SATIRE ON AMERICAN LIFE AS PORTRAYED
IN THE NOVELS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North
Texas State Teachers College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Helen Marjorie Norman, B. A.

Blum, Texas
August, 1940

88378
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criticisms of Lewis's Novels as a Whole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criticism of the Individual Novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>SATIRE ON LIFE IN A SMALL TOWN</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary of Main Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Description of Small Towns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Educational Facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic Conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Discontent of the People</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>SATIRE ON THE LIFE OF A BUSINESS MAN</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Business Man's Lack of Integrity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Hypocrisy of the Business Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary of Babbitt, Mantrap, Dodsworth, and Work of Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>CRITICISM OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary of Arrowsmith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professors of Medical Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fraternities of Medical Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students of Medical Universities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercialism of Medical Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trials of an Honest Physician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>SATIRE ON CERTAIN PHASES OF RELIGION</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faults of the Church and Sunday School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Modern Gospel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social-service Organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter

Impostures in the Church
Hypocrisy of Evangelists
Insincerity of the Ministers
Differences of Religious Sects
Summary of Elmer Gantry

VI. CRITICISM OF POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, AND SOCIAL REFORM

Summary of The Man Who Knew Coolidge, Ann Vickers, It Can't Happen Here, and The Prodigal Parents
Ignorance of Politicians
Ignorance of People Who Vote
Faults in the Democratic Government
Criticism of the president
Criticism of the courts
Unions and organized labor
Failure of Social Organizations
Deplorable conditions of society
Deplorable conditions of prisons
Capital punishment
Hardships of the social workers

VII. CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER I

-INTRODUCTION

Sinclair Lewis has not been content to paint idealistic pictures of America wherein the people are romantic, cultured, and unusually interested in ordinary life. He has seen through close observation and experience that there are weaknesses in certain phases of American life, and he has criticized most severely the politics, government, social organizations, business, medical professions, religion, and small town society of our country. In comparison with the civilization found in the old world, American people are sadly lacking. Their attitudes toward education, religion, society, and politics are deplorable. Since 1920, Lewis has written only novels in which he has ridiculed the leading phases of American life. He has given an exact picture; he has left no faults uncovered. He loves America and he hates to see her in a state of degeneration. He has tried to appeal to the human side of his public in order to open the eyes of America to her own defects. He has been cynical, satirical, and humorous in his attempt to picture America as she really is.

I have chosen the novels that Lewis has written since the year 1920 to show that he has satirized America in her
various phases of life. I have not explored the fields of poetry and drama nor the earlier novels; for beginning with Main Street in 1920 and ending with the Prodigal Parents in 1938, Lewis has depicted the faults of a nation struggling for peace and security in a world of materialistic ideals. He has become a classic figure in American fiction, and his leading novels, which I shall discuss, promise to be read by a long posterity. From my survey of these novels and the criticisms which I have found in various books and periodicals published since the appearance of Main Street, I wish to show how Sinclair Lewis has satirized certain phases of American life. Since the last war, the business world, religion, the medical associations, the social organizations, the small towns, and the politics and government of America have been open to candid criticism; and Lewis has painted a realistic picture of these conditions in a manner that no other satirist has been able to achieve.

In order to present both favorable and unfavorable criticisms concerned with the novels of Lewis, I have first chosen those critics who have judged the novels as a whole; and then I have selected criticisms of the individual novels in the order in which the novels were written.

In the Living Age for April, 1930, Morand, a modern critic, has written a very commendable criticism concerning the works of Sinclair Lewis. Morand realizes that since 1920, the American public has clamored for more realistic
writing than that which had been offered in previous years, and he sympathizes with Lewis as a lover of America who has tried to aid her in mending her faults. Morand writes as follows:

"It was high time for us to discover this writer who loves his native soil. Between two generations of cosmopolitan Americans so near, indeed too near, to ourselves, Lewis remains standing at the head of a group of men about forty-five years old, a member of what might be called the center party."

"Post-war America is becoming more human. It is thirsty for religious tolerance, moral freedom, sexual frankness, diffusion of the arts, and respect for the other fellow. It no longer aspires to be the world's biggest, but the world's best."*

In an editorial in The Nation for November, 1930, there appears an article in defence of the satirical writings of Lewis. This editorial is in answer to the many bitter attacks upon Lewis as winner of the Nobel Prize in 1930:

"For the first time the Nobel Prize for literature has been awarded to an American citizen. And it is eminently just that the award should have been made, for this first time, to Sinclair Lewis. He is among the three or four best known and most widely read American writers, both in the United States and abroad. His novels attain a very high standard of literary excellence. And more than any other writer of equal or lesser eminence he has set down the spirit of America."

It is interesting to note the attitude with which Europe looks at Sinclair Lewis. In the Bookman for January, 1931, I found the following comment concerning Lewis and the Swedish Academy Award:

2 The Nation, CXXXI (1930), 544.
One cannot help wondering whether the Swedish Academy did not very largely base its award on the service Lewis is supposed to have rendered Europe in making America better understood, in giving Europeans a better chance to cite chapter and verse for their sneering at our culture. . . . Of all the living American authors, he is the most read and best known in Europe.

In the Current History for January, 1931, there is a very high praise of the work of Lewis. Lewis Mumford, a modern critic, thinks that Lewis has not been properly commended for his works. This critic defends Lewis in the following statement:

He remains the most effective satirist our country has produced. His achievement is no small one; and it merits a closer examination.

Carl Van Doren in his biographical sketch of Lewis described him as "a magic teller of stories." He thinks of Lewis as a sensitive man who loves his country but cannot help seeing its many faults. To Van Doren, Lewis is a special genius sent to the world of literature to describe a twentieth century America in a manner that may easily be understood by all who read his novels. Van Doren speaks of Lewis in this manner:

Sinclair Lewis is the quintessence of the United States, set off by a special genius but not transmuted from the general type. Those inquiring foreigners who in the eighteenth century would have sought out Benjamin Franklin as the essential American, or in the nineteenth, Mark Twain, would in the twentieth find what they were looking for in Sinclair Lewis. If the United States were rich enough, it might well endow him as a permanent

---

exhibit in whom philosophical visitors could study the national epitome. 5

I found another valuable criticism of Lewis in Hartwick's Foreground of American Fiction. Hartwick is a true sympathizer with Lewis's satire of an America that has grown stale in her culture and ideals. He defends Lewis in the following paragraph:

He is representative of that uprising of intellectuals which followed the war and (until it began to wane about 1927) took up the cudgels against Methodists, defenders of censorship, hypocrites, prohibition, bourgeois foibles, evangelism in business and religion, Victorian standards of conduct, and regimentation of every kind. . . . Lewis has led the fight against Boobus Americanus, that amazingly prevalent individual who feeds on platitudes, supplies the Mercury with material for its "Americana" section each month, and thinks all foreigners are "radicals." 6

One critic has compared Lewis to Mark Twain. Carl Van Doren in The American Novel writes this paragraph:

The two men had much in common, though Lewis had a better disciplined mind than Mark Twain, and more outspoken courage. Both of them chose large subjects and treated them with high-spirited exuberance. . . . Lewis's chief work carried on the kind of examination of the present which Mark Twain began in his Guilded Age but did not continue. As this made Lewis the more controversial of the two, and perhaps the more contemporary, it also involved him more deeply in living issues. The living issues of one age have a way of living on into another. There can be no question that his books are landmarks in the history of American opinions through two crucial decades.

Another criticism, an article found in an historical and

---

5 Carl Van Doren, Sinclair Lewis, p. 29.
critical survey of American Fiction, shows that Lewis is loath to let petty provincialism rule the standards of a great country; it shows that Lewis is justified in finding fault with a young and inexperienced America who needs a protecting hand to guide her toward progress. Arthur H. Quinn, the author of this article, gives the following comment concerned with Lewis's satire:

With this loathing for the petty tyranny of an oligarchy of opinion which tries to reduce all lives within its reach to one deadly level and spreads uniformity like a plague, every liberal must sympathize. Lewis's attack upon the active obstruction to progressive ideas, the grudging consent to civic improvement, the terror of a few more taxes for schools and libraries, struck a welcome note. In Lewis's conclusion that "not individuals but institutions are the enemies" of progress, he seemed to recognize the basic political cleavage between those who vote to preserve some institution like the tariff or prohibition, and those who trust to leadership which is flexible enough to meet the issues as they arise.

So far the criticisms which I have used concerning the writings of Sinclair Lewis as a whole have all been favorable, and some of them have been flattering to the genius of Lewis as a novelist; but I have also found in my research many criticisms that are unfavorable toward the novelist as a true satirist. From these, I have chosen only a few of the more representative comments.

With a satire almost as bitter as that of Lewis himself, W. E. Harmon, who has been greatly annoyed with Lewis for refusing the Pulitzer Prize, writes the following criticism:

---

8 Arthur H. Quinn, American Fiction, p. 661.
Sinclair Lewis has attempted a stunt in self-advertising in which bad taste and a puerile temper were necessary concomitants, and he put it over with some, mostly those who either had not thought the matter through, or were possessed of the same mental characteristics.

And in Current History for January, 1930, there appears an article by still another critic who finds fault with Lewis. This critic seems to think that instead of painting a true portrait of America, Lewis has simply drawn a comic caricature of what foreigners believe is a fair representation of our country. In the following passage this critic, Lewis Mumford, ridicules Lewis as being destructive to the dignity of America:

As a satirist he has created a picture of America that corresponds in a remarkable degree with the naive caricature of America that all but the most enlightened and perceptive Europeans carry in their heads. In crowning Mr. Lewis's work the Swedish Academy has, in the form of a compliment, conveyed a subtle disparagement of the country they honored.

I have already mentioned Arthur H. Quinn as a favorable critic of Lewis, but in his same article on "Critics and Satirists" he gives a very unfavorable statement about Lewis. He seems to think that in spite of the fact that Lewis has used characters to show the deficiencies in the different phases of American life, he has failed to make these characters human, and has made a very poor attempt to be a real artist. It

appears that there has been much argument concerning the use of Lewis's novels as dramatic productions. Quinn writes the following criticism:

It is not unfair to Lewis to remark that he has never indicated in his fiction the ability to draw characters whose standards and training enable them to help, to warn, or to stab others less secure, who are subdued by a force they only dimly understand. Lewis would probably reply that he is not interested in such contrasts, but if not, he should have kept away from situations which demand such an ability. But after all, the comparison, which might be extended much further would only establish the fact that Sidney Howard, the playwright, is a far finer artist than Sinclair Lewis, the novelist. 11

In the North American Review for June, 1938, Lloyd Morris, another critic, has denounced Lewis as an extreme sentimentalist. He writes the following passage concerning Lewis as a moralist:

Readers guessed that Mr. Lewis was essentially a moralist. Like Hawthorne and Melville before him, he expressed his idealism obliquely. Since most moralists are disillusioned sentimentalists, they were not surprised by the strong tincture of sentimentality in Mr. Lewis's books. Vigorous and forthright in his scorn of those elements in our culture which set obstacles to its inherent ideal. ... it illuminates all his books from Main Street to The Prodigal Parents. 12

Further along in the same article, Morris writes this comment which shows that he has no faith in Lewis as an aid to building the idealistic dream of democracy which he has tried to set up in his novels:

11 A. H. Quinn, American Fiction, p. 665.
For the better way of life which Mr. Lewis has never proposed is not a new one. It is the life of American yesterdays. It is the old, free, democratic, individualistic career of the middle class. . . . it is the romantic "American Dream". That dream promised freedom when mastery of environment had been achieved. The fate of those characters who have enlisted Mr. Lewis's affection, from Dr. Kennicott to Fred Cornplow, states the irony of non-fulfillment. 13

In the North American Review for December, 1939, Thomas D. Horton has tried to picture the future of Lewis as a novelist. The criticism is both favorable and unfavorable, and well worth the reader's investigation. The following excerpts are from this article:

Sinclair Lewis's historical importance will probably grow with the years. He held up the mirror to America in what was probably its most reckless period, and his books as a whole are mines of information for the future historian. Whether he did any moral good . . . is dubious, but he did label his era culturally and philologically. After all, it is no small achievement for a writer to contribute two major type words to the national language, "Babbitt" and "Main Street". . . . He was also the first to inject satire and burlesque in our imaginative literature on a large scale. 14

And in the same article but on another page is this brisk criticism:

But perhaps the real trouble is that at bottom, Mr. Lewis does not seem to be a writer but a conversationalist full of humor with a sharp eye and ear for the antics of the Middle Western American. . . . His writings appeal to the ear rather than to the eye. 15

In the New Republic for October, 1936, Robert Cantwell

13 Ibid., p. 388.
15 Ibid., p. 393.
sums up the extent of Lewis's value as a novelist. Cantwell has found fault with Lewis because he has offered no remedy for the state of degeneration into which he claims that America has fallen. He feels that critics were wrong in judging Lewis as a representative writer of America. The following excerpt is from Cantwell's article:

It was a mistake for his critics to see in these novels evidence of that intellectual awakening and skeptical self-criticism which has become known as America's coming-of-age. For Lewis is the historian of America's catastrophic going-to-pieces, or at least of the going-to-pieces of her middle class, with no remedy to offer for the decline that he records; and he has dramatized the process of disintegration, as well as his own dilemma, in the outlines of his novels, in the progress of his characters, and sometimes, and most painfully, in the lapses of taste and precision that periodically weaken the structure of his prose. 16

Since Main Street has been considered by many critics as Lewis's best novel, I found many articles about it, but I have chosen only those which I think may best represent the importance of the novel. In the Bookman for April, 1925, an article written by Grant Overton, though fierce in ridicule against Lewis's style, proves a most valuable appraisal of the novel. Overton appears to have very little faith in the novel as an historical reference, but he does think it will last and be read for many years to come. The following passage is taken from Overton's article:

Main Street has force, direction, and character. It has the acute realism of Defoe and a sort of artistic savagery found only in Hogarth and the news camera. You need not call it a novel, if you prefer not; call it a notebook, a panorama, an encyclopedia... overlong, formless, overwritten, without climaxes, its significance escaped nobody... The historical value of Main Street is extraordinary. Think of its being read a hundred years hence. How impossible, then, for the pleasant myth with which (no doubt) elders will want to inspire the youth of the time. 17

And in the New Republic for May, 1936, an editorial about Sinclair Lewis, justifies Main Street as being a very effective protest against American provincialism. In this article, there is none of the sharp ridicule found in the criticism of Overton. An important passage from the editorial reads as follows:

It made a specific, and above all, a really effective, protest against the shortcomings of American Character and the stifling complacency of the atmosphere in which most Americans live, and by the implication promoted higher standards and a more wholesome society, thus squaring with the intention of the founder. 18

Carl Van Doren, in The American Novel, has written an interesting comment on Main Street. In his criticism he has tried to explain Lewis's purpose in writing the book. He writes in the following manner:

In Main Street he set out to tell a true story about the American village, whether anybody could read it or not, and he was surprised by the tremendous acclamation. He had not reasoned that it was time to take a new attitude toward the village or calculated


that it would be prudent. He only put down, dramatically, the discontents that had been stirring in him for at least fifteen years. But there was something seismographic in his nerves, and he had recorded a ground swell of popular feeling. His occasional explicit comments on dull villages were quoted till they reverberated.¹⁹

Hartwick has written a constructive criticism in the Foreground of American Fiction. He speaks of the novel in this manner:
"Main Street became, in fact, the smash hit of contemporary literature, and Lewis the curse of thousands and the toast of hundreds." ²⁰

Babbitt has received almost as much criticism as Main Street in spite of the fact that it is much less important in the eyes of critics. In an editorial in the Nation for November, 1930, appears the following criticism in regard to Babbitt:

Only a very considerable artist could see so piercingly, so relentlessly the elements of a civilization and have the craft to reproduce them in a novel... or a man from Vermont calling on the president of the United States, would know that along with his uncanny penetration, his incredible flow of language, and ironical appreciation of the shortcomings of his countrymen goes a kind of inner sympathy and kinship with the worst of them. ²¹

In an earlier volume for September, 1927, there appears an editorial which points out the ridiculous style in which Lewis has made the novel Babbitt popular:

The name of Sinclair Lewis, the novelist, is associated by every critic in the country with at

²⁰ Harry Hartwick, Foreground of American Fiction, p. 252.
²¹ Nation, CXXXI (1930), 544.
least two outstanding qualities, gusto and mimicry... The most frequent objects of his mimicry is our old acquaintance Babbitt... The aimless and inconsecutive flow of dreadful platitudes, thickwitted observations, and ungramatical philosophizings proved to be as diverting as it was torrential. 22

Van Doren in The American Novel has written a very lengthy discussion about Babbitt, and there are some paragraphs that are fair examples of the kind of criticism which this book has received from various critics at home and abroad. Van Doren praises Lewis's ability to use lifelike characters, and sympathizes with his satirical attitude toward the business men of America as represented in the character of Babbitt.

Van Doren speaks of the novel in this manner:

His triumph was generally overlooked by readers, who failed to notice that this was a classic experience: a man in the midst of prosperity stopping to weigh and value his possessions. The familiar theme was lost in the volume of evidence as to Babbitt's conformity before and after his adventure. Countless critics saw in Babbitt a proof that the typical American was like a standard part of a machine, always ready to be fitted into the national design... Of all Lewis's novels Babbitt is the most expertly constructed. 22

Although Babbitt may not be as lasting as some of Lewis's other novels, it is, at least, representative of the modern American business man, and will, perhaps, continue to be read for many years, not only for its historical value but for sheer enjoyment.

