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The Vehicle

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The Vehicle

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We invite manuscripts of all sorts — short stories,
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and photographs.

“Unless otherwise stated, any resemblance to living
characters is purely coincidental.”

Robert Mills French
Editor

Mary Ellen Mockbee
Assistant Editor

Editorial

It has been reported to us that our story "Moment of Power" was objected to on the grounds that it depicted unfavorably two persons attached to the university. Such objections show that the story has been misjudged, and the following remarks are therefore appropriate.

"Moment of Power" was a piece of *satirical fiction*. Like all fiction that has succeeded, it patterned itself after life. The worst condemnation made of bad fiction is that it is *not true to life*. The advice of all good writers is to "write about what you know." So the author of "Moment of Power" used people like those he knew from experience. But it is ridiculous to say that the paymaster and offices exist only at Eastern. Paymasters and offices like those described exist at practically all large state-controlled institutions—colleges, universities, old folks' homes, prisons, statehouses, hospitals, insane asylums, etc. And in each office there are employees physically resembling those in "Moment of Power."

Nobody at Eastern was the "original" of Mr. Schramm. But suppose somebody *had* been used as a model for him. Nobody at all mindful of the processes of fiction would say that because he sat for the picture he did everything that the fictional Mr. Schramm did. Consider some of the great works of fiction. Tolstoy based Pierre in *War and Peace* on his own father. But do we conclude that all the things Pierre did in the novel Tolstoy's father did in life? Mr. Micawber is patterned after Dickens' father, but do we charge the elder Dickens with all the idiotic things that Micawber did? The hero of *A Farewell to Arms* repeats part of Ernest Hemingway's history; are we going to insist, then, that Hemingway deserted the Italian army and had an illegitimate child by an English nurse who died bearing it? Certainly not. Therefore, even if the *look* and *official position* of Eastern's paymaster *had been* borrowed (they were *not*) for Mr. Schramm, must we go on to say that Eastern's paymaster did everything Mr. Schramm is represented as doing? If we do, something is wrong with our minds.

We have also said that "Moment of Power" was satire. Satire takes all abuse as its province. "Moment of Power" satirizes no particular person but the universal office wolf who uses his rank to bargain for favors with the female office help. In "Moment of Power" the wolf is especially ridi-

culous because he has never overcome his timorousness more than enough to force a few tolerable kisses upon his assistant. As she knows, he has never been nor ever will be a threat to her virtue. (Incidentally, of this poor woman there is no original at Eastern. If anybody thinks there is, let him weigh the undeniably *fictional* qualities Miss Baker has against those charged not to be fiction.) As for the pursuit angle, as Jack Webb says in the picture "30," there is a pursued secretary in every office. How many of them, we wonder, have Miss Baker's general attributes. Tens of thousands!

In sum, "Moment of Power" is not a story of Mr. X and Miss Y at Eastern — or at any other place. It is a story of Mr. Schramm and Miss Baker, fictional creatures leading fictional existences. Satire, however, it is worth remembering, does not have to deal exclusively with either their truth or fiction. Shelley and Byron were apt at ridiculing living people, naming real names and acts and places. Dryden and Pope and Swift veiled the satirized persons thinly. Orwell and Huxley satirized situations not yet existent. If such people and situations as these last use in *1984* and *Brave New World* never come into being, doubtless the authors will deserve part of the thanks. Therefore *The Vehicle* claims the right to satirize whatever in its estimation seems ridiculous. It affirms, however, that good taste has always been, and will always be, one of its guiding principles. It has no intention of smirking, or guffawing or being perverse. It does not intend to laugh at anything that cannot be helped or ought not to be changed. Satire is always a little cruel, and heaven knows *The Vehicle* does not even like to be cruel. But no reform was ever wrought by any writing to which people were totally indifferent. So if somebody squeals because a shoe fits, we ought not to care.

What we do mind is being judged by the *emotions* when we ought to be judged by logic. In the present instance, someone said to us, "Logically, you are right, but somehow I can't feel kindly toward that story!" Logically, but! If people are going to pocket their logic and judge by their emotions, the world is in a fine shape indeed! *Emotional* sway is responsible for most of the tragic deeds of man—suicide, murder, and hasty marriage, to mention only a few. We don't mind being judged, but we want to be judged correctly. If, on our own part, we unwittingly cause the innocent to suffer, we are sorry. This applies to the present instance.

A White Man's Burden

By Robert Mills French

I

It was a cool evening and Tim McCall walked hurriedly to keep from noticing the chill. It was early summer; seemingly the coolness was spring's dying breath as the days became warmer.

