Just Plain H.L. Hunt

by Tom Buckley

The richest American would like to be no different from you and me. He wears shiny blue suits, cuts his own hair and carries his lunch in a brown paper bag

"I just don't understand it," said the richest man in the United States. "No, I just don't understand it at all. I should have had you beaten by now, but it looks to me like you're going to win. . . . And here I was a-tellin' you what a great checker player I was."

Haroldson Lafayette Hunt's voice was wispy, unhurried, full of genial self-reproach. He fell silent. His blue-grey eyes flickered across my face and went out. Then, focusing on the board, clicking a couple of captured red pieces up and down in his big hands, he began to puzzle out his next move.

At last he slid one of his men out of the king row and into the black phalanx that marched up the center of the board. I tried to concentrate, but Hunt kept talking. "People think that checkers is a simple game," he said. "It isn't. It's more scientific than chess."

I moved a piece and took it back. "I didn't take my finger off it," I said. Hunt nodded. When I finally moved he seemed puzzled.

"That was your first mistake," Hunt said. "Your very first. For a while there I thought you were going to beat me." He moved and I had to jump. He double-jumped. A couple of moves later he had a king, and my men became fugitives, pursued to the double corner and destroyed.

Hunt folded up the board and put the checkers back in their box. "Let's sit outdoors for a while." Hunt is seventy-seven years old, and the air-conditioning gets him in his bones every once in a while. We walked out the front door and sat down on white wicker rockers under the six-columned portico. Dallas in July. The night was hot and wet. Even the moon seemed wet. The sky was the color of lead.

We rocked and talked. We had been talking almost nonstop for a couple of days. When Hunt had his way, which was most of the time, we talked about the Communist menace, about *Life Line*, his patriotic radio program, about his inspirational "teen-speakers" project, his books and his newspaper column. Whenever I could, I steered the conversation around to his picturesque early life, his adventures in the oil business, in which he has made a couple of billion dollars, and his exploits, until ten years ago, as the country's biggest gambler.

Hunt has always played a lone hand. He was all but unknown outside the oil industry, and not very well-known inside it, until after World War II. By then he was already worth a billion or so. In 1948 *Life* magazine breached his shield of anonymity. In an article on the new "big rich" of the Southwest, it ran a blurry photograph of him. It had been taken without his permission on a Dallas street. In the same year Hunt granted his first interview, but after that there was another long silence.

In the past few years Hunt has become more accessible. It has become apparent to him that granting interviews is cheaper and more effective than advertising and pamphleteering in putting his political and social views before the public. For the same reason he has become an energetic writer of letters to the editors of newspapers all over the country.

"I used to be afraid to speak," Hunt says. "Now I'm afraid not to." Hunt clearly believes it is his duty to issue his warnings. But he has been doing it for quite a few years now, and his attacks on the Supreme Court, the United Nations, the Federal Government—all of them as nests of subversives and incompetents—have lost their zip. When they are his topic he seems to wheez and grind like an old phonograph.

But when he can be persuaded to talk about his own career, the gloom lifts. His fears for the future are forgotten. Hunt spins along with wit and a countryman's understated humor. Caught up in the flood of reminiscence, he will talk for thirty or forty minutes at a stretch. Even so, there is a kind of tentativeness to what he says. It seems to be the uncertainty of a man recalling long-forgotten events after a silence of many years.

There's no self-importance to old H. L. Sitting there on his porch, he could have been a retired farmer idling away the sunset years. Even his clothing is the uniform of respectable, frugal, unconcerned old age. His inexpensive dark blue suit jacket is shiny and doesn't match his trousers. He wears a washed-out light blue shirt with a clip-on bow tie. His cotton socks sag and his shoes are cracked. His thin, fluffy white hair needs cutting; he will do it himself.

The richest man in the country, perhaps in the world? I ask myself again and again. Ruthless businessman? Arch-villain and propagandist of the Far Right? Deep plotter accused by two writers of complicity in the assassination of President Kennedy? Impossible, I tell myself. Ridiculous. With his great fortune, his stories of a long life that stretches back into an utterly different era of this country's history, his certainty that we're going to hell in a handcart, he seems much more like everybody's super-grandpa.

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen writes: "The gambling propensity is another subsidiary trait of the barbarian temperament. [The two major traits, he says, are 'ferocity and astuteness.'] It is a concomitant variation of character of almost universal prevalence among sporting men and among men given to warlike and emulative activities generally. . . . The chief factor in the gambling habit is the belief in luck."

Hunt's long life has been all gamble. It began with cards and went on to land speculation and oil exploration. Luck has often been the only apparent reason for great oil finds. Wildcatters have struck it rich with a bottom-of-the-bankroll well when one drilled fifty yards away would have been dry. "I've got more luck than brains," they often say. Hunt is more inclined to talk about his astuteness, but even he is proud of his "hunches." He likes to recall, "I had 10,000-barrels-a-day production before I even had a geologist working for me."

