E.M. Jellinek and All That!

A Brief Look Back at the Origins of Post-Repeal Alcohol Science in the United States

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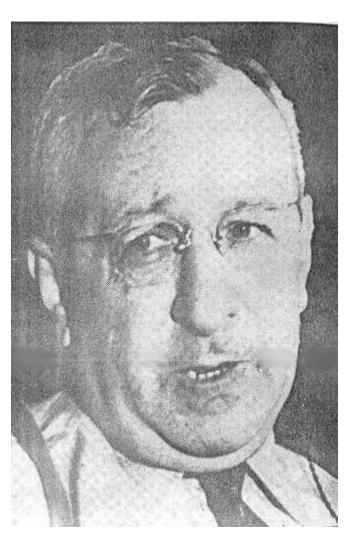
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American alcohol science was effectively reborn in the 1930s -- as it happened, the same decade Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was born. Unlike AA, however -- which in due course gave rise to an enormous historical literature -- alcohol science has attracted little historical interest. "Why?" is a good question.

I wonder if the sixty-plus-year period that has passed since the post-Repeal origins of modern alcohol science is long enough that some of us -- perhaps especially younger researchers -- may take the alcohol science tradition for granted and tend to assume (if and when the matter is given any thought at all) that, like death and taxes, the institution has always been there. That would be quite incorrect, of course. Preprohibition and 19th-century traditions of alcohol research and alcoholism treatment were virtually wiped out by the 18th or prohibition Amendment's passage -- save for pockets of polemically oriented scientific work cultivated by the Dry and Wet sides in the great battle for Repeal. A mainstream alcohol science tradition did not exist in the U.S. in 1930, and it would take years -- how many is another interesting question -for alcohol science to secure a position as one of the two leading institutions in American society (the other was AA) respecting informed opinion on alcohol-related issues. This by now enduring alcohol science institution and tradition did not simply happen on the scene. As a professor of mine at Berkeley used to say, "History doesn't just happen, somebody somewhere has to do something!" And so what I'd like to recount to you today is a glimpse of some of the somebodies in the story (some familiar and others less so), some of the somethings they did, and, finally, some of the

context in which they strived to launch a new scientific pursuit in post-Repeal America.

Let's begin with the grand old man himself, Elvin Morton Jellinek (1890-1963) -- better known simply as "E.M." or, among his family and closest associates, "Bunky" - Hungarian for "little radish." There was no more colorful nor important figure in the story of the new alcohol science movement, though he more properly belongs to the story's *middle* rather than its *beginning*. Jellinek would become the chief scientific hero of both the emergent "alcohol science movement" and the "modern alcoholism movement." He is still remembered and honored today in citations of his work, in the annual "Jellinek Memorial Award" (given to the greatest scholarly contribution to human knowledge on problems relating to alcohol), and also in the occasional



suggestion in the literature that "alcoholism" should be renamed "Jellinek's Disease."

Jellinek as pictured in the Nov. 25, 1946 issue of Time magazine. Time's text described Jellinek in this article as "the bustling director" of Yale's alcohol studies group. He served briefly as the director of the Yale group's Section on Alcohol Studies but was passed over in favor of Selden Bacon for the directorship of the renamed Center of Alcohol Studies in 1950.

By some accounts Jellinek was also a bit of a charlatan. Among other endearing frauds, for instance, he appears to have fabricated his doctorate and in fact may have held no college degree at all. A hint of the iffy quality of his academic certification is offered in the pages of the early *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* -- where his signatures to his first published papers described his doctorate as honorary, but that qualification disappeared in later publications. e.g., I hasten to add that one of Jellinek's distinguished colleagues at Yale, Edith Lisansky

Gomberg, once commented to me that if Jellinek was a fraud then "...the field *needs* more frauds like him -- at least he was *interesting*!"

Jellinek was born in 1890 in New York City, the son of an Hungarian-Jewish immigrants, themselves part of a distinguished extended family in Europe. The only source we have on Jellinek's pre-alcohol-research life is a very sketchy three-page memo written by his daughter, Ruth Surry, to R. Brinkley Smithers in the mid-1960s.³ It reports that Jellinek's father returned to Budapest when Jellinek was still

Effects of Alcohol on the Individual: Review of the Literature of 1939.*

E. Morton Jellinek, M.Ed., Sc.D. (Hon.)

Executive Director, Study of the Effects of Alcohol on the Individual.