Only the distant call of the whippoorwill contrasted with the steady staccato of Tim's footsteps on the pavement. Hearing the night bird reminded Tim of summer's presence, and he smiled to himself as he thought of the months to come. All winter he had dreamed of and waited for warm weather, and now he quivered in anticipation of the good times to come.

"Tim, old boy," he said aloud to himself, "you have got it made. Five hundred in the bank, a new car, healthy and free; yes, sir, you've got it made!"

He had done well to move south for his new job. Prior to the last six months he had plugged away teaching year in and year out with nothing to show for it. At first he had not wanted to come south, but he found the offer of the job as personnel manager, at twice his previous salary, too good to pass up. Now, just six short months later, he was sitting pretty.

Congratulating himself, he thought, "Yes, sir, McCall, you're a shrewd one. In this day and age a guy has to watch out for himself; no one else will."

Like the meeting he was going to tonight, something about a "white-citizens' council"; he didn't care one way or the other if niggers worked in the plant, but the other men had seemed to resent it, so he had gone along with it. Anyway, why fight city hall?

"The damn niggers should be kept in their place," he agreed with himself. That's why he had fired all those who worked at the plant before. That was his reason for attending the town meeting tonight.

Turning down a dimly lit street, Tim walked toward a group of men who stood milling about in front of the community center. As he came into the light which streamed out of the windows of the building, Tim recognized several of the men.

John Alexander, the town banker, and probably the richest and most influential man in Northern Mississippi, stood in front of the group, talking loudly and waving his hands about. Facing him, listening intently, were some of the most prominent citizens of Greenville. They were evidently upset about something, for their faces were contorted and beaded with sweat.

Noticing Tim, John Alexander motioned to the others as he called to him:

"Tim, oh Tim, we need some help!"

"What's the trouble, John?" replied Tim as he drew up among the group.

Angry murmurs from the crowd covered up John's reply, but Tim caught "rape" and "lynch" from the general buzz.

"Wait a minute, boys," Tim shouted over the din. "I don't want any part of a lynching."

"You don't understand, Tim," Alexander blurted out. "Joe's little girl has been missing ever since noon when she was last seen with old Jim in the school yard."

Joe was a laborer whom Tim had employed recently and his little girl, Mary, was just six and in her first year of school.

"Do you mean old Jim, the nigger watchman that I fired yesterday?" Tim inquired.

"Yeh, that's the son of a bitch," someone in the crowd yelled. "Mary was listening to one of his damn stories at recess, and now we can't find her!"

"That black bastard has killed my little girl," Joe sobbed. "I say let's get him!"

"Let's go," one voice screamed above the din, and like an enraged animal the crowd moved, as one, toward niggertown.

The residents of that neighborhood knew something terrible was about to happen, for no lights were burning in the houses, and a deathly silence hung over the area.

The crowd was a multitude of angry voices:

"There's his shack over there; let's hang his black carcass from his own tree!"

"Who's got the rope?"

"Lemme at the son of a bitch!"

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"Come on out, nigger!"

"Yahoo!"

"He's at the window. Get him!"

A slow shaking voice called out from the dark house—"What you all want wit' me? I ain't done nuttin'. I ain't hurt nobody. Let me be, jes' let me be."

"The yellow devil's bawling," Joe screamed. "Let's give him something to bawl about!"

Tim no longer thought of right and wrong; he was part of the mob, and all he did was a part of that body's function. Without thinking, he shouted, "I'll go talk to him; I'll get him out here."

Running up to the shack, Tim called out, "Jim, Jim, it's all right. It's Mr. McCall; I want to talk to you."

Almost hysterical now, the old Negro called back, "Masta McCall, don' let 'em take me, you my fren, help me! They gonna lynch me, but you a good man. I knows yo won't let 'em."

"It's all right, Jim, I won't let them hurt you," Tim lied. "Come on out. I'll help you."

A stooped, trembling old Negro emerged from the house and shuffled to Tim's side.

"Bless yo, suh, bless yo, Masta Tim. I knowed yo'd help me. Yo a good man, bless yo."

No sooner had the old man spoken than he was dragged away screaming by the fanatical crowd.

"Help me, Masta Tim," the pathetic old man sobbed. "Yo said they wouldn't hurt me! Oh, Gaud, help me!"

Everything after that had seemed like a nightmare to Tim. The old man screaming, the eerie light from the torches that the mob now carried, and finally the choking, gasping sound that came from the swinging body made everything seem unreal.