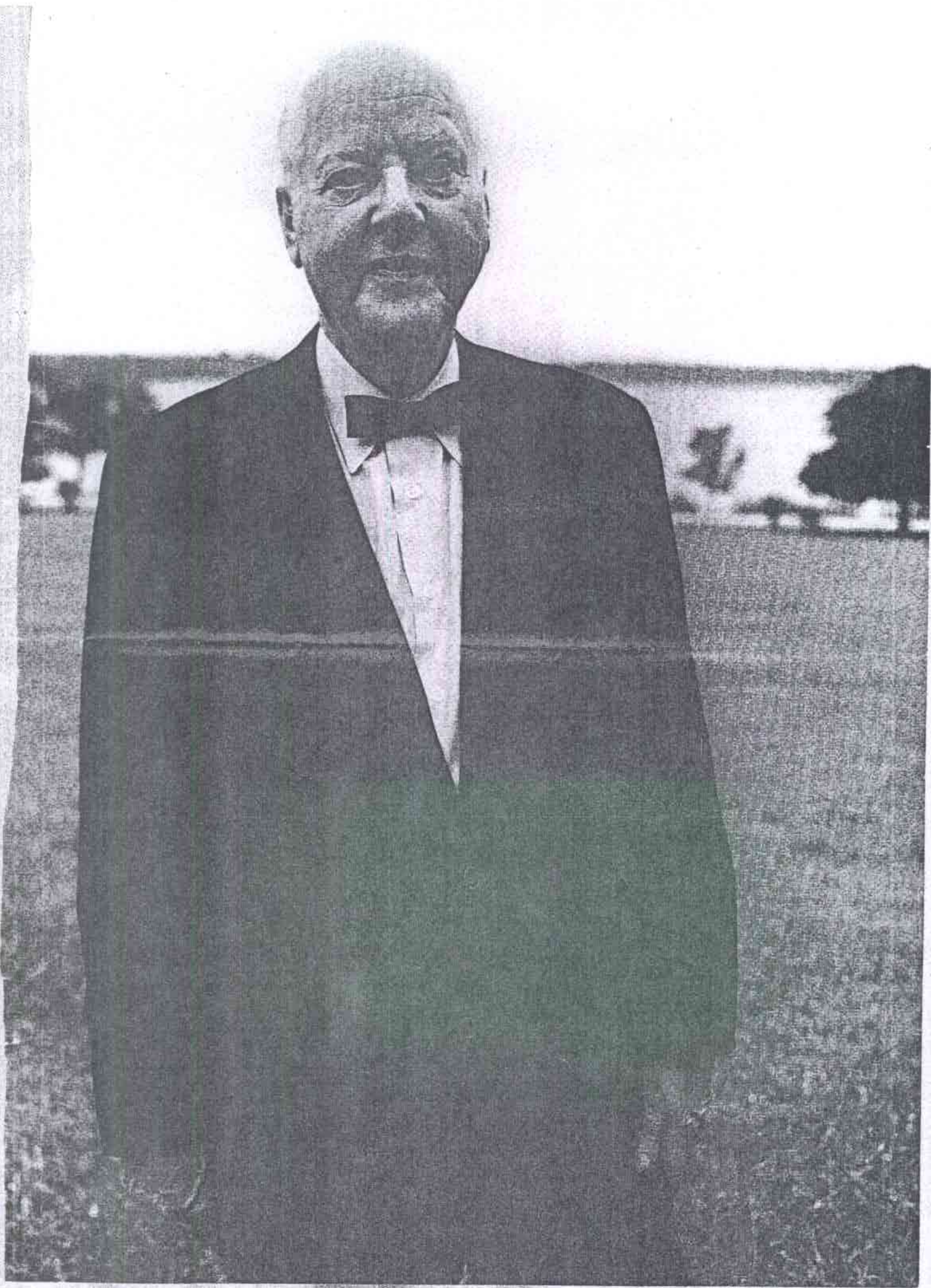
"I'd say that nineteen out of twenty people who try to break into the oil-producing business go broke," Hunt said one afternoon in his big corner office on the twenty-ninth floor of the First National Bank Building. It is a shining new fifty-two-story monument to Dallas' position as the commercial capital of the Southwest, in which Hunt's enterprises occupy six floors.

What always surprised him, Hunt went on, was that some men who knew everything there was to know about oil couldn't make money under any circumstances, while he, knowing far less, had done so well. The answer, implicitly, is luck, and because of their confidence in their luck, their nerve and their skill, and their belief that they must use these abilities to keep them, men like Hunt are often inveterate gamblers.

There are those who say that he entered the oil business by way of the poker table. Hunt denies this. People who knew him at the time say that he turned up in 1921, a busted land speculator and cotton grower, in the boomtown of El Dorado, Arkansas.

One story is that he literally won his first well in a game of five-card stud. An old-time petroleum reporter in Dallas says he has talked to men who swore they were sitting at the table when Hunt raked in the pot. But

Photographed by Diane Arbus



even if nothing so dramatic ever happened, says an oilman, also rich, the money with which he bought his first rig and drilled his first well was won at cards.

Hunt himself acknowledges that he was playing a lot of poker in those days, and says he never came up against a stronger player. It seems certain, in any event, that just as some children are born with sweet voices and perfect pitch, Hunt had a brain for the subtleties of games that combine chance and skill and are usually played for money.

The youngest of the eight children of a Confederate Army veteran who went north from Arkansas to escape the shame of Reconstruction, Hunt was born on a farm near Ramsey, Illinois. While he was still in short pants, he says, he could trim his older brothers at Authors. Flinch cards were the great home amusement in those days in all but the most straitlaced families and an accepted test of prowess for virtually all men.

Hunt's mother, the daughter of a Union Army chaplain and by family tradition descended from French royalty, made her youngest child her pet. The family was getting into easier circumstances and she had the time to baby him.

Young Hunt, his father's namesake and called "June" for short, could read, he says, by the time he was three. At the age of six, when other boys were ready to enter school, he had read his way through all of his brothers' and sisters' textbooks.

When he got to be sixteen, six feet tall and strong but just beginning to fill out to the two hundred pounds of his maturity, he went down to Vandalia, the county seat, and hopped a westbound freight, determined to see the country. In his bindle he carried a couple of decks of cards.

Work was easy to find, with harvest gangs in the Dakotas, in logging caps, at ranches in the high plains, driving a ten-mule team in the San Joaquin valley. And always there were the card games. Hunt played in noisy bunkhouses, in hobo jungles and in the backrooms of saloons in hamlets that squatted beside the tracks of the Frisco and the Katy and the Santa Fe.

"I was working in a logging camp in the Pecos Valley, near Flagstaff, New Mexico," he said. "Our camp was on a railroad branch line. There was another branch a couple of miles away that led to a camp where there was a Mexican gang. I used to go down there after work to play cooncan." I looked up. "It's a very scientific game," Hunt explained. "You play it with a Spanish forty-card deck without the eights, nines or tens.

"We were sitting outside and I was dealing, laying the cards on a crate. After a while I began to win, and win sensationally. It got so there was a regular procession from the bunkhouse, men bringing fresh money into the game. We kept on playing and finally it seemed like the money began to dry up a little bit. By then I had won nearly $4,000. I began to fold up. I put my money into tobacco sacks and put them in my pocket.

"I was graciously telling the Mexicans *adios*," Hunt said with a chuckle, "and I started down the tracks. When I got far enough so they couldn't shoot me, I ducked into the woods. I knew that if I stayed with the tracks they could overtake me with a handcar. I began running, and I ran all the way—it was six or seven miles—back to my own camp.