The next important novel by Lewis is Arrowsmith which

22 Ibid., CXXV (1927), 280.
has received only the very highest of praise both in America and in Europe. An editorial in the New Republic for May, 1927, gives the following appraisal of this most popular novel:

This year Arrowsmith clearly presented stronger claims than Main Street. In addition to its purging satire it sets forth in its hero a standard of manhood in loyalty to scientific truth, and it is a novel of drive and power, the best which Mr. Lewis has written. The jury could not have passed it by, nor the trustees have failed to confirm their judgment. 24

T. K. Whipple, in his Spokesmen, has written on Sinclair Lewis as a modern writer about American Life. Perhaps, better than any other critic, he has found a thread of importance in even the poorest of Lewis's works. Elmer Gantry, the novel in which Lewis takes the courage to discuss the fallacies of American religion, has been severely criticized and even censored at one time, but Whipple defends it in this manner:

No doubt every detail of Elmer Gantry is faithfully accurate, and one ought to be grateful to Lewis for so detailed a clinical report on the morbid symptoms which attack religion in a land where the religious spirit is dead. Nothing is omitted, no possible fraud or quackery or hypocrisy or iniquity —nothing is missing but religion. And that perhaps is why one is less grateful than one ought to be. 25

In the North American Review, Thomas D. Horton praises the novelist for having the courage to attack the subject of religion. He thinks that Lewis's work is beneficial to the modern world of writers. He defends Elmer Gantry in this

paragraph taken from his article:

Perhaps the only good thing about Elmer Gantry is that in it Mr. Lewis dared to say sharp things about the clergy, thereby setting an example of courage to write about the clergy honestly. 26

In the same article, Horton discusses the other novels; I have chosen Horton's articles about these later novels because his is the latest criticism that I was able to find. It will be interesting to the reader to know how America looks at Sinclair Lewis as a novelist today. Horton dismisses the other novels as being of much less importance than Lewis's earlier satires. He does however, give a brief statement about each. The following excerpts from Horton's criticism show that he is still an admirer of Lewis and that he believes Lewis will continue to be popular as a novelist:

The Man Who Knew Coolidge (1928), is a hilarious monologue in the manner of George F. Babbitt. It keeps the reader's interest throughout its 75,000 words, and for that deserves a prize for superb literary vaudevillism.

... there is enough heartbreak in the gradual collapse of the bond of life-long trust between Fran and Sam Dodsworth to make of the book very interesting reading.

Mr. Lewis's next two books, Ann Vickers and Work of Art are among his feeblest. The first is a Sunday supplementish expose of the horrible conditions in American...

---

prisons as viewed from the eyes of a bewildered social worker. . . . In *Work of Art*, Mr. Lewis turns temporary traitor to all his chief ideas. 27

Horton writes the following appraisal concerning the astounding novel, *It Can't Happen Here* (1936):

Mr. Lewis's description of several of the corpo activities, personalities, and writings seem plausible enough, particularly his excerpts from Windrip's "Zero Hour", and as always, his ear for the conversation of shabby Americans is most perfect. The cogitations of District Commissioner Effingham Swam probably form an appallingly accurate advance report of what the likes of him will be when and if Fascism comes to America. 28

Concerning the *Prodigal Parents*, I found only one important criticism. Lloyd Morris in *The North American Review*, gives a favorable criticism of Lewis's novel, even though he thinks it is of little value. He shows that Lewis is still popular and that his books are still being read. The following excerpt is from Morris's article:

The reception of Sinclair Lewis's latest novel sets a problem for critics. Published in January, by April *The Prodigal Parents* stood near the top of all lists of best-selling fiction. Yet few books within recent years have had a press so completely unfavorable. It took a beating from the publishers. 29

In the chapters that follow, I have attempted to point out the various ways in which Sinclair Lewis has proved himself a capable and worthy satirist of the faults of American life.

27 Ibid., pp. 386-387.
28 Ibid., p. 389.
CHAPTER II

SATIRE ON LIFE IN A SMALL TOWN

Main Street, the novel which won for Lewis the Nobel Prize in literature, 1930, is perhaps the most representative of his works containing satire on life in America. The novel is a true picture of the dullness and provincialism of a small village which, like hundreds of similar ones, has threatened the progress of civilization with its smug and conventional attitudes toward society, religion, and government.

Main Street is the story of Carol Kennicott, an ambitious young woman who sets out to fulfill an idealistic dream of reformation. She marries an uninteresting physician with whom she makes her home at Gopher Prairie, an insignificant but thoroughly standardized small town, which Carol immediately tries to transform into a beautiful little city filled with cultured people who live in perfect harmony with their environment. Carol hates the prim attitude of the people toward progressive ideas; she is disgusted with the fact that the inhabitants of Gopher Prairie place no particular value upon their education, religion, and government; she realizes that Gopher Prairie lives only by one standard of uniformity in

17
ideals and financial ability.

Carol's futile attempts to change Gopher Prairie are quite pathetic. She is greatly criticized by the people who do not fail to show their distrust and bitterness toward anyone who tries to change their pattern of life. She is a failure even in her own home, for here, too, she tries to make a complete change. After years of unrewarded labor as a reformer, Carol realizes that she has not succeeded in any of her projects. The secret of her failure lies in her inability to understand the simple people who want only to be left alone.

Like the heroine of his novel, Lewis has revolted against the hypocrisy and narrowness of a society which shows indifference to any attempt toward progress. He realizes that, because of their vast numbers, the small towns of America may be a great retarding element in our civilization. In 1920, the year in which the book was published, America was filled with small towns whose standards of living were the very essence of America's civilization; and at that time Lewis had every reason to believe that small villages should be reformed.

The novel shows that Lewis fears that our civilization may be greatly influenced by the standards of a small community, and he has tried to point out the fallacies of such standards. The following passage from the novel expresses Lewis's concern over the effect that Main Street, if left alone, may have over America:
But a village in a country which is taking pains to become altogether standardized and pure, which aspires to succeed Victorian England as the chief mediocrity of the world, is no longer merely provincial, no longer downy and restful in its leaf-shadowed ignorance. It is a force seeking to dominate the earth, to drain the hills of sea and color, to set Dante at boosting Gopher Prairie. . . . Sure of itself, it bullies other civilizations. 1

To Lewis, the main street of Gopher Prairie may be any main street in any small town in America. With strong satire he has painted a picture of the ugliness and bigotry of a small town; yet he has shown a strain of tolerance toward Main Street, for he is not alien to its environment. Lewis has lived in a small town and has seen its main street just as he pictures it for his readers in this passage:

Main Street with its two-story brick shops, its story-and-a-half wooden residences, its muddy expanse from concrete walk to walk, its huddle of fords and lumber wagons. . . . The broad, straight, unenticing gashes of the streets let in the grasping prairie on every side. . . . The skeleton iron windmill on the farm a few blocks away, at the north end of Main Street was like the ribs of a dead cow. 2

And like Carol, in the novel, Lewis wants Main Street to be a beautiful place. The following passage, which shows Carol's idealistic view of Gopher Prairie, may well be substituted for Lewis's dream about a new and better Main Street:

She saw in Gopher Prairie a Georgian city hall; warm brick walls with white shutters, a fanlight, a wide hall and curving stair. She saw it the common home and inspiration not only of the town but of the country about. It should contain the court-room, . . .

1 Sinclair Lewis, Main Street, p. 267.
2 Ibid., p. 29.
public library, a collection of excellent prints, restroom and model kitchen for farmwives, theater, lecture room, free community ballroom, farm-bureau, gymnasium.

Lewis has seen the many deficiencies in the small town societies of America; he has ridiculed the dullness and lack of personality of a people whose highest ideals are for material values; and he has realized that small communities are not only settled and smug in their customs but are hostile to any change that may be made in their life. In the next paragraph, Lewis shows the rebukes of a citizen of Main Street against any outsider who tries to interfere with the routine of small town existence:

And as for a lecture hall—haven't we got the churches? . . . But just the same I don't believe any of us old-timers would like to see the town that we worked so hard to build being torn down to make a place that wouldn't look like nothing. . . And don't you think it's sweet now? 4

Lewis is disgusted with the people of Main Street who are content with the dullness of their own knowledge; he is distressed at a small town provincialism which is destructive because it poisons the lives of those who cling to it. In the following excerpt from the novel, Lewis shows his hatred for a small village that is strongly against human tolerance and progress:

It is an unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It

3 Ibid., p. 131.
4 Ibid., p. 136.
is discontentment... the discontentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God. 5

He describes the inhabitants of Main Street as being commonplace, dreary, and uninteresting in their attempt to be standardized. In the next paragraph, he pictures the people of a small town:

A savorless people, gulping tasteless food, and sitting afterward, coatless and thoughtless, in rocking chairs prickly with inane decorations, listening to mechanical music, saying mechanical things about the excellence of Ford automobiles, and viewing themselves as the greatest race in the world. 6

Lewis pokes fun at the village gossips who, in their self-possessed and witless manners, are always ready to find fault with others in their public and private conduct. He shows his disgust for such narrowness of opinion in this satirical passage from the novel:

I just don't see how folks can talk and act like they do. You don't know the things that go on under cover. Just the other day... I pay no attention to stories, but I heard it mighty good and straight that... and then there's that Ole Jenson, the grocer, ... and Nat Hicks, and... 7

And in the next paragraph, Lewis ridicules the narrow-minded people who, because they feel superior, show no mercy toward their hired help. He thinks that the people of Main Street

5 Ibid., p. 265.
6 Ibid., p. 265.
7 Ibid., p. 185.
are proud and conceited when they have nothing to be proud of. According to him they are too self-centered to care for the problems of the lower class. In this passage, Lewis shows the boldness and heartlessness of a citizen of Main Street who speaks of her hired help in this manner:

They're ungrateful, all that class of people. I do think the domestic problem is simply becoming awful. I don't know what the country's coming to, with these Scandahoolian clodhoppers demanding bath-tubs and everything—as if they weren't mighty good and lucky at home if they got a bath in the wash-tub.8

Lewis thinks that the inhabitants of Main Street are lacking in culture and education; they have no esthetic sense; they decorate their homes with the poorest of taste; they mistake gaudiness for refinement. The following passage describes the living room of one of Main Street's most prosperous citizens:

The walls of Mrs. Cass's parlor were plastered with 'handpainted' pictures; . . . with a plaque depicting the Exposition Building in Minneapolis, . . . and the banners of the educational institutions attended by the Cass's two sons; . . . the latest novel by Gene Stratton-Portor.9

He has noted that small villages have very poor school systems; the buildings are shabby and unattractive; and there is little chance for appreciative learning. The following passage shows the kind of schools which Lewis has found in Main Street:

The grades and the high school were combined in a damp yellow-brick structure with the narrow windows of an antiquated jail—a hulk which
expressed hatred and compulsory training. Main Street's library is little better. It is an old dwelling, sufficient but unattractive; its shelves are stacked with useless and worn out copies of books and periodicals; the fiction is a list of novels written by such literary figures as Zane Grey. Should a stranger visit the library, she would enter in the manner of Carol Kennicott:

She was profusely escorted to a room like a grandmother's attic, where she discovered periodicals devoted to house-decoration and town-planning, with a six-year file of the National Geographic. . . . Carol sat cross-legged on the floor, the magazines in heaps about her. There would be nothing inviting to entice an idle person to spend an hour of leisure and comfort in this library.

The people of Main Street go to the theater for recreation, entertainment, and education; the movies are as vital to the solid citizens of a small town as land-speculation and guns and automobiles. Lewis satirizes the intellect of Main Street in this passage:

The intellectual tension induced by the master film was relieved by a livelier, more lyric and less philosophical drama. . . . If the plot lacked lucidity, the dual motif of legs and pie was clear and sure. Bathing and modeling were equally sound occasions for legs; the wedding scene was but an approach to the thunderous climax when Mr. Schnarken slipped a piece of custard pie into the clergyman's rear pocket.

10 Ibid., p. 132.
11 Ibid., p. 130.
12 Ibid., p. 198.
Lewis ridicules the small town people for their economic positions. Their civilization is for the mass; it suppresses individuality. Everyone must live alike materially as well as mentally and spiritually. There may be physical variety but certainly no cultural variety among the small business man, the country doctors, the village preachers, the clubwomen, and the village idlers. Main Street is secure economically; therefore it needs no improvement. With the words of a village lawyer who sees the faults of Main Street, Lewis gives this description of the deplorable economic condition of a small town:

We have Nature beaten; we can make her grow wheat; we can keep warm when she sends us blizzards. So we raise the devil just for pleasure—wars, politics, race-hatreds, labor-disputes. Here in Gopher Prairie we've cleared the fields, and become soft, so we make ourselves unhappy artificially, at great expense and exertion. . . . The worst is the commercial hatred—the grocer feeling that any man who doesn't deal with him is robbing him. . . . It applies to lawyers and doctors. . . as much as to grocers. 13

Lewis has seen that the attainment of material values is most important in the eyes of the villagers. There are no idealistic dreams for these sturdy, materialistic people; they work with the spirit of a clan who believes that the individual will prosper only as the community succeeds. In the next passage, Lewis rails against the materialistic ideals of Main Street:

Though a Gopher Prairie regards itself as

13 Ibid., p. 158.
a part of the Great World, compares itself to Rome and Vienna, it will not acquire the scientific spirit, the international mind, which would make it great. It picks at information which will visibly procure money or social distinction. Its conception of a community ideal is not the grand manner, the noble aspiration, the fine aristocratic pride, but cheap labor for the kitchen and rapid increase in the price of land. It plays cards on greasy oilcloth in a shanty, and does not know that prophets are walking and talking on the terrace. 14

There is a certain conformity in Main Street social affairs. Lewis thinks that Main Street refuses to take into her circle of society those who do not serve the usual refreshments, play the usual games, and dismiss at the usual hour at her parties. Lewis shows only disgust at these social gatherings which, if rearranged, could be of enlightening value to the intellect of Main Street. Below is a description of a party in Main Street:

Though Juanita Haydock was highly advanced in the matter of finger-bowls, doilies, and bathmats, her "refreshments" were typical of all afternoon-coffees. . . . They apologized and discussed the afternoon's game as they passed through the thicket of women's feet. . . . There was, even in the most strictly conforming Gopher Prairie circles, a certain option as to collations. . . . But there was in all the town no heretic . . . who omitted angel's-food. 15

Lewis also ridicules the literary club which the village schoolteacher, after much labor, has organized. To this club come the town's most prominent and learned women who wish to display their intellect before an audience. The following

---

14 Ibid., p. 267.
15 Ibid., p. 88.
excerpt from the novel will suffice to illustrate Lewis's criticism of the town's favorite woman speaker who gives a most amazing account of the Scotch poet, Burns:

Burns was quite a poor boy and he did not enjoy the advantages we enjoy today, .... he did not have our educational advantages and Latin and the other treasures of the mind so richly strewn before the, alas, too oftimes inattentive feet of our youth. .... Burns had to work hard. .... Many of us have greatly enjoyed his pieces about the mouse and other rustic subjects, with their message of humble beauty— I am so sorry I have not got the time to quote some of them. 16

And when Carol, the reformer, suggests that the literary club collect, in some manner, funds for charity, she receives this rebuke from one of the town's wealthy spinsters:

Besides. .... They've been fooling you, Mrs. Kennicott. There isn't any real poverty here. Take that Mrs. Steinhof you spoke of: I send her our washing whenever there's too much for our hired girl— I must have sent her ten dollars' worth the past year alone! I'm sure Papa would never approve of a city home-building fund. .... He says he hates to foreclose mortgages, but it's the only way to make them respect the law. 17

And in regard to Main Street's feminine interest in politics, Lewis gives this satirical speech by the elegant spinster:

Yes, we ought to show up those Minneapolis folks. .... And oh, by the way, we must oppose this movement of Mrs. Potbury's to have the state clubs come out definitely in favor of woman suffrage. Women haven't any place in politics. They would lose all their daintiness and charm if
they become involved in these horrid plots and log-rolling and all this awful political stuff about scandal and personalities and so on. 18

Lewis also satirizes the hypocritical attitude of Main Street's leading ladies concerning their religion. At one of their club meetings, a benign soul speaks as follows about charity and the Bible:

I'm sure we're all heartily in accord with Mrs. Kennicott in feeling that wherever genuine poverty is encountered, it is ... but a joy to fulfill our duty to the less fortunate ones. But I must say it seems to me that we should lose the whole point of the thing by not regarding it as charity. Why that's the chief adornment of the true Christian and the church! The Bible has laid it down for our guidance. ... I should hate to think of a world in which we were deprived of the pleasure of giving. Besides, if these shiftless folks realize they're getting charity and not something to which they have a right, they're so much more grateful. 19

From the above paragraph, we may easily see the manner in which Lewis has made fun of the prim lady who, in trying to appear charitable, only succeeds in making herself seem heartless and ridiculous.

Year after year, according to Lewis, Main Street follows her dull routine of life with very few changes; it goes on living in a very simple manner and refuses to be bothered with rebels like Carol. The following excerpt shows Lewis's survey of the monotony of this simple life:

The most considerable event of the two years

18 Ibid., p. 143.
19 Ibid., p. 142.
occurred when Vida Sherwin resigned from the high school and was married. Carol was her attendant, and as the wedding was at the Episcopal Church, all the women wore new kid slippers and long, white gloves, and looked refined. 20

And in the next passage, Lewis shows how indifferent one person in Main Street may be to the ideals of her closest friend:

For years Carol had been little sister to Vida, and had never in the least known to what degree Vida loved and hated her and in curious ways was bound to her. 21

Lewis informs his reader that the old traditions of a small village have vanished, and the Main Street of 1920 is no longer a secure abode for friendship, honesty, and success; instead, the Main Street which Lewis describes is filled with motor cars, motion pictures, land deals, and politics. Lewis fears for the effect that the dominating dullness of a small village may have upon foreigners who resign themselves to the comforts of Main Street. For the respectability of a small town is reinforced by vows that to be different and unconventional is to be of dubious virtue. He states in his novel that experiments in better political views and cooperative distribution are unknown:

Large experiments in politics and in cooperative distribution ventures requiring knowledge, courage, and imagination, do originate in the West and Middlewest, but they are not of the towns, they are of the farmers. 22

20 Ibid., p. 249.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 266.
Lewis thinks that because small communities are smug and settled in their ideas, they are incapable of seeing that any change can brighten their lives; they are content with the dullness, for they have their own knowledge; they do not welcome criticism. When on special occasions commercial companies send out lecturers to these small towns to acquaint the people with new ideas and culture, the speakers meet with little approval. This passage will illustrate Lewis's contempt of the indifference of Main Street's audience:

... the sallow women in skirts and blouses, eager to be made to think, the men in vests and shirtsleeves, eager to be allowed to laugh, and the wriggling children, eager to sneak away. . . .
Two farmers talking hoarsely, a wagon creaking down Main Street, the crow of a rooster. . . .
It was the contentment of the lost hunter stopping to rest. 23

After a week of lectures that are meant to be constructive to the culture of Main Street, the people show their resentment in this manner:

Maybe that guy's got the right dope, but what's the use of looking on the dark side of things all the time? New ideas are first-rate, but not all this criticism. Enough trouble in life without looking for it! 24

Thus does the small town seem proud and educated, and the people go away feeling that they have gained much cultural value.