Norman Jolliffe, M.D.

Associate Professor of Medicine, New York University College of Medicine; Chief of the Medical Service of the Psychiatric Division, Bellevue Hospital.

Received for publication April 10, 1940.

INTRODUCTION

ITHIN a century a jungle of 96,000,000 words has grown around the problem of alcohol. The lack of comprehensive periodic surveys of this dense growth has made itself felt in the task of compiling a critical reference work on the effects of alcohol

pre-school age. Surry had only a vague sense of her father's college

Jellinek's doctorate is described as honorary in the first paper he published in the Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol

career. Thereafter, "he served for a few months as a captain in the Hungarian Red Cross in World War I," writes Surry, "carrying medical supplies to

the front lines." After Hungary's defeat, Jellinek worked briefly in a government school for "nervous children," and thereafter became involved in the fast-paced arena of post-World War I currency speculation. He went broke -- taking others with him, says Surry -- and beat a hasty retreat in 1920. His family did not hear from him until five years later, when he reported in that he was working for a steamship line in Sierra Leone under the name of Nikita Hartmann. Later in the 1920s, still under the Hartmann name, Jellinek worked on banana research in Honduras for the United Fruit Company. In 1931, he took a job as a biostatistician at Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts. Surry's candid memo -- which harbored still more exotic hints and clues about Jellinek's peripatetic and remarkable past -- cries out that a thorough-

An Outline of Basic Policies for a Research Program on Problems of Alcohol*

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Associate Professor, Applied Physiology, Yale University.

Received for publication May 21, 1942.

HIS memorandum submits to the Scientific Committee of the Research Council on Problems of Alcohol certain conclusions emanating from the review of the alcohol literature sponsored by the Research Council under the title Study of the Effects of Alcohol

going biography of the man be undertaken by competent hands!

Soon afterward, however, the honorary qualification was dropped -- as shown for example in Jellinek's important 1942 paper charting a future course for the still-fledgling alcohol science movement.

Jellinek entered the alcohol field in 1939 when he was hired by Dr. Norman Jolliffe to manage the new Carnegie Project, the first substantial grant won by a group called the Research Council on Problems of Alcohol, the chief locus for emergent alcohol science in the late 1930s. Jellinek was about 50 when he signed on, yet still an alcohol research greenhorn. Surry's memo, once again, recalled that Jellinek "knew very little about alcoholism but he was interested so he got some books on the subject and spent a weekend in bed studying."^{3, p. 3} Jellinek devoted the rest of his life to the field. He suffered a fatal heart attack at Stanford in 1963, where he was hard at work on the Cooperative Commission Report.⁴ Incidentally, it wasn't easy for Jellinek to find work in the later years of his career -- a reminder that even the field's celebrated scientific hero couldn't take support for granted in this still-marginal area of science.

Why was Jellinek so famous, so revered, and so important to the field? His two most notable scientific contributions were (1) the description of the alcoholism syndrome⁵ and (2) an alcoholism prevalence formula⁶ that bore his name, based on current cirrhosis mortality. Both were published in the early 1950s -- incidentally, one as a mere "research note" in the *QJSA* and the other as a mere "annex" to a WHO report. But Jellinek had earned his fame and standing *before the 1950s* -- primarily by serving as the great *salesman* for science vis a vis the nation's longstanding tensions around alcohol. He tackled the nettlesome problem of defining science's would-be role in relation to society and alcohol, and, as Penny Booth Page put it, acted -- at times brilliantly -- "as impresario to a newly emerging field."^{7, p. 1634}

This, of course, was (and remains) no mean task. One must try to imagine how blank was the slate for this new scientific endeavor. What, exactly, was a new science of alcohol to contribute? What research problem or problems would it tackle? And how, in turn, would these problems be related to society's ostensible choices respecting alcohol? Problem definition is a notoriously open-ended aspect of scientific activity, and so Jellinek and his cohort of would-be alcohol scientists faced an open-ended and complex problem in defining the new science's aspirations and intended contributions. The situation was made all the more challenging by rapidly changing social conditions. Jellinek arrived at no single solution to the problem of defining science's relationship to alcohol and society. In fact, one of his gifts may well have been a certain nimbleness that allowed him to adjust, shift, or integrate problem focuses with changing circumstances.