"I was certainly smart enough not to tell anyone what happened, and I slept out under a tree. During the night, two or three times I'd feel hands sort of patting my blankets in the darkness. I'd just stir uneasily. I was wide-awake, but I was pretending I was asleep. The next morning, early, I left."

Across Hunt's wide lawn could be seen a necklace of lights from cars on the road that circles White Rock Lake. A tattered American flag hung from a tall white pole in front of the house. His staff, which he supervises with Southern forbearance, sometimes neglects to lower it at night.

"I got to be known as Arizona Slim," Hunt said. "I had this tremendous physique from working in the woods. Once, I remember, when I was buying a suit—it cost $10—in Little Rock, a group of men came into the store. They had seen me on the street and they tried to talk me into being what they used to call a white hope. Jack Johnson was the heavyweight champion, and he was a Negro. They wanted me to train to fight him, but I hardly ever even got into fights, so I said, 'No, thanks.'

"The only pal I ever had—I don't recall his name now—and I had followed the wheat harvest into the Dakotas," Hunt said. "One night we were playing solitaire. We paid each other $52 for the deck, turnabout. You got back $5 for each card you played. Well, I ran the pack and he gave me $260. It was all the money he had. I tried to get him to take it back but he wouldn't.

"I tried to get him to take back $100 and then $50, but he kept saying, 'I don't need it.' I'd say, 'I don't need it, either. What would I do with it?' Finally, he said, 'You could go to college with it.' 'How could I,' I said, 'I've never even been to grade school.' But the more I thought about it, the better I liked the idea. I had heard of a school in Indiana and I decided to go there."

Hunt arrived at Valparaiso University three weeks late for the start of the 1906-07 school year. Despite this and his lack of formal education, he got himself admitted. "I tried to take everything," he said. "Latin, algebra, rhetoric, I think they called it, zoology, some kind of history. By the end of the term I was standing second in my class. I was also playing a lot of poker. With those older fellows it was like shooting fish in a barrel. After the start of the second term, though, I got sick. It was a very severe form of tonsilitis that I used to get. Finally, I had to drop out. I went home for a while and never went back."

A vague, cloudy look came into Hunt's old eyes. I got the feeling that he was thinking of the wanderlust that had kept him from becoming a college graduate and, perhaps, an accountant in Terre Haute or a teacher in St. Louis.

In 1911 his father died and Hunt came back to claim his inheritance. His father had prospered. The farm had grown to five hundred acres. There was also real estate in St. Louis. With a legacy that he says totaled nearly $5,000, Hunt headed south. His father had often spoken of the rich delta country on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi; he had fought there, in the battle of Ditch Bayou, one of the actions peripheral to the siege of Vicksburg.

The black cotton land had sold for $100 an acre before the Civil War; now it could be had for $15. Assuming a mortgage, Hunt bought a thousand-acre plantation, and planted a crop. Two weeks later the river flooded, inundating his land for three months. It was the first time it had happened, the natives told him, in thirty-five years. When the river subsided, Hunt gamely tried for a late corn crop but the cutworms got that.

Hunt found out the following year, he says, that "probabilities are not always dependable." The Mississippi overflowed again. In 1913 he borrowed some money and made his second attempt to grow cotton, encouraged by the certainty that there was at least no shortage of moisture in the soil.

It was a good year. The plantation made a bale an acre. Other good years followed. By the end of World War I, Hunt and the other delta planters had money to burn.

"A planter would sell his plantation, buy two or three automobiles, or go and visit Europe," Hunt said. "When he got homesick he would come back and buy his old plantation or another one. I traded back and forth, and there got to be a time when I was worth a couple of hundred thousand dollars."

When Hunt arrived in Lake Village, Arkansas, where he made his home at this period, he was not greatly admired. As an Illinoisan, he was regarded as little better than a scalawag. Even after the word got around that his father was a Confederate veteran, old-timers were still liable to reflexively mutter "blue-bellied Yankee s.o.b." when he walked by.

Hunt, who has always had a lively interest in the opposite sex, began courting a local belle named Lyda Bunker. She and her parents were Quakers. ("Before the far-left turn of the Quakers," Hunt says.) In 1914, after his second successful crop, she agreed to marry him.

Dixon T. Gaines, the treasurer of Chicot County, knew Hunt at the time. "He played with some real good poker players—my father was one of them," Gaines told a questioner not long ago. "He was considered as good as they were. Hunt also used to go across the river to Greenville, Mississippi. They had big games there, at the Planters Club. It was considered very unusual for a man as young as Hunt to hold his own in games like that.

"He was a very tough checker player, too," Gaines said. "He took the game very seriously, although I don't think he played for money. He was strong and popular with the men, and had a very good reputation. No, I

wouldn't say he was handsome and I don't think the girls liked him so well, but he had an intelligent face."

By 1920 Hunt says that he sensed that the cotton boom was coming to an end. He ordered his factors in New Orleans to sell his cotton. He also sold short in the futures market. But futures rose. Hunt posted margin until his cash was gone. He was closed out. Busted. His plantation lands were mortgaged for $200,000, far more than he could sell them for. In 1921 cotton dropped to $50 a bale, and everybody in the delta went broke. Hunt's forebodings had come twelve months too soon.

In that same year oil was discovered at El Dorado, ninety miles west of Lake Village. Hunt borrowed $50 from a local bank —he says that money had become so tight he needed three comakers—and struck out for the boomtown along rutted roads in his battered Dodge touring car.

Hunt's version of what happened in El Dorado is that he traded in oil leases, an occupation not requiring much capital, until he accumulated enough money to buy a battered rig and drill a well of his own. But Dixon Gaines said, "The story was current in Lake Village at the time that he patronized a gambling place, playing when he was not leasing and trading."

"Did you ever play poker in really fast company?" I asked Hunt on one occasion.

"The best there was. I played most of the time I wasn't working."

Had he ever come up against a better player?

"No," he said. "I don't think I ever did."

"Several years after I was married," he said, "I went to New Orleans. One of my daughters had to have her tonsils out. During the afternoon I went to the Planters Club in the Grunewald Hotel—it's the Roosevelt Hotel now—and I bought a hundred dollars' worth of chips. By the time I had to leave for dinner I had run it up to seven hundred dollars. I went back later in the evening and sat down in the no-limit game."