The mob remained for some time watching the wildly thrashing body, and Tim wondered why they had not tied the arms and legs.

After a while the body ceased to jerk convulsively, and now it was a limp object that turned slowly at the end of the thick rope. Losing interest and nerve, the mob dispersed as quickly as it had formed.

(To Be Continued)

Passing Train

By Wayne Baker, E.I.U.

This chilly morning's light glints on the rails
As we, slow moving, shovel cobs of grain
For pay; at five we'll watch this evening fail
Towards night through our old kitchen window pane.
But listen, now—here comes nine-thirty's train;
Remember, friends, how, youngsters, years ago
We sat on gray back porches sagged from strain
And thought: "Some day I'll board that train and go"—
See, as it passes, paper blown a-scatter,
The air horn honks, the rails go "click" and "clatter;"
Dust swirls 'round and chaff blows in our eyes—
And now, it's all gone westward, the sound dies.
And other days have long now gone before;
The train that we once knew stops here no more.

Autumn

By Major Dan Ragain, E.I.U.

The summer of our youth, now a faded lady gaudily
clad in red and gold, pays a last brief call before departing.

The lake below is strewn with leaves, withered dancers
on a sea of glass.

The south wind returns once more and searches each
dale and hollow for the wild flowers which grew there in
young summer, for the laughter of the young lovers who spun
their bright dreams there, but these are lost forever, leaving
in their place only emptiness and memories which grow cold
with the passing of dark time.

The sun drops into the forest in the west and fills the
woodlands with bright streamers of gold; the timeless earth
is strewn with gossamer wings which are as threads of bright
silver reaching . . . reaching. The dusty gold of October
touches the treetops and in an instant is gone.

I stand in the gathering dusk and feel the emptiness
within my soul, for I know that these precious things are
gone forever, nevermore to be a part of my life. Summer
eternal, thou art but a dream of foolish youth. Summer is
lost forever, carried away on the wind to the land of summers
past where the bright dreams of our youth live on.

Chaos in Cultureville

By J. B. Young

But it couldn't happen—everything had worked out so perfectly; All the graphs had proved his theory, and statistics can't be wrong!

Golden McShrewd was a lost man, a professor of economics who had lost on the stock market! Oh, he had had defeats before, but never anything like this. The Investment Club wouldn't stand for this; they were all bankrupt.

For a little over a year now the faculty of Claptrap Normal where McShrewd taught had dabbled in the stock market through the Investment Club. Never taken very seriously by the members, the club had been a pleasant bit of therapy for the restless and idle professors. Friday night they would all meet at the house of one of the members and take the role of great industrialists or powerful financiers over coffee and poker.

The club was taken lightly by the non-participants on the faculty also, and many a good-natured jibe about "the beating Florida Power was taking" or "the drop in Bonanza Uranium" passed between them and the rabid fans who became fascinated with the endeavor.

The situation got out of hand with some of the more enthusiastic members. At first they had confined their nervous rattling of the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and the "Dow-Jones Stock Averages" to the coffee shop, but lately classes had been cut and papers went ungraded as the harried investors frantically memorized the financial reports.

The investments originally were confined to ten dollars a month, but "Bazooka Bubble-Gum" had boomed, giving them a taste of success, and after that there was no stopping the would-be millionaires.. Soon, entire paychecks were being gambled in a frenzied, learned manner. The local stock broker prospered; his son was given a plush convertible of the most recent model Cadillac. The investors lost steadily.

As the investments increased, the plight of the college community became worse and worse. Neglected students wandered blindly down corridors, looking for professors who were busy trying to increase the mortgages on their homes and stall on their car payments. Abused faculty wives were reported seen in the local Goodwill Industries store, haggling over second-hand clothing. The state welfare association was preparing to offer relief to hungry faculty children.

Distraught faculty members were heard wailing in their offices; the president received desperate pleas to move into the salaries for the next biennium. The broker wore a large, warm smile; one might even say he glowed.

Poor but proud, the enlightened millionaires-to-be were quite bellicose about their shrewdness. One member, Reginald M. Johnson, who always appeared haughty and arrogant in his associations, became so angry with a group of students who had asked innocently about the stock market (it was, after all, a class in economics) that he crashed out of the classroom, knocking over several chairs in the process, and raced to his office. Once inside the confines of his office, he threw a tantrum which ripened into apoplexy. At the last report, Dr. Johnson was still in a state of shock, able only to look wildly about and hiss menacingly, "Don't you see? Don't you SEE?"

