

[The More Modest Among Us]

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“My grandfather came from England about a hundred and twenty-five years ago. He stopped in Jamaica for some time on his way to the United States, and there he met my grandmother. She was of Spanish and French descent. They made their home in New Orleans, where my grandfather bought and sold cotton.

“My father was born and educated in New Orleans. I have a baptismal certificate showing that he was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, so I guess my grandmother must have been a member, as my grandfather was a Free Mason and could have scarcely belonged to that denomination. My father received degrees as an M. D. and also a D. D. He was ordained as an Episcopal minister and served as rector of various Episcopal churches for about fifteen years. He finally gave up the ministry and gave his entire attention to practicing medicine in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He also did a good deal of surgical work. He had a lot of surgical experience in Jackson's army.

“My mother was born in Michigan and was of German and English descent. She came to Prairie du Chien when she was a small girl and married there in 1880.

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"I was born at Prairie du Chien or, in English, Dog Prarie, in 1884. It is one of the oldest towns in Wisconsin and the site of a fort which was built during the Indian wars.

"I had one sister, no brothers. My sister and my father died with diphtheria 2 when I was about a year and a half old. Diphtheria killed them quickly in those days. The first thing I can remember was having my throat swabbed with a carbolic solution. The memory was clear enough to cause me to recognize the smell and taste years afterwards. Diphtheria, when it took a virulent form, was a such more dangerous disease then than it is now. It was not uncommon for the mortality to go as high an fifty percent or more. During such epidemics no public funerals were held for those who died of the disease. People were afraid of contracting the disease themselves.

"My father left my mother and me a home and about five thousand dollars in cash, also a library of over two thousand volumes.

"I was almost eight years old when I started to school. The diphtheria had injured me somewhat, and a case of measles when I was seven kept me from starting earlier. My mother married again soon after I began school and we moved to the country. We had a two-room school and two overworked teachers where I went in the country, but I doubt that the opportunity to learn was much poorer than it is in an up-to-date school. The discipline was, of course, terrible but, aside from that, I have yet to see any educational system in which the student does not have to learn for himself anything that will prove of value to him. I was fond of reading and probably spent as such time reading in my library at home as I did on my school work. At any rate, I found that I had already read most of the books which were used in the high school English courses, as well as a great number that are never heard of in the high schools.

"My stepfather and I got along very well, though he thought I was too much of a runt to ever make a farmer. However, he used to allow me about half an acre of very fertile ground on which I was supposed to make my spending money. Once I raised about four

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hundred bushels of onions on the ground. I shipped my crop to Chicago and they netted a little over ten cents a bushel, 3 though they were quoted as selling at a dollar a bushel. After that I did my selling around home. The commission man probably made fifty cents a bushel for himself on that little onion deal, and I have never felt that it was a fair division.

“My step-father sold his farm and retired about 1900. We moved to West Salem, a small town near La Crosse. I went to the high school at West Salem and, as usual, I spent more time on my own out-of-school reading than I did on my school work. During these years I read practically all the standard English literature from Spencer's 'Faerie Queen' to Mark Twain and Kipling, as well as most of the European philosophers. I was thoroughly stopped by [Regel?]. It was many years later that I discovered that [Regel?] probably did not understand himself any too well, as the remark he is said to have made might lead one to think, 'I never found but one man who understood all I have written and I am not altogether sure that he understands it.'

“Probably of more value than the library was Bernarr MacFadden's magazine Physical Culture. I bought the second issue at a newsstand and for many years did not miss a copy. MacFadden never received the credit he deserved for his work. A good many cranks used to contribute, but there was much sound information in his magazine. He began the fight on patent medicine frauds years before Collier's, which is usually given the credit. He also wrote a good deal on the value of sunshine and certain vitamin-containing foods. Of course, neither he nor any one else knew at that time why such things was of special value, but he seemed to have an instinct which led him to correct conclusions.

“In 1905 I went to the University of Wisconsin. I majored in mathematics for my first degree, but the truth of the matter is that I was not very much of a mathematician, though I did later teach a few courses in elementary college 4 mathematics. I later received a degree in physics which suited me better.