"With only seven hundred dollars?" I asked him.

"I was planning to play tight at the start," he said, "and you could always get a sight of the cards on the showdown for the amount of money you had in front of you if the last bet was too big for you to match."

Hunt went on with his story. "The best talent in the country was in that game. There was Jinks Miller, a man I'd been hearing about for years; White Top, Indian Jack, John Crow. These were nationally famous poker players. But I had an advantage. I knew them but they didn't know me. As far as they were concerned I was just a planter from the Mississippi delta, and planters were easy money for them.

"The game was five-card stud. That's all I ever played, except draw poker a few times. They also played 'dogs' in that game. A little dog was the deuce to the seven in different suits with one card missing; a big dog was the nine-spot to the ace. As I recall, it ranked over three of a kind—I think that's right—but lower than a straight.

"I still remember one hand," he said. "The first ace bet and I stayed in with a small pair, one up and one in the hole. Jinks Miller was sitting in back of me and he had an ace, too. He just called. No pairs were showing on the last card. Miller caught a king. He naturally assumed with his big front that he could move me out. He made a big bet and I called. I was pretty sure he hadn't paired because if he had had an ace or a king in the hole I was confident he would have raised on the second card. About three minutes later, while the next hand was being dealt, I saw him kind of jerk. I knew he had figured out how I knew I had him beat. I quit at midnight—I seldom played cards after midnight—with $10,200.

"Where I learned I was the best poker player in the world was during the El Dorado oil boom. The talent, the high-powered talent from all over the country, was there. Three different times I sewed up the game. Those fellows knew all there was to know about cheating, but after a while I heard the rumors that Hunt was onto something new, some new form of cheating.

"But I was so much better than most players I relied on my superior skill," he said. "It was just the same as cheating in a way. I'll show you what I mean."

We walked into the living room and Hunt asked one of the maids to see if she could find a deck of cards. When she finally produced a dog-eared deck from the drawer of an end table, Hunt fanned them face up.

"When I was playing poker," he said, "I had a photographic memory. I could look at cards like this for a moment and tell you every card in order. In poker you've got to remember what cards have been played. That's elementary. But there's another thing. Most players don't shuffle carefully. There's a tendency for cards to keep the same order they were discarded in.

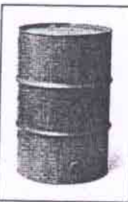
"If you noticed that a hand was thrown in like this—" here he picked up a king, jack, nine, five, three in different suits—"there's a chance that's worth betting on, if the dealer is using an overhand shuffle, that if the queen comes up the jack or the nine will be next."

Hunt riffled the cards a few times with his thick, stiff fingers and then put them away. He says he hasn't played poker more than a couple of times since 1921. He found that even the biggest games became penny-ante to him after he had made his fortune. And, he added, he was so much better than the competition that it took all the fun out of the game. I told him that his estimate of his abilities sounded a touch exaggerated, but he insisted it was accurate.

"There was a man I used to play with, he was the mayor of Lake Village, Arkansas, and he was about the tightest player I ever saw," Hunt said. "He never bluffed; he just couldn't do it. So when I'd bluff him out of a pot I'd throw my hand in so he could just get a glimpse of my hole card. I'd act like I didn't know I was doing it.

"After it happened a couple of times, him seeing that he had been bluffed, I knew that I had him set up, that he couldn't keep from trying it. A hand or two later, sure enough, he shoved out a big stack of chips. The other players said, 'Oh, oh, he's got it,' and they dropped out. But I said, 'I've got a notion to call you, just for practice.' The other players thought I was crazy, but I was right—he didn't have anything."

On a guess, I asked Hunt if he had ever played against Nick the Greek, the legendary poker talent, who is about his age. "Yes, in New Orleans," he said. "I didn't think so much of him. He was a talented gambler but he was impatient and always trying to liven up the game and so on. I always looked on him as more or less of a sucker. There were reports that Greek restaurant people sent him money to play with. The well-known gamblers could get a stake anytime."



The oil business is tricky and lessons are apt to be expensive. Hunt's first well was a moderately good producer, but after that he had a run of mistakes. He drilled too deep and then too shallow, he bought leases on the wrong side of proved acreage, sold oil to a small refining company that paid a couple of cents a barrel over the posted price, and saw it go bankrupt. He stayed solvent, although it is said that there were Saturday nights when he would have to find a poker game to win enough money in order to pay his crew.

But after a couple of years he hit his stride. He branched out into the West Smackover field and brought in forty small wells. He sold a half interest to Standard Oil for $600,000. It was his first big money. Hunt parlayed it in the Urania field in Louisiana and in West Texas.

After a couple of years of commuting back and forth to Lake Village on odd weekends, Hunt moved his family to El Dorado. The first of his six children, Haroldson Lafayette Hunt III, had been born in 1918. Harry B. Reeves, an El Dorado merchant who was Hunt's neighbor, remembers Hunt as a handsome, auburn-haired man who wore planter's white suits when he wasn't out in the oil fields.

"He had one of the keenest business minds for his education that I've ever encountered," Reeves said. "I remember he tried to get me to go in with him in the East Texas field, where he made his big money. If I had I'd be worth $100,000,000 today. Not that I mind; I've got a very nice business here.

"One thing about Hunt was that he always kept his word. [There was agreement on that among all the people I talked to about him.] A lot of oilmen, if they took a lease with a poor farmer or a nigger and the nearby holes turned out to be dry, why they'd find some fault in the title to keep from paying. Hunt never did that.

"Hunt talked very little in those days. I once asked him why and he said, 'What I

learned, Harry, was by listening.' He built himself a beautiful house on four acres in the nicest part of town. But, except for that, he didn't care for luxuries and he didn't try to put on a show.

"I see he's quite a churchgoer now," the El Dorado merchant said. "I never knew him to go in the old days, although Mrs. Lyda Bunker Hunt—she was a wonderful woman—and the children went regularly. Many's the time she would come to visit in the evenings and say that her husband was playing poker. Hunt was always quite a gambler."