23 Ibid., p. 238.
24 Ibid., p. 237.
Main Street, according to Lewis, is conceited. The people devote their attention to a hard, pushing economic life; they have no time for the independent thinker who is interested in spiritual welfare. Such a person is an outcast from Main Street society. In the following speech from one of the social outcasts, Lewis shows the complete lack of independence of the village folks:

Yeh, I'm probably a yahoo, but by gum I do keep my independence by doing odd jobs, and that's more'n these polite cusses like the clerks in the bank do. When I'm rude to some slob, it may be partly because I don't know better, ... but mostly it's because I mean something. I'm about the only man in Johnson County that remembers the joker in the Declaration of Independence about Americans being supposed to have the right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' 25

Lewis realizes that Main Street is restless; it has laid much emphasis on a standardized, mechanically perfect existence. Sometimes it wonders how it has reached its stale existence; it is doubtful about what it wants and needs, and there is discontent among the apparently placid people. Lewis sums up the attitude of Main Street in the thoughts of Carol:

Just good taste? Fastidious people? Oh—no! I believe all of us want the same things—We're together, the industrial workers and the women and the farmers and the negro race ... and even a few Respectables. It's all the same revolt, in all the classes that have waited and taken advice. I think perhaps we want a more conscious life. We're tired of drudging and sleeping and dying. We're

25 Ibid., p. 117.
tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists. We're tired of always deferring hope till the next generation.26

And though the town seems to change no more than the surrounding fields, there is a constant shifting; the citizens become restless and want to drift to other towns. There is small permanence of residence and occupation except among professional men, and perhaps the very prominent people. New people come to settle in Main Street and take up their cross of conventionality; old citizens move to other small towns no better than Main Street; the towns remain the same but the individual faces differ. Lewis describes the changes of the villages in this manner:

... A man becomes farmer, grocer, town policeman, garageman, restaurant-owner, postmaster, insurance-agent, and farmer all over again, and the community more or less patiently suffers from his lack of knowledge in each of these experiments.27

Lewis realizes that the youth of Main Street may become bored with the dull life of the village; he sees this restlessness that exists among the less settled villagers; he believes that many of the people, if given the chance, would gladly leave the small village for the dazzling beauty of a large city, and once out of the sight of Main Street, these people would never return. In the next paragraph, Lewis shows the discontentment raging in the community:

26Ibid., p. 201.
27Ibid., p. 248.
With such a small-town life a Kennicott or a Champ Perry is content, but there are also hundreds of thousands, particularly women and young men, who are not at all content. The more intelligent young people (and the fortunate widows!) flee to the cities with agility and, despite the functional tradition, resolutely stay there, seldom returning even for holidays. The most protesting patriots of the towns leave them in old age, if they can afford it, and go to live in California or the cities. 28

According to Lewis, there is really no love for their old home town; the people only pretend that they love the stale existence which has been their lot; they have simply been caught in the web of monotony, and it is a difficult task for them to break away. Each individual poses before his fellowman; not for worlds would one let his friends and acquaintances think that he was bored; always each citizen must keep up the hideous pretense of being secure and satisfied in his prim existence.

In Main Street, Lewis has written satirical passages that have awakened America to the smugness of her small town civilization. Our country has been able to see herself, through the eyes of Sinclair Lewis, not dressed up in stately fashion, but inexperienced and shabby in the eyes of older generations. Lewis loves America and he wants the small towns to be representative of intelligence and commonsense rather than of sham and hypocrisy. He has pried everywhere in America to find the ridiculous pictures of community life which he

28 Ibid., pp. 264-265.
describes in the novel, and although people may wince when they see a true picture of themselves, they realize that Sinclair Lewis has the gift of a genius for exactness.
CHAPTER III

SATIRE ON THE LIFE OF THE AMERICAN BUSINESS MAN

Since 1920 Sinclair Lewis has undertaken to inspect and unmercifully to castigate the self-satisfaction and crudeness of the life of the business man in the United States. The ostensible objects of his ridicule are American complacency, provincialism, narrowness of thought, unquestioning enthusiasm for the familiar and distrust of the unfamiliar, cultural ignorance, and the reduction of all life's values to a material basis. He bases his criticism on the disparity between life in the older and newer civilizations.

America, being a democratic country, prides herself on the fact that all of her citizens are born with equal rights; the American business man has taken advantage of this democratic ideal and has considered himself on an equal basis with people who are much better educated in the fields of art, music, literature, education, and the amenities of our civilization. The business man has not prospered because of his intellect or perseverance; he has simply blundered into a paying industry; he has neither character nor personality, and only lives according to the
customs of the men of his own class. He has no originality; he is always ready to be fitted into a pattern of life that is the standard of the masses in the business world.

Four of Sinclair Lewis's novels give sufficient proof that the typical American business man is thoroughly standardized in his ideals of life, and there is little difference in the materialistic values of the life of the realtor, the millionaire, the lawyer, and the small town business man. The great tragedy of American business lies in the fact that business men are lacking in integrity. Many American families have been enticed by false schemes such as the following dictation sent out by a New York realtor whose only thought is to sell a house:

Say, old Man!
I just want to know how I can do you a whelava favor? ... Did you ever stop to think that we're here to save you trouble? ... To save your time, just fill out the blank enclosed!

Lewis thinks it a deplorable situation that a realtor must put on a bold advertising front in order to beat his competitors. According to him, a salesman should not be compelled to use falsehoods and fraud in order to make a living.

Our American satirist believes that the greatest part of our business is profitably carried on through false

---

1Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 36.
advertising. Here is an example of the type of advertisements that go out from business houses every day:

We teach boxing and self-defence by mail.

... Many pupils have written that after a few lessons, they've out-boxed bigger and better opponents.

The big-business firm may use a less obvious method of fraud, but in the end the purpose is the same, that of using salesmanship, publicity, and advertising for the sake of making a large profit. Lewis gives an example of this type of fraud in another of his novels. The manager of a small hotel wishes to get a loan from a large financing company in order to build a better hotel. Here is the answer which he receives:

I must say that the firm ... might not come in on financing your inn. But I think the prospect is small for a man of your executive ability. ... Why don't you stick with us, and get in on the big money? We might take you in as a partner in a few years.

Nor is it always a big business firm who tries to defraud the public. Sometimes an individual, encouraged by the many false advertisements which he has read, tries to take advantage of an innocent public. The satirist gives us a picture of the lazy business man who tries to get something for nothing. A young American who has made a failure at business resorts to writing, but he has been unable

2Ibid., p. 80.
to pass the criticism of publishers; so he compiles a number of letter forms which he sends out to fifty famous authors. The content of these letters appears as follows:

He was engaged in the last fatiguing months of finishing a long novel, his wife was ill, his two children were hungry and without enough clothing to go to school, his rent was unpaid, and unless the benefactor could send him three hundred dollars at once, the whole bunch of them would have to commit suicide. 4

From these letters the scoundrel receives several checks ranging from ten dollars to one hundred and fifty.

Sometimes an innocent person may walk into a store, with the intention of buying one cheap article, but through the cleverness of a clerk who has been drilled with the idea of proper sales-talk, he is led into buying several expensive articles which he neither needs, nor can afford.

Sinclair Lewis has not overlooked this phase of business in his barbed criticism. In one of his novels he pictures, quite clearly, the timid soul, a bachelor and lawyer, who walks into a large department store in New York to purchase some simple clothes for a camping trip. Here we find an elaborate example of modern sales-talk from the clerk:

Certainly, Sir; may I recommend these whipcord riding-breeches ... they'll last a lifetime, and they're a very nice value at only sixty-eight dollars. 5

4 Ibid., p. 315.
5 Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap, p. 22.
In his novels Lewis shows that the pursuit of wealth is a fierce and dangerous occupation which business men must follow in order to keep abreast of their competitors. Lewis shows how the business men of America live in constant fear of ruin; how they continually make plots to gain more power; and how they must bow to a dictatorship that compels them to seek no other master but Industry. The following speech is from one of Lewis's characters who may well represent the mediocre business man who has just made a big and profitable business deal:

I wound up a nice little deal. . . .
Pretty nice . . . and yet . . . Kind of comes over me: Here I've pretty much done all the things I ought to do; . . . even so, I don't know that I'm entirely satisfied. 6

Often, a wealthy man who is president of a large firm will become so disgusted with the continual grind and un-ending chase for more power that he suddenly wonders why he works at all:

All this activity . . . seemed to him an irritating fussiness. What did it matter whether he had another hundred thousand dollars. . . . Why were all these hundreds of young people willing to be machines for the purposes of rattling papers and bowing to the president. 7

According to Lewis, American business is so harsh and unrelenting a dictator that, even though one may travel across the ocean in an attempt to escape, he is unable

---

7 Sinclair Lewis, *Dodsworth*, p. 15.
avoid his master, Industry. The following paragraph describes the thoughts of a character from one of Lewis' novels:

That there was something slightly ridiculous about mixing up Spain and Devon and Norway . . . and transporting them to the sandy hills of a midwestern town, . . . did vaguely occur to Sam, but it was all a fantastic play to him . . . Here at least, was all the color and irregularity he had gone abroad to seek, all the twisty ironwork and scalloped tiles . . . along with all the mass-produced American refrigerators.  

It is interesting to see how Lewis pictures American business in the eyes of a European professor:

Some of us think that perhaps we shall prevail even against Americanism which I may venture to define as a theological belief that it is more important to have your purchases tidily rung up on a cash register than to purchase what you want.  

Lewis believes that the business man's life is indeed lacking in ethical values. He portrays the fact that men in the world of industry show indifference toward beauty, truth, art, and real human values. He shows that the philosophy of the business man is made up of greed, hypocrisy, and contempt toward new ideas.

Lewis thinks that American business may be in a state of disintegration caused by the lack of proper vocational background; but he also believes that the educational background plays a leading part in business as well as any other vocation. The business man, having no traditions of any
other values save those which he has created, has found no new ones. The standards by which he has attained his original ends have proved workable and satisfactory; to discard or amend them might mean disaster. He has found the right system and it does not occur to him that any humility may be called for on his part. He is a standardized Good Citizen; he resides in a respectable neighborhood; he provides well for his family; he knows the right sort of people; he tries to avoid anything dishonest.

Lewis gives this example in order to prove that the business man has no ideal other than making money:

Babbitt's virtues... were steadiness and diligence. He was conventionally honest, he kept his records of buyers and sellers complete,... His shoulders were broad enough, his voice deep enough, his relish of humor strong enough, to establish him as one of the ruling caste of Good Fellows. Yet his eventual importance to mankind was perhaps lessened by his large and complacent ignorance.... He serenely believed that the one purpose of the real-estate business was to make money for George F. Babbitt. 10

Lewis gives evidence to show that the business man is unable to cope with the many temptations which surround him in his industrious life. The business man wants to be honest but he also wants to become a tremendous success in his particular industry, and because he is sadly lacking in intellectual reasoning, he is often led into plots which cause him much anxiety. The following excerpt from Lewis's novel 10 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 42.
shows the lack of intellectual reasoning on the part of a man in the business world:

Course I don't mean to say that every ad I write is literally true or that I always believe everything I say when I give some buyer a good strong selling-spiel. You see—you see it's like this: in the first place, maybe the owner of the property exaggerated when he put it into my hands, and it certainly isn't my place to go proving my principal a liar! And then most folks are so darn crooked themselves that they expect a fellow to do a little lying, so if I was fool enough to never whoop the ante I'd get the credit for lying anyway! In self-defense I got to toot my own horn. 11

Lewis snarls furiously at the interest of the business man in schools, colleges, and museums. He shows, in his novels, how business men try to use education as a means of profit. Here is an example:

We have a duty toward our fair city, to announce, broadcast, the facts about our high schools, characterized by their complete plants and the finest school ventilating systems in the country. . . . Our magnificent new hotels and banks and the paintings and carved marble in the lobbies. . . . that our library and art museum are well supported and housed in convenient and roomy buildings. 12

And here is an example of what the business man who is a millionaire thinks:

Pictures? Why talk stupidity about pictures when he could talk intelligently about engines? Language? If he had nothing to say, what was the good of saying it in three languages? 13

11 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 46.
12 Ibid., p. 187.
13 Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 59.
Lewis thinks that the business man wants to know just enough business English to make himself understood; he cares nothing for art, music, and literature. He has no time for education; he thinks only in the terms of power and wealth. In the novel, Babbitt, we find a pathetic demonstration of the relation of the average business man to cultural tastes:

"Culture has become as necessary an adornment and advertisement for a city today as pavements or bank clearances. . . . Pictures and books are fine for those that have the time to study 'em. . . . I don't care a rap for all this long-haired music. I'd rather listen to a good jazz band." 14

Lewis has a theory that a great deal of business language is not human at all. By means of making sounds, a person avoids appearing untruthful and offensively honest. A complete example of this enlivened vernacular appears in the novel, Babbitt. A foreigner would find it most difficult to understand such an expression as this:

"Pleasmeech." 15

Lewis's attitude toward the social background of the business man is bitter. He believes that the man in business is living in a mass-production machine age where there has been an upheaval in the realm of ethics. Thrift has turned out to be a deceiver; benevolence and personal integrity have been wholly cast into the discard. The business

14 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 261.
15 Ibid., p. 249.
man has no integral personality; he is like a robot who only moves by mechanical devices. He would like to get away from the eternal grind of the business world, but he is afraid; he doesn't know how; he has followed his master, Industry, too long. He is lacking in inner standards and he is conformed to his own environment. He has a conviction that his life is empty; he has a dread for the dullness of the future. Yet he lacks intelligence and imagination to be anything other than a cog in the great wheel of industry.

Toward the end of the book Lewis gives Babbitt's own confession that he has neglected to make use of his abilities by means of ideals other than those of materialistic value. In the following paragraph, Babbitt is speaking to his son:

I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I've made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundred rods. 16

Lewis has observed the stupidity and sheep-likeness of the modern business man; he has seen how business men are afraid to get away from their environment, how they feel uncomfortable in any situation that is outside their world, how they cringe when in the presence of culture. It is no marvel that the author sprinkles his sarcasm throughout his novels. Here are some excerpts from the conversation of various business men in Lewis's novels:

16 Ibid., p. 40.
And business! . . . what's the use of it? . . . All we do is cut each other's throats and make the public pay for it. . . . They hate the whole peppy, boasting, go-ahead game. . . . Good Lord, I don't know what rights man has and I don't know the solution of boredom. 17

I've got to do something or it'll be a breakdown! . . . Quit all this crossword puzzle mongering of the law. . . . Get out among real men and eat real grub. 18

I'd like to sit under a linden tree for six straight months and not hear one word about Efficiency or doing big things. 19

But though he wants, and tries, to get away from his environment, something is always pulling him back. These paragraphs will show the reactions of the various business men who seek refuge from industry. First is the millionaire who is vacationing in Europe.

Why had he ever gone abroad? It had unsettled him. He had been bored in Paris. . . . How was it that America which had been so surely and comfortably in his hand, had slipped away. 20

The second excerpt is from a well-to-do business man who has taken a three weeks vacation.

Funny! Vacation doesn't seem to have done me a bit of good. . . . I'm crankier and nervouser than when I came up here. 21

The next paragraph concerns a timid lawyer who has sought

17 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
18 Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap, pp. 17-18.
19 Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 21.
20 Ibid., p. 170.
21 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 152.
refuge in the wilds of the Canadian woods in hopes that he may become a he-man. After days of rough camping, he suddenly comes upon a house where there is real food and a bed.

How luxurious not to squat on a tarpaulin!

. . . How delicious was the ham. . . . to be eaten to soft music and fainting lights. 22

The following excerpt concerns a small town boy who has made good in the city. He is considering a vacation to some foreign country, but at last he decides to return to his old home town.

Where did he want to go? Why should he go anywhere? What he wanted to do this minute, was to get back to planning the systemized purchase of knife-cleaning machines . . . He knew suddenly. . . . to the little American House where he made his start. 23

The social background of the business man in America is in the same state as that of his vocational and educational backgrounds, according to Lewis. He thinks the business man is intolerant of everyone unlike himself. The business man sees the faults of his fellowmen without ever once thinking that he is in the same class. Lewis severely criticizes the attitude of the business man toward other people. The following line may be said by any business man in America:

Trouble with a lot of folks is: They're so blamed material; they don't see the spiritual

22 Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap, p. 127.
23 Sinclair Lewis, Work of Art, p. 211.
and mental side of American supremacy. . . .
they think these mechanical improvements are all we stand for. 24

Here is a description of the social background of our business men as seen in the eyes of an American lady who has spent many years in England:

For all our admiration of American energy and mechanical ingenuity, it's the most terrible country the world has ever seen. Such voices ---like brass horns! Such rudeness! Such lack of reticence! And such material ideas! And the standardization---everyone thinking exactly alike about everything. 25

Americans know their faults, but they cannot bear to be criticized. Lewis points out this belief in a brief conversation between a business man from America and an Englishman.