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“My first paying job after getting my bachelor's degree was that of assistant instructor in the physics department of the Louisiana State University, at Baton Rouge. My salary was eight hundred per year. Ordinarily an assistant is supposed to have from twelve to sixteen teaching hours per week. However, there were only two of us in the department and the head was more interested in growing sugar cane on a large plantation he owned than he was in teaching. As a result, I found that I was getting about thirty hours of teaching and part of it in classes which my chief took credit for conducting. Teaching was not at all pleasant that year for, in addition to the rather heavy schedule, I gave failing grades to quite a number of men on the athletic teams. They believed they should pass because of athletics and I was innocent enough to think that grades were given to every one for their knowledge of physics. A great relief was felt by all when I left at the end of the year to take a research assistantship at the University of Illinois. My old chief in Louisiana became president of the university a few years later and served in that position until his death not long ago. He used to be rather fond of the quotation from Tennyson: ‘Knowledge comes but Wisdom lingers.’ Even though he was not very fond of work. I believe he made an excellent president and justified his favorite quotation. He knew how to direct the work of others.

“My work in Illinois was called research in astronomy, but it consisted principally in making photo-electric cells and in trying to improve the sensitiveness of such cells so that they would be were useful in measuring the light from variable stars. Some of the first cells that were made in the United States were made in Illinois just before I came. The astronomer used them in estimating the masses of some double stars as well as other measurements of interest in astronomy.

“While I was there, I took two civil service examinations, one for the 5 Coast and [Geodetic?] Survey and one for the Philippine service. In the first I mad the second highest mark and in the second I was pretty well down the list. I received an offer of \$1,200 a year from the Philippine Service, and in 1914 I left for the islands with forty-eight other men

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who were newly appointed. Some of the men said there were more than a thousand on the eligible list, so the more modest among us wondered who was nodding when the list was made for appointments. It took twenty-eight days to reach the islands and most of us probably gained a better appreciation of the size of the Pacific Ocean.

“My appointment called for high school teaching, and I was sent to the norther part of Luzon and made my first acquaintance with the Filipino. Some of the teachers had trouble and seemed to think them hard to discipline, but I am sure it must have been their own fault. Although I never considered myself a very skilled hand at managing people, I had only three cases that called for my action during the entire six years I served on the islands. The teaching was, of course, in English and the native will compare well in school ability with American high school and college students. The Filipinos are generally a very considerate and good mannered people and sensitive to discourteous treatment. One of the most indignant boys that I remember to have dealt with had been sworn at by an American teacher. It took a great deal of explanation to make him understand that the teacher had been saying, ‘Please do your garden work a little faster’, in customary American slang.

“My contract called for two years of high school teaching. At the end of the first year I was made principal and given a two-hundred-dollar raise. At the conclusion of my two-year contract I decided that I had better return to the states, so I resigned and went to Manila to make the trip home. It is not good to ‘miss too many boats’, as they say of Americans who have gone seedy from staying too long.

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“However, I was offered an appointment as assistant professor in physics at the university at Manila, and stayed four years longer at a salary of \$2,200 a year.

“During my six years I made trips to Japan and China as well as a trip of a couple of hundred miles on foot through the mountains in central Luzon. It is generally called the

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wild people's country. The wild people are believed to have inhabited the islands before the coming of the Filipinos and to have been driven into the mountains by them. Very few of the speak either English or Spanish, so I was unable to talk to those I saw.

“Their villages are always built away from the narrow trails which lead through the mountains so that one could easily pass by without seeing any sign of them except for the cultivated terraces. These terraces are the most extensive mountain terraces in the world. Sometimes the entire side of a mountain is built up into rice patches if there is a supply of water which can be led from one patch to another. The terracing is done with wooden tools, as the people do not work iron, though they sometimes [beat?] gold nuggets into rings and other ornaments.