What was the Carnegie Grant, which had hired Jellinek into his new alcohol research career? Until about a decade ago, the only picture we had of the Carnegie Grant derived from Mark Keller's reminiscences of his early years in the field, when he worked as Dr. Norman Jolliffe's editorial and research assistant at Bellevue Hospital in New York. According to Keller's account, ^{e.g., in 8} Jolliffe, a Bellevue internist and faculty member at the NYU Medical School, had applied to the Rockefeller establishment for an ambitious, seven-year grant to study alcoholism -- incidentally,

thereby planning to make good research use of the steady flow of admissions to Bellevue's alcoholic ward. Rockefeller people took an initial interest in Jolliffe's proposal and sent him to tour European alcoholism research and treatment projects. On Jolliffe's return to the U.S., however, Rockefeller interest flagged. Not wishing to let a good thing expire, New York University brass organized a prestigious scientific advisory committee to give Jolliffe's project much needed symbolic support. That entity in due course, according to Keller, became the Research Council on Problems of Alcohol.

There can be no doubt that the Bellevue alcoholism ward had an involvement in the Council's early history. For instance, Jolliffe's boss at Bellevue, psychiatrist Karl M. Bowman, turns up as chairman of the RCPA's executive committee in an announcement of the new group's plan in *Science* magazine in October, 1938. But there were other aspects of the RCPA's membership and structure that throw doubt on Keller's account. First, the Council's membership in 1938 comprised a large and prestigious assemblage of U.S. scientists -- including, for instance, two Nobel Prizewinning physicists (Robert A. Millikan and Arthur Holly Compton) and seven past, present, or future presidents of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) (among them, Harvard physiologist Walter B. Cannon, economist Wesley C. Mitchell, and astronomer Harlow Shapley). Next, there is the odd fact that whereas Jolliffe's study addressed the topic of *alcoholism*, the Carnegie grant's focus lay on the *effects of alcohol on man*. Finally, the Carnegie project's literature reviewing approach possessed an altogether extraordinary fact-checking procedure in which would-be elements of a new scientific canon on alcohol would first be judged



DR. KARL M. BOWMAN Long, notable career

established, doubtful, or not valid according to the review, and then passed up a kind of scientific chain of command for higher and higher levels of scientific validation. See 10, chapt. 8 What on earth might such an exacting and elaborate procedure have to do with Jolliffe's proposed study of alcoholics at Bellevue?

Karl Murdock Bowman (1888-1973) soon departed the east coast and the RCPA for San Francisco, where he helped establish and later headed the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute from 1941 to his semi-retirement in 1956. Bowman was a much sought after psychiatric witness in criminal proceedings in his day -- "the most celebrated instance" of such testimony, according to one obit, , "...was his testimony in the dramatic Leopold-Loeb murder trial in 1924" This photo is borrowed from Bowman's obituary in the San Francisco Examiner (3/4/73).

We know now that the Council and its prize catch, the Carnegie grant, had roots that stretched deeper than Jolliffe's proposal. We know that the Council's origins may be traced all the way back to a curious *educational* dilemma that cropped up for the nation's public schools in the wake of Repeal in 1933. On the nation's long historical road to the passage of national prohibition, a woman named Mary H. Hunt had pushed for temperance education in public schools. She was enormously successful in this venture, and by 1919, when prohibition passed, virtually every state in the union had statutes or even constitutional provisions mandating a very parched form of alcohol education in public schools. With prohibition's imposition, however, these laws fell into disuse. Unlike the drug education measures common in today's schools, Americans educators in the 1920s may have found it a tad unbecoming to teach

children not to do something that the laws of the land already prohibited!