At the tremendous rate of investment which the club was experiencing, it grew in scope and importance. The advisor, Golden McShrewd, who had always appeared to be slightly befuddled by life and was the butt of students' jokes, became aware of his position and took on an air of haughtiness. He exhibited all the signs of possessing a "messiah complex." Addressing no one informally and his classes in only the most confusing intellectual manner, McShrewd had ridden the investment hysteria to heights of grandeur which he had never dared dream of.

Locked doors became the rule of all the members of the Investment Club, who feared sabotage of their elaborate plans. Wild-eyed, they would walk cautiously down the halls, staying close to the walls and avoiding open doorways, always conscious of the fact that someone might attempt to steal the precious documents in their briefcases.

Meetings of the club were held on back roads in black limousines with drawn curtains; members began obtaining licenses to carry guns for protection.

As the entire matter reached a height of mass-hysteria, two incidents occurred which would inevitably lead to disaster.

A non-investing professor, Dr. Golstein, a self-appointed expert in any field, made the mistake of telling one of the by-now-fanatic apostles of the sacred sect that the whole idea was not sound. A rather annoying and outspoken fellow, he had had the audacity to refer to the club as "silly"! An argument ensued which ended only when the investor chal-

lenged Goldstein to a duel. The challenged professor, being of a practical nature, walked away laughing so heartily that tears streamed down his well-rounded cheeks and fogged his glasses. The challenger did not take the insult lightly, however, and went to get his gun. His wife, who was by this time beside herself with poverty and concern over her husband, tried to persuade him to stop, and then called the police.

In the typical "blitzkrieg" fashion the police arrived thirty minutes later and surrounded the house from which the professor had long since gone. Hiding behind their cars, they pleaded with the man via loudspeakers and called the nearby towns for help. The dog of the besieged professor happened to run out of the garage at this moment, knocking over some garbage cans which lined the driveway, and in the confusion a gun battle was started between the local Cultureville police and a newly arrived squad from a nearby town.

Meanwhile, the vengeance-bound professor had lost his nerve and had gone to the country club, where he was consuming his fifteenth martini when the police found him.

The other seemingly harmless event was a new order of stock by the club's advisor, Dr. McShrewd. Planning intricately, he had plotted out on his graph the stock most likely to succeed for November. After many sleepless nights, he had decided on "Wisconsin Red-Beauty Cranberries & Sons, Inc." Calling an emergency meeting of the club, he presented his findings and proposed a plan of entire investment of all possible funds in this company. For a week all stock presently held had been liquidated and stock in "Wisconsin Red-Beauty Cranberries & Sons, Inc." had been purchased in its place. Entire fortunes of the club members went into cranberry stock.

At first the returns were promising; slight gains were felt. Smiles began to return to tired faces as the venture started paying off. Old feuds were settled peacefully; club members began to accept the jibes of their associates in good humor; the storm appeared to be over. So calm did the scene appear that the president of the college made plans to visit his mother on Thanksgiving Day.

Then it happened—the decree came from a government office in Washington, D.C., that all cranberries sprayed with a certain weed-killer containing the poison "aminotroazole," which caused cancer in rats, were a threat to health. Immediately, sale of contaminated cranberries was declared illegal in many states; federal authorities moved to outlaw all cranberries which had been sprayed with the poison.

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And beauty draws us
with a single hair."
—Pope*

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And, woe, all "Wisconsin Red-Beauty Cranberries & Sons, Inc." cranberries had been sprayed with the ill-fated weed-killer.

A rush to sell interest in the company ensued, but it was too late. All was lost for our would-be millionaires; they were bankrupt, each and every one.

Throughout Cultureville, gun-shots echoed from bedrooms with drawn shades, as the unhappy investors reacted in a manner befitting reasonable men. Offices on the third floor of Bleep Hall were at a premium in the hectic week to come.

Over one-half of the faculty was lost in that week; black crepe draped every doorway; no one smiled.

The unhappiest man of the lot was undoubtedly Dr. Golden McShrewd, who attempted to commit suicide but could not open the latch which locked the window of his office. His attempt at suicide foiled, the bewildered professor wanders about, babbling of "Wall Street" and "business." His faith in statistics shaken, Dr. McShrewd is indeed a lost man!

Cure-all

By Jerry N. White, E.I.U.

Trust a finger,
A finger of pipe,
Tipped with a nail of steel drillbit,
Down a man-made throat
Into the gut of the earth:
Thrust it deeper,
And deeper,
Until the earth in great sickness
Belches up a foul, black liquid
That putrefies and spoils
All it touches.

Love --- Long Distance

By Mary Ellen Mockbee, E.I.U.