“Their fondness for dog feast seems to be the best known of their habits. They have the regular dog markets where the dogs are brought for sale, and one will frequently meet a party with a dozen or more dogs. The dogs seem to know that there is trouble ahead and are tied with short thongs to wooden lead sticks to prevent them from gnawing the leashes and escaping. They starve the dogs for a few days, then they give them their fill of rice and sweet potatoes. They are then killed and roasted whole, barbecue style. The sausage is already stuffed.

“These [Iggorotes?] are a small race, probably averaging about five feet in height, but they are nevertheless sturdy. One of them carried a trunk for me on a thirty-five mile mountain trip. I made the trip in a day and was very glad indeed to have two days' rest at a constabulary station. The little [man?] came in the next morning with the trunk which weighed about fifty pounds he was not nearly as tired as I was, though I had carried only a few pounds in a blanket roll.

“While going through the mountains I met a couple of missionaries who were also seeing the sights but I suspect, from the way I have heard others of their kind talk, that they later told the home missionary societies about the terrible hardships they endured. As a matter

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of fact, the average missionary fares better than the civil service employe, but the latter do not feel that they are martyrs and are in fact glad to get the jobs and a chance to travel a little. I know quite a number of mission people who served in the Philippines, China, and Korea. They are likeable people, but I doubt that many of them could have fared as well in any other line. Those in China seemed to have the softest snaps. Nearly all of them are engaged in school work. One fellow used to say he wanted two more babies because of the extra allowance which was made for those having larger families. I don't think he has ever quite forgiven me for asking him if he didn't think there might be more profit in raising pedigreed puppies.

"I did not get to see much of the [?], the [Mohammedans?] who [occupy some?] of the southern islands. Like Kipling's 'Fuzzy Wuzzy', the Moro is 'A first class fighting man.' They gave the American soldiers a very respectable fight before they were subdued, even though they were poorly equipped. The Spaniards and the Filipinos have never been able to meet them on equal terms. Possibly, the quality of the Moro soldiers was due to their belief that the surest road to a ringside seat in heaven was to die while killing unbelievers. I saw half dozen Moros walking down a Manila business street, and it was very evident that some of the Filipinos they passed were badly frightened. They probably thought that the Moros might suddenly decide to run [amuck?].

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"The Filipinos apparently do not take their religion as seriously as do the Mohammedans. The Roman Church was a great political power before the coming of the Americans, but did not prevent the natives from telling numberless tales in which the priests were the heroes. It is impossible, that the 'Good Fathers' should have been in as many ribald adventures or should have been responsible for the number of children assigned to them by their amused parishioners. One tale which produced great amusement was of a Spanish employee of a large tobacco company, who wrapped a monkey carefully and carried it to the priest for baptism. The 'infant' was supposed to be in a dying condition so the rites were quickly performed on the veiled monkey. At the close of the ceremony the

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girl who was carrying the 'baby' tossed it to the chandelier and it quickly climbed to the ceiling to the amazement of the priest. As it happened, the priest made a trip to Manila a few weeks later and secured some stationary from the offices of the tobacco company. The gentleman who was responsible for the monkey's baptism received a letter on the company's paper soon afterwards. In the letter was an account of some of his financial irregularities and the information that he was without a job and a long way from home. The gentleman immediately went to Manila, thinking he was fired, and tried to [beg?] off. Such a tale would not be relished in Moro Land and it would probably be a very brave or very forgetful man who would tell it a second time. The Filipino has a well developed sense of humor and is greatly amused by the peculiarities of others. However, it is unusual to find a Filipino boy who is self conscious or who appears to have any idea that he could ever do anything ridiculous himself.

"One amusing custom of the church consisted of throwing the bones of those whose relatives failed to pay cemetery rent over the walls. There were large mounds of them for a long time after the coming of the Americans.

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"Most of the poorer natives had common law marriages, as the church fees were more than they could afford to pay and civil weddings were not recognized.

"The church had attempted to suppress Free Masonry on the grounds that its members were attempting to liberalize the government. A number of native patriots were executed. Amongst them was Jose Rizal. Rizal was a graduate of several European Universities and an able author. One of his novels, "Nola No [Tangere?]", was offensive to the government and he was obliged to leave the islands. He had the misfortune to be in the islands at the outbreak of the insurrection against Spain and was executed on charges of having encouraged the insurrection and being a Mason.

