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THE DANGERS OF MONOTONY

Many years ago when visiting in England, I was being shown around a toy factory when my attention was drawn to a man making doll's eyes. It was a simple process, all he had to do was drop different coloured liquids in four or five grooves. He himself said that a ten-year old child could do the job. When I asked him how long he had been at the same task he replied: 'Thirtyeight years.' Just imagine, working for more than a generation doing something which bored him to death. And there you have the greatest foe of happiness — stark monotony.

When Madame Curie was a student living on very little, and meeting, with astonishing courage, a succession of reverses, she wrote a poem about the future. The student, she wrote could not dream forever in college halls: She must leave the land of science To go out and struggle for her bread On the grey roads of life.

She was a girl in her twenties at that time, with high spirits and great enthusiasm, but she held no illusions about the road she had to travel and she welcomed its challenge.

The test of the grey roads of life — the monotonous roads — is the most trying. "Most people fall victims to the tiresomeness of life than to its tears," wrote Percy Ainsworth. "The tragedies of life do not always occur in the storms of life. Beneath the grey skies of routine, very sad things happen."

When the element of surprise goes out of life the test of monotony begins and for many it dampens their religious life. As children we used to put our hands over playmates' eyes and cry: "Open your mouth and shut your eyes and see what somebody sends you." And the enjoyment of such a game lay in the thrill of surprise. Half the pleasure of the Christmas season is that, besides giving and receiving gifts, the

air of mystery and secrecy is everywhere.

Dr. Joseph Parker once declared: "If we had no changes we should have no prayers." When men become accustomed to things, he said, they lose the sense of wonder, and soon after that the sense of reverence. Few take the trouble to watch a sunrise because it is so common. Men view with complete indifference nature's most dazzling spectacles for no other reason than this — they are used to them. Seed-time and summer and autumn and winter pass with such unvarying regularity that men cease to be stirred by them.

Monotony has made agnostics of many men and atheists of others. It is so much easier to believe in God when life is exciting and colorful, even if sorrow is the cause of it; God seems more real in the crisis than in the commonplace. The Hebrew people rose to great heights under persecution but sagged woefully in less eventful days. In Genesis there is the story of young Jacob fleeing from home after he had deceived his father and wronged his brother. He travelled what must have been in those days a great distance and then from sheer weariness fell asleep. God visited him in that sleep and when he awoke Jacob cried with astonishment — with incredulity — "Surely the Lord was in this place and I knew it not." How many times there are when, startled by some unusual happening, we recognize that God has been near — an unsuspected presence — unsuspected because life has become humdrum.

This is an age of specialization, people labour with concentration in a narrow field and it has a bad effect upon them. They get to know more and more about less and less. It is good to see people taking their work seriously, but it can be overdone.

Today's quotation is an old proverb: "The only difference between a groove and a grave is the depth."

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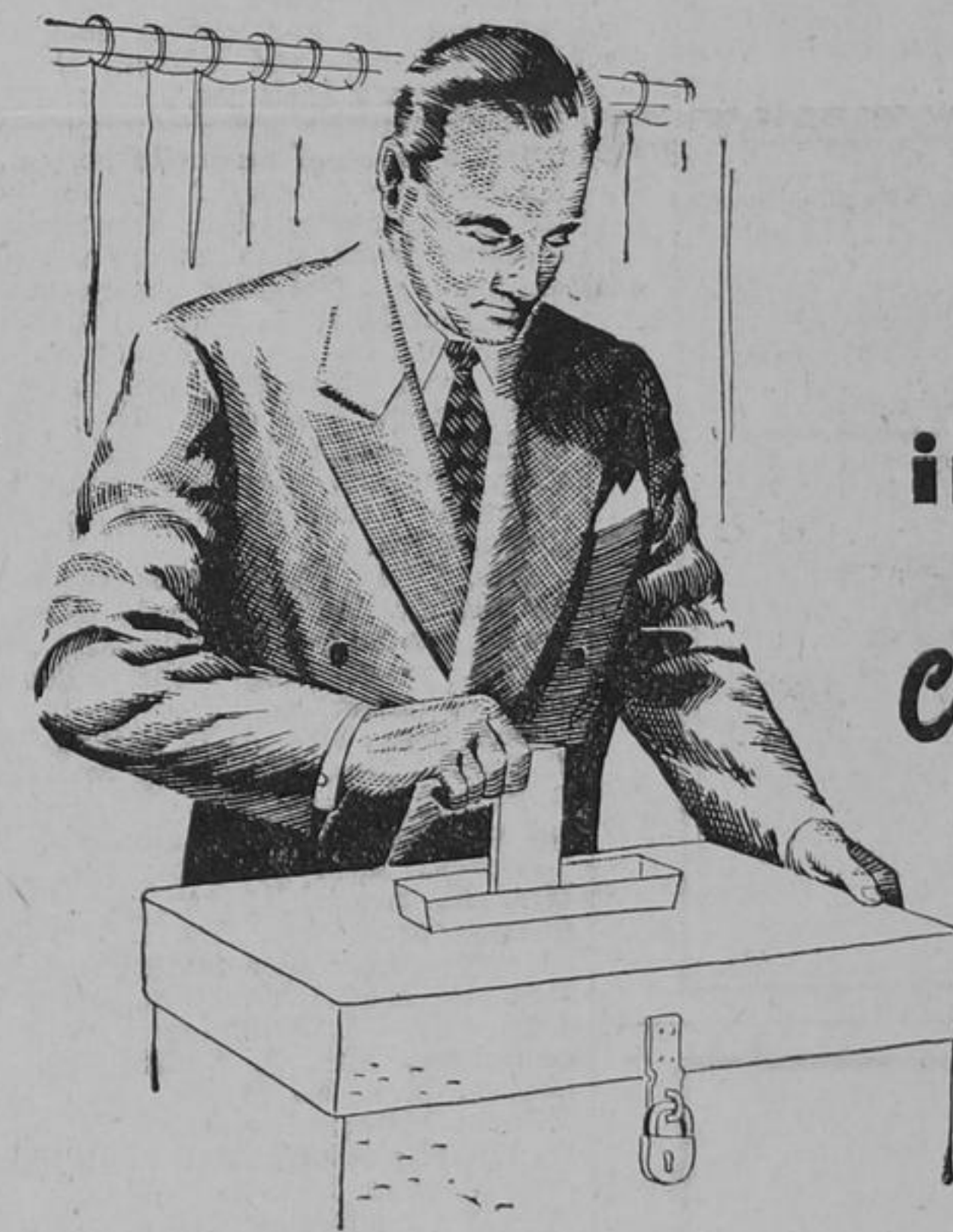


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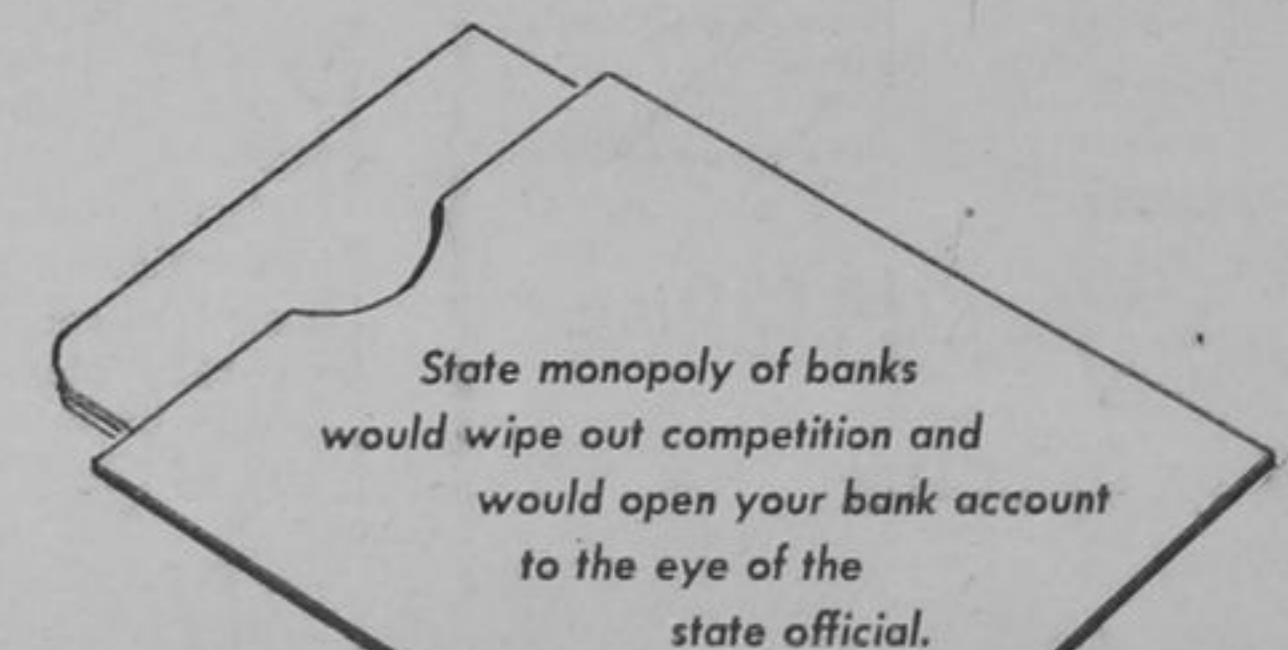
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