You Americans are always so touchy. No Englishman ever minds criticism of England, he laughs at it. 26

The business man, himself, makes the following statement concerning the social conditions of America today. This character, from the novel, Dodsworth, has just returned from Europe; he realizes the difference between the countries:

. . . I had a feeling of leisure in France and England. I felt there as though people made their jobs work for them; they didn't give up their lives working for their jobs. And I felt as though there was such a devil of a lot to learn about the world that we're too busy to learn here. 27

24 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 85.
25 Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 83.
26 Ibid., p. 85.
27 Ibid., p. 175.
Once the business man tries to free himself from work, he realizes just how binding it can be. Here is a summary of the thoughts of a man who has tried to break the chains of his social background:

He was chained by every friend who had made life agreeable—bound not to shock or lose them. He was chained by every dollar he had made... every hour he had worked—they had left him stiff, spiritually rheumatic. 28

Sinclair Lewis realizes that the political background of the American business man is in a pathetic state. He realizes that the American business men spend very little time trying to better the political situation, and that they spend a great deal of time criticizing; he realizes that the knowledge concerned with politics is not adequate. Here is an example of what the average business man thinks about the question of prohibition:

Course I believe in it on principle, but I don't propose to have anybody telling me what I got to think and do. No American 'll ever stand for that. 29

And here is an example of the American business man's interest in the presidential election:

Say, Old Man, what do you think about the republican candidate? Don't you think it's about time we had a real business administration. 30

And here is still another business man's answer to the vital 28

Ibid., p. 175.


30 Ibid., p. 117.
question of politics:

In my opinion, what this country needs, first and foremost, is a good, sound, business-like conduct of its affairs. 31

Lewis further criticizes the political background in one of his novels wherein he lets a newspaperman, who has been abroad, make this remark to his best friend:

I know it's just vanity, but there are things outside of America—whether they're ever going to have sense enough to make a Pan-Europa there—whether Britain is going to recognize Russian oil—what Fascism really means. . . . things that ought to be almost as interesting as the next baseball game. 32

And here is another excerpt from the same speech:

We boast of scientific investigation, and yet we're the only supposedly civilized country where thousands of supposedly sane citizens will listen to an illiterate clod-hopping preacher or politician setting himself up as an authority on biology and attacking evolution. 33

Here is Lewis's criticism of the big business man and his ideas about politics:

After twenty-five years of big industry Sam Dodsworth still believed . . . that socialism meant the dividing up of wealth, after which the millionaires would get it all back within ten years. But to take socialism seriously— it annoyed him. 34

Lewis has also criticized the crudities of the American
business man's attitude toward religion. Here, according to Lewis, is the opinion of the business man concerning the subject:

There's no use discussing and arguing about religion; it just stirs up bad feelings. 35

Again Lewis ridicules the business man's ideas in the following manner:

Actually the content of his theology was that there was a supreme being who had tried to make us perfect but presumably had failed, that if one was a Good Man he would go to a place called Heaven... but if one was a Bad Man... he would be punished.... The kernel of his practical religion was that it was respectable, and beneficial to one's business. 36

According to Lewis, the business man in a large city never has to bother about religion. He realizes that there are churches in the city, but he doesn't take time to go to them. He lives his own life as he pleases and is often shocked by the moral atmosphere which surrounds him. He is even old-fashioned in some of his moral ideas. In the novel, Dodsworth, the author gives the moral ideals of the wealthy business man:

... the suave references to perversions which he had increasingly been hearing in New York and London, and which sickened him, made

35 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 207.
36 Ibid., p. 209.
him glad to be normal and provincial and old-fashioned. 37

Yet when a business man finds himself face to face with a crisis; when he finds that he has lost the most valuable thing that he possesses, he does not turn to religion for comfort. Again, Lewis strikes with swift anger at the religious attitude of the business man. Dodsworth, a character in the novel by that name, has met the inevitable crisis; his wife, whom he adores, has gone away with a hated French count; and the middle-aged, unromantic millionaire is at a complete loss as to what to do. He finally drifts into the state of an immoral drunkard, and is very much ashamed of himself:

... so abnormally flushed that no friend of his hearty triumphant days would have recognized him, sitting on the edge of his bed, his hair wild... 38

Again, in one of Lewis's lesser novels we find the soliloquies of the timid business man who has always led a conservative and moral life; but when he finds that, through no fault of his own, he has run away with the wife of his best friend, he is too busy to think much about his moral ideas.

As to whether he was virtuous in rescuing Alverna, or vile in treachery to Joe, or maddeningly both at once—such frail philosophies could not make themselves heard in the torment of his toil. 39

37 Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 90.
38 Ibid., p. 320.
39 Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap, p. 95.
In the novel, *Work of Art*, Lewis shows the viewpoint of the small-town business man. Here, the business man is trying to excuse the base actions of a friend by means of his inheritance:

Well, you're right to stay off the big booze, and we're wrong. Probably we just do it because we're bored, son. Don't think because you happen to have the kind of natural-born make-up. . . . that folks not so lucky are all born bad. 40

Again, we find a hotel clerk meditating:

He had . . . been free of vicious business, and most of the guests had been good and decent, yet there had inevitably been so many others—the little hotel thieves. . . . the passers of "rubber checks", irritating in their angry roars of innocence, the suicides who so very bloodily brought shame to hotel rooms, the sneaking immoralists, and the equally unpleasant prudes who objected, publicly to other people's private immoralities. 41

Thus throughout the four novels, *Babbitt*, *Mantrap*, *Dodsworth*, and *Work of Art*, Lewis has given us concrete pictures of the vocational, educational, social, political, and religious backgrounds of the American business man. He has not meant to be cynical in a destructive manner, but rather as a means of helping America's business men to improve their backgrounds.

---

the business man. In this novel we find the well-to-do type. He is good-hearted, eager, perplexed, stupid; he makes absurd attempts at super-culture by radio; he has an incredible flow of language; but at heart he is generous and naive. He contents himself with a mechanical and standardized existence; he tries to be like his fellowmen, but often he discovers that men may have ideals other than those of making money and that real happiness is not to be attained through material comfort; he perceives that he has lost real happiness because he has lacked the courage to follow his spiritual ideals.

The following quotation from the novel, Babbitt, may well represent the feelings of any well-to-do business man in America:

Sometime I hope folks will quit handing all the credit to a lot of moth-eaten, mildewed, out-of-date, old, European dumps, and give proper credit to the famous Zenith Spirit. . . . that clean fighting determination to win Success. . . . the same standardization of stores, offices, streets, hotels, clothes, throughout the United States shows how strong and enduring a type ours is. 42

Again, we find the specifications of the Standardized American Citizen according to the Babbitts of our day:

Here's the new generation of Americans: fellows with hair on their chests and smiles in their eyes and adding machines in their

---

42 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, p. 184.
offices. . . . We like ourselves first-rate, and if you don't like us, look out. 43

The Babbitts of America live upon the surface and have thereby lost hold of reality. In the end their discontent avails them little, but they at least resolve to make the lives of their children different.

In this novel, Lewis points out a way for the business man to escape dullness; he shows his conviction that happiness is to be achieved only by obedience to genuine impulses of the individual.

In Mantrap, which is the next novel concerned with the business man, Lewis presents the Timid Soul in business. Here, we find the delicate, conservative bachelor who would like to be brave and courageous, but is afraid of convention. When the Timid Soul grows tired of his daily routine, he plays golf; but he finally becomes so exasperated with the dullness of his life, that he decides to take a vacation in order to avoid a nervous breakdown. On his vacation he tries to be a regular he-man, but finds that the wiles of the forest are more than he can courageously meet. Using Ralph Prescott as a representative of the type, Lewis ridicules the conservative business man in the following manner:

To Ralph . . . trying on clothes was ordinarily a torture . . . But out of his camping armor he had all the pleasure of a

43 Ibid., p. 183.
masquerade. He looked very virile and competent, he told himself. He straightened up with ferocity... he removed the rimless eyeglasses. 44

All his life the Timid Soul has known tepid and cautious acquaintances; his friends are intelligent, easy, and loyal, but afraid of life. He admires the courage of the Babbitts and longs to have the boldness of manner which they seem to enjoy; but when he finally finds a friend of this type, he becomes bored with that barking laugh and loud patronage.

When he goes on a camping trip he thinks that all of his problems of self-confidence will be settled, but he often ponders in this manner:

Am I going to be afraid all the while?

... His joy in adventure had dimmed; it almost vanished as he listened to the chatter, as he heard of wolves, of forest fires, of canoes sinking. 45

He spent his life in the world of business and, as a result, is at a complete loss as to what to do in the outside world. When he becomes involved with a sordid love-affair he is ashamed and wants to find a way out, but because of his lack of ability to cope with such a situation, he is stranded. He is a weakling and is unable to do anything about it. Finally, through instinct and not by reasoning, he returns to his own environment only to find that he is more lonely and more discontented than ever. Like Babbitt he realizes that in

44 Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap, p. 8.
order to be happy one must pay more attention to developing one's personality.

The third novel in which Lewis presents a type in the business world is Dodsworth. Here we find the millionaire type. He is not a Babbitt; he rarely shouts and he knows baseball fans and Babbitts only through business. He is not a Timid Soul but is conservative in many ways; he plays golf reasonably and does not brag about his score; he likes fishing camps but does not believe in letting them interfere with his comfort. He has energy and common sense; he is Samuel Dodsworth, the American Captain of Industry, and he dreams of motors.

Like the Booster and the Timid Soul, he becomes restless and wearied with his daily routine. He frets as he sits erect in his limousine while his chauffeur drives him to town:

These moments of driving were the only times he was alone. He was as beset by people as in his most frenziedly popular days at college. . . . People came to him, swarmed about him, wanted his advice and his money and the spiritual support which they found in his ponderous caution. Yet he liked to be alone. 46

He always wears large somber suits, brown, gray, or blue, expensively tailored and not very interesting. One sees him as a man of importance; he is tall, deep-chested, and kind.

He goes abroad to try to find solace in the beauty

---

46 Sinclair Lewis, Dodsworth, p. 13.
of the old world, but soon discovers that all he wants is to get back to his office. He is not satisfied to lead a life of leisure; he does not know how to devote his time to pleasure; he is at a loss when left alone. In vain he tries to drift into a life of indolence, but instinct causes him to know that he is in the wrong, and he struggles to regain his old, secure position among his more conservative friends.

He is appalled at the idea of divorce, yet when he has to face it, he is very meek; he is old-fashioned in his religion, but when he finds himself alone in the world he becomes a drunkard and does all the things which he has abhorred in other men. But the incredible jar of being dismissed by society causes him to think and to see people as individuals, not as clothes sitting. The following paragraph will describe the feelings of the millionaire type whose friends have deserted him:


Again, Lewis points out to his readers the fact that American business men need to spend more time in trying to develop their personalities so that they may be more able to
meet any crisis that life may offer.

In his fourth novel concerning the business man, Lewis ridicules the small town business man. In the book, Work of Art, we find Myron Weagle, who represents the business man who has tried to rise above his environment. He spends all of his time trying to get a better position, and is not satisfied when he gets it; he still has the desire for more money and a bigger business. He is furiously proud of his profession as a hotel-keeper; he is proud of his new discoveries, such as the most compact form of towel racks, the commercial value of free shoe rags, the best position for bed-lights, and the excellence of certain foods. He is an authority on Pullman laundry methods, repair of upholstery, and food supply. In his opinion

... no church or capitol or university or fort or hospital has no known the heart and blood circulation of history as a great hotel. 48

When he finally accumulates enough money to go abroad, his reaction to the beauties of foreign countries is this:

He saw in Italy, Switzerland, France, and England, everything that he had longed for as being cultured and of good repute. And he saw distinguished small-city restaurants. 49

Myron represents the type who has never missed a train, but has never been seen to hurry. He is a tall man,

---

48 Sinclair Lewis, Work of Art, p. 156.
49 Ibid., p. 167.
inexpressive of face; he is a dull, typical captain of business; he makes business notes in a little pocket notebook. In his solitude he takes the leisure to make plans for his one great dream -- that of the Perfect Inn which he wants to own and manage himself. As he gains wealth, he spends his money for the material things of life and gives no thought to developing his spiritual ideals. He wants to be cultured and refined but does not have the slightest idea as to how to begin. On the last day of his return from Europe, he suddenly agonizes:

Good Lord, I knew I forgot something. I forgot to see an art gallery! 50

In the end, our small town business man always realizes that he has spent a lifetime trying to find the Perfect Art which has never existed.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how Lewis represented four types of American business men. In Babbitt he has represented the mediocre type who lives comfortably; in Mantrap he has represented the conservative type who seeks solace from the business world; in Dodsworth he has represented the millionaire type who is ready to retire; and in Work of Art he has given us a picture of the small town business man who is forever trying to gain more material wealth. Though the characters may

50 ibid., p. 359.
differ as individuals, there is little difference in their ideals of life; each type places no value on spiritual life; each type fights for more money and power; and in the end, each type finds himself lacking in true worth. These four types may well represent the different types of businessmen found in America today; and Lewis has portrayed the pictures of their individual lives in a manner that has proved most interesting to the public.

Lewis confines himself largely to the socially representative surface; it is significant that his interest is in social types and classes rather than in individuals as human beings, and his treatment of characters is external only. Destiny has made him a satirist, and years of scrutiny have gone into the making of these four novels. With malignant hatred and barbed satire he has given us his criticism of the American businessman; undoubtedly his hostility is only a reply to what he has observed.
CHAPTER IV

CRITICISM OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL PROFESSION

Arrowsmith is the story of a young man who sets out to make a great physician; he is interested in the spiritual side of medicine, not the material side. In preparing himself at a medical university, Arrowsmith meets with many doubtful problems which he tries to solve out of his own experience. He hates the noise and insincerity of his fellow classmates and fraternity brothers; he sees their shallowness of character and their greed for success and financial power; and he determines not to be like them. Among the entire faculty of the great university which he is attending, Arrowsmith meets but one man who holds his interest; this man is a professor of science, and Arrowsmith adores him. To Arrowsmith, the German scientist, who in reality is an old and wearied man, is a hero in a black cape with a silver star over his breast. The young student tries to be like this beloved master of science, and is greatly distressed when that gentleman, because of financial distress and illness, is forced to resort to commercial means with his medical discoveries. Many times Arrowsmith becomes discouraged
and threaten to give up his great ambition to become a savior of human lives, but always there is before him the picture of the tired, old man who taught him all of his ideals about the love of humanity. On all sides, Arrowsmith meets with opposition, but with the aid of his courageous wife he fights on toward the success which he finally reaches. This success comes in the form of the discovery of a serum that will cure a terrible plague that has struck the colonies where Arrowsmith has been sent to act as physician. He discloses his discovery too late, however, for, just as he is ready to put the precious serum on the market, he is informed that another scientist has beat him to the announcement. Facing this terrible ordeal, together with the fact that his beloved wife has been a victim to the hated plague, Arrowsmith sets his face once more toward medical research. There is hope in his heart and strength in his love for humanity as he goes about his duties, for, as Lewis has pointed out, a truly great scientist will never give up.

Arrowsmith is the novel for which Lewis refused the Pulitzer Prize, and it is full of admirable knowledge concerning the medical profession. It is the story of an incorruptibly honest servant of science who doubts that humanity is very valuable. It is the story of Martin Arrowsmith, a physician, who in research encounters many obstacles.

In this novel, Lewis has shown the insidious betrayal of values in a great university and a great research
foundation where one may hope for disinterested motives and a free play of intelligence. He begins with a satirical portrait of America's leading universities with their fine buildings and their hundreds of young Doctors of Philosophy who give rapid instruction to prepare young men for the various professions which they wish to follow. Lewis ridicules the universities for their costly equipment, and for their money-making schemes; he scoffs at their presidents who are best described as money-raisers and after-dinner speakers; and he sneers at their extension courses which are conducted by radio. He describes a typical American university in this manner:

It is the property of the people of the state, and what they want ... is a mill to turn out men and women who will lead moral lives, play bridge, drive good cars, be enterprising in business, and occasionally mention books, though they are not expected to have time to read them. It is a Ford Motor Factory, and if its products rattle a little, they are beautifully standardized, with perfectly interchangeable parts.  

He describes the professors of the medical school who are always quarreling among themselves and are too absorbed in their own correctness to heed individual students. To him, the professors are unimaginative and uninteresting; they are incapable of arousing the interest of the students, and they lecture in drone voices. Lewis presents a professor in the following manner:

The professor of anatomy, Dr. Oliver O. Stout, was

---

1Sinclair Lewis, Arrowsmith, p. 7.
himself an anatomy, a dissection-chart, a thinly covered knot of nerves and blood vessels and bones. Stout had precise and enormous knowledge; in his dry voice he could repeat more facts about the left little toe than you would have thought anybody would care to learn regarding the left little toe. 2

Next, in the words of a kindly professor, Lewis describes the kinds of students who attend the universities:

There are two kinds of students that the gods give me. One kind they dump on me like a bushel of potatoes. I do not like potatoes, and the potatoes do not ever seem to have great affection for me, but I take them and teach them to kill patients. The other kind, they are very few! They seem for some reason . . . to work with bugs and make mistakes. 3

With barbed satire, he pictures the insincerity of the fraternities which are supposed to be honorable:

Digamma Pi was a lively boarding-house with a billiard table and low prices. Rough and amiable noises came from it at night, and a good deal of singing . . . yet for three years Digams had won the valedictory and the Hugh Loizeau Medal in Experimental Surgery. This autumn the Digams elected Ira Hinkley, because they had been gaining a reputation for dissipation . . . and no company which included the Reverend Mr. Hinkley could possibly be taken by the dean as immoral, which was an advantage if they continued comfortably immoral. 4

Lewis criticizes the valedictory of the Medical School in the following manner:

Any psychologist desiring a perfectly normal man for use in demonstrations could not have done

---

2 Ibid., p. 21.
3 Ibid., p. 12.
4 Ibid., p. 15.
better than to have engaged Irving Watters. He was always and carefully dull; smilingly, easily, dependably dull. If there was any cliche which he did not use, it was because he had not yet heard it. He believed in morality—except on Saturday evenings.