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"I made several trips to Japan, and I saw a little of India and China. I had read Arnold's 'Light of Asia' and some of Muller's translations many years before and had always felt that there was something which Arnold had failed to bring out in his presentation of Buddhism. I was fortunate in making the acquaintance of a few Japanese who were well informed not only in oriental philosophy but also better informed on western thought than I was.

"I do not believe that Christianity has any chance of making much headway amongst the educated classes in Buddhist countries. All the moral teachings of Christianity, in some cases almost did same words as the sayings of Jesus, are found in the sayings of Gautama. Even some of the parables were told by him five hundred years before the founding of Christianity. However, the most serious hindrance to the spread of Christianity in such countries is probably the record of the Christian Church as compared to the Buddhist. The Christian Church has pretty consistently opposed new knowledge, whereas the Buddhist teachings make ignorance the original sin. It could under no condition have opposed the development of astronomy or the theory of evolution. In a history of two thousand and five hundred years it has no record of religious persecutions, a thing which even modern Christianity cannot claim and 10 Christendom has no parallel to the history of Asoka's reign. Amongst the more degenerated sects of the buddhist belief in miracles is not uncommon. Apparently such belief was discouraged by the founder, who dismissed one of his monks for claiming to have performed a miracle and made a law for his priesthood that none should ever claim any supernatural powers or inspirations not open to others. The first Catholic missionaries to Asia were astonished to find many of the forms of their own church practiced in Buddhist temples but, instead of taking the rational view that the early Christians had probably borrowed those forms from the earlier organization, they concluded that Satan was imitating the church. I could tell you not a few but scores of striking similarities between Christianity and Buddhism. In some cases the early Buddhist viewpoint and the sayings attributed to Jesus are so entirely the same that it seems very possible that His inspiration may have come from the older teachings. A large part of the European philosophy was foreshadowed in the teachings of Gautama.

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The indebtedness of such men as Schopenhauer, Spinoza, and Emerson is generally recognized. How much more of western thought was implied in Asiatic philosophy to not recognized by most of us because of the nonsense which is mixed with it and also because of the different method of expression.

“The greater tolerance of the Buddhist to shown in his attitude towards other religions, especially Christianity. Instead of consigning them to various degrees of high temperature in the hereafter he regards Christianity as having ‘great merit’ and teaches that the Christians are following a good path which will eventually lead to enlightenment. Considering these things, I do not see how Christianity can hope to make any striking progress amongst the intelligent classes who are born in Buddhist countries.

“It cost very little to make A trip to Japan, as I couldn't see the need of taking first-class passage; and, since I lived with an English-speaking 11 Japanese student, the living expenses were no more those in Manila for the two of us. He was an active boy and we must have covered fifteen miles of walking on a good many days. I still think I would like to spend several years living in various parts of Asia.

“I met my first wife In the Philippines. She was employed as a supervisor of the Manila high schools. Very few men were available for the Philippine service after the United States entered the war, and the women who were brought over developed a bad habit of marrying before their contracts expired. We were married after returning to the states, however. The better class of native girls consider it rather improper to be seen with an American.

“I tried to get in the army shortly after we entered the war, but the army decided there was no need for my services. ‘Underweight’, they said. There was no draft In the Islands, but most of the young men applied and quite a few received commissions. The standard explanation of those who did not enlist was, ‘What good would one private be amongst all those second lieutenants.’

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“In 1920 I returned to the United States and got a position at Georgia Tech at a salary of \$2,750 a year. I taught eight years there. At the end of the first year I bought a home in Decatur. That was in 1920 and houses were at their highest price then. The place cost about \$8,500 counting the improvements I put in. My wife was rather anxious to own a place. Personally, I never could see that it was cheaper to buy than to rent. When I finally wound up the thing, it was very evident that I could have paid double rent and still have been much better off. I also bought a five-acre lot, a little on the edge of town, expecting to sell the house as soon as possible and build there. I have always enjoyed having animals around and my wife was very fond of gardening, especially of flowers. I rather think she must have studied the habits and cultivation of about every flowering plant that was grown around Atlanta.

