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Believe It or Not

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BELIEVE IT OR NOT

A farmer lived in southeastern North Dakota; he had several successive crop failures; he had a large family to support; he resorted to bootlegging; federal agents caught him; he pleaded guilty; the U. S. attorney recommended clemency, and more; the federal judge sentenced the "criminal" to three days—not, it was explained, as punishment, but to insure government payment of expenses home, a three day trip. That's the story that appeared in the North Dakota press last month.

The all-wise human, who is never all-wise, places his "do" or his "don't" in legislation or constitution, but the practically-minded, more or less humane, somewhat emotional, slightly spiritual administrator of the "do" or the "don't" hews away rough corners, whenever, in his judgment, the occasion demands. The rest of the all-wise humans "huddle down" for a quarrelling or quibbling contest about the action and its results. Parlor and street-corner discussions record blame or praise for the judiciary. Congressional exponents of executive inefficiency "chew" the sweet morsel. Committees on law enforcement make new discoveries of a "growing tide." But few read in the incident its deeper meaning.

Last month we touched on constitutional sanctity and the legislator. Here you see involved the judiciary and the executive. That's our triumvirate! We must be a terrible people—law-avoiding, law-evading!

We hear talk of repeals; we read about moratoriums in law making; but legislators go right on writing more laws, just as often, just as fast as the occasion permits. And so, we again beg you to listen to that old Chinese philosopher, Lao Tse, 560 B. C.: "The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be. . . . If the government is prying and meddling, there will be constant infraction of the law. . . . Varily, mankind have been under delusion for many a day! Govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish—don't overdo it."