The next paragraph shows Lewis’s contempt for the students who study medicine for pecuniary purposes rather than for the benefit of being able to save lives. With the voice of a student who has discovered the insincerity of his colleagues, Lewis exclaims:

Well—these darn studes, they aren’t trying to learn science; they’re simply learning a trade. They just want to get the knowledge that’ll enable ’em to cash in. They don’t talk about saving lives but about ’losing cases’—losing dollars! And they wouldn’t even mind losing cases if it was a sensational operation that’d advertise ’em! They make me sick! How many of ’em do you find that’re interested in the work Ehrlich is doing in Germany?

The colleagues, annoyed by any student who doubts their purposes for studying science, further prove their lack of interest in the spiritual side of medicine by defending themselves.

During the strain of study for examinations Martin was peculiarly vexing in regard to "laying in the best quality medical terms like the best quality sterilizers—not for use but to impress your patients". As one, the Digams suggested, "Say if you don’t like the way we study medicine, we’ll be tickled to death to take up a collection and send you back to Elk Mills.

5 Ibid., pp. 17-18.  
6 Ibid., p. 25.
where you won't be disturbed by all us lowbrows and commercialists."

Lewis realizes that once in a while a medical university is blessed with the presence of a few men who are interested in science as a means of helping the world rather than as a means of making more money; but he also realizes that such men must fight bitterly against a faculty and student body of disinterested and restless men. With the words of a learned and faithful old German scientist, Lewis ridicules the medical students who have no love for humanity:

There is but one trouble of a philosophical bacteriologist. Why should we destroy these amiable pathogenic germs? Are we too sure, when we regard these oh, most unbeautiful young students attending Y. M. C. A.'s and singing dinkle-songs and wearing hats with initials burned into them—is it worth while to protect them from the so elegantly functioning Bacillus typhosus with its lovely flagella? 8

Lewis sympathizes with those rare students who take interest in the causes of certain medical discoveries; he loves the American youth who puts his soul into his studies and tries to overlook the materialistic views of his classmates. But Lewis has seen the bitter antagonism with which the instructors and classmates of such an unfortunate student meet his doubtful questions concerning the proof of certain remedies. The following paragraph shows the reaction of an irritated professor when a student wishes to know how the use of certain medicines

7Ibid., p. 29.
8Ibid., p. 39.
has been proved perfect:

How do they know? Why my critical young friend, because thousands of physicians have used it for years...

I trust that you other gentlemen, who perhaps lack Mr. Arrowsmith's profound scientific attainments and the power to use such handy technical terms as 'control' will merely on my feeble advice, continue to use ichtyrol.

With extreme dismay, Lewis has discovered that in spite of the fact that American research in the natural sciences, physics, chemistry, and medicine, ranks with the best of our age, a certain number of speculative men want to take advantage of their opportunities. In the following paragraph, Lewis criticizes the commercialism of the pharmaceutical houses:

I lay awake half the night... thinking about your discovery... We'll patent your method of synthesizing antibodies and immediately put them on the market in large quantities, with a great big advertising campaign. We'll start with anti-diptheria serum. By the way, when you receive your next check you'll find we've raised your honorarium to seven thousand a year.

Thus, does the faithful scientist who has tried to invent a serum that will benefit the world, receive bribes to let the medicine become patent.

Then there are the medical advertisements that doctors receive, Lewis satirizes the medical peddlers by giving the

---

9 Ibid., p. 41.
10 Ibid., p. 154.
following example of their advertisements:

Doctor, don't be buffalced by the unenterprising. No reason why YOU should lack the equipment which impresses patients, makes practice easy, and brings honor and riches. All the high-class supplies which distinguish the Leaders of the Profession from the Dubs are within your reach right NOW by the famous New Idea Financial system: "Just a little down and the rest FREE--out of the increased earnings which New Idea apparatus will bring you!" 11

And here is yet another:

The Bindledorf Outfit is not only useful but exquisitely beautiful, adorns and gives class to any office. We guarantee that by the installation of a Bindledorf Outfit . . . you can increase your income from a thousand to ten thousand annually and please patients more than by the most pains-taking plugging. 12

In this paragraph from the novel Lewis shows how doctors, who are impressed by the elaborate advertisements, make use of them to deceive their patients:

When he had telephoned, Dr. Winters shook hands ardently. He indicated his electric cabinet. "Got one of those things yet? Ought to, my boy. Don't know as I use it very often, except with the cranks that haven't anything the matter with 'em, but say, it would surprise you how it impresses folks." 13

And next Lewis shows the hypocrisy of an older physician who tries to help a young doctor after his first patient has died. The older physician, for a price, runs the following notice in the daily paper:

Dr. M. Arrowsmith of Wheatslyvania is being congratulated, we are informed by our valued pioneer

11 Ibid. , p. 153.
12 Ibid., p. 154.
13 Ibid., p. 163.
local physician, Dr. Adam Winter, by the medical fraternity all through the Pony River Valley, there being no occupation or profession more unselfishly appreciative of each other’s virtues than the medical gentlemen, on the courage and enterprise he displayed in addition to his scientific skill. 14

Lewis sympathizes with the small town physician who has no means of recreation. According to him, it is not so much the fault of the physician as of the people in a town who force their doctors, through boredom, to indulge in drinking and gambling with the common people. The following excerpt is a fair example of Lewis’s ridicule:

The players came and went, and sometimes slept on the floor for an hour or two, but they were never less than four in the game. The stink of cheap feeble cigarettes and cheap powerful cigars hovered about the table like a malign spirit; the floor was scattered with stubs, matches, old cards, and whiskey bottles. Among the warriors were Martin, . . . the barber, a highway engineer, all of them stripped to flannel undershirts, not moving for an hour, ruffling their cards, eyes squinting and vacant. 15

Often the small town physician, settled by his routine practice among a group of farmers, feels himself superior to his patients, yet he has no way of trying to improve his medical knowledge; he merely drinks and gambles in his leisure hours. In the following paragraph Lewis criticizes such a small town physician:

Arrowsmith, I may do you an injustice, but there’s a lot of you young practitioners who feel

14 Ibid., p. 164.
15 Ibid., p. 168.
superior to the farmers, that are doing their own jobs better than you are. You think that if you were only in the city with libraries and medical meetings and everything, you'd develop. Well, I don't know of anything to prevent your studying at home! You consider yourself so much better educated than these rustics, but I notice you say, "gosh" . . . and that sort of thing. 16

In the next passage, Lewis shows the hypocrisy of physicians who find fault with their fellow practitioners:

Well, I don't like to knock any fellow practitioner, and I suppose he's well intentioned, but just between you and me he does too confounded much guesswork. Now you take you and me, we apply science to a case, instead of taking a chance and just relying on experience and going off half-cocked. But McMinturn, he doesn't know enough. And, say, that wife of his. . . . 17

Lewis includes the public health officials in his satire. Bitterly, he criticizes those who with singing courage preach the gospel that hygiene will kill the medical art. The following passage shows how a young physician may be tempted by articles in newspapers touching on science and health:

He told himself however much he might relieve the sick, essentially he was a businessman, in rivalry with Dr. Winter of Leopolis and Dr. Hasselink of Groningen; that though they might be honest, honesty and healing were less their purpose than making money; that to get rid of avoidable disease and produce a healthy population would be the worst thing in the world for them; and that they must all be replaced by public health officials. 18

16 Ibid., pp. 169-170.
17 Ibid., p. 177.
18 Ibid., pp. 171-172.
Lewis acquaints his readers with the fact that public health officials are ignorant and noisy in their attempts to sell the idea of health to a community. They post placards over the community with the following sensational announcement:

You can't get health
By pussyfoot stealth
So let's every health-booster
Crow just like a rooster. 19

It is with mockery that Lewis described, in the next passage, the circular sheets sent out by the head of a Program Committee of the State Convention of Health:

Brother males and shemales:
Are you coming to the health bee?
It will be the liveliest hop-to-it that this busy lil ole planet has ever seen.
And it's going to be practical. We'll kill out on all these glittering generalities and get messages from men as kin talk, so we can lug a think or two home wid us. 20

And if a doctor should suggest certain methods of cleanliness in a community, he would receive nothing but rebuke from health agencies. Lewis gives the following example:

When Martin suggested that all milk should be pasteurized, that certain tenements known to be tuberculosis-breeder should be burnt down instead of being fumigated in a fiddling useless way, when he hinted that these attacks would save more lives than ten thousand sermons and ten years of parade by little girls carrying banners . . .

19 Ibid., p. 195.
20 Ibid., p. 224.
then Pickerbaugh worried, "No, no, Martin, don't think we could do that. Get so much opposition from the dairymen and the landlords. Can't accomplish anything in this work unless you keep from offending people."

Lewis thinks that too much money is spent on beautiful hospitals and clinics, and not enough on the right type of medical attention. In the following passage, he shows how a young doctor is impressed by the magnificent beauty of a clinic:

The clinic occupied fourteen rooms in a twenty-story building constructed (or so Martin certainly remembered it) of marble, gold, and rubies. The clinic reception-room, focused on a vast stone fireplace, was like the drawing-room of an oil magnate, but it was not a place of leisure. The young woman at the door demanded Martin's symptoms and address. A page in buttons sped with his name to a nurse, who flew to the inner office. Before Angus appeared, Martin had to wait another quarterhour in a smaller, richer, still more abasing reception-room. By this time he was so awed that he would have permitted the clinic surgeons to operate on him for any ill which at the moment they happened to fancy.

When a truly great scientist makes an important discovery, there are always those hypocrites who are waiting to impose upon him with soft, purring compliments such as Lewis has written in the following passage:

Martin, my boy, the director has been telling me about your splendid discovery and his plans for you. I want to congratulate you with all my heart, and to welcome you as a fellow department-head.

21 Ibid., p. 227.
22 Ibid., p. 265.
... What a magnificent future! ... If this work really pans out, there's no limit to the honors that'll come to you. ... Acclaim by scientific societies, any professorship you might happen to want, prizes, the biggest men begging to consult you, a ripping place in society. 23

And when the great scientist refuses to throw his scientific material together as rapidly as possible and send it in to the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine to be published, his director speaks in this manner:

Nonsense! That attitude is old-fashioned. This is no longer an age of parochialism but of competition, in art and science just as much as in commerce--competition with your own group, but with those outside it, competition to the death! Plug up the holes thoroughly, later, but we can't have somebody else stealing a march on us. Remember you have your name to make. The way to make it is by working with me. 24

Private industries are always on the alert for scientific discoveries and want to profit by them before they have been tested and established. The bacteriologist searches for vaccines to cure widespread diseases, and the chemical manufacturer wants to snatch them prematurely from his hand for mass production.

Lewis describes the fight of the physician against a deadly plague. The earnest physician who is trying to aid people, finds no cooperation; instead he is met with defiance. The people refuse to quarantine because they are

23 Ibid., p. 322.
24 Ibid., p. 324.
afraid it will hurt their business. The following excerpt from the novel illustrates the kind of opposition that Lewis criticizes:

Still there was no quarantine, no official admission. Inchcape Jones vomited feeble proclamations on the inadvisability of too-large public gatherings . . . but to Sir Robert Fairlamb he protested, "Honestly, there's only been a few deaths, and I think it's all passed over. . . . and it's been conveyed to me that if we were to establish a quarantine, the merchants would take the strongest measures . . . . It would ruin the tourist and export business. 25

With the mind of a great physician who really cares more for the preservation of human life than for business, Lewis makes the following comment in his novel concerning the heartlessness of a money-mad generation during the time of a terrible plague:

There may have been in the shadowy heart of Max Gottlieb a diabolic insensibility to divine pity, to suffering humankind; there may have been mere resentment of doctors who considered his science as valuable only as it was handy to advertising their business of healing; there may have been . . . the demand of genius for privacy. Certainly he who had lived to study the methods of immunizing mankind against disease had little interest in actually using these methods. He was a fabulous painter, so contemptuous of popular taste that after a lifetime of creation he should destroy everything he had done, lest it be marred and mocked by the dull eyes of the crowd. 26

Thus in his novel, Lewis has pointed out the many faults of the medical profession. He has shown the discouraging

25 Ibid., p. 346.
26 Ibid., p. 347.
obstacles that lie in the wake of a promising young scientist; he has pictured the futile attempts of the medical student to have faith in his work; he has portrayed the fruitless search for success without glory; and in the end he meditates, with the man of science,

Gottlieb is right about these jests of God. Yey! His best one is the tropics. God planned them so beautiful, flowers and sea and mountains. He made the fruit to grow so well that man need not work—and then He laughed, and stuck in volcanoes and snakes and damp heat and early senility and the plague and malaria. 27

Throughout the novel Lewis has tried to picture the conflicts of an earnest physician who is met on all sides with plots, mistakes, and hatred until he loses his faith, and at last is willing to become interested in the commercial side of his profession. It is with bitter satire that Lewis has pointed out the faults of the medical profession, but it is with love that he has tried to pave the way for a true physician. Lewis was the son of a doctor in a small town, and has understood the many difficulties which a physician meets. It is with the voice of a philosopher that he sums up the chief qualities of a truly great scientist:

To be a scientist—it is not just a different job, so that a man should choose between being a scientist and being an explorer or a bond-salesman or a physician or a king or a farmer. It is a tingle of very obscure emotions, like mysticism, or wanting to write poetry. The normal man, he

27 Ibid., p. 352.
does not care much what he does except that he should eat and sleep and make love. But the scientist is intensely religious—he is so religious that he excepts quarter-truths, because they are an insult to his faith. 28

28 Ibid., p. 22.
CHAPTER V

SATIRE ON CERTAIN PHASES OF RELIGION

Sinclair Lewis has selected and emphasized certain aspects of the religion of America, and his achievement is to have treated more effectively than anyone else several of the most conspicuous phases of this subject. Lewis has conceded that we are living in a world where material values are our standard; he has seen that in our mad haste for more money, power, and luxury we have forgotten certain spiritual values. He thinks that Americans have no belief nor faith to make them try to live their lives according to the highest standard which they are able to visualize. According to him, God and religion have come to mean many different things, and fear and uncertainty are keeping the American people from being equipped to cope with life.

In his novel, Elmer Gantry, Lewis has attempted to point out the crudities of our American religion. He believes that propagandists have tried to conceal from the public the fact that the church seems to have failed in teaching religious principles. He has found that religious enthusiasts prefer to talk about the religious conditions in our country, rather
than to exercise their abilities toward helping them.

The tragedy of our religion, Lewis has observed, lies in the fact that the church and Sunday School are too busy with social and economic affairs to devote much time to the teachings of Christ. Children are either sent or carried to Sunday School and church at the convenience of their parents, and are left to gather their own conclusions concerning the gospel. Using a small boy as an example, Lewis points out the effects of American religion on growing boys and girls who are later expected to be upright citizens in a small town:

The church, the Sunday School, the evangelistic orgy, choir practice, raising the mortgage, the delights of funerals, the snickers in back pews or in the other room at weddings—they were as natural, as inescapable a mold of manners to Elmer as Catholic processions to a street gamin. ¹

And the money that is spent on Sunday School pamphlets and cards to impress our younger generation brings in the following response, according to Lewis:

Sunday School text cards! True, they were chiefly a medium of gambling... he had plenty of time in his gallery and they gave him a taste for gaudy robes. ²

Lewis further points out that the church has failed in its duty to impress children with the laws of good citizenship and decency:

He had in fact, got everything from the church and Sunday School, except, perhaps, any longing what-

² Ibid., p. 27.
ever for decency and kindness and reason. 3

According to Lewis, Puritanism has hitherto been the backbone of the American character, and the main street of American greatness. America is a land of violent contrasts; and the reaction against Puritanism seems to have gone to dangerous lengths. This reaction is indicative of shallowness of mind. The gospel of today is a message of social reform, not of spiritual redemption. It is a demonstrable fact that under the political leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Evangelical Protestants in general are making moral issues of social problems, participating in politics and exercising temporal power.

With bitter satire Lewis points out the speech of a bishop to one of his ministers:

After all, it's our mission to preach the pure gospel . . . and not to monkey with politics. But you've been so successful. At the next conference I shall be able to offer you at last a church here in Zenith, and a very large one. It used to be the most fashionable and useful Methodist church in town. . . . wicked shame to see this great institution, . . . declining and, by thunder, not hardly giving a cent for missions! — But if you build up the church, guess the official board will properly remunerate your labors. 4

Lewis thinks that the church should give herself to the building of character in individuals and leave the social and economic questions alone; furthermore, he believes that it is the duty of the church to take into account all the forces

4 Ibid., p. 309.
which help or hinder the building of individual character. With malicious hatred, he presents to his readers the following paragraph concerning an American evangelist who has gained wealth and power by appealing to the emotional side of the masses:

With the money so easily come by, Sharon burst out in hectic plans. She was going to buy a ten-thousand acre farm for a Christian Socialist colony and a university. . . . She was going to organize a new crusade—an army of ten million which would march through heathen countries and convert the entire world to Christianity in this generation. 5

Lewis has criticized the social-service organizations which have arisen in our churches. He is alarmed by the emphasis given to a purely economic doctrine in American pulpits and church publications. He has noted with dismay the rifts and dissensions which such preachings have caused. The proponents of these doctrines call themselves Christian Socialists. Lewis gives this description of a church in a large city:

Wellspring Church had been carrying on a score of institutional affairs, and Elmer doubled them, for nothing brought in more sympathy, publicity, and contributions. Rich old hyenas who never went to church would ooze out a hundred dollars or even five hundred when you described the shawled mothers coming tearfully to the milk station.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Elmer scarce had time to prepare his sermons . . . he was even willing to have new ideas, lifted out of biology and biography and political editorials. 6

---

5 Ibid., pp. 213-14.
6 Ibid., pp. 318-19.
Lewis has drawn a comical picture of the kind of advertisements which clergymen send out from the churches of America. It is the inception of the salesmanship of salvation which makes them known and respected in every forward-looking church in the country.

