

Me for Sal

By Gelett Burgess

Advertising ain't what it was in the old days when they did it by hand, so to speak. I can recall the time when a whole valley would be pre-empted by a stove-polish hustler, rocks, barns and fences, only to have his claim jumped by some quack-medicine fiend, bringing on a regular duel with paint-brushes. Many's the landscape I've spoiled and many's the barn I've disfigured in my day. I've painted signs in and I've painted signs out; I've covered territories the way a kid colors a map. I've slung lampblack and yellow ochre by the barrel; I've made block letters to fill a dictionary. Companies didn't buy space by the square foot in my day; they didn't have cutout fences and funny pictures and electric lights; they advertised by counties and states and mountain ranges, by jiminy! Desecrating the face of Nature was good enough for them. Those here breakfast-food people have taken all the romance out of the business.

It was in the spring of 1879 when I got an order from the Medford Salt Company to decorate the Connecticut Valley. Medford Salt was supposed to be Heaven's best gift to invalids suffering from ague, chills and fever, rheumatism, and the Lord only knows what else. It was my opinion then, and it's my firm conviction now, that it was nothing more nor less than a fake, pure and simple, only it was not pure and not simple. I diagnosed the stuff as consisting of sea salt, alum and terra alba in equal parts. But that was none of my business; I only had to illuminate the countryside with the conspicuous words, "TRY MEDFORD SALT FOR AGUE; IT CURES—" or any other phrase I could cook up to fill the proper space. I was known to be equal to the best for neatness and dispatch, and the company left all details to me. I hired a horse and democrat wagon, bought a stock of paints, oils and brushes, and started out to attract attention to the supposed virtues of Medford Salt. Besides this material I had a half-dozen cases of the remedy to pay for space with where I couldn't steal it.

I broke into the valley at Springfield, Massachusetts, planning to work up the left bank into New Hampshire and down the right-side bank back. There were no game laws or closed seasons then. If I found a rock I wanted was already covered I painted the sign out with white lead, returning in a day or two to use the space for Medford Salt, trusting to luck that there wouldn't be anybody with a brush along after me for some time. I took my chances with the rivals in my business as a part of the job, and farmers with shot-guns I usually managed to fool by working on dangerous places at night with a dark lantern.

When I got up as far as Adamston, New Hampshire, I found I'd have to stop there some time, for there was a branch of the Connecticut came in there that I wished to adorn. So I put up at the Central House and made that my headquarters. In Adamston I met Sally Twitchell, and collapsed for the first time in front of a woman. She had a farm in her own right and no relatives, except her kid sister, who had all the beauty and none of the sense in the family.

I had talked the business over with Sal, and she was terribly interested, thinking it was a romantic sort of life for a man thereby doing both sides of the river at once. I got acquainted first by securing Sal's consent to having the side of her barn painted. I just threw myself on that piece of work, and did the company credit.

I had talked the business over with Sal, and she was terribly interested, thinking it was a romantic sort of life to be in. She got up the design for the barn herself, and it took me two days to paint it in lemon-yellow letters on a Prussian blue background, about the most expensive paints I could se-

lect. There were three lines of it, and it read this way:

TRY
MEDFORD SALT
IT SATISFIES

Sal spent a lot of time watching me work, and insisted on learning how to mix paints, about the only thing in the world she wasn't up on besides horning cattle. I kept a lot of my paint in her barn for her to fool with, and before she'd got through she'd done over about the whole inside of the house. Her fondness for paint went right to my

heart. She saw possibilities in it that I had never dreamed of.

I would have felt pretty sure of her if it hadn't been for a chap named Teddy Doane who used to come to the house as regular as I did, and between the two of us Sal kept us guessing. Teddy had a general store in Adamston, and another across the river in Clinton, Vermont. Of course, he was a good deal better off than I was, and a nice enough fellow with the girls, so I was considerably afraid of him. My long snit was a knowledge of the world, including Boston and New York, with a spice of adventure thrown in, and I played my cards accordingly. Teddy held trumps in being right on the ground winter and summer, so that it looked like an even break with a chance for each. Sal acted square with both of

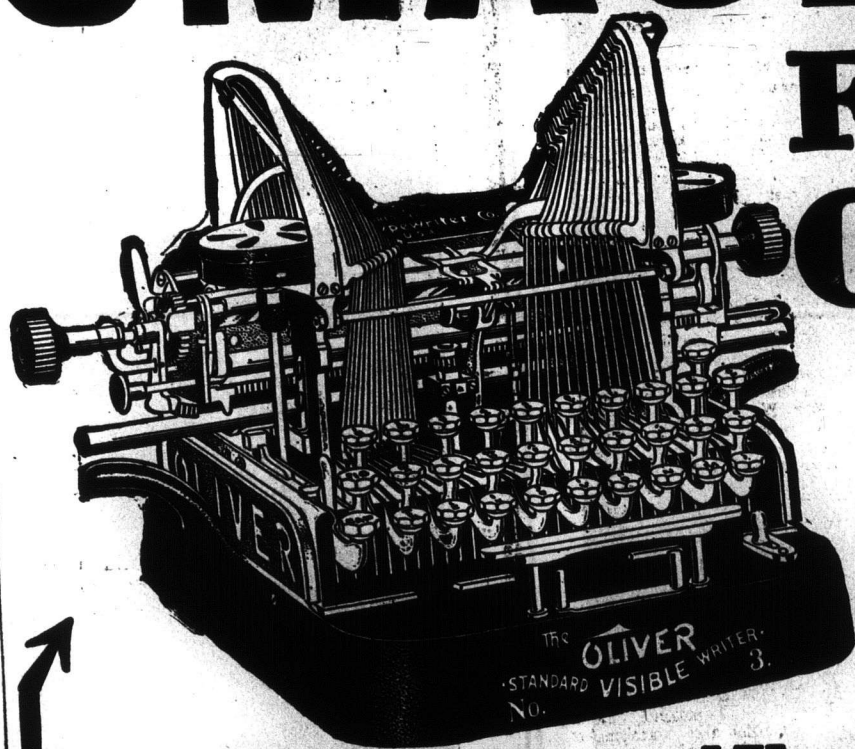
us, but her little sister teased the life out of us.

Meanwhile, Medford Salt was permeating the vicinity; I didn't allow lovmaking to interfere with business, and my contract called for some pretty lively work. If I wanted to earn the thousand dollars I was to get for my trip I had to hump myself, and without that thousand in sight I couldn't propose to Sal. I told her as much as I dared to, and waited for a chance to say the rest.

We walked and we talked as much as I had time for, and got better acquainted every day. She was interested in everything I did and all I'd seen, and it seemed to me she'd be ready to sell out and go to New York whenever I said the word. She sewed on buttons for me, and mended my

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