“The teaching at Georgia Tech was of a very routine character without much chance of more advanced work. It is an engineering school and does remarkably good work in training engineers, but did not pretend to be much in the line of research or graduate specialties.

“My wife died in December 1925, and two years later in 1928 I left Tech to go to Cornell for graduate work in physics. Toward the close of the first semester they offered me part-time work in teaching. The teaching work was light, calling for three classes a week and so left an abundance of time for study. Cornell probably allows its students more freedom of choice than any other of the great universities, though they have to hold their undergraduates to a more systematic course than their graduate students. I believe it is an excellent system, as every one is working at something in which he has a real interest instead of grinding out credits.

“I returned to Atlanta in 1931 to try to sell my house. I had already sold the lot, though I was obliged to sell what cost \$2,500 for \$500. No one was greatly interested in building even in 1928. In 1931 it was practically impossible to sell houses for money, or it least that

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was my experience. I finally traded it for an abandoned farm. I had a \$6,000 equity in the place but should have been glad to have sold it for \$1,000.

“I moved to the farm with my collie dog in the fall of 1931. There are few better companions than a wise collie. We disagreed about only one thing. I was in the habit of killing any rat I could manage to catch. This dog held the belief that nothing should ever be killed and would plainly give me to understand that it wasn't fair, in his opinion, to hurt those poor rats.

“In 1932 I re-married and started raising a few beans and farming some of the fertile patches that had withstood a generation of cotton cropping.

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I had over four hundred hens part of the time but that many hens can easily eat fifty or sixty dollars' worth of feed in a month, and frequently make a return of fifteen or twenty dollars worth of eggs. At any rate I found there was no money to be made on worn-out farm, but kept on always in hopes of finding a buyer at some price in the next few months. The farm was profitable only in one respect - it was a pleasant place to live. I sold it in 1937 and netted \$500 on it. I may say that I received \$500 on my house which had cost at least \$6,000 above rent. I believe it is generally cheaper to rent than to buy.

“I built a trailer to live in and came back to Atlanta to try for a job, but didn't have the luck of finding one. In fact, if it had not been for a little trading which I did in stocks I would have been out of cash long before I sold the farm. Stocks have a great advantage over most other forms of property in that they can be sold at some price. Trading stocks is not a job that is suitable to many. It requires very careful study. A person attempting to trade on a little newspaper opinion and so-called expert advice is almost certain to have serious losses. The reason is not hard to see. When prices are at the bottom they are there because it is almost the unanimous opinion that things are bad and getting worse, and when they are at the top it is because every one expects even better things. The only

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people I have ever known who made money consistently were those who formed their own opinions and made a business of their trading. A great many people who would not think of playing against professionals for money in a card game will attempt to speculate. They are playing a far more complicated game in competition with very shrewd opponents. No, I do not regard speculation as gambling unless you are willing to define all buying and selling in hopes of a profit as gambling, and I think any one would be justified in buying and equity if he had good reason to think it would soon be worth more in selling if he thought it likely to decline. However, I am sure that if any one thinks it a way to make easy money he has not realized the requirements of successful trading. I never had so much as a thousand dollars in the market and of course frequently found I was mistaken, or right too soon, but during the seven years I made something every year but one. That year I lost about \$200. During my best year I made about [\$800?].

“The recent reforms in the market were badly needed but scarcely go far enough to be called a thorough job. I think the only serious mistake was made in making the margin requirements too high. That probably caused the 1937 panic to be more severe than it would have been otherwise. This requirement has reduced later.

“Living in a trailer is very much like living in an efficiency apartment. Trailers are very comfortable both in warm and cold weather and, after one has learned to have ‘a place for everything and everything in its place’, the trailer is more convenient than most houses. However, I am working on some plans for a small portable house which can be carried on a trailer frame and can be erected or reloaded on its carrier in a few hours. I want to have the plans ready to use in case I get a sale for the trailer which I am now using. Such a house can be made at a cost of from \$200 to \$400 for materials and is far more convenient than the average house.