WAKE UP, MR. DEVIL

If old Satan were as lazy as some would-be Christians in this burg, we'd all be safe. But he isn't! Come out next Sunday, 10:30 A.M. and hear a red-blooded sermon by Rev. Gantry on

WOULD JESUS PLAY POKER?
M.E. Church.

The above advertisement according to Lewis, may be found in the weekly papers of the Presbyterian Church, the Disciples Church, the United Brethren Church, and the Baptist Church.

Nor does Lewis fail to point out and ridicule the fact that many American evangelists use fraud and deceit in order to win their people:

Healing was later to become the chief feature of many evangelists. Sharon came to it by accident. . . . during her meeting in Schenectady a man led up his deaf wife and begged Sharon to heal her. It amused Sharon to send out for some oil (it happened to be shot-gun oil) to anoint the woman's ear and pray lustily for healing. The woman screamed, "Glory to God, I've got my hearing back!"

The following excerpt shows how Lewis ridicules the fact that American evangelists appeal to the emotional side of their

---

7 Ibid., p. 295.
8 Ibid., p. 212.
audience rather than the intellectual side:

Others about him were beating their foreheads, others were shrieking, "Lord, be merciful," and one woman—he remembered her as a strange, repressed, mad-eyed special student who was not known to have any friends—was stretching out, oblivious of the crowd, jerking, her limbs twitching, her hands clenched, panting rhythmically. 9

And with swift strokes of satire, Lewis writes the following criticism concerning women evangelists:

When she attacked the larger towns and asked for the support of the richer churches, Sharon had to create several new methods in the trade of evangelism. The churches were suspicious of women evangelists. . . . they couldn't shout loud enough to scare the devil out of sinners. . . . Sound churchmen here and there were asking whether there was any peculiar spiritual value in frightening people into groveling maniacs. They were even so commercial as to inquire why a pastor . . . should agonize over helping an evangelist to make . . . forty thousand a year. 10

Lewis has observed many hypocrites in the American churches. A man may be mean, grasping, and dishonest, believe erroneously, and be able neither to conquer nor suppress his doubts, yet pretend to be a sincere believer.

Here is Lewis's criticism of such a man:

After nearly two decades he knew that he had been fooling himself; that he did not actually admire Jesus as the sole leader; that the teachings of Jesus were contradictory and borrowed from earlier rabbis; and that if the teachings of Christianity were adequate flags, symbols, philosophies for most of the bellowing preachers whom he met and detested

---

9 Ibid., p. 48.
10 Ibid., p. 191.
then perforce they must for him be flags, the
symbols of the enemy. 11

According to Lewis, a man's private convictions regarding
church doctrines do not prevent his participation in the
work of the church, and his move toward the clergy is not
always actuated from a sense of church loyalty, but on the
persuasive influence of older people. Lewis has the young
man who has just been converted to meditate in the following
manner:

I wonder if the Holy Ghost really was there and
getting after me . . . or was it just because Judson
and Ma and all those Christians were there whooping
it up. 12

Lewis also criticizes the doubt of the minister who tries
to be sincere and to understand his own preachings:

His worst doubt was the doubt of himself . . .
He who each Sunday morning neatly pointed his con-
gregation the way to heaven was himself tossed in
a Purgatory of self-despising doubt, where his
every mystic aspiration a superstitious mockery,
and his every desire to be honest a cruelty which
he must spare Bess and his well-loved brood. 13

Lewis criticizes the greed and insincerity of the clergyman
in the following paragraph, wherein a minister makes this
speech before his vast audience:

I firmly believe that we ought to add to our
Methodist practice some of the Great Truths . . .
and that we ought most certainly not to confine the
church to already perceived dogmas but encourage it
to grow. It stands to reason that really devout

11 Ibid., p. 122.
12 Ibid., p. 51.
13 Ibid., p. 246.
prayer and concentration should most materially effect both health and financial welfare. 14

And in the next paragraph, Lewis shows the conceit of the modern clergyman:

Elmer managed, during supper, to let them know that not only was he a theological seminary man, not only had he mastered psychology, Oriental occultism, and the methods of making millions, but also he had been general manager for the famous Miss Sharon Falconer. 15

Lewis believes that in this modern age Christians are rather to be looked down upon because they do right for gain. The increasing number of suicides makes us realize that life is too hard to cope with; the lack of work brings about the inevitable lowering of moral standards; therefore it behooves us so to order our civilization by making religion a part of our daily lives. In the following lines Lewis paints a searing picture of the attitude of the average man concerning the minister:

Preachers are just ordinary guys like the rest of us. . . . Sure; preachers can cuss and make love just like anybody else. I know! What they get away with, pretending to be different. . . . would make you gentlemen tired. . . . See if I couldn't 've been a preacher— a knock-out -- bet I could handle a big crowd well's any of 'em. 16

Today, according to Lewis, the clergyment as a class are discredited men who have lost the trust and confidence of the great masses of people simply because they have proved

14 Ibid., p. 249.
15 Ibid., p. 255.
16 Ibid., p. 147.
themselves insincere. Despite their fine preachings the poor have lost faith in ministers because they eat and drink of the best and remain unmoved by any suffering and starvation that may be near. Religious life among the faithful seems to go on much as before. The crowds still flock to our churches for religious services, but, beyond these duties which have been ingrained in them by habit and tradition, they leave the minister alone to splendid aloofness. In the following passage, Lewis describes the thoughts of a young minister who goes to a large city to preach the gospel:

His first sermon in a real city! Might lead to anything. Better give 'em something red-hot and startling. Let's see . . . . Repentance--no, better go slow on that repentance idea; this Deacon Eversley, the lawyer, might be pretty-well-to-do and get sore if you suggested he had anything to repent of. 17

Lewis believes that wealth and power have made the church worldly, but the very fact that the church is growing in this respect is causing her undoing. Her clergymen, who in earlier days were used to poverty and little education, now find themselves men of money and importance. Business men cultivate their acquaintance, and give them big loans at reduced rates of interest. Politicians flatter them and get them all sorts of favors:

The teachers of new testaments and church history were ministers whom admiring but bored metropolitan congregations had kicked up-stairs. To both of them

17 Ibid., p. 142.
polite deacons had said, "We consider you essentially scholarly, Brother... We're pulling wires to get you the high honor that's your due--election to a chair in one of the Baptist seminaries." 18

And while ministers are reaching out for more power and wealth, the clergy preaches its pale, scholarly sermons about moral principles of justice, but they do not become imprudently specific about concrete cases of injustice. They rail against sins without attacking the economic abuses that are causing these sins. They preach mealy-mouthed homilies about the Kingdom of Heaven, while making sure that meanwhile they themselves have plenty of the kingdom of this world.

Lewis has given us an interesting example of the young minister who has just started on the road to success:

Where could Elmer find a better profession than the ministry--thousands listening to him--invited to banquets and everything. So much easier... but same time, elegant and superior work... and cheaper professional training... The salaries weren't so bad--he'd go to the top, of course, and might make eight or ten thousand. 19

And in the following passage, Lewis satirizes the hypocrisy of the young minister:

All you have to do is to get some sound and perfectly meaningless doctrine and keep repeating it. The Episcopal pulpit for actors that aren't good enough for the stage but the good old Baptist fold for realists. 20

According to Lewis, the different religious sects of America think that those who do not believe in certain

18 Ibid., p. 117.
19 Ibid., p. 62.
20 Ibid., p. 87.
doctrines are lost; to them the individual counts for nothing. Lewis thinks that all forms of Christianity should embrace every opportunity for a declaration in the permanent defence of human freedom. The deliberate setting aside of such opportunity by one group or the other is a pitiful confession; it confesses that organized religion is interested in its own survival at any price even though that price is the surrender of every sacred function of religion. Lewis criticizes the different religious sects in this manner:

How can there be a worthy Christian unless he's been baptized by immersion? . . . The Baptist Church, being the only pure Scriptural church, is the one real church of God, and we're not setting ourselves up—we're just following God's ordinances. 21

And when in his novel Lewis lets a character insinuate that there is nothing in the Bible about Episcopalians, a devoted Christian answers:

You bet your life you find something. It talks about Bishops, and that means Episcopal bishops—the popes and the Methodists are uncanonical bishops. 22

Again, when two ministers who believe in different doctrines get into a heated discussion as to whether Christians have to have a church or preacher, one of the characters in Lewis's novel grabs his Bible and expostulates, "It says here in Hebrews, 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.'" 23

Lewis also presents us with a speech from a devoted Baptist:

21 Ibid., p. 88.
22 Ibid., p. 89.
23 Ibid., p. 90.
We're a specially selected group of Parsifals—beautiful to the eye and stirring to the ear and overflowing with knowledge of what God said to the Holy Ghost. . . . We're just rarin' to go out and preach the precious Baptist doctrine of 'Get ducked or duck.' We're wonders. 24

Here Lewis gives his idea of the content of a modern Baptist sermon:

Brother Knobough summed up for the benefit of Elmer and God, the history of the Baptists, the importances of missions, and the perils of not reading the Bible before breakfast daily. 25

In the following passage, Lewis satirizes the Baptist ministers as being more interested in material than in spiritual wealth:

The other preachers leaned back in their chairs and tried to look casual, and hoped that Brother Tusker was going to bear down even a lee-tle heavier on the matter of raising salaries. 26

The next passage is from another Baptist minister concerning his type of sermon:

I just give 'em a good helpful sermon, with some jokes sprinkled in to make it interesting and some stuff about the theater or something that'll startle 'em a little and wake 'em up, and help 'em to lead better and fuller lives. 27

Next, Lewis points out the belief of one minister concerning all other religious sects in general:

Because the Baptists and Methodists have all the

24 Ibid., p. 85.
25 Ibid., p. 79.
26 Ibid., p. 78.
27 Ibid., p. 87.
With a satire that is barbed with venom, Lewis criticizes the doctrine of a certain church concerning the damnation of infants:

Then God help the Baptist Church and the Baptist doctrine! God help us all, in these unregenerate days, that we should be contaminated by such infidelity.

... Either we are washed white and saved, or else we are not washed, and we are not saved! That's the simple truth. ... And so if he be not baptized, then he must burn in hell forever. 29

Lewis further criticizes the mutual hatred of the different sects by letting one of his characters, a member of the Baptist church, uphold the rights of his organization by explaining "the historic position of the Baptist as the one true Scriptural Church, practicing immersion as taught by Christ himself." 30

Thus has Lewis ridiculed the declining conditions of American religion. He has pointed out that attention must be given to the individual and not to the masses if souls are to be saved. He blames the biggest part of the faults of our religion on the ministers; for whether he be in a small town or a large city, whether he be a missionary or an evangelist,

28 Ibid., p. 87.
29 Ibid., p. 33.
30 Ibid., p. 63.
regardless of what his doctrine may be, he must forget about politics and economics and uphold the banner of genuine and simple kindness in Christianity.

In Elmer Gantry Lewis has characterized the average American preacher. Elmer Gantry represents the hypocrite in the ministry. In public, his language is moderate and restrained; he breathes an atmosphere of earnestness; but in his private life he is cruel, relentless, and dishonest.

When he stands before an audience to preach,

Not one of them considered that there could be anything comic in the spectacle of a large young man, divinely fitted for coal-heaving, standing up and wallowing in thick slippery words about Love and the soul. 31

In the following passage Lewis paints a portrait of the Elmer type of minister:

He made them tearful over the gentleness with which he described the Christchild. . . . yet the next moment he had them stretching with admiration as he arched his big shoulder-muscles and observed that he would knock the block off any sneering, sneaking, lying, beer-bloated bully who should dare to come up to him in meeting and try to throw a monkey-wrench into the machinery by dragging out a lot of contemptible . . . doubts. 32

And when on his deathbed a poor admirer of this atrocious minister sends him his pitiful savings,

31 Ibid., p. 58.
32 Ibid., p. 37.
Elmer Gantry never knew who sent him thirty dimes, wrapped in a tract about holiness, nor why. But he found the sentiments in the tract useful in a sermon, and the thirty dimes he spent for photographs of burlesque ladies. 33

Lewis has tried to point out in this novel that civilization is threatened because the ministers of America lack humane virtues—those of moderation, common sense, and common decency.

Lewis has used the character, Elmer Gantry, to represent the hypocrisy of our modern American ministers. He pictures Elmer as the son of a good, Christian woman whose highest aim in life is that her boy become a minister of the gospel. The following passage gives a brief account of Elmer's boyhood:

Elmer had since the age of sixteen been a member in good standing of the Baptist Church—he had been most satisfactorily immersed in the Kayooska River. Large though Elmer was, the evangelist had been a powerful man and had not only ducked him, but in sacred enthusiasm, held him under, so that he came up sputtering, in a state of grace and muddiness. He had also been saved several times, and once, when he had pneumonia, he had been esteemed by the pastor and all visiting ladies as rapidly growing in grace. 34

But Elmer resisted his mother's desire, for he did not want to give up his entertaining vices which with wide-eyed happiness he was discovering anew every year.

In college Elmer's character was no better. He had only one authentic friend. In the following lines, Lewis points

33 Ibid., p. 125.
34 Ibid., p. 28.
out the reason for Elmer's lack of popularity:

It was not merely that he was a shouter, a pounder on backs, an over-whelming force, so that there was never any refuge of intimacy with him. It was because he was always demanding. Except with his widow mother, whom he vaguely worshipped, and with Jim Lefferts, Elmer assumed that he was the center of the universe and that the rest of the system was valuable only as it afforded him help and pleasure. 35

When Elmer, through the hypnotism of a visiting evangelist, finally decides to become a minister because he thinks it will be an easy job with a big salary, Lewis describes him in this manner:

The greatest urge was his memory of holding his audience, playing on them. To move people--Golly! He wanted to be addressing somebody on something right now, and being applauded! 36

And after a year in the pulpit Elmer, according to Lewis, has become a great minister. In these lines from his novel, Lewis criticizes Elmer's hypocrisy as a minister:

Brother Cantry was shaking hands all round. His sanctifying ordination, or it might have been his summer of bouncing from pulpit to pulpit, had so elevated him that he could greet them as impressively and fraternally as a sewing-machine agent. He shook hands with a good grip, he looked at all the more aged sisters as though he were moved to give them a holy kiss, he said the right things about the weather. 37

After he has established himself as a respectable young minister in a small but profitable village, Elmer grows weary with his dull life and once more tastes of the vices of life.

36 Ibid., p. 63.
37 Ibid., p. 96.
in a near-by city; but much to his surprise, a friendly bishop discovers him in a drunken stupor and in an unholy environment. As a result of the bishop's report, Elmer loses his position and gives up the ministry for a position as traveling salesman.

Failing to make a success as a salesman, Elmer unites himself with a woman evangelist who, although she pretends to be an angel, is a devil in disguise. He lives with her until her dramatic death at one of her own meetings. Afterward, Elmer again, through false pretense, finds his way into the ministry, marries the virtuous daughter of a prominent and well-to-do minister, and thus establishes his career. He rises to great heights in the ministry, but still remains, in spite of his religious environment, a vile and unrelenting hypocrite.

Thus has Lewis criticized our American religion. From the poor teachings of our Sunday Schools and churches to the false enthusiasm of the minister of a large church, he has shown that modern American religion needs to undergo a great change. He has found fault with the masses who attend church only for the sake of appearance; he has criticized the evangelists for appealing to the emotion of an audience; and he has bitterly ridiculed the hypocrisy of our clergymen. He has left few defects in our religion uncovered; and he has surprised his public with the boldness of his criticisms of so broad a subject as that of religion.
CHAPTER VI

CRITICISM OF POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, AND SOCIAL REFORM

Sinclair Lewis has written four novels concerned with American politics, government, and social reform. In each of these four novels, he has criticized these institutions in a manner that should be helpful to our nation. Lewis thinks that little is known of the make-shift conglomeration of political agencies. Congress has created new bureaus, boards, and divisions of government without pattern or pretense of consistency. The capital of the world's largest democracy is controlled by a system that is astonishingly arbitrary and chaotic.

In The Man Who Knew Coolidge, Lewis has pictured the stereotyped politician. Lowell Schmaltz is a character who symbolizes the average man who shows a great interest in the politics of his nation; he is a man who enjoys every convenience and luxury of life; he belongs to the Kiwanis Club, and his chief ideals of life are service and practicability. He spends his spare moments in making long and pointless political speeches before the various clubs and organizations which he
attends. He is forceful enough and often profane in private, and he speaks effectively in public. He lapses easily into the most execrable grammar and when excited or angry is inclined to mix phrases and reverse word order until what he is saying becomes positively meaningless. He has a sense of humor, and he is quite a raconteur to his associates. In mixed company he is inclined to be rather stiff, appearing the least bit uncomfortable.

Throughout the novel, Lewis has used this character to poke fun at our rambling political speakers who talk for hours without saying anything of particular value to the public. With bitter sarcasm, Lewis describes this type of man's ideal in regard to socialism:

But just to speak of socialism a moment. I'm willing to give every man a fair square deal, but when it comes to supporting a lot of loafers, the way I look at it is that the constructive, practical people like ourselves, who control the country, ought, you might say—1

But the reader never knows just what Mr. Schmaltz was going to say next, for that great political speaker suddenly launches forth into another and more exciting account of his beliefs and ideals concerning America.

In the following speech, Lewis gives the content of the Schmaltz idea of politics:

I don't mean to suggest for one second that I've

1Sinclair Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, p. 92.
got any better bean than the plain ordinary average citizen, but I've given a whole lot of attention to politics and such matters—In fact, strikes me that it's the duty of all the better-educated citizens to take an interest in the affairs of state, for what, after all, as a fellow was saying to us at the Kiwanis Club the other day—what is the government but the union of all of us put together for mutual advantage and protection?  

And next, we find an example of the intellect of our modest politician:

What I always say is, intellect is always important, in its place, and industry, and even ideals, so long as they are thoroughly practical, but what is more important in life than a Sense of Humor?  

