

Manhattan sketch

BY ELGIN E. GROSECLOSE, '20

BUY AN APPLE

New York, December 1, 1930

When the history of the Depression of 1930 is written it will probably be said 'twas the apple saved the day. Although the Franciscan brothers must be credited with the first popgun barrage against Want, and the Big Business brigade led up the heavy artillery with their \$6,000,000 fund, the 'Buy an Apple' campaign was the first effective engagement of the battle.

After the frosts began to nip the ears and restless men began to pace the parks at night too penniless to purchase lodging even at a quarter and too cold to sleep on the benches, the Brotherhood at their chapel on Twenty-eighth street mobilized their funds and began to dole out nickles. Nickles for the simple reason that there weren't sufficient dimes to go round. Men stood patiently in lines three abreast and a block deep waiting to file past the cowed monk who stood on the steps handing each one a five cent piece and a cigarette. The cigarette could be smoked, if there were a match handy, but about the only thing a nickel will buy in New York is a subway ride. True, there is one noted restaurant down in Fulton street which dispenses all sorts of sandwiches at five per, but although one may walk a mile for a Camel, five miles is a long way to trudge for a sandwich.

The apple idea originated, either from motives of charity or a desire to remove a market glut—or perhaps both—with the International Apple Association of which Joseph Sicker is president. It was conceived and executed in a thorough practical, typically American fashion, and whatever the motives the result was magnificent. A fund was started with which to buy apples and sell them below cost to the unemployed. Anyone out of work may apply at the Association offices and receive a card entitling him to buy a box containing 88, 90 or 100 apples at a price somewhat below the regular wholesale price. Those having no money re-

ceive them on credit, paying when they have sold the apples. Only about ten per cent fail to return to pay.

The result was immediate and overwhelming. Apples appeared, overnight, on every corner—and between corners. Going up from the Jersey ferries, you pass about four stands to the block. At the Hudson Tube terminal they are still thicker. Around Grand Central the scene resembles the Novogorod Fair, and you have to tread carefully to avoid spilling someone's apple stand. Six thousand men and several score women, most of whom had certainly never worked but for wages before, discovered themselves not only making a living (though meagre) but potential Wanamakers.

The six thousand are of all sorts and descriptions, some taciturn, some hopeful, some insistent and raucous. They range from unshaved derelicts who have never known a regular job to neat looking fellows whose faces are freshly shaved but collars dirty. In age they vary from boys of twelve to old men getting on toward eighty. The women wear silk hose, some have fur trimmed coats and their noses are freshly powdered. Only their shoes show the effect of much tramping and their hats the grime of city streets.

New York response has been equal to the appeal. The city has become, in fact, apple-conscious. Apple munching is the popular pastime. People eating them while hastening to work, while riding in subways and mounting elevators. Debutantes throwing cores into the gutters along Park Avenue. The merits of Northern Spy vs. Gravenstein are hotly debated. The Winesap, the Delicious, the Jonathan and the Macintosh each have their advocates.

A pathetic sight is to witness some benevolent gentleman, his pockets bulging, an expression on his face of one

who has dined not wisely but too well—a cross between that of a well fed cat and an approaching attack of cholera morbus—gazing wistfully at a big Delicious which he has just bought. He looks hopefully, then helplessly, at a small boy who has just tossed away a core, then at a mechanic with pockets also bulging. Not even a horse in sight.

In the first sixteen days three million apples were bought by hungry and philanthropic New Yorkers—that of course in addition to those sold on the regular fruit stands. Not quite an apple a day for everybody, but then doctors also must live. Three million apples at five cents apiece comes to \$150,000.

How long the apple will continue to hold the battle line is a question. Already Yankee shrewdness is asserting itself. The destitute yesterday have today entered the capitalist class and are hiring others to hawk apples for them. Evidences of 'racketeering' are beginning to appear. Tickets issued to unemployed are finding their way into the hands of regular retailers who are thus supplying themselves below the market. The wholesalers also have begun to advance their prices. Finally there is the matter of how long New York's appetite will hold out. The whole scheme may collapse from indigestion.

Meantime, other agencies have gotten into action. Armories are being thrown open for destitute sleepers. Soup kitchens and bread lines have been started. None of these of course get at the root of the problem like the apple campaign. The Big Boys of Wall Street, who from their skyscraper pinnacles have been watching the progress of the storm since last April, and who might have at any time during the past three years cast their eyes toward the street below and seen stray cats of humanity at nightfall stealthily steal up to garbage cans and scratch among the refuse, have finally unlimbered their guns. The comic opera climax of the movement is the 'Buy Now' campaign being waged by retailers anxious to rid their shelves of unwanted merchandise. One shoe store chain placards in bold letters 'As our contribution to relieve depression, we are reducing prices on all our shoes.' Presumably, it will have no difficulty in finding an object for its solicitude.

When all is written and we look back from the complacent heights of the next Bull Movement on the Depression, 1930 the 'Buy an Apple' campaign of the International Apple Association will be recalled as the most immediate, practical and picturesque incident of the period. So much so that the apple may remain the symbol of the time—just as the rose recalls a protracted struggle between two rival English houses, or the poppy the last great mankilling.