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mean inexpensive and available to all, we agree. But if by vulgar you mean indecent, it is up to the world to prove it.

The Way Americans Talk

Now let us examine some of the voluminous expressions of American culture to see whether or not we are confusing vulgar—that is, common, or of the people—with cheap and indecent. Since the use of “vulgar” was most vociferously applied to our radio, we might start with a consideration of speech. Is our American speech vulgar? The other evening, one of your eminent statesmen in an excellent speech on America, wherein he did us more than adequate justice, threw in a little jibe about our English—or American. Well, though it is not necessary for us to resort to literal translation in communicating with each other, still there is no denying that we do not speak the same language. So we are not exactly ashamed or hurt when we are told that English and American are not identical. One of our greatest books recently written was called *The American Language*, by H. L. Mencken. We have a hunch, in fact, that perhaps after all American is a new language, spoken by 133 million people from end to end of our Continent with less difficulty than obtains between some of the segments of the British Empire. In fact, there is less difference of dialect in America than there is between Cockney and Oxford.

No Aristocratic Speech

Still, American speech is pungent and pointed, to say the least. We are a lusty and vigorous people — unafraid. We speak as we feel, and have fought down for many years a tendency to be secretive and muffled. Here I find myself somewhat baffled. There is in every people's make-up its own peculiar mental landscape. Against this landscape, each man uses words which have no meaning except to himself and those with a similar mental landscape. American speech is not an accident of our country. It is a speech shaped by the effort of a great many different peoples over a vast continent, determined to make themselves easily understood. However, it is hardly worth while to argue. Who is to say what is correct—“bisin” or “basin”?

But what is worth talking about is whether the differences between elements of society are so great that they put one down as menial and the other up as aristocratic. In that sense I can assure you that again we are a vulgar people. Our speech is so standardised that we cannot tell whether a man is an executive (aristocrat) or a hod-carrier. An executive has no hesitancy in speaking loosely and freely, even if it does put him down to a labourer's level. We have differences of speech, but they carry no implications of class.

Writing for the Millions

In the matter of our literature, we admit that we are a vulgar people because our literature rings with the lust of life . . .

The mass production technique in literature has come to supplant the old notion of writing for the select few. To be successful in America, you have to write for the masses. We publish every year 225 million books. Of these, at least 80 million volumes are fiction, and 15 million are religious books. The Bible is still the best-seller in America. This idea of literature as a commodity to be



“We have lifted the modern woman from the level of a peasant”

turned out on a mass production basis flies in the face of the old aristocratic notion that one ‘does not make money out of writing.

We have in America 20 thousand free public libraries. In these libraries, over 114 million books have been taken out at least four times each in the course of the year. The New York Library has over two million volumes, and the Library of Congress has six million books, with 1,450 librarians and others in attendance, and over 18 million documents, manuscripts, films, records and musical scores.

I have worked in the Congressional Library for years. Its beautiful rotunda and galleries will impress anyone. There you will see working men and politicians, school-boys and great scholars, all reading and working in a library provided by their Government to implement our democracy.

Over three thousand people pass through it every day. Yes, we are a vulgar people. We make everything we touch vulgar—that is, common, available, as far as possible, to the common man. And when, in the depression, the Government offered funds from 15 to 20 dollars a week to unemployed, they turned to the writers' project and produced a series of Guides to the several States that would pass for good literature in any country.

Not Afraid of Music

“Now let us take the question of music. At a concert in Wellington the other day, a New Zealander came out to play a great Concerto. He introduced this number with a slighting reference to the effect that some people danced “boogie-woogie” to this Concerto. Everybody in the audience tittered. Now, what was the fact? The fact is that in America people suddenly discovered this “Concerto for Two” and liked it so well that they began to play it for dancing. Now this far from proved that American taste in music is vulgar—it did the opposite. It showed that American taste has risen to such an extent that we now like to dance to a classical piece and give that piece of music a slight increase in tempo. But as I listened to that concert, I was astonished to note that in New Zealand the opposite took place. New Zealanders would take some light

tune to which we dance in America, and would slow it down. As somebody observed, they play “Pistol Packin’ Mama” as if it were a hymn. Now we in America do like jazz and jitter-bugging. It is, I suppose, the instinct for the Highland fling coming out in us. We love music, and we are not afraid of what it does to us.

We have 15 major symphony orchestras conducted by some of the finest musicians alive. We have over 200 smaller orchestras playing in other American cities. Every summer there are outdoor concerts in almost all of our major centres, attended by anywhere from 25 to 30 thousand people, listening to the best music. The Water Gate concerts on the Potomac in Washington, attended by 5000 or more people regularly, are a sight to delight the eyes and ears of any man.

The Working Man In Art

Let us take the question of art. We have in America over 1,400 museums of art, housing some of the world's finest masterpieces. At least 50 million people visit these museums every year. We have a great vernacular art, represented by such great painters as Grant Wood and Thomas Benton. When in the depression the Government established an art project, it offered people in America 15 to 20 dollars a week to paint. Hundreds of people turned to the brush and oils and canvas. To-day, our public buildings are lined with by no means inconsequential paintings. These paintings depict the life of the working man—in steel mill, in factory, on the farms, at recreation and at toil. The instinctive love of beauty came out; creating, however, what would be called a vulgar art—that is, the art of the people.

In Wichita, Kansas, the workers in an air-plant factory have formed an 80-piece band, which plays in the symphony concerts. In large factories there are choral clubs. The factory workers like to show that they have souls above nuts and bolts, too. Of course, this will be challenged as being done for profit-making, for advertising. But advertising in America has done an excellent piece of work in education long neglected by the schools and colleges. These schools and colleges tend to concern themselves with the classical and the aristocratic. They

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