In business Mr. Schmaltz is a hypocrite. When his business is failing, he pretends that it is most successful; he asks for a vast loan on the basis that his is the most exclusive agency for new cash registers. According to Lewis, such a politician considers himself on an equal basis with the president of the United States in regard to intellect, integrity, and politics.

Throughout the novel, this detestable character makes uninteresting and pointless speeches concerned with American politics, frequently digressing from his speech to refer to personal illustrations and pointless jokes. The novel ends with Schmaltz's rendition of the president's ideas in regard to our foreign policy, after which he expresses his own ideas of domestic policy in the following manner:

\[2 \text{Ibid., pp. 11-12.}\]
\[3 \text{Ibid., p. 118.}\]
And I shall be glad if in my small way I have done anything to make clearer to you the New Era of American Civilization; to express modestly to you the motto of Lowell Schmaltz: "Read widely, think scientifically, speak briefly, and sell the goods!" 4

Ann Vickers in the novel by that name is a vigorous and determined social worker who from childhood has had wistful dreams of her country as being a beautiful place in which all the people are clean, healthy, intelligent, and broad-minded citizens. After the death of her father, a quiet, decent professor whom she has always adored, Ann sets out to face the many difficult problems concerning her own welfare and the social conditions of America in general. Her heart bleeds for the unprivileged poor who live in the slums and have no motive in life other than to steal, beg, or borrow enough food and money to live on. She looks with sorrow upon the distressing conditions of a democratic country that allows its men to go to war, and with bitter hatred upon the unsanitary conditions of American prisons. She hates the ignorance and lack of humanity in the American government which advocates the cruel treatment of prisoners and other social outcasts. In the character of Ann, Lewis has symbolized all of the people of America who fight for the rights of the inferior and unfortunate members of our civilization.

While yet a young girl, Ann undertakes to reconstruct some of the deplorable conditions of society, and she fights

4Ibid., p. 163.
on through life trying to uphold the banner of good will toward humanity. But on all sides Ann meets with bitter opposition and ridicule. Once while her particular group of women social workers are trying to impress a disinterested crowd of people with speeches concerning the rights and freedom of women, a mob breaks out and Ann sees the admonishment of the mob by officials whom that same group had hired to guard the peace. The following lines from the novel show Ann's reaction to this bitter scene:

She wanted to leap out, to kill the policemen ... but she was held in by Officer Monahan, and from the elevator of the car, saw something she could never forget; something that made her fundamentally a revolutionist even in the days when she was to be a cautious public official. ... She discovered something that later made it impossible for her to accept the emotional pacifism fashionable everywhere ... from 1920 to 1930: that an unarmed mass is helpless against an armed trained squadron; that neither age, sex, arguments, nor sweet reasonableness is proof against guns and clubs. 5

So Ann is carried to jail for causing an uprising in the community, and when she gets there she finds seventeen women besides the suffragists; all talking, hating the world and a little bewildered by it. The following excerpt is taken from the novel:

Seventeen of them, out of whom, by count, fourteen seemed to Ann no more "criminal" than herself. Poverty, unemployment, early underfeeding and ... plain feebleness of mind and puerile love of silk and bright lights, had sent them here. 6

---

6 Ibid., p. 151.
This incident only helps in making Ann revolt more than ever toward American society. With grim determination Ann sets out to take her place in the world as a great reformer, but to her dismay she only succeeds in getting herself mixed up in an illicit love affair. The following lines show Ann's reaction to this situation:

She sat wondering how many other traditionally dramatic situations, would, under the bleak light of reality lose their horrible splendor . . . Did wartime heroes really hate the fiendish enemy as much as they did salty beef or crabbed officers? And when they were dying in the muck, did they really rejoice such a lot at giving up their lives for their several kings and countries? Were any traditions sound? . . . Were Americans always generous and neighborly? . . .

For fifteen months Ann lives in an American prison so that she may more closely observe the foul conditions of the unsanitary cells, and do her part toward persuading the government that such conditions were horrible and disgusting. After a bitter fight with opposition on all sides, she finally succeeds in getting partial reforms in prisons, but unfortunately she falls in love with a judge whose ideals are against all of the things for which Ann has fought. Her judge is imprisoned in one of the sanitary prisons, but the fact that the prisons have been slightly reformed gives Ann little satisfaction.

After a life of hardship and failure, Ann at last settles down with the determination to regain her faith in humanity and to do all she can to help toward bettering society.

---

The next novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, is a satire on our undemocratic form of government. In this book Lewis lets the character Doremus Jessup represent the dreamers and philosophers of America who visualize a beautiful country with spiritual ideals, while in reality they know that it is things of material value that count with the people of our world. Lewis pictures America as being overrun by dictators and governmental organizations whose lust for power and wealth cause them to stop at nothing that will deter them from their greedy pathways. With a critical eye—Doremus looks upon a changing world and sighs for the good old days of Lincoln when Democracy really meant "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

In this novel Lewis has tried to point out the fact that if America does not improve her governmental, political, and social conditions she is headed toward the same kind of government that Europe has today, a dictatorship that in its relentless cruelty has no consideration for the individual human life and soul. Doremus represents the clear thinker; he is an editor who watches with rising uneasiness the coming presidential election. Lewis describes him thus:

He was an equal and sympathetic boss; an imaginative news detective, he was, even in this ironbound Republican state, independent in politics; and in his editorials against graft and injustice, though they were not fanatically chronic he could slash like a dog whip. 8

---

8 Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*, p. 25.
With the eyes of a prophet, Doremus awaits the coming of a dictatorship to America, and when his friends laugh at him and tell him that such a thing can never happen in America, he scornfully answers:

Why there's no country in the world that can get more hysterical—yes, or more obsequious!—than America. Look how Huey Long became absolute monarch over Louisiana, and how the Right Honorable ... Windrip owns this State. Listen to Bishop Prang and Father Coughlin on the radio—divine oracles, to millions. Remember how casually most Americans have accepted Tammany grafting and Chicago gangs and the crookedness of so many of President Harding's appointees? Could Hitler's bunch, or Windrip's, be worse? 9

In the end just as Doremus has prophesied the new president turns out to be another Hitler, and the good law-abiding citizens of America who have only wanted peace and to be left alone are imprisoned because they do not worship the new form of government. The following excerpt illustrates Doremus's discovery:

Doremus discovered that neither he nor any other small citizen had been hearing one hundredth of what was going on in America; Windrip & Co. had, like Hitler and Mussolini, discovered that a modern state can by the triple process controlling every item in the press, breaking up at the start any association which might become dangerous, and keeping all the machine guns, artillery, armored automobiles and aeroplanes in the hands of the government, dominate the complex contemporary population ... 10

The Prodigal Parents, Lewis's latest novel, is the story of Fred Cornplow, a modern business man, who is bewildered and resentful over the actions of his two grown children. Sara,

9 Ibid., p. 21.
10 Ibid., p. 314.
the daughter, is brilliant and sophisticated; she shows a
great deal of interest in politics, and treats her father as
though he were a small boy. Howard, the son, is handsome and
idle; he, too, pretends to be interested in politics and plans
to do many great deeds, but he only succeeds in being a fi-
nancial burden to his father. Fred tries to play the role of
a domineering parent on rare occasions but only succeeds in
making himself appear ridiculous in the eyes of his children.
The following passage from the novel is an illustration of
Fred's attempt to discourage his children in their passion for
communism:

But unlike you communists, I don't feel that I'm
Almighty God. I can't do everything in the world at
once. I'm the president of the Mind Your Own Business
Association. I'm just not rich enough and not smart
enough to rebuild the New York slums and stop all the
war at one and the same time... My workmen and
my customers both seem pretty well satisfied. I get
along all right with my own family. 11

But his intelligent children only look upon him with pity and
tolerance. Sara expresses her opinion of her father in the
following manner:

Positively, Freddie enjoys being an old horse in
a treadmill. I believe, no matter how he kicks about
it, he's secretly pleased when we sponge on him. Shows
what a noble, stalwart pillar of society he is! We must
see to it that he contributes to the Coheeze. 12

Once, during a rather pointless talk at a rather pointless
birthday party given in his honor, Fred becomes bored with his

12 Ibid., p. 42.
dull routine in life and decides to retire long enough to travel abroad. In the following passage from the novel, Lewis describes Fred's thoughts:

Whether it was the addition of another year to his age, or the toothaching memory of the cousinly Tillery's sponging, or Howard's picture of expanded agency with Fred as lunatic, or Sara's explanation that he was useless except as a feeder for communism, ... he knew, in this half-second, and knew terrifyingly ... that he did want to retire and, with Hazel, try to discover what manner of man he was and might become. 13

But it is years before Fred starts the final step toward retirement; not until after both of his children are safely married, does he find time to go abroad. And then his stay is cut short, for Fred and his wife, Hazel, no more than get themselves comfortably settled in Paris than their daughter-in-law appears to tell them that Fred must return to America to look after Howard.

With great reluctance, Fred takes the next boat to America and finds that his son has fallen to the state of drunkenness and is without a job.

Once more the dependable Fred takes things into his own hands; he soon has Howard back on his feet, and the disgusted Sara once more interested in the affairs of state. After years of futile attempts to rid himself of the burden of being a protecting parent, Fred discovers that modern youth needs the proper guidance of older and wiser heads. Toward the end of the

13 Ibid., p. 78.
novel Fred comes to the following conclusion which he discloses in a letter to Hazel who is still in France:

You stay in Europe . . . as long as you want to. In this family we never did have much compulsion, us over the kids, you and me over the other, and if maybe it has not entirely worked out O. K. always, I think the children are beginning to appreciate it, and everything is going to be swell. And hope you and I will start off again some day. But now it don't seem to matter . . . . It seems to me now that it isn't going where you want to that's freedom, but knowing that you can go. 14

So in each of these novels, Lewis has satirized America in her politics, government, and social reform.

According to Lewis, more attention is given to marble facades, historic monuments, ceremonial streets, and extensive parks than to a sound form of government. In his novel, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, Lewis has severely criticized the bragging politician who on his return from Washington, describes the White House in this manner:

Now even you gentlemen that have been to Washington and seen the White House may not know that the offices, including the President's own private office, are in wings stretching out on either side of the main structure. . . . I tell you it was a mighty moving thing to think of the famous men that had inhabited that structure. . . . For what after all is a greater inspiration than the lives of our heroes. 15

Lewis further points out the fact that our communities are plagued by hidden alley slums, by crime and disease and unemployment with which they are often unable to cope. For Congress, in its eagerness to build a capitol second to none, has

14 Ibid., p. 298.
15 Sinclair Lewis, The Man Who Knew Coolidge, p. 75.
neglected essential community service. It has favored national institutions at the expense of schools, penal establishments, health centers, hospitals, and libraries. The following passage from Lewis's novel, *Ann Vickers*, gives his description of our communities:

... in Bermondsey, ... like valiant New York, ... was nothing but a square mile or two of handsome shops, bedrooms, public buildings, surrounded by square leagues of houses like pens in a slaughteryard, pinchbeck shops, and dirty factories. The side streets ... stretched out in flat-faced houses in which, it seemed, human beings could no more have a rich and individual existence than ants in a hill. The innumerable children were dirty, the men returning from work, were tired and threadbare; the women were creeping things. 16

According to Lewis, Americans are too aristocratic and snobbish. A free representative democratic government must be effected by the method of reason, conference, compromise, and adjudication; not despotism, firing squads, purges, assassinations, bloody revolutions, and inevitably war. The world is back-tracking under the banners of communism and fascism. There is no hope for permanent ballot government and rational peaceful change, unless a majority of the voters are sufficiently educated to understand a few fundamentals that have become established in our modern civilization, and after becoming so educated are minded to vote accordingly. The following passage from *The Prodigal Parents* illustrates Lewis's view:

Naturally, I believe in guaranteeing work, with a maximum week's labor of thirty hours and a minimum wage of fifty dollars, for all workers . . . . But our chief concern is with Youth, because it has a chance to be educated; it isn't blinded by the American myth that this is a democracy and that everybody still has a chance. 17

Lewis has observed that the standard of living in our country is determined by the total quantity of goods and services produced; the majority of voters have no decent knowledge of the fundamentals of government. In his novel, It Can't Happen Here, Lewis has criticized the American politicians:

The coming and the going of the N. R. A., the F. E. R. A., the F. W. A., and all the rest, had convinced Doremus that there were four sets of people who did not clearly understand anything whatever about how the government must be conducted; all the authorities in Washington; all of the citizenry who talked or wrote profusely about politics; the bewildered untouchables who said nothing; and Doremus. 18

In the following passage, Lewis criticizes the ignorance of politicians who make speeches before their trusting audiences:

What this country needs is Discipline! Peace is a great dream, but sometimes it's only a pipe dream! We don't want all this highbrow intellectuality, all this book-learning. That's good enough in its way, but isn't it, after all, just a nice toy for grown-ups? No, what we all of us must have, if this great land is going to go on maintaining its high position among the Congress of Nations, is Discipline—Will Power—Character! 19

To Lewis it is obvious that there is imperative need for a

17 Sinclair Lewis, The Prodigal Parents, p. 50.
18 Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, p. 128.
19 Ibid., p. 8.
revitalizing of the spirit of democracy. There must be a new birth of loyalty to the democratic way of life and an increase in the vigor of our desire to fight for the individual. Autocracy in business and industry through the domination of small controlling groups needs to be replaced by more cooperative procedures. In the same novel, he satirizes the politician in this manner:

He was not only 100 per cent American; he exacted 40 per cent of chauvinistic interest on top of principal. He was on every occasion heard to say, "WE ought to keep all these foreigners out of the country," ... Louis was altogether convinced that if the ignorant politicians would keep their dirty hands off banking and the stock exchange and hours of labor for salesman in department stores, then everyone in the country would profit. 20

According to Lewis, many unprincipled demagogues have fattened on the very people who have chosen them as their representatives in the world of politics. The following excerpt from the same novel shows Lewis's contempt for the false promises of the candidates for governmental positions:

He pictured, then, a Paradise of Democracy in which with the old political machines destroyed, every humblest worker would be king and ruler, dominating representatives elected from among his own kind of people, and these representatives not growing indifferent, as hitherto they had done, once they were far off in Washington, but kept alert to the public interests by the supervision of a strengthened executive. 21

Lewis describes the turbulent inauguration of one whom the

20 Ibid., p. 13.
21 Ibid., p. 120.
admiring and unsuspecting public has placed in office:

More than a thousand reporters, and radio men covered the inauguration. Twenty-seven constituents of Senator Porkweed, of all sexes, had to sleep on the floor of the senator's office, and a hall-bedroom in the suburb of Blandesburg rented for thirty dollars for two nights. The presidents of Brazil, the Argentine, and Chile flew to the inauguration in a Pan-American aeroplane, and Japan sent seven hundred students on a special train from Seattle. 22

Lewis believes that political corruption, organized crime, child labor, and social abuses are the things that will bring about the ruin of America. He wants America to consolidate her gains, integrate her social resources, and adjust capital-labor problems. Lewis thinks it is truly absurd to see a legislative body that cost taxpayers millions of dollars a year passing formal acts to name a street or a plant. For Congress has not taken the time to have anything more than a makeshift political system. Lewis criticizes our political system in the following passage:

Tattle-mongers suggested that the naming of the Chicago plant after Macgoblin instead of Sarason suggested a beginning coolness between Sarason and Windrip, but the two leaders were able to quash such canards by appearing together at the great reception given to Bishop Cannon by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and being photographed shaking hands. 23

In the following excerpt Lewis criticizes with bitter contempt the hypocrisy of a politician:

Why say, he was on the Better Interurban Trolley and Transportation Commission that got us several extensions of street-car lines to the suburbs—and while

22 Ibid., p. 161.
23 Ibid., p. 250.
I guess Ed himself profited somewhat by advanced knowledge of what suburbs these new lines were going to tap, still, that was only sensible, after all, when you look at it in the right way--somebody had to make that profit... 24

Lewis thinks that the average man who participates in politics in America is sadly lacking in culture and education.

In this speech from one of his novels he gives us an example of the kind of men who represent our biggest politicians:

Now myself, I've always given a lot of attention to intellectual matters. Of course I'm right up on history--I've read clear through both Wale's "Outline of History," or practically clear through it, and also Vanber's "Story of Mankind," especially studying the illustrations. ... And now I'm kind of specializing in philosophy. 25

In the next passage from the same novel, Lewis lets one of his characters who speaks as a political agent, summarize the interest of the individual state in education:

Now I'm mighty good and proud of my own state. ... And the Zenith High School is the largest and finest high school building for any city of equal size in the country, and furthermore, by a recent and very wise enactment of the Board of Education, no teacher is allowed to teach in the school unless ... proves that at the last election he turned out and voted either the Republican or Democratic ticket, which gives us an unusually large percentage of really solid and responsible birds among the profs in the school, instead of a lot of crazy intelligentsia and lice like that. 26

Democracy, Lewis has pointed out, is a noble experiment in coöperative endeavor, but Americans do not have coöperative

25 Ibid., p. 169.
26 Ibid., p. 95.
character. According to Lewis, Americans do not cooperate even in family life. In his novel, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, Lewis criticizes the cooperation in the home of a political speaker.

Aside from her apparently not wanting me to be anything whatsoever around the house except the guy that pays the bills and carves the duck and fixes the furnace and drives her car out of the garage so she can go off to a hen bridge-party, here lately we've got into a kind of bad way of quarrelling. 27

Lewis further points out the fact that American farmers are isolated from one another by distance, suspicions, and hatred; urban dwellers are equally isolated by distinctions and conflicts of points of view. American people do not work together successfully; it takes intelligence to cooperate. In *The Prodigal Parents* Lewis ridicules the attitude of a farmer toward some strangers who have had a car wreck near his home.

The farmer loomed up, grunted, looked, exhibited the proper pleasure at seeing a real accident so near his hearthstone, made sure that he got his flashlight back from Gene and went away, after surprisingly, asking no questions beyond: Who were these three young men? Their occupations? Their parentage? Dates of birth? Place of birth? Their opinion of Franklin D. Roosevelt. 28

Lewis thinks that Americans can hardly expect to realize the democratic ideal in national life until we can do so in community life.