Mary H. Hunt became deeply involved in the textbook industry for temperance, hygiene, and physiology in American public schools and was said to have amassed a considerable fortune from her efforts -- which wealth ultimately strained her relationship with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

But those same state-level educational laws kicked back into effect with Repeal in 1933. And, as it happened, they kicked back into a cultural atmosphere that was unreceptive to the bone-dry, hellfire-and-brimstone tone of pre-Prohibition temperance education. Thoughtful citizens were reluctant to re-kindle the debate over alcohol with such materials. Moreover, the nation's great struggles over both the

prohibition and repeal amendments had created a mass of propaganda labeled as science on both sides of the alcohol issue, making middle-of-the-road educators and citizens unsure of what recent, credible, and mainstream science actually had to say about alcohol. After Repeal, more than a few states soon formed "educational commissions," which sought to reconstitute alcohol pedagogy on the latest independent or mainstream scientific information on alcohol -- thus creating credible educational content more in tune with the times and less reflective of the old passions of the temperance enthusiasm.

A man named Harry Hascell Moore was a specialist in health and education policy. He saw an opportunity to make a social contribution as well as generate a job for himself by organizing a one-time, grand, national conference that would assemble the scientific expertise necessary to resolve outstanding and contested articles of

knowledge about alcohol and the human organism. The substantive results of this conference would then serve as the authoritative source for new pedagogy across the nation. The group Moore brought together to orchestrate this big event was called the "Sponsoring Committee of the National Conference on Alcohol." It held its first meeting in June of 1937, and its initial membership comprised some of the bigwigs of the educational community -- including, for example, Willard E. Givens, Executive Secretary of the nation's powerful National Education Association, who served as the Sponsoring Committee's titular head. It may be suggested that the contemporary struggle over alcohol pedagogy represented a shift from the question of alcohol's "legal and commercial" status (as fought out in the debate over Repeal) to the question of alcohol's "symbolic status" in our culture (as defined in the nation's post-Repeal official pedagogy). Interestingly, alcohol's symbolic status had not been habilitated by wets during the Repeal struggle -- since wets fought chiefly "against prohibition" and not "for alcohol." 10

The Sponsoring Committee's members reasoned that they needed an affiliation with a mainstream scientific organization in order to vouchsafe their neutrality and gain scientific credibility. The group first approached the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. But Academy Executive Secretary, Albert L. Barrows, wasn't sold on the idea and, among other comments, suggested that more energy needed to be spent reviewing the scientific literature on alcohol *before* work on the organization of the conference should be commenced. The group next approached the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) with the same proposition -- in effect, "be our source of scientific credibility and vetting." Earl B. McKinley, Dean of the George Washington University Medical School and acting on behalf of the Sponsoring Committee, put the proposal in December, 1937, in



Indianapolis, to the AAAS's Executive Committee at the Association's annual meetings.

Bacteriologist Earl Baldwin McKinley (1894-1938) perished little more than a half-year later, when a Pan American clipper crashed into the Pacific on a flight from Guam to Manila. According to a newspaper account, McKinley and an associate were "utilizing the flight to test a theory that germs of some diseases are carried thru the air."

The AAAS was favorably disposed. And their welcoming attitude toward the fledgling alcohol group probably stemmed from a lucky overlap in interests. Recall that December, 1937 falls during the Great

DR. EARL B. McKINLEY

Depression. Scientists, as a class of workers, were particularly hard hit by the depression. Employment rates fell sharply as industries cut back research investment. Moreover, the public image of science had become deeply tarnished by the popular view that the depression's massive unemployment rate had been occasioned in significant part by labor-saving technological advances provided by modern science. There were even calls that a moratorium on scientific work should be declared until the economy got back on track. The AAAS's newly appointed Permanent Secretary, astronomer Forest R. Moulton, had a bold plan to resuscitate scientific employment and re-burnish science's public image via something he called the "Science & Society Movement." Moulton sought to bring to the public's attention the social conscience and social contributions of science. Ivory tower scientists didn't simply cause hardship by their indifference to the social consequences of their innovations, Moulton argued; scientific method, for example, might even help society solve important social problems. see 11



There is something deliciously unlikely about the fact that distinguished mathematical astronomer and AAAS secretary, Forest Ray Moulton (1872-1952), was a significant player in the fledgling alcohol science movement in the U.S. Aside from the improbability, Moulton's involvement evidences the importance of a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of alliances and constituencies in the birth and early development of the new alcohol science enterprise.

The makings of a *quid pro quo* were in place, therefore, when the alcohol group approached the AAAS. The alcohol group wanted scientific credibility for its grand national conference from the AAAS, and the AAAS, for its part, looked upon the alcohol group as a wonderful opportunity to put Moulton's claims of scientific social responsibility into action -- thereby showcasing that modern science had a heart as well as a head.

But this confluence of interests brought changes to the alcohol group's agenda. For one, scientists were less interested in a single national conference than in establishing an on-going area of scientific specialization and support. The group's name was changed accordingly to the Research Council on Problems of Alcohol. Scientists gained in influence at the expense of educators.

Not everybody was entirely happy with the new AAAS-sanctioned alcohol research council. Some temperance voices, for instance, saw the new scientific initiative as implying that more knowledge was needed about alcohol -- whereas temperance thought held that plenty of knowledge was already on the books to condemn alcohol outright.



Virginia ordered doctors to write the truth, then burned what they wrote

This poor quality image of Waddell & Haag's report being shoveled into the furnace is borrowed from journalist Virginius Dabney's article on the Virginia fiasco, published in a short-lived magazine titled simply Ken. ¹² The controversy got virtually no national press attention, and I had never heard of it until chancing upon Frederick Lewis Allen's brief account in Since Yesterday (1968, p. 118). Allen's source was Dabney's lone article -- all of which is an object lesson in how even relatively notorious events in their own time can come perilously close to historical oblivion.

A dramatic confrontation between temperance sentiment and mainstream scientific evaluations of alcohol took place in the spring of 1938, soon after McKinley had approached the AAAS in Indianapolis. Down in Virginia, two pharmacology professors, J.A. Waddell and H.B. Haag, had produced an overview report on alcohol's effects on the human organism at the request of the state's Legislature -which body hoped the new review would help reconstitute the state's alcohol pedagogy. When news leaked that the two scientists' report contained language to the effect that moderate drinking was unharmful, temperance organizations in the state immediately rallied and deluged the legislature and the governor's office with cries of objection. Stunned state legislators soon voted to have the one thousand copies of Waddell and Haag's report burned -- unread! -- in the capitol furnace, which burning was duly carried out by the building's fire marshall on April 26th, 1938. And though the destruction of the report had been partly occasioned by the legislature's desire to see publication rights flow back to the authors, the new scientific membership of the RCPA looked upon the book-burning with a sense of foreboding -- and growing resolve.

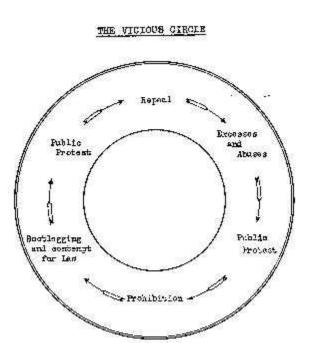


Harvey Bernhardt Haag (1900-1961) was a light-hearted and much loved pharmacology professor at the Medical College of Virginia. A typescript obituary written by a fellow faculty member recounted in part: 'None of his students will ever forget his breezy entrance with broad smile, bow tie cocked jauntily, and cigar in hand, and his first greeting to them of 'happy days are here again.' From that moment on, their attention was held not only the the clarity of his presentations, but also by his flashing wit that kept each session alive with good humor....And how out of all this evolved 'Harvey Haag Day,' those happy good-humored days in which the male students appeared with bow ties, burnt-cork mustaches, lighted cigars, and with the ladies, also outfitted imaginatively, took over proceedings for the hour with carefully planned take-offs of various teachers in pharmacology and other disciplines...',13

The text of the Research Council's proposal for the Carnegie grant, written a year later, made direct reference to these events in Virginia. "In

consideration of this experience," one sentence read, "and of the confused state of public opinon regarding the effects of alcohol, it seems especially desriable that a further fact-finding be conducted by a large and representative group of scientists of unquestioned authority." In this way, the Council saw itself and the Carnegie proposal as a kind of scientific cavalry, riding in to give Waddell and Haag's beleagured scientific outpost much needed back-up.