By the end of the Twenties, Hunt was already a millionaire a couple of times over, and ready for bigger things. The opportunity soon came. In 1930 a shabby, friendly, seventy-year-old wildcatter named Columbus M. Joiner, known to everyone as Dad, was prospecting for oil in Rusk County in East Texas. It was an area about which all the experts agreed: not a chance of oil, they said. Joiner wasn't particularly optimistic himself, but the leases were cheap and these were the only kind he could afford.

With 4,000 acres under lease, Joiner had to raise money to drill. He decided to sell shares in the venture to the farmers and small businessmen of the county. Some got in for as little as $10 or $20. The Depression was already painful in East Texas and oil looked like the road to salvation.

The first well, drilled on the farm of a widow named Daisy Bradford, was dry. Joiner had to start selling shares again. He roved the sandy wastes and piney woods in his Model-T for a couple of weeks. By a miracle of persuasion he returned with the money for a second hole. It, too, was dry.

Caught up in the excitement of unremitting failure, and perversely surer than ever that pools of oil lay beneath his feet, Joiner performed prodigies of salesmanship. But cash had all but ceased to circulate in the countryside. Nevertheless, he began Daisy Bradford No. 3. His investors helped him to man the rig, their wives brought coffee and sandwiches out to the men.

At a thousand feet there was no sign of oil. Joiner heartened his volunteers and jollied his professional roughnecks by recalling that many years before in Oklahoma he had stopped drilling at what turned out to be eighteen feet above an enormous pool. "Ever since then," he liked to say, "I've always gone eighteen feet deeper."

At fifteen hundred feet traces of oil showed up on the drill stem, then vanished. Joiner pushed on twenty-four hours a day. Suddenly one morning there was a roaring far below. The well blew in as a tremendous gusher. Rushing under the great spraying plume that seemed to hang in the air, Joiner and the crew and his shareholders danced and rolled in the thick blackish-green oil. They tasted it and rubbed it in their hair.

Once again there was a boom. Brokers, bootleggers, brothel keepers, gamblers and highwaymen roared into Rusk County. Leases changed hands in a frenzied auction that continued day and night. Properties were subdivided into units as small as an eighth of an acre. Wasteful, uncontrolled exploitation of the field began. Within a few months thousands of wells had been drilled; under the laws that then governed the industry each leaseholder had no recourse but to recover the oil that laid beneath his property before his neighbor drained it off. It had been that way—it isn't anymore—ever since 1901, when the discovery of the Spindletop field brought the oil age to Texas. The wells were drilled so close there the bases touched. As a result, the natural pressure of the field was destroyed, making it impossible to recover more than thirty or forty percent of the oil. The millions of cubic feet of natural gas were merely burned off.

The East Texas field turned out to be the largest ever discovered in this country, an underground oil lake forty-three miles long and up to nine miles wide. Within three years it added a third to the nation's oil reserves. But the discovery could not have come at a worse time. There was already a glut of oil; the Depression had sharply cut consumption. Without production controls, well owners increased the amounts they pumped in an effort to catch up with steadily dropping prices. They couldn't, of course, and oil fell to a disastrous ten cents a barrel.

Joiner suffered most. His oil was unwanted and he found out he couldn't even sell the leases against the time that it would be. He had muddled his bookkeeping and the big companies said the original titles to the land were clouded.

Hunt arrived at the field early in the boom but he used his ready cash buying leases that turned out to be on the wrong side of the discovery well. When Hunt found out that Joiner was ready to sell, he sought him out. Both men were canny traders, but, according to a man who was there at the time, "Joiner was inclined to drink quite a lot, and Hunt stayed close to him until he made the deal."

Hunt paid Joiner $30,000 in cash, which he borrowed from a man in Lake Village—this was presumably the deal that Harry Reeves could have got in on—and gave him $45,000 in short-term notes and a guarantee of $1,250,000 in payments out of future production. For the discovery well, Daisy Bradford No. 3, Hunt paid $20,000 and a $50,000 guarantee.

The deal turned out to be Hunt's greatest business coup. Within five or six years he was bankruptcy-proof and had the reserves to drill a long series of dry holes without feeling the pinch. In its first thirty-five years—the date was observed in 1965 with the dedication of a monument to The Joiner No. 3 Daisy Bradford at which Hunt spoke—the field had produced 3,500,000,000 barrels and shows no signs of drying up. Hunt's profits alone have been put at $100,000,000. Since Joiner died in Dallas in 1947 in much reduced circumstances, there has been a feeling that Hunt drove too hard a bargain, or at least should have tossed the old fellow a bonus later on.

On the other hand, Hunt argues with a kind of W.C.Fields outrageousness at which he excels that he could have made far more by investing elsewhere in the field and that he subordinated his own best interests to do Joiner a favor. In fairness, it must be pointed out that Hunt was taking a chance on the state of the market and on the validity of the titles, that Joiner wanted to sell, and that that's the way the oil game, and every other trading business, is played.

The Federal Government smoothed Hunt's path to great wealth when, in 1935, the passage of the Connally "hot oil" act limited oil production and slowly restored the market price. Virtually all oil producers, including Hunt, had begged for the legislation. Production is still limited to keep up the price. Hunt had told me proudly that he was one of the "fathers" of the act. Thus I was surprised to find out sometime later that his company had been fined $49,000 for violating it. Hunt said his employees had been stealing the oil and selling it on their own.

For one reason or another Hunt took a violent dislike to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, whose agents enforced the hot-oil law. Sixteen years later Hunt got back at him. After reading an article by Ickes opposing the Constitutional amendment then under consideration to limit the President to two terms, Hunt spent a lot of money helping to get it passed.

World War II pulled the oil business out of the doldrums for good. The price movement went steadily upward. Thanks to the special tax advantages enjoyed by the industry, including the celebrated depletion allowance, wildcatters kept virtually all the money they made. At a Congressional hearing in the Fifties examples were cited of oil companies with receipts of several million dollars a year that paid no taxes whatever.

Indeed, the money rolled in so fast that the depletion shelter began to leak. Oilmen had to use their ingenuity to get rid of the money by using it for exploration before the tax man could get his hands on it. The story is told of Hunt suddenly appearing at his branch office in Midland, Texas, and ordering his agent there to spend $4,000,000 on leases by the end of the month. The man protested, saying there weren't $40 worth of promising leases available. Hunt was firm. For the next couple of weeks every cat-and-dog salesman in the vicinity was convinced that he had stumbled on the mother lode. Then, wanting to get rid of some more tax dollars, Hunt ordered wells drilled on his new properties. To his annoyance, several produced oil.