According to Lewis, the greatest stumbling block in the way of progress in capacity for democratic accomplishment is

27 Ibid., p. 177.
the fact that the leaders of business and industry are autocrats. Every time such autocrats assert their control over an industrial organization or company they set themselves in the way of the growth of such capacity. When employers and labor unions outlaw industrial warfare as a means of settling their disputes, business and industry may be better fitted for democratic procedure. In *The Prodigal Parents* Lewis ridicules the attitude of youth toward business and industry:

On the "P" & "F" cover, in a technique familiar to Fred from the high-school papers his children had once brought home, was a caricature labeled "A Dictator of the Auto Industry," ... she balked at two other caricatures, "Workers Unite!" and "The Newest Deal." In the first, "Labor" was revealed as an agonized dwarf lashed by a diabolic monster named "Capital!" 29

Lewis discloses the fact that the will of the great majority is often blocked by the American Congress. The states are not represented on the same population and area basis. Americans emphasize the importance of free discussion; yet most Americans are afraid to talk except on what they are sure is the popular side of a question. We shrink from acquiring new ideas. We need more free thinking and less free talking. In *It Can't Happen Here*, Lewis gives an example of what happens to a man who tries to say what he really thinks:

He had alarmed all his fellow editors ... by asserting the innocence of Tom Mooney. ... He even suggested editorially that when Russia had her factories and railroads and giant farms really going ... she might conceivably be the pleasantest country in the
world. . . . When he wrote that editorial . . . he really did get into trouble. He got named Bolshevik, and in two days his paper lost a hundred and fifty out of its five thousand circulation. 30

Lewis believes that we look to our president to lay down a program that will restore the enterprising spirit and release the suppressed energies of our people, so that idle workmen and idle factories may not stare helplessly at each other, and so that our economic system may sustain and make possible our democratic system of government. The following excerpt from It Can't Happen Here shows how Lewis ridicules the promises that American candidates for presidency make to their trusting public:

. . . he was all against the banks but all for the bankers . . . that he had thoroughly tested plans to make all wages very high and the prices of everything produced by these same highly paid workers very low; that he was 100 per cent for Labor, but 100 per cent against all strikes; and that he was in favor of the United States so arming itself, so preparing to produce its own coffee, sugar, perfumes, tweeds, and nickel instead of importing them, that it could defy the world. 31

Lewis shows evidence that threats not only of dismissal but of murder have been used to deter men from unionism. Once a union calls a strike, there is no reason for the postponement of a vote. All that organized labor is asking now is adherence to the labor-relations act as the law of the land. Too many reactionaries shout for "Law and Order" only when

---

30 Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, p. 58.
31 Ibid., p. 70.
the law is what they themselves have ordered. In It Can't Happen Here Lewis bitterly satirizes the government's reaction to a mob of strikers:

A machine-gunner M. M., who had listened reverently, let loose. The mob began to drop, and into the backs of the wounded as they went staggering away the M. M. infantry, running, poked their bayonets. Such a juicy squash it made, and the fugitives looked so amazed, so funny, as they tumbled in grotesque heaps! 32

Lewis also ridicules our courts. He thinks Americans do not go to court necessarily to right a wrong but to get a legal decision when two rights conflict, and society has set up these courts which make the judgment on such cases. The social well-being calls for the preservation of our political democracy. In his novel, Ann Vickers, Lewis criticizes a government that hurriedly sends men to prison.

... there are no criminals and no prisoners, but only men who have done something that at the moment was regarded as breaking the law, and who at the hit-or-miss guess verdict of a judge (who was no judge at all, but only a man judging, in accordance as his digestion and his wife's nagging affected him) were carted off to prison. 33

Lewis thinks there is too much racketeering in American unions, and not enough sound education in the real meaning of democratic unionization. America does not want government legislation preventing strikes; but unions and employers must definitely outlaw strikes themselves by truly democratic methods. In It Can't Happen Here Lewis has the following criticism of

32 Ibid., p. 164.
33 Sinclair Lewis, Ann Vickers, p. 305.
American organizations in government:

Blessed be they who are not Patriots and Idealists, and who do not feel they must dash right out and do Something About It, something so immediately important that all doubters must be liquidated--tortured--slaughtered! Good old murder, that since the slaying of Abel by Cain has always been the new device by which all oligarchies and dictators have, for all future ages to come, removed opposition! 34

Lewis points out the deplorable situation in organized labor by saying that the White House makes promises to secure campaign contributions and votes. The following lines from one of Lewis's novels give a description of the speech of a candidate for the presidency:

He slid into a rhapsody of general ideas—a mish-mash of polite regards to Justice, Freedom, Equality, Order, Prosperity, Patriotism, and any number of other noble but slippery abstractions. 35

Lewis thinks that because of the heroism of great industrial leaders, people have been aroused to act, while the so-called hero is found joining with the racketeers, by increasing prices, collecting for both the racketeers and themselves, from their victims, the public. It is high time for our patriotic citizens to take an active interest in helping the better element among the working class to fight this attempt to make American labor a pawn for gigantic labor racket and political bargains. In the following excerpt Lewis ridicules the rabble-rousers whose chief desire is for their own personal power.

34 Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, p. 138.
35 Ibid., p. 119.
and notoriety:

Is it possible . . . that the most vigorous and boldest idealists have been the worst enemies of human progress instead of its greatest creators? Possible that plain men with the humble trait of minding their own business will rank higher in the heavenly hierarchy than all the plumed souls who have shoved their way in among the masses and insisted on saving them? 36

According to Lewis, if America will observe the principles in the Bill of Rights in the home, in the school, in the church, and in all areas of American life she will have no more mob violences.

Lewis is alarmed at the degenerate state into which American society has lapsed. Our social organizations have tried to reform America, but, so far, they have not been very successful. Our people are discontented; we depend upon a change in political leadership to bring about a miraculous progress in our country. Party organizations are for the masses; they pay little attention to the desires of the individual, and are unresponsive to the opinion of the public. Our people are always being disillusioned by liberals who fail to organize the ardent hopes which they arouse. People who follow a strong political leader are lacking in unity and intelligent reasoning. In the following passage from Ann Vickers, Lewis shows the hopelessness of American social reforms:

It was a definite, powerful realm, this of "social work," . . . It was as clearly marked off from ordinary affairs as the navy or the priesthood . . . A whole world

36 Ibid., p. 141.
--charity distribution, prison improvement, fighting for free speech and free divorce and birth-control and bobbed hair. . . a hectic world composed of saints, grifters, publicity-grabbers, humorists who found senators in Stetson hats funny. . . 37

According to Lewis, Americans are beginning to abandon the democratic ideals which seemed such a desirable goal for social organization. Charitable organizations must go on scolding at slackness and cruelty; they must be sentimentals, charlatans, and egotists setting up their own beliefs against the wisdom of the ages. Again, Lewis criticizes the lack of understanding between social workers and the public:

That world had its obvious faults. Rather more than the hard-boiled newspaper paragraphers who slurred every manner of "ist," Ann, because she had to deal personally with them, disliked the lunatic fringe; the undernourished pastors who got into the newspapers by advocating anarchism or even cubism, and the overnourished pastors who drew crowds by denouncing alcohol and prostitution (with attractive illustrations). The people who loved authority and could best get it by dealing with the timid and unresisting poor. The people who wanted to take out on the entire human race the sorrows of their own small childhoods. 38

Through the voice of Ann Vickers, a social reformer in one of his novels, Lewis criticizes the deplorable conditions of American society today. Ann is pleading for the prisoners:

Probably we cannot tomorrow turn all the so-called criminals loose and close the jails--though of course that is just what we are doing, on the installment plan,

by letting them go at the end of their sentences. No, Society cannot free the victims Society has unfitted for freedom. Doubtless, since the Millennium is still centuries ahead, it is advisable to make prisons as sanitary and well-lighted as possible, that the convicts may live out their death more comfortably. 39

Again, Lewis pleads for the living dear who are in prison, while at the same time he severely criticizes a society that has allowed such conditions to exist:

What is to take the place of prisons? Something will. Fundamentally, such institutions as parole and probation for those who merely need a little help and reconstruction. For the ethically diseased, for the incurable, safe-keeping in hospitals. There is no more reason for punishing the ethically sick than the physically sick. And, since the revolutionists in criminology are so much more 'hard-boiled' than any Tammany judge, he would not infrequently give a sentence for life to unfortunates who now get only five years. 40

In the next paragraph, Lewis continues with his ruthless criticism of a modern American society:

The infamy of criminals is a favorite dinner-table topic. But the futility of prisons is a topic as little known among allegedly intelligent people as the teleology of the Tibetans. In certain social problems, a trace of knowledge has now been spread about, that one expects even a hobo, a Fifth Avenue rector, or a president of the United States to have some elementary notion that war and capitalism— . . . are not sacred and permanent. But that darkness . . . a mode of life which combines the horror of a bayonet-duel with the petty meanness of village gossip, are not the remedies for complex sickness of the soul is as unknown to most judges, lawyers, wardens, legislators, and plain citizens today as it was to the bloody

39 Ibid., p. 273.
40 Ibid., pp. 273-74.
117

cesspool of Newgate Prison a hundred years ago. 41

In this paragraph, Lewis ridicules the officers of America for their treatment of women prisoners:

The fingers crept slowly down off the negress, seemed to thrust into her eyes, clamped on her shoulder, while she dropped on her knees on the blistering planks of the platform, her still handcuffed wrists twisted by the brawny sheriff. 42

Lewis has observed the ignorance and lack of integrity of the American prison officials; it is with this type of men that social workers have to deal:

I don't know . . . what a 'sociologist' is, but if you're it, it's all right by me! But you ain't going to like it! We got some pretty tough cons here. Well—you better stick around a month or so . . . and then beat it back to your colleges and houses of refuge and all that soft-soap bunk. 43

In the next paragraph Lewis rails at the conditions of American prisons:

It is not true that every person who came as a first offender . . . with only amateurish notions of crime, learned in that university the delights of drugs . . . learned that it was his duty to get even with society by being more vicious next time, learned about new and slicker crimes. Not every one. A few of them were too numbed and frightened to learn anything. But it is true that not one single person failed to go out . . . more sickly of body and more resentful for it and more capable of spreading disease among Decent Citizens who had been breeding him to their ruin. 44

41 Ibid., p. 274.
42 Ibid., p. 286.
43 Ibid., p. 290.
44 Ibid., p. 251.
But, according to Lewis, it is not only the prisons that need reform. The following paragraph shows his bitter attack on the crusaders who unsuccessfully try to prevent war:

The Corleers Hook Settlement House entered the war along with President Wilson. . . . All the settlement workers . . . proclaimed that they were pacifists, opposed to all other wars. This crusade was to overthrow the Prussian military clique, after which there would forever be eternal peace.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . If was the headquarters for "social workers" from other cities, who did their bayonet practice with peculiar purity of purpose. 45

Again, Lewis criticizes a society that tries to entertain her soldiers before sending them to the slaughter-house, war:

. . . But the gayer and more wanton the warriors became, the more cramped with creeping depression was she. They were her brothers, these young men, even if they were a little sentimental and unexciting, like all males. That this solid chest against which she agreeably leaned in dancing should in a few months be a heap of ragged muck, crawling with maggots—oh, God, no cause was worth it. 46

In the next passage, Lewis ridicules the reception given to social workers who make speeches about the horrors of American social conditions:

The crowd did not rise to the dehumanized horror of mob rage. There were among them too many sympathizers with suffrage, . . . and the interesting thing is that these defenders were either prosperous "leading citizens" or rugged and shabbily clean workmen; none of them worthy citizens in between wages and directorates. 47

46 Ibid., p. 126.
And in the next excerpt Lewis describes the kind of work that is facing the uninterested public today. Social workers live a life of misery and unhappiness; they give up the comforts of society and march into a world of filth and sordidness, only to be met on all sides with disapproval and contempt.

Ann, Pat, and Eleanor were each of them sent out, alone, from Clateburn to help local Mothers in Zion organize suffrage associations; out to small, suspicious, masculine towns, where woman's entire place was still in the home, . . . They were received by acid matrons . . . Supported by three or four of these old war-horses. . . . they spoke on street corners, while the slowly gathering audience cat-called and whistled and made sounds of kissing; and at night they slept in funereal black walnut beds in the unaired "spare-rooms" of the local Cassandras. 48

Lewis also criticizes capital punishment in our American form of government. It is wrong because it does not stop murder; it is wrong because records show that a large per cent of killers are seldom put to death because of the fact that they can hire a good lawyer to free them from the death chamber; it is wrong because of the ghastly possibility that this irrevocable penalty may be imposed on an innocent man. In Ann Vickers Lewis describes the unjust punishment which has been thrust upon a poor, ignorant negro woman who has killed her husband in self-defence:

In five days more the majestic state would take this living human being out and kill her. There she was, probably mad, old and wizened and ashen, yet full of the miracle of life--eyes magically seeing things

48 Ibid., p. 116.
and thus making them exist, ears delicate to catch the sound, womb that had brought forth strong shining-copper sons, hands that had woven bright rugs and mixed corn pone... and in five days... the state in its wisdom and strength would take her and turn her into a heap of senseless and putrid flesh, and be proud of its revenge, and certain that by thus murdering Lil Hezekiah it had prevented all future murder forever and ever. 49

Throughout these four novels, Lewis has criticized the politics, government and social reform of America not as a cynic but as a man who wishes to see American people become idealists. He wants us to refuse to believe that the world is a great machine; he wants us to deny the supreme importance of standardization, and the conservation of energy, as explaining our world. He wants American people to believe that the world has a meaning, that man's life is important; and that there is a kind of inner harmony between the heart of the Universe and the soul of man, such that human intelligence can pierce through the abnormalities of American society and make America a better place in which to live.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

As a satirist Sinclair Lewis has portrayed a realistic picture of the crudities of small town society, the industrial world, the medical profession, religion, politics, government, and social reform in America. In the preceding chapters I have attempted to show how Lewis has criticized these various phases of life. In my introductory chapter I have presented both favorable and unfavorable comments by critics who have judged Lewis as a representative satirist of America, and from my survey I have concluded that Lewis holds the respect of most critics as a genius of true satire.

In my second chapter, which deals with Lewis's criticism of life in the small towns of America, I have tried to show how the satirist ridicules the small communities whose people live a life of monotony and discontentment; how he laughs at the smug provincialism of a people whose highest ambition in life is to have material comfort; and how he describes the narrow attitudes of the people toward society, religion,
economic conditions, politics, and social reformation. I
have attempted to show that Lewis thinks the people of small
towns are sadly lacking in integrity, intelligence, humane-
ness, personality, and spiritual ideals; that these people
have built for themselves a thoroughly standardized civil-
ization; and that any attempt on the part of an outsider to
change the mechanical existence of life in a small town is
futile.

Lewis has also been a critic of the industrial world.
He has ridiculed the life of the well-to-do business man,
the millionaire business man, the conservative business man,
and the small town business man as being monotonous and me-
chanical. There is physical difference in each of the types
but very little spiritual difference. In the business world,
men rush through a standardized life in search of material
wealth; industrial leadership is their highest aim, and they
have no time to feed their souls with culture and spiritual
training. I have tried to point out that according to Lewis,
the business man never accomplishes what he has set out in
life to achieve, but goes on, year after year in the same
dull routine, thinking that some day he can escape the fetters
of industry.

Lewis has also satirized the medical profession of
America. He has given accurate pictures of a commercialized
existence in the world of medicine, and has not failed to
ridicule physicians for their greed and hypocrisy. Lewis has criticized the medical schools for their lack of training in spiritual ideals and has ridiculed the false enthusiasm and comfort of the more learned physicians; he has uncovered every possible evil in a profession where honesty and humbleness should be highly valued. He has revealed the fact that physicians no longer fight to preserve the life of the individual but to compete against their colleagues in matters of prestige and finance. Lewis has criticized medical associations for wanting luxury and beautiful architecture in hospitals instead of the necessary medicines that will cure human ailments; he has poked fun at the men on the board of medical directors who allow their best medicines to be sold as patents in order to gain more material wealth. According to Lewis, the medical profession is lacking in integrity and true medical spirit.

American religion does not escape the criticism of Lewis. He has ridiculed the war that exists between different religious sects; he hates the hypocrisy of evangelists and makes fun of the ignorance and vices of certain ministers; he believes, furthermore, that our churches and Sunday Schools are of little value to growing boys and girls because of their lack of proper religious training. Lewis has neglected no faults of the clergy of America; instead he has succeeded in bringing to light a vast number of defects in the world of religion.
In four of his novels Lewis has satirized American politics, government, and social reform. He has bitterly attacked the policies of our government and politics; he has criticized the false promises of candidates who are greatly lacking in integrity, has found fault with our democratic government concerning the administration of our homes, schools, and churches; and he has severely satirized the people who are strongly opposed to social reformation in any form. I have tried to show that Lewis believes our entire system of politics, government, and social reform should be revised.

After a close study of the most important novels of Sinclair Lewis and a careful survey of the comments of various critics concerning this eccentric novelist, I have concluded that Lewis is indeed a true satirist, and that his works will live as a graphic picture of a certain period of American history.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Novels by Sinclair Lewis

Lewis, Sinclair, Main Street, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.


Works Consulted

"Arrowsmith in Germany," Living Age, CCCXXIX (1926), 381-382.

"Arrowsmith, Medical Novel by Sinclair Lewis, Satisfactorily Filmed," Hygéea, X (1932), 224-225.


"English Countercheck Quarrelsome to Mr. Lewis," Living Age, CXIV (1922), 244-246.


"John Bull and Sinclair Lewis," Living Age, CCCXXV (1925), 429-430.


"Literary Felonies," Saturday Review of Literature, XIV (1936), 3-4.

"Literary Main Street," Nation, CXXII (1922), 546.

"Literary Spotlight," Bookman, LVI (1922), 54.