“The average American of low income certainly does not select his food so has to get the maximum value for the amount he spends. It seems to me that it would be well worth while if more instruction were given to such matters. Of course, any one can find all kinds

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of articles telling about calories, proteins, minerals, vitamins, and so on, but the trouble with that is that even the few who read and understand such articles do not apply them. What we need is some very low-priced diets which are sufficient to maintain 15 good health and as persistent a hammering on the subject as there is, for instance, on the merits of advertised foods or the great curative powers of patent medicines. Some of my neighbors in the country were evidently suffering from malnutrition though they spent more for groceries than I did. Their houses and surroundings were very unsanitary. It costs no more to have clean surroundings and a well-balanced diet than to live on hog and hominy in a house which any up-to-date farmer would consider unfit for cattle.

"I don't believe that any one thoroughly understands all of the causes of depressions; at least it is a subject on which the 'doctors' are about unanimous in their disagreement. Certainly Presidents Coolidge and Hoover did not understand the subject, or they would scarcely allowed our present situation to develop while they smilingly assured the American people that all was well with the world and the best of our coming prosperity was just around the corner. I do believe I can claim to have been more foresighted than that, for I sold the small amount of stock which I owned jointly with my mother before the 1929 break and, as before stated, would have been very glad to sell all the other property I owned.

"The depression was very possibly made during the years [1913?] to 1927 when most of us were spending more than we had really made. The sum of debts, if the estimates are at all correct, represented much too large a proportion of our total wealth, and they could only be carried by a continual advance in values. The world depression stopped that. Then the forced economy and the shrinking of values began and the depression fed on its own growth. Hoover, due to the political situation, was practically powerless. I doubt that, with the emergency powers later given to Roosevelt, he would have taken sufficiently drastic action, as he took too much of a banker's view of the situation. The United States were simply due to follow the rest of the world in revaluing money and reorganizing industry.

“Any inspection of employment and production figures plainly shows that there was a considerable increase in the hourly production, especially during the last fifteen years. Our distribution of income must be adjusted to the increase in labor efficiency if that increased production is to be used. A concentration of wealth in the hands of a small proportion of our citizens cannot possibly be made consistent with general prosperity. Regardless of whether one believes that enormous fortunes are acquired by moral individuals or not, the general good requires that they should not exist and certainly that these should not endure in the hands of a hereditary class. We have an excellent illustration of the effect of concentration of power and wealth in the thousand year's depression which Asia has suffered. The poverty of Asia is not produced by the inferiority of its people but by the lack of good governments and political freedom. In the United States I believe that our past prosperity has been due to our more fair distribution of wealth among those who produced it rather than to the efforts of a few who have managed to control large enterprises.

“The New Deal policies seem to me to be generally correct, and the American people appear to have some understanding of what is happening. They are not likely to hand the full control back to our former masters. However, I do not think we are going to see the 1929 levels reached rapidly. Too many people are now accustomed to live on a lower consuming level than they did in the 1920's. Very few of these I know who were earning well during that period are now spending as freely as they did then. To reach that glorious but rather silly level of spending, we must probably wait until a new generation of spenders, arrives.

“I have been working on the W. P. A. for about three months. The W. P. A. or some such arrangement is almost a necessity as long as our industrial organizations are unable to properly employ people who are able to work. I believe that in time we will again adjust things, however, so that it will not be necessary. It scarcely would be beneficial to business

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employment or production to have the millions now depending on W. P. A. unable to buy at all.

“I am not a member of any church, though if I were to choose one of the [?] would probably suit me fairly well. It seems to me that the Christian Churches generally are making an attempt to worship both God and [?], a thing which their founder warned them could not be done.

“The prospects of getting employment do not seem especially good, but there should be a pretty fair chance of starting a small business. I knew a well-to-do Chinaman in Manila who began business with about \$25, but of course he was only a ‘Heathen Chinese’.”