There are times when slow deliv'ry
Seems the postman's art.
Far more swiftly speeds the impulse
That is sent from heart to heart.

Metropolitan Caravan

By Thomas McPeak, E.I.U.

No memory of mine can stroll into childhood days without having to sidestep the toylike wheels of the now-vanishing pushwagons. Edging their way slowly into a small boy's vision as they crossed the forbidden boundary of the Fulleton Avenue car-line, they came like ancient Armenian camels bearing mysteries and delicacies from strange lands—lands that were rarely penetrated, and then only under escort of an adult.

Each wagon had its own special lure. Its own smell. Its own peculiar sound. Its own way of effecting different emotions in even the most passive listeners. The eerie, haunting chant of "Knives sharpen . . . ed, knives sharpen . . . ed" could send a shiver up a five-year-old's spine and elicit these words at night in a newly learned prayer: "And, dear God, please help that sad, lonesome, dirty man that sharpens knives."

The light airy bells of the milk-white ice-cream wagon with its operator in his pure, military-like uniform inspired a happier response. A classy little base runner would freeze between second and first when he heard the magic signal of the ice-cream bells. Pausing briefly, he would deliberate between loyalty and desire, then race after the outfielders who were already digging into their pockets for that precious dime. Yet, despite the spirited charge of the older children, the ice-cream wagon didn't mean as much to them as it did to a much younger fellow. Their excitement was merely sensuous—a pleasure that lasted only the few seconds it took to gobble down the melting sweet stuff. The ice-cream man, the milk-white wagon, and the airy bells were replaced instantly by the argument concerning whose turn it was to bat.

But to that smaller fellow, the ice-cream wagon was a baseball game, an unopened birthday present, and an unexpected cartoon between westerns, all in one. Those merry bells carried a strange sorcery which could dry tears, relieve the fear of impending punishment, and heal the scorch made by the burn of angry words.

Dismal indeed were those dark, rainy summer days that—in addition to all their other evils—kept the ice-cream, peanuts-and-popcorn, hot-dog, and fruit carts from making their daily shortcut through the boy's street from the car-lines

to nearby Humboldt Park. Not that the boy had enough gold to sample all the tidbits of this metropolitan caravan, but items like roasted peanuts, popcorn, and fruit, though they didn't seem quite worth the investment, were nice to see and smell.

The hot-dog and tamale wagon presented the strongest temptation to the young teens of the neighborhood. Each evening, the hot-dog stand, rolling leisurely through the streets with its promise of a vagabond snack, vied in appeal with a family supper. It offered no such challenge, though, to the little boy. A hot dog and its necessary accompaniment, soda pop, cost a whole quarter. And a quarter all in one piece, when once gotten hold of, was not to be spent, but to be held and thought about. The hot dogs and tamales, like the peanuts and popcorn, were usually appreciated for their odor and appearance.

Not all the pushwagons could be appreciated for their odor and appearance. The pots-and-pans wagon was somewhat lacking in romantic appeal, if not in noise, and the junk and secondhand carts left something to be desired. Yet these wagons, like their more glamorous counterparts, also insured the independence of their owners.

Today these itinerant merchants have become almost extinct. Drive-ins and super-markets have driven the peddlers from the city streets. No doubt this is for the best. But I think there is at least one small boy in that massive industrial kingdom of Chicago who, feeling alone and sad at this very moment, would perk up and clap his hands at the sight of the almost comical parade of the peddlers.

Read not to me of history proud;
May glory of the past be forgotten.
Look to that book with intent to learn;
Then picture bodies grown rotten.

—*R.M.F.*

What can he offer when spring is gone?
What is left of that drawing bold?
How will it be in the time of shadow
When the sand has drifted and the picture
is lost?

—*R.M.F.*

Ode to the Lion Hunters

By Richard Blair

Oh, luck's amuck.
The gun is stuck.
The lion is leaping high!

Shall it be that,
Before this cat,
All of us shall die?

No! One is brave
Our lives to save.
Observe his wondrous feat!

Down Leo's throat
He shoves his coat—
His arm . . .
 and head . . .
 and feet!

Immortality

By M. E. M., E.I.U.

Sometimes,
When life is full of fear.
Is bleak and drear,
I wonder . . .
Does the hungry grass above the rotting clay
Draw from it all
Of what we call a Soul?

Entrance

By Sam Martin, E.I.U.

Random smiles will greet you
If you walk alone;
Many eyes will meet you
Piercing to the bone.
Heads will turn as you go by;
Then chatter will resume.
You have your coffee now—relax!
You're just part of the room.

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