In the Fifties Hunt's enterprises began to operate abroad. One of the first ventures was a concession from Pakistan. As the only Moslem country with almost no oil, Pakistan is called by its inhabitants the land that Allah forgot. Hunt's crews prospected for three years, in one place drilling the deepest well in Asia, but they were unable to jog Allah's memory.

Hunt lived for six months in 1958 at the court of the Sheik of Kuwait while trying to negotiate a valuable offshore concession. If Hunt, besides being the richest man in the United States, isn't the richest man in

the world, the Sheik is. Hunt says that they got on very well together, since no one offered the Texan any sheep's eyeballs or other Arabian delicacies.

At the last moment, however, the concession was awarded to a government-backed Japanese syndicate, which had offered a less advantageous deal than Hunt's. Hunt, who is not what anyone would describe as a good loser, was bitterly disappointed. He told me that the grand vizier had been bribed by the wily Orientals. Another theory he advanced was that the Japanese had convinced the Sheik their government would fight to defend the fields against a possible Russian attack while the United States would do nothing. A New York oil analyst offered another explanation. "You've got to have someplace to sell your oil," he said. "The Japanese could promise a market—their own country—which Hunt couldn't do."

The anguish of the Kuwait experience was eased a few years later when Hunt and his sons struck it rich in Libya, discovering a field with proved reserves of 6,000,000,000 barrels. To assure a market for the oil, they sold half of their fifty percent interest—the Libyan government has the other fifty percent—to British Petroleum. As soon as a pipeline is completed across two hundred miles of desert to the Mediterranean coast, the oil will start flowing at 100,000 barrels a day. "There's so much oil there," said the Dallas petroleum reporter, "that you could give it away and still make money."

In a widely quoted article in 1957, *Fortune* magazine tried to rank the richest men in the country. They turned out to be almost without exception either active oilmen or members of families like the Rockefellers and Mellons whose fortunes are based on oil. Saying that its estimates were "conservative," *Fortune* put Jean Paul Getty, who controls Tidewater Oil, at the top of the list with a cool billion. Hunt was ranked in the middle of the second category with $700,000,000 or so. Since then, though, Getty has abdicated his title by moving to England and Hunt has come on strong with the Libyan discovery.

"In terms of extraordinary, independent wealth, there is only one man—H. L. Hunt," Getty himself said a couple of years ago. And a man who is reasonably familiar with Hunt's operations said much more recently: "If he couldn't cash in today for $2,000,000,000 I'd be very much surprised."

Moreover, while Getty has pretty much kept his hands on the money he has made—one of his sons had to sue him recently to get some of it—Hunt has been cutting his six children in on his good thing for the past thirty years. "There's absolutely no question about the Hunts being the richest family in the country," my informant said.

But even the most educated guessing is, at the end, a frustrating exercise. Final enlightenment never comes. None of the Hunt family's enterprises has outside stockholders. They publish no reports or balance sheets and reveal their affairs to no board of directors. Only the tax man knows, and he's not talking.

"It's like trying to find out how many missiles the Russians have," said a New York oil analyst.

Hunt himself says he doesn't know how much he's worth—"We've never really tallied it up," he said—and this statement agrees with Getty's dictum that if you can count your assets you're not a billionaire.

The three major producing companies are Hunt Oil, Placid Oil and Hunt International. Their daily production is estimated at 50,000 barrels of oil and hundreds of thousands of cubic feet of natural gas. It is produced in at least eleven states and Canada. Since the Libyan strike, exploratory drilling has been started in Alaska, Australia and along the fringes of the North Sea.

Almost all of Hunt's production is sold to the "majors," the integrated companies such as Gulf, the Texas Company and so on, which produce, refine and market petroleum products. The Hunts own one refinery in Alabama, which produces asphalt and, as a byproduct, gasoline that is sold at about three hundred filling stations in the Deep South under the Parade brand.

The only important business not connected with oil that Hunt owns is H.L.H. Products. It operates fourteen packing plants and markets 343 food and drug products, from collard greens to an antacid called Gastro-Majic that Hunt swears by. H.L.H., which is often confused with Hunt Foods, owned by Norton Simon, has been expanding rapidly in recent years. It now has annual sales of $30,000,000. Not by coincidence it sponsors more than half of the airings of *Life Line*, Hunt's patriotic program, that are heard around the country, and thus this expense comes out of H.L.H.'s advertising budget rather than out of Hunt's pocket.

Hunt likes to boast that his enterprises are run by "skeleton crews" of executives, working happily for salaries far smaller than they could command from the majors. In the industry, though, the Hunts are regarded by some observers as stiff-backed and inclined to arrogance.

Quite recently, Hunt said, his son Herbert had called a meeting of Hunt executives to discuss bids on leases being offered in Alaska by the Federal Government.

"I went downstairs into the meeting," Hunt said. "I motioned for Herbert to bring the maps and reports to my office. We sat down with my chief geologist and looked things over. We decided what we would bid on before those other fellows could have got their throats cleared."

For three decades Hunt has had the problem of investing his enormous income, which averages probably $1,000,000 a week. Since he says he has resolutely refused to buy stocks in firms he does not wholly own or even to diversify his own activities very much, his funds have gone largely into real estate.

"He must be one of the biggest landowners in the country," says a man who knows him well. Hunt is known to have enormous ranches in Wyoming, Montana and Texas, cotton plantations in Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana, timberlands all over the South, grazing lands and citrus groves in Florida and vast pecan orchards, not to mention immensely valuable realty holdings in Dallas, Atlanta and other cities.

One parcel has eluded Hunt's grasp. As we were driving home from his office one afternoon, he pointed out a cemetery we were passing. "That's the Cox Cemetery. All the old families of Dallas are buried there. I bought that land over there—" indicating an adjoining lot—"and I'm trying to trade it to the cemetery association for a barrel of ground inside the fence."

