

¶Answering letters is a civilized man's duty.

LETTERS WILL WIN FRIENDS

DURING the course of any calendar or fiscal year dozens of persons tell me: "I just ha-a-a-ate to write letters!" And then they smile, confident that this has established a common bond.

I am shocked and amazed that so many thousands of literate and otherwise civilized persons are guilty of this fault. They would not be so unabashed in telling me that they never say "Good morning," or "Thank you," or "I beg your pardon," or "I am pleased to see you." But answering mail is equally an obligation, and of the same nature.

With tools no more complicated than a sheet of paper, an envelope, a stamp, and a pen you can cultivate fertile soil and make it bloom.

The world champion for promptness in answering mail was, in my experience, the late George Horace Lorimer, editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*. And he probably received as many letters daily as any human being has ever received, year in and year out. He usually answered within twenty-four hours, often within twelve.

Never more than three days; and if it was three days he would apologize for the delay and state the cause.

For millions of men and women the "must" letters are probably not more than one a day, possibly not more than three a week. Why don't they write these letters promptly? I have discovered two answers about which I am certain.

First, and this may astound you if you are not one of the offenders, is lack of proper paper and envelopes. No one would accept an invitation to grand opera if he had to wear overalls. However, millions of us who cannot afford evening gowns and dress suits can afford the cost of good paper. It is amazingly cheap.

I cannot avoid wondering why any of us who brush our teeth and comb our hair and have telephones and send our linen to the laundry can be so silly as not to provide ourselves with excellent paper. For indirect contact with our friends and acquaintances it is our clothing.

Second of the two causes for

neglecting letter-writing is a peculiarly vain and silly idea that the letter must be a literary product comparable to an essay by Charles Lamb or one of The Spectator papers. Let us assume that you are a dealer in hay, grain, lime, coal, and ice; and that you laboriously compose a letter of astounding literary merit. If I received it, my first thought would be that you did not write it. And I wouldn't like that. If I like you, it is because of what you are. What I want in your letter is the essential you.

The best letters are short. Abraham Lincoln wrote many that are classic, on half a sheet of paper. But he wasn't trying to compose classics. He was hurried and harassed. The sense of duty to mankind impelled him to write. His brief letter to the mother who had lost five sons in the War was probably dashed off in haste, but it ranks close to the Gettysburg address as sublime literature.

The moral lesson is: write that letter that civilized human relations demand!

When I was a newspaper reporter, aged 21, death exploded close to me for the first. A District Judge, who was a dear and revered friend in the prime of life,

died of acute indigestion. He was 38 years of age, and thousands of his friends and admirers thought he would be the next governor of the state if they could induce him to run.

I was studying law and he was directing my reading. When I received the stunning news of his sudden death I knew that I must write a letter to his widow, but I did not know how to write such a letter. After bitter and tearful travail, it seemed to me necessary to confess this fact and trust her to excuse it. She knew my age. She, herself was only 27. So I wrote:

"I have just received the tragic news. If there is anything appropriate to write or say or anything that could be in the slightest degree helpful, I do not know it. Therefore this letter will be just a line to say that I am thinking of you during these sad hours."

She received hundreds of letters and scores of callers. On the second day after the funeral a woman friend called and took the widow to her home. That was on the fifth day after Christmas. She took the young widow into her children's playroom, where they were having a grand time with their new toys. She said to her: "These babies do

not know the words, death or funeral. They want to show you their toys. They love you. Play with them. It will be good for you."

Years later the widow told me that answering the letters was the

most painful ordeal she had ever suffered; and that mine was the only one she didn't have to answer. Also that her knowing friend saved her from prostration.—
Chester T. Crowell, condensed from Your Life.

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FANTASTIC RUMOUR

RECENTLY a remarkable letter was published in *New Yorker* from a man who wrote that Hitler had been assassinated in Hamburg in November or December of 1935 and that the man now appearing in his place is always one of four carefully selected doubles. Skeptics doubt this story, placing it in a sort of reverse category with reports that Rudolph and Marie Vetsera never died at Mayerling. The Editor of the New York paper has no such misgivings. His correspondent's letter, it is stated, was quietly matter-of-fact, confining itself unemotionally to names and dates. After stating that he had heard the same from other unprejudiced sources, the editor asserts:

"An Englishman, for instance, told us last week at tea that it was common gossip in London that a great deal of Chamberlain's confusion at Munich was the result of his sudden, horrified realization that the man he spoke to in that carefully darkened room was not Hitler at all! Some time before that we heard a doctor, one of the best laryngologists in New York, say that it would be impossible for a man with *der Fuhrer's* throat condition to speak in public for as long as ten minutes. Confirmation indeed has come from many people, even from some who were high in the Nazi regime and then suddenly and mysteriously found it wise to leave Germany. It is our private conviction that Adolf Hitler has been as dead as vaudeville for more than four years, but we realise that fuller documentary proof is desirable. The editor therefore will welcome further communications on this subject."—*From Australian Digest of World Reading.*