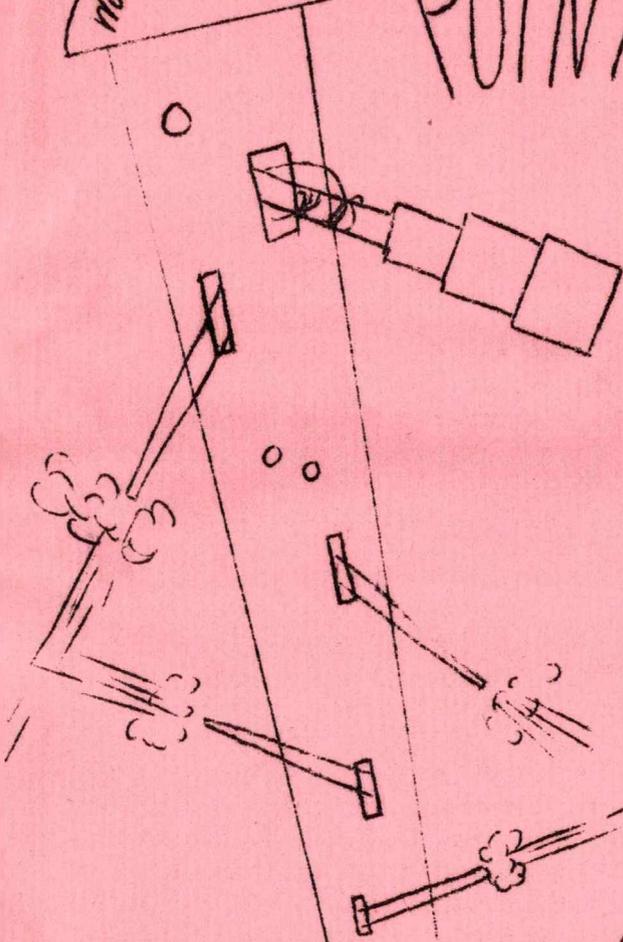


VANTAGE POINT

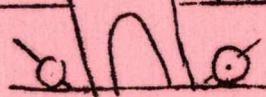
Michel's
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SCHVAMBRANIA

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MARCH 1945



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W. W. W.

VANTAGE POINT No. 1 March 14th, 1945

A battery of opinion published by John Michel for the benefit of the Vanguard Amateur Press Association---and other worthy cognoscenti.

WHERE IS MY WANDERING TEST TUBE TONIGHT?

A number of our professional sad sacks have been brutally bashed on the noggin by the fortunes of war at recent date and are seeing hard times and catastrophe in the stars. While not agreeing with the spirit of this oracle, I am, unhappily at one with its letter. The war emergency and the manpower crisis have nourished my purse to the point where it can no longer honestly be called trash, but I am still far from being a happy man, as a 4F scribe with no difficulty at all in singling out the sounds of Uncle Sam's hunting horn.

At the same time I will admit to being in no restricted pickle. The Champagne Circuit is struggling along sans breast of uninea hen; Lucius Beebe is down to his last embroidered weskit; at least one hundred twenty millions of our people have resigned themselves to life without Oklahoma! and Mr. Bennett Cerf is faced with the ghastly dilemma of steadfastly refusing to edit another anthology on the grounds that his next smash hit will exhaust the paper ration of his publishers up to 1948.

The international situation is equally depressing. The masses are staring at Mr. Churchill, while Mr. Churchill is staring at the masses. General De Gaulle trips his light fantastic, dropping in his wake canny Gallicisms which in one way or another cancel out the beautiful speeches of the night before. Italy is in an uproar, Belgium is on the toboggan, Greece has blown itself to hell and the Swedes and the Swiss have as yet done little but make faint, squeaking noises in the direction of Germany. But I am wise enough to know that there is

never pre-announced or exhaustingly disastrous to worry about in the United States. Sooner or later the darkness lifts, and, already a bright new light, designed to sustain what is left of the nation's fine old stuff, is casting interesting reflections of the coming dawn.

I refer, of course to the recent rebirth of science.

Scarcely had we gone to bat and wound up for a homerun hit on the Nazis, with bases loaded, when our entire tribe of manufacturers opened up with a terrific barrage of propaganda. The message, in three-color, full-page ads in the runover sections of the dime and two-bit family magazines, cried cheerily that come V-Day the skies would crack on the dotted line and drown us all in a flood of pocket radios, wireless refrigerators, wrist-watch television sets, microfilm phonographs and book recordings, sulfa drugs in sodas and sodas in pellets the size of a horse pill. Plainly the war emergency had built such a big bonfire under our technical brains that they had requested ten minutes of silence in the laboratories and emerged with twenty years of progress impaled on the points of their slide rules.

