment of the vivid scene, though he doesn't recognize it as that. To him it all seems very odd and amusing and foreign. Obviously American, more obviously New York, he fails to realize that it is he who is out of place on Orchard Street, he who is the jarring note. His grinning comment is:

"Aw, why don't dem guys try talkin' wid heir faces?"

No, "If Winter Comes" Here; The Word Is "When"

It may be the middle of summer, but yonder shabby old chap, bowed and wizened, knows from past experience that winter cannot be far behind. That's why he's gathering up the wood that the less foresighted leave lying about Orchard Street in this warm season. A baby's broken crib is one of his trophies taken from the muddy sidewalk—the relic of a tragedy, perhaps, but kindling, just the same.

Not much is abandoned to the refuse of Orchard Street without thought, but sometimes people haven't thought enough and others realize on the discards, as is that old man rummaging among the hopeless-looking rags in the ash cans. The fate of the cats of Orchard Street is on the lap of the gods, oo, and summer pickings have made sleeker



A pushcart prince gets out his other wagon after the day's work is over.

black and white feline furs. Black and white they all seem to be; 'tis the favorite local shading. Black cats are as rare as tow-headed children, and white cats are not possible by the very nature of their environment. Hence the compromise, hence the protective coloration.

Past Delancey Street an elderly man is peering at the contents of a well stocked pushcart. You can tell that his eyes aren't as good as they once were, even before he begins to sort over a large tray of spectacles. Some of them should afford better vision than the pince-nez he is wearing. He tries them all

on, but can't seem to decide. It is the unprofessional opinion of the pushcart proprietor, who doesn't possess one of those shrinking alphabets the oculists use, that the customer's eyes may in some way be affected by the large diamond he sports in his bow tie.

From an upper-floor window float the notes of an automatic piano profaning the night. Further along, a music store with a main line of phonographs illustrates its wares by playing the "Colonel Bogey March"—whoever he is, remarks Orchard Street. Another store's barker is the proprietor's son giving graphically on a banjo-mandolin musical intima-

tions of a sacrifice regardless of costs.

Two of Orchard Street's black-eyed sub-debs stroll by, arm in arm, chanting discordantly and incongruously of the South Seas. They have caught the jazz melody down the block from a tinkling piano on top of which stands—must stand—a bust of Wagner. Isn't the pushcart man out front selling those busts for just that purpose and aren't they just the thing for all the best decorated pianos? For the other end of the instrument one buys a bust of Shakespeare—not that he had any more to do with the South Seas or Dixieland than Wagner, nor as much concern with music,



Scales are a favorite toy in Orchard Street.

but those two fellows, they team up well on top of a piano, thinks Orchard Street.

Next to a pushcart with a varied line of hardware, stands a mobile book stall, which, if it carries the classics, has disguised them in Hebrew characters. Perhaps the best of the other volumes might be described as bargains;

the worst by that pithy review of Hamlet's: "Words, words, words."

If the literature offered by Orchard Street lacks the magic touch, it is to be found near by in little bottles that serve only the innocent purpose of anointing straw hats which have seen service and making them as the day from the blackness of Erebus.

The entrepreneur holds aloft a bottle, summoning a crowd. He draws the cork and liberally moistens a rag, by no means damping his commodity with faint praise. From the rack on his cart he seizes an ancient straw hat which in careful preparation for this very demonstration must have spent some time in a coal bin. With the rag, he makes a pass at the hat.

"See the magick fluit. The hat vas blak. Now the hat iss blak and vite."

A Little Demonstration Is a Risky Thing

There isn't a doubt of it. In case there should be some lingering suspicions, however, the vender of the magic fluid deftly removes the headgear of a bystander. It is but the work of an instant to apply the potion, and across the crown is a broad white stripe. Remarkable! Even the bystander is struck. In a moment, when it dawns on him that he is going to have to purchase a bottle of the magic fluid in order to eliminate the zebra design from his hat, he will be even more struck.

A cart of watermelons rolls by, some of them cut to display the alluring pinkness of their interiors to the gaze of the multitude and to indicate a willingness not only to sell a whole melon, but any fraction thereof. Under the wagon seat is a tub of rinds which would seem to ascribe to the melon seller a neatness not always in evidence on Orchard Street. But the skeptical hint that there is a bit of change to be picked up in rinds as hog feed.

Lights from the street lamps, from windows, from cart torches, illumine Orchard Street's color and its commerce. It's a commerce that does not scorn conduct in terms of cents—not in the \$4.99 bargain, but in splits of nickels. It is an all-pervading commerce, too. It is represented in the person of the aged Kosher butcher, in whose long white beard all the fowls of Lear's nonsense rhyme,

An owl and a hen,
Two larks and a hen,

might have built precarious nests. Small wonder that the very children love to play store and that favorite playthings are little toy scales. Childish accents lisp of costs and profits. The eyes of youth see business opportunities.

Business Is Business Early In Orchard Street

A lad lolls on the stone doorsteps of his home, lazily watching others play bounce-and-catch against the convenient backdrop those steps offer. Suddenly his eyes brighten and he declares:

"I should charge you a cent for using these steps."

It's only an idea and the boys laugh it off. But a business instinct is in the bud. So it is in the case of the urchin who runs errands and confesses: "A cop gimme nine cents to git t'ree peaches an' I tol' d' stand man dey wuz fer de cop and he gimme 'em fer nuttin'." To be perfectly legitimate about it, Tony tells the cop and is allowed to keep the nine cents for his errand. Net result—cordiality promoted between the cop and the stand man and a profit to Tony of the difference between nine cents and the normal tip for the errand.

Take care of the pennies—Through the narrow thoroughfare that is Orchard Street a big sightseeing bus is gliding along. The faces of its occupants are expressive, mostly of a thank-heaven-I-don't-have-to-live-down-here feeling. The bus passes and the mournful voice of the megaphoning guide floats back.

"Down here on a hot summer's night"—As the words trail away a smiling, swarthy man emerges from his home with his family. He walks toward the curb, where a man very like him was conducting a thriving pushcart business that morning. There's an automobile there now. The swarthy man loads his family in and drives off.

THE MOSQUITO, PRINCE OF FATALISTS

By JAMES J. MONTAGUE Illustrations by MERLE JOHNSON

UNFORTUNATELY for humanity, the mosquito is a fatalist. Like the late Julius Caesar, he figures that death will come when it will come. Therefore his practice is to eat, drink and be merry while there is still an opportunity.

A creature which is absolutely fearless—which will die for his dinner with a song still on his lips—is not going to be easily exterminated.

Time was when we pinned a great deal of faith on the good work the Woman's Club of New Rochelle was doing in raising a fund to drain the swamps and apply crude oil to the casual pools on the golf course.

This process made the course smelly, and when the water subsided the grass was so slippery that one couldn't make a shot without following through with his feet and hurting his head. But the mosquitoes couldn't use the casual water as nurseries, and it seemed likely that their numbers would decrease during the next few weeks.

However, they merely went elsewhere. They found casual water in still larger quantities in the salt meadows near by, raised still

more numerous families and brought them all back to the golf course to pasture on the players.

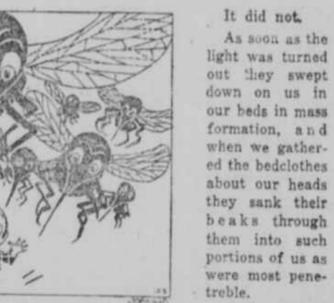
So we didn't subscribe to the fund the following year.

When, after many weeks of rain, the parent mosquitoes multiplied in our back yard, and with remarkable foresight and parental providence sent their children, when young and small, through the meshes of our screens to grow up inside the house, we sought to cope with them by instituting a reign of terror.

Every night before bedtime we lit the lights all over the house, so that all the mosquitoes gathered therein could see what we were doing, and then went about with a wet towel noisily killing or maiming such of them as had parked themselves on the walls and ceilings.

It was our idea that the ghastly spectacle of mutilated mosquito carcasses about the plastering would convince their surviving companions that the place was not safe and that their most prudent course was to get outside as soon as possible.

We had forgotten that the mosquito is a fatalist. Insect after insect fell dead at the very feet of their friends and relatives, but did it daunt the latter in the least or turn them from their sinister purpose?



A creature which will die for its dinner with a song still on its lips.

As soon as the light would shine out some patrol mosquito would buzz a warning and all his fellows would betake themselves to ready-made trenches behind the picture molding and stay there till we were exhausted in the search for them.

From this safe retreat they would watch us swatting with wet towels already dead and flattened mosquitoes which spotted the walls. These, of course, we mistook for live ones. After you have killed two or three hundred mosquitoes in the average bedroom the place becomes so flecked with them that you cannot distinguish the dead from the living and are placed at a heavy disadvantage.

Of course, no one could sleep while so many live mosquitoes were crooning gies and mdrigals about one's ears and boasting tunelessly of what they were about to do.

So we tried gassing them. We closed all the doors and windows, stopped up the chinks

with rags and put a charcoal burner in the room before going to bed.

When we opened the doors we found the mosquitoes gathered around the burner, admiring the red glow from the embers within it and drying their humidity-dampened wings in the genial warmth.

They seemed annoyed that our coming had interrupted this pleasant method of spending an evening and, buzzing nastily, retired again behind the picture molding.

In a couple of days one of them found a little water in an old pickle jar in the cellar and informed his fellows of his find. Of course, all the mother mosquitoes went down there immediately and reared thriving families of two or three thousands to the family.

We might have killed most of them in time, but we didn't. When we saw them, on the day of their graduation from the pool, swarming up stairs to take their nocturnal stations in our bedroom we did the only thing that was possible to do.

We moved out and left them to feed on the furniture—if they could find any nourishment in it.

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All the mother mosquitos went down and reared thriving families.



Did it turn them from their sinister purpose? It did not.