For *our* purposes, this background helps explain why the Carnegie proposal had its particular focus, why so prestigious an assemblage of U.S. scientists was involved in the new enterprise, and, as well, how both Repeal and the Great Depression -- two larger features of contemporary history -- were important factors in shaping the new scientific initiative.



An early RCPA draft brochure included this "vicious circle" illustration of the historical problem that the new scientific organization wished to address. The historical "wheel" they present shows "Repeal" at the top, then "Excesses and Abuses," then "Public Protest," then "Prohibition," then "Bootlegging and [Contempt] for Law," then "Public Protest," and then leading back to "Repeal" at the top. This focus on the problem of historical alternation was neither new nor confined to the RCPA. Fosdick and Scott's influential 1933 study, Toward Liquor Control, had highlighted the problem as well -- noting for example in the book's opening pages, "In four different periods in her history Iowa had some form of state-wide prohibition, alternating with license systems of one type or another."

If the early alcohol science movement sounds like a struggle, it certainly was! The new enterprise was strongly buffeted and shaped by a continuing dry-wet struggle over alcohol that survived Repeal -- especially in the nation's educational and regulatory arenas. The early alcohol science movement also had to "sell" science as a legitimate participant in our American discourse over alcohol and even as the appropriate institutional "owner" of the alcohol problems -- now displacing the longstanding hegemony of temperance ideology and political groups. Men like Harry Moore, Forest Moulton, Karl Bowman, and E.M. Jellinek had to market one or another aspect of science's "cultural capital" to the larger society -- in effect searching for a cultural niche that would allow the new scientific specialty both to make a useful contribution to society and to allow for the development of this new territory of scientific expertise and employment.



"You two should have much to discuss," said Professor Jellinek, introducing temperance worker Virginia Colvin, daughter of D. Leigh Colvin, 1936 prohibition candidate for president, to Merle Hagemeyer, a Seagram Distillers' employee

Shot borrowed from a 1943 Collier's article on the new Yale Summer School of Alcohol Studies titled provocatively, "Wet and Dry School." Yale's alcohol science program struggled hard to differentiate itself from both dry and wet camps. The article closed with an anecdote that sheds a little light on Jellinek's charm: "A young woman social worker addressed Doctor Jellinek, 'You've told us the bad effects of drinking. Can you tell me if there are any bad effects from not drinking?"

[&]quot;"Well,' said Jellinek, 'there's halo pressure -- a very dangerous thing.""¹⁵

The early Research Council had sought to fill a pedagogic need by staging its big national conference. When AAAS scientists infused the RCPA with new blood and new aims, however, scientists sought to give the new research territory an ongoing function. One problem the post-AAAS Council focused upon, for example, was how to free the nation from an historical pattern of cyclical alternations between periods of dry and wet political dominance. By the early 1940s -- when the heart of the alcohol science movement had moved from the Research Council in New York to the Yale Center in New Haven -- E.M. Jellinek articulated an "alcohol problems perspective" in which science's chief role was defined as that of understanding and interpreting the considerable complexity of this problem domain to the larger society. Jellinek's popular paradigm provided a framework that, for a time at least, allowed drys and wets to set aside their differences -- a welcome *modus vivendi* for a country that was after all at war at the time and needed nothing less than it citizenry split by the old alcohol divide.

Are matters really much different today? After a lengthy hiatus -- brought about by the hegemony of the modern alcoholism paradigm -- the dry/wet axis and struggle has re-appeared in the U.S. Once again, alcohol science (now an established scientific pursuit) is caught in the middle between conflicting values, perspectives, and models of alcohol problems. And scientists must decide anew how the institution of science can best perform a service for society as well as advance scientific knowledge. No mean tasks...then or now!

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¹³Larson, Paul S., "Obituary -- Harvey B. Haag" (typescript), n.d. (presumably written shortly after Haag's death on Oct. 14, 1961), received from the Thompkins-McCaw Library, Virginia Commonwealth University. (I thank VCU archivist Jodi Koste for this document.)

¹⁴Fosdick, Raymond B., and Scott, Albert L., *Toward Liquor Control*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933.

¹⁵Porter, Amy (with photographs by Knopf-Pix), "Wet and Dry School," Collier's, October 30, 1943.