During the Thirties, as the money rolled in, Hunt began playing the horses in a big way. He often visited Saratoga and Belmont in the summer and the Florida tracks and the Fair Grounds in New Orleans in the winter. Although not a plunger in the class of John (Bet-a-Million) Gates or Pittsburgh Phil, he made some pretty good scores. One, he recalled, came at Saratoga on a sprinter called So Rare.

"The books were still on then," he said. "So Rare was a hundred-to-one on the morning line. I had been watching the horse and I bet $1,000 to place and $1,000 to show at forty-to-one and twenty-to-one with Tom Shaw. As I was walking away from the betting ring a man I knew—he wasn't a bookmaker—said, 'You've got to give me the same bet.' So I did. So Rare bore out in the stretch turn and did well to finish third, and I thought that was pretty good. But the winner was disqualified and the next two horses were moved up, so I collected $120,000."

Right from the start, Hunt says, he had his own theories of handicapping. He paid well for information and hired experts to help him. At one time, two statisticians, one of whom, he says, had a degree from M.I.T., occupied an office near his that was equipped with special telephone lines. During World War II, though, Hunt says he curtailed his betting, regarding it as "unpatriotic" to use the overtaxed telephone network for dozens of long-distance messages a day to bookmakers.

He made up for lost time as soon as the war ended, and branched out into baseball, college football and, until the dumping scandals caused him to lose his faith, college basketball. He has never had any confidence in the integrity of professional football, he says, and for that reason tried to dissuade his youngest son, Lamar, who was one of the founders of the American Football League, from going into it.

(Lamar was jocularly known as "Poor Boy" when he was a scrub on the Southern Methodist team. Sometime later, on being informed that Lamar was losing $1,000,000 a year in pro football, Hunt was credited with saying, *(Continued on page 140)*

JUST PLAIN H. L. HUNT

(Continued from page 69) "That's bad. It means he'll be broke in two hundred and fifty years.")

In the Fifties Hunt became one of the biggest bettors of all time. His wagers became bizarre, archducal. Such bets could not be kept secret; he reportedly risked $300,000 on a single World Series game and $100,000 on a Southwest Conference football contest. It was not exceptional for him to bet $25,000 or $50,000 on each of fifteen or twenty other football games on a single Saturday. Hunt denies his bets ever got that big and he says that over the year he probably broke even.

"I had just as good information as the bookies had," he said. "The only thing that could beat me in the long run was my own money." I must have looked blank, because Hunt added patiently, "You take the average referee, he does not have a very large business. . . ." His voice trailed off leaving the implication that it might be worth a worried bookmaker's while to insure himself against having to pay an enormous sum to Hunt by trying to bribe an official.

Hunt says he got around this problem by making his bets in sealed envelopes held by a third party, the envelope being opened only after the game had been played. It is a system that is unknown among knowledgeable bettors in the East, but then they never made such bets as Hunt did.

Craps caught his attention briefly, but his interest was to some extent theoretical and scientific. He used to visit a gambling establishment on the highway between Dallas and Fort Worth to test what he called "the law of consecutivity." By that, he said, he meant that what the dice were doing they would continue to do on the short term. It seemed to me like another way of saying, "The dice are hot," or cold, as the case may be.

Hunt also developed an interest in gin rummy. He played gin with "the talent" for high stakes and found out he wasn't as good as they were. (It was the only such modest admission he ever made to me.) So he called in Oswald Jacoby, the championship bridge player and author of an authoritative work on gin, to give him lessons. Hunt said, typically, that he thought Jacoby was overrated: "He tried to help me, but I didn't learn much."

In 1958 Hunt was subpoenaed by a Federal grand jury in Indianapolis that was investigating interstate gambling. A fortuitous illness prevented him from testifying at the time, and he never did appear. From his hospital bed Hunt told reporters that it hardly mattered, since he had quit gambling the year before and that, anyhow, his reputation in that field had been greatly exaggerated.

"If you play a little gin, bridge or bingo," he said, "then you are about as much of a gambler as I am."

As it turned out, Hunt had quit, and I asked him how he had managed to break the habit of a lifetime. Had enormous bets become a bore?

"I found out that the clouds and the flowers are a little bit prettier when you don't gamble," he said. "Customs change, too. I used to know of Federal judges who bet on the horses but it ceased to be considered an innocent diversion. It got to be too troublesome and, anyhow, I hated to take the time out from the fight for freedom."

After lunching at the Dallas Petroleum Club on the fiftieth floor of his office building one day, Hunt suggested that we take the escalator to the observatory on the roof. From there he pointed across the raw cityscape.

"That's where Jack Kennedy was shot," he said, directing my eye to a grey highway edged in green and then to a dreary, heavy brick building, the Texas School Book Depository, not far from the railroad terminal.

In the first confused hours after the assassination, when it was generally assumed that the President had been murdered by one of the right-wing fanatics who abound in Dallas, Hunt was bitterly criticized for having helped to create the climate of violence and intolerance in which the deed had taken place. In his office he had had me read a copy of a wire-service dispatch from Washington, quoting Senator Maurine Neuberger of Oregon as saying that Hunt would have to bear "a lot of the onus [because of] fanatical broadcasts he sponsors. If anybody is responsible, he is."

The broadcast that Senator Neuberger was talking about was *Life Line*, which had been attacking Kennedy pretty steadily since he took office. On the day of the assassination, the recorded program had discussed the "leftist plot" to deprive the American people of their right to bear arms. In a dictatorship, the broadcast pointed out, "no firearms are permitted the people, because they would then have the weapons with which to rise up against their oppressors."

There were other unfortunate coincidences. Nelson Bunker Hunt, one of Hunt's sons, had helped to pay for a virulently anti-Kennedy full-page advertisement that appeared in the Dallas *News* on the morning of the visit. When Jack Ruby was arrested after fatally shooting Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused killer of the President, two *Life Line* radio scripts were found in his pocket. He said he had received them in a sample package of H.L.H. food at the Texas Products Show a few weeks before. And Ruby, it came out, had accompanied a young woman to the offices of Lamar Hunt not long before the assassination.

No other shadow of a connection between Hunt and the assassination was ever established, but this did not prevent the authors of two theoretical works on the murder of the President to conclude that Hunt had instigated the killing to prevent Kennedy from reducing the oil-depletion allowance and, by moving toward a solution of the Vietnam struggle, to take the United States off a war footing. Kennedy *had* announced the previous January that he would work for a reduction of the allowance, but considering the logrolling power of the oil-producing states and the influence of Vice-President Johnson, it is regarded as highly unlikely that the President would have been able to get the legislation passed, and both he and the oilmen knew it.

Late on the day of the assassination, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, fearing that Hunt might become the object of violence, insisted that he leave Dallas and go into hiding. Hunt finally agreed to take his wife to

This Winter...

Wear the Trademark of the Florida Sun!

No matter where you go in this glorious vacation state, the sun will follow you. Its glow will brighten your spirits . . . and the gentle warmth of its rays will touch your skin with golden magic. Come on down and live it up! Leave the chill winds, snow and slush all far behind! Water-ski, skin dive . . . go sailing and deepsea fishing! Play golf or tennis . . . watch the thoroughbreds and greyhounds race. Then nightclub-hop 'til dawn. Or, just be lazy and relaxed . . . do nothing but smooth on suntan lotion. No matter what you do, you'll wear our trademark home . . . and along with it, you'll take a radiant glow of health! Come soak up Florida's sunshine . . . it's a good *warm* feeling.

Florida

Wouldn't You Rather get a Florida Tan this Winter!

FLORIDA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Room 247-C, Tallahassee, Florida 32304

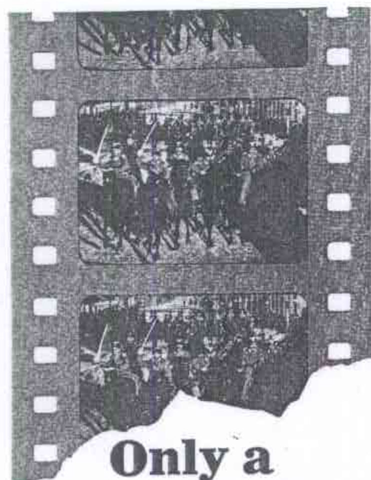
Send the FREE colorful new "Discover All of Florida" brochure to:

NAME...

ADDRESS...

CITY...

STATE..................................ZIP...................



Only a motion picture as great as DOCTOR ZHIVAGO could have produced the country's best-selling sound track album.

Music composed and conducted by Maurice Jarre

1E/S1E-6ST

The spectacular Oscar-winning score by Maurice Jarre (who also created the stirring music for "Lawrence of Arabia") becomes a #1 album of remarkable beauty and dimension to match the marvels of MGM's masterful film, "Doctor Zhivago," winner of six Academy Awards.

MGM Records is a division of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc.

stay with relatives in Baltimore. On the way he changed his mind. "I don't get along very well with being scared," he said. So the Hunts headed for Washington and took a suite at the Mayflower Hotel, where they were highly visible. A few days before Christmas, over F.B.I. protests, they returned to Dallas.

Since Hunt, whose residence is unfenced, refused to hire bodyguards, city detectives rode with him to and from his office and circled his house at night. Their presence irritated Hunt. "I told them I wasn't going to put up with them anymore," he said. "The police was a-beggin' me to let them stay around. They said they'd be blamed if anything happened to me, but I told them no."

Recalling that he had supported "Jack and Lyndon" in 1960, Hunt said that the President's death was "a terrible tragedy for the country."

There is more praise implicit in his statement than Hunt gives to most of the nation's Chief Executives. There hasn't been a really good one, in his view, since Coolidge, who routed subversives and cut the national debt.

Hunt says he voted for Hoover, whom he resembles and sometimes used to be mistaken for, but he now thinks he overrated the Great Engineer. "I remember a speech I once heard him make," Hunt said, "back before the Second World War. It was at the Bankers Club in New York in, I think, 19 and 38. He said there wasn't a-goin' to be a war because the Germans were too kindly to start one and they didn't have enough money. He said that bombing planes were ineffective against ships and cities. That man talked for two hours and there wasn't a thing he said that turned out to be right."

Communist gains during the New Deal came as no surprise to Hunt. "Roosevelt, he didn't know any better," Hunt told me. "He never met a payroll in his life. But I can't understand why Senator Joe Robinson, John Nance Garner and Jim Farley—these were smart men, fellows who could make a living playing poker—I don't see why *they* wanted to fasten socialism on the United States."

Truman was a failure, but in some ways an improvement over Roosevelt, said Hunt, while Eisenhower, whom he also supported, was a total disaster. Ike was so genial, inspired so much confidence, that he gave the country a terrible push toward bolshevism without anyone's being particularly aware of what was happening.

In 1960 Hunt's candidate was Lyndon Johnson, a son of Texas who was sound on depletion and other patriotic causes. Hunt says he backed Johnson with $50,000 and a great deal of free advice. "It got so I was writing him daily memos," Hunt said. "Lyndon could have had the nomination but he made every known mistake."

Hunt tried to help in other ways. When, shortly before the nominating convention, the Reverend W. A. Criswell, a Baptist divine of unexampled fervor who happened to be Hunt's pastor, told his flock that "the election of a Catholic as President would mean the end of religious liberty in America," it was Hunt's money which covered the $10,000 cost of having copies of the sermon sent to every Protestant minister in the country. He says a member of his staff ordered the reprints without his knowledge.

But when the enemies of religious freedom nominated Kennedy anyhow, Hunt says he decided to go along, advising "Lyndon" to accept second place on the ticket. Hunt explains his decision by saying tha he thought Kennedy's Catholicis would make him a conservative ant Communist, and that he admired th candidate's father as an astute bus nessman and, like himself, an a mirer of the late Senator Jose McCarthy.

But neither Kennedy nor Johns was any more successful than th predecessors at gaining Hunt esteem. For Kennedy, it was giv aways and, of course, Cuba. F Johnson, a purported failure to kee a promise to name Senators Jam Eastland and Thomas Dodd as sp cial advisers on Communist infiltr tion.

Nor is Hunt more charitabl toward the also-rans. Stevenson wa unspeakable and Nixon "a bad egg. Goldwater, whom he supported wit money when he ran for the Senat put up such a poor Presidential cam paign that Hunt doubts now that h would have been a good Preside despite his ideological soundness.

Hunt liked McCarthy, who was popular in Texas that he came to known as the state's third senato The two men frequently discusse the Communist peril while playin gin rummy in Dallas or Washingