

QUESTION CLIMATE

By ALLEN WHITE

over and yawn that old Alphabetical is visionary. Here I can get a canning factory and nobody eats the goods; I hustle up a woolen factory, and the community quits wearing trousers; I build for them a street-car line to haul them to and from their palatial residences, and what do the sun-baked human mud-turtles do but all jump off the log into the water and hide from them cars like they were chariots of fire? What this town needs is not factories, nor railroads, nor modern improvements—Old Alphabetical can get them—but the next great scheme I go into is to go down the river, get some good red mud, and make a few thousand men who will build up a town.

It has been fifteen years and over since Colonel Morrison put on his long coat and high hat and started for the money markets of the East, seeking whom he might devour. At the close of the eighties the Colonel and all his tribe found that the stock of eastern capitalists who were ready to pay good prices for the fine shimmering blue sky and bracing ozone of the West was running low. It was said in town that the Colonel had come to the end of his string, for not only were the doors of capital closed to him in the East, but newcomers had stopped looking for farms at home. There was nothing to do but to sit down and swap jack-knives with other land agents, and as they had taken most of the agencies for the best insurance companies while the Colonel was on dress parade, there was nothing left for him to do but to run for justice of the peace, and, being elected, do what he could to make his tenure for life.

Though he was elected, more out of gratitude for what he had tried to do for the town than because people thought he would make a fair judge, he got no further than his office in popular esteem. He did not seem to wear well with the people in the daily run and jostle of life. During the forty years he has been in our town, he has lived most of the time apart from the people—transacting his business in the East, or locating strangers on new lands. He has not been one of us, and there were stories afloat that his shrewdness had sometimes caused him to thrust a toe over the dead-line of exact honesty. In the town he never helped us to fight for

those things of which the town is really proud: our schools, the college, the municipal ownership of electric lights and waterworks, the public library, the abolition of the saloon, and all of the dozen small matters of public interest in which good citizens take a pride. Colonel Morrison was living his grand life, in his tailor-made clothes, while his townsmen were out with their coats of making our town the substantial place it is. So in his latter days he is old Alphabetical Morrison, a man apart from us. We like him well enough, and so long as he cares to be justice of the peace no one will object, for that is his due. But, somehow, there is no talk of making him county clerk; and there is a reason in everybody's mind why no party names him to run for county treasurer. He has been trying hard enough for ten years to break through the crust of the common interests that he has so long ignored. One sees him at public meetings—a rather wishtful-looking, chubby-faced old man—on the edge of the crowd, ready to be called out for a speech. But no one calls his name; no one cares particularly what old Alphabetical has to say. Long ago he said all that he can say to our people.

The only thing that Alphabetical ever organized that paid was a family. In the early days he managed to get a home clear of indebtedness and was shrewd enough to keep it out of all of his transactions. Tow-headed and Morrison filled the schoolhouse, and twenty years later there were so many of his girls teaching school that the school board had to make a ruling limiting the number of teachers from one family in the city school, in order to force the young Morrison girls to go to the country to teach. In these days the girls keep the house going and Alphabetical is a notary public and a justice of the peace, which keeps his office going in the little

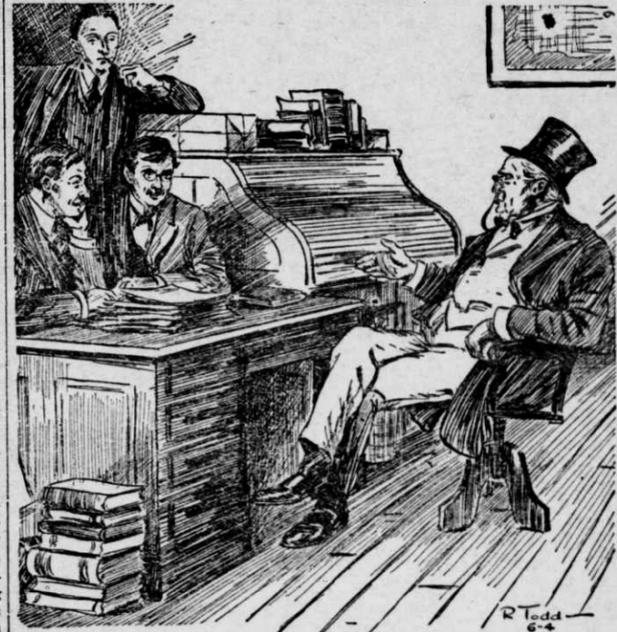
square board building at the end of the street. But every day for the past ten years he has been coming to our office for his bundle of old newspapers. These he reads carefully, and sometimes what he reads inspires him to write something for our paper on the future of the Queen City though much oftener his articles are retrospective. He is the president of the Old Settlers' society, and once or twice a year he brings in an obituary which he has written for the family of some old-timer.

One would think that an idler would be a nuisance in a busy place, but, on the contrary, we all like old Alphabetical around our office. For he is an old man who has not grown sour. His smooth, fat face has not been wrinkled by the vinegar of failure, and the noise that came from his lusty lungs in the old days is subsiding. But he has never forgiven General Durham, of the Statesman, for saying of a fight between Alphabetical and another land agent back in the sixties that "those who heard it pronounced it the most vocal engagement they had ever known." That is why he brings his obituaries to us; that is why he does us the honor of borrowing papers from us; and that is why, on a dull afternoon, he likes to sit in the old sway-back swivel-chair and tell us his theory of the increase in the rainfall, his notion about the influence of trees upon the hot winds, his opinion of the disappearance of the grasshoppers. Also, that is why we always save a circus ticket for old Alphabetical, just as we save one for each of the boys in the office.

One day he came into the office in a bad humor. He picked up a country paper, glanced it over, threw it down, kicked from under his feet a dog that had followed a subscriber into the room, and slammed his hat into the waste-basket with considerable feeling as he picked up a New York paper.

"Well—well, what's the matter with the judiciary this morning?" someone asked the old man.

He did not reply at once, but turned his paper over and over, apparently looking for something to interest him. Gradually the revolutions of his paper became slower and slower, and finally he stopped turning the paper and began reading. It was ten



"He Likes to Sit in the Old Swayback Swivel Chair and Tell Us His Theory of the Increase in the Rainfall."

minutes before he spoke. When he put down the paper his cherubic face was beaming, and he said: "Oh—I know I'm a fool, but I wish the Lord had sent me to live in a town large enough so that every dirty-faced brat on the street wouldn't feel he had a right to call me 'Alphabetical'! Dammit, I've done the best I could! I haven't made any alarming success. I know it. There's no need of rubbing it in on me." He was silent for a time with his hands on his knees and his head thrown back, looking at the ceiling. Almost imperceptibly a smile began to crack his features, and when he turned his eyes to the man at the desk, they were dancing with merriment, as he said: "Just been reading a piece here in the Sun about the influence of climate on human endeavor. It says that in northern latitudes there is more oxygen in the air and folks breathe faster, and their blood flows faster, and that keeps their liver going. Trouble with me has always been climate—sluggish liver. If I had just a little more oxygen floating round in my system, the woolen mill would still be running, the street cars would be going, and this town would have had forty thousand inhabitants. My fatal mistake was one of latitude. But"—and he drew out the word mockingly—"but I guess if the Lord had wanted me to make a town here He would have given me a different kind of liver!" He slapped his knees as he sighed: "This is a funny world, and the more you see of it the funnier it gets." The old man grinned complacently at the ceiling for a minute, and before getting out of his chair kicked his shoe-heels together merrily, wiped his glasses as he rose, put his bundle of papers under his arm, and left the office whistling an old-fashioned tune.

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His Quaintness.
"Something powerful queer about Josh Juckett," said a resident of Grudge. "He got back day before yesterday from a week's stay in Kansas City. Last night he and him went to the picture show and saw a Harold Lloyd comedy. And, actually, Josh never said a word about how much funnier it was when he saw it with the original cast up to Kay See."—Kansas City Star.

The housewife smiles with satisfaction as she looks at the basket of clear, white clothes and thanks Red Cross Ball Blue. At all grocers.—Advertisement.

Terrible Force of Habit.
As an illustration of the terrible force of habit, there is the story of the man who had been visiting at the home of a millionaire. When he returned to his boarding house he absent-mindedly left his shoes outside his door to be shined by the butler. When he looked for the shoes the next morning one of the other boarders had made away with them.

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Dubious Compliment.
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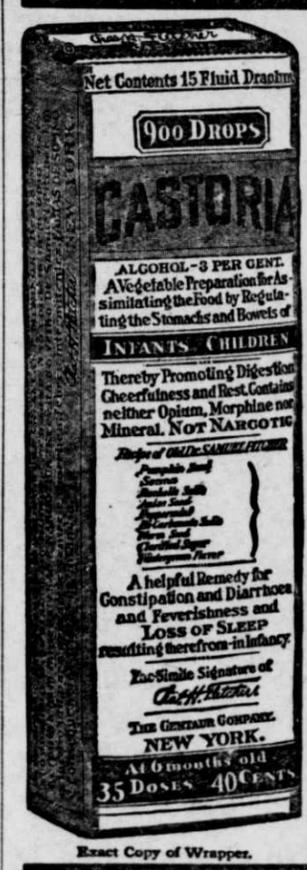
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A Matter of Form.
George Coban was talking at the Lamb's club about a very popular song-bird of revue. "Is she good?" a poet asked. "Well," said Mr. Coban, "I have known more assiduous church-goers." "Oh, you know what I mean. Is she good? Has she got a good voice?" persisted the poet. "Her voice is insured," said Mr. Coban, "for \$250. Her figure is insured for \$300,000."

Try One.
She—Do you like fish balls?
He—Don't believe I ever attended one.

Wireless Call Bells.
An officer of the Portuguese army has developed a system of operating call bells by wireless, which army circles say will do away with prolonged watching for calls at radio receiving stations.

The biggest fool is the man who fools himself.

Everywhere She Goes.
We have a little dog that is rather fond of me, and follows me wherever I go. It happened in church as I was sitting at the end of the pew, during a sermon, that I noticed all eyes fixed on me. I looked and saw little Trix wiggling his tail for all he was worth, glad to have found me. As I could not chase him home, I had to get up and walk out, feeling the heat that made me blush as Trix and I marched down the aisle.—Exchange.

Papa's Golf Stockings.
Father, brilliant in striped golf stockings, was off for a day with the family at the Van Courtland Links. He was complacently self-conscious. Eight-year-old Ethel was fretful and nervous. Several people in the subway car were smiling. Suddenly Ethel piped, "Mamma, can't I have some new stockin's like papa. I wanna look like a zebra, too."

Recipe Wanted.
Flint (looking at picture)—"I wonder what made the tower of Pisa lean?" Fattleigh—"If I knew I'd try it."

Kept Guessing.
"You seem interested in free verse." "No, I'm not. But I read half a column of it before I discovered it was not going to rhyme."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Mean Insinuation.
A bachelor says a mule is the most obstinate thing on earth, but married men know better.—Chicago Daily News.

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