The results were astonishing. Feature writers and the editors of women's magazines reared up and let out falsetto shrieks of delight. Digests, blinded by the brilliance of billion-horsepower brains, wrigglingly stated that war had its uses in keeping scientists on their toes, while broad grins split the usually bland faces of the National Association of Manufacturers, which proceeded to hatch a fat little plot based on the idea that anything they could do to avoid responsibility for a postwar economic crash was crumbcake in their coffee, and this was it.

The glorious inspiration, since seen crawling from page to page of the conservative organs of the public prints, was that tough luck and scientific gadgets had made America great and were marked to get her past that last hump to

the poorhouse again. The sole requisites with which to launch an era of unequalled prosperity were a few dies, a sheet or two of pink plastic, and lo! you wouldn't be able to hear the wails of hungry babes for the busy rumble of screw machines filling the land like the voice of the turtle.

I might have been willing to go along at least half-way with this proposition were it not for the fact that I am in on a little secret the NAM would like to bury. The cost of unearthing this smothered corpse was but a trifle to a number of professional, literary ghouls and I am passing it on to you at the same price. Hold on to your hats.

At least nine tenths of these wonderful wartime discoveries are prewar products. There isn't a single great advance in our technology that hadn't cut its teeth and already been sized up in general outline by the time the depression was a year-old brat. There are a few cute ideas that have been developed by our masterminds as interesting adjuncts to the war machines, but, by and large, you can name the wonder and find it in the Patent Office records previous to 1938. This fact alone would raise no one's blood pressure to the boiling point. What gets me square in the craw is the gall of this buzzard's crew busily spraying tinted mists over the countryside in the shape of gorgeous promises they wouldn't dare deliver in forty years, knowing as they do that what drowned the nation in the first place isn't going to resuscitate it tomorrow.

Lest anyone think me an enemy of progress, I immediately absolve science and the scientists from any major share of the blame for this feeble-minded approach to a desperate problem. A few of our technicians are hungry cockroaches, but the vast majority of scientists are socially useful and forward-looking citizens. It is true that they usually vote conservative, but they do this because their eyes are glued to microscopes.

instead of the street and their ears to the amplifying ends of cyclotron tubes instead of the ground. For some strange reason they are paid very little to make sure that they can't do too much.

In some ways the effects of this form of strangulation are pitiful, for a scientist is actually a sort of perpetual motion machine that continually throws off one good idea after another, like sparks. There is no way of stopping the works for good. Millions were spent during the late twenties to find out how. One idea grows out of another. An improved radio tube is invented and five years later makes possible a television set. A wizard in the Middle West cracks an atom with a cosmic mallet and a decade after the event we are tossing B-29s at the Japs with superfuels in their guts that would give hell's heating plant a run for its Fahrenheit. Out of whirling spindles belt lines grow, and before you can say "overproduction," they've created goods twenty times the value of all the country's ready cash.

To their great sorrow, our economic astrologists don't know the secret of halting the process. The sorcerers spoke the magic words a decade or two back and their apprentices have been running for buckets ever since. In the prewar period, the country fell ill of this strange diet, and now, the only remedy the medicine men can think up to cure the impending sickness is another dose of the same poison, without providing room for the hundred-yard dash to the bathroom door.

It is a weird thing indeed listening to the panegyrics rising to the heavens from the lips of men who, during the depression, loaded their mousetraps for any rat who thought up a better one. The classic story of American T and T who have openly confessed to the suppression of over eight thousand patent improvements on the telephone in order to jack up the cost of a call, is well known. The genius who first developed non-runnable Nylon may not have known it, but his life

was in constant peril from representatives of the Jap silk interests and our domestic stocking manufacturers, while the first man bold enough to have suggested making a razor blade that would never wear out is probably resting at this moment on the bottom of the Chicago River, encased in a block of cement. The sole inventor who escape with less than the loss of his eyebrows prior to the advent of the forties was found to have presented no threat to the stability of the economic structure. His product was odorless perfume.

There can be no doubt that practically any one of us has a fascination for gadgets. A favorite pastime of Americans is to haunt the counters of the five and dimes looking over the latest miracles in doohickies and thingumbobulators. But to suggest them as a panacea for poverty, or to soothe us with plastics, when what we really want is a paycheck, is a foolish approach to a pressing problem and can only result in the creation of another Niagara.

I am as ready as the next man to call a prefabricated box my castle, and I am actually palpitating for the time when I may quietly invest in a down payment on a roadable sport plane with built in bath. But there is a little memo I'd like to slip the manufacturers of all these goodies before they vanish into their cellophane wrappings.

When the time is ripe for the horn of plenty to sound its jive, I want to be assured of the wherewithal to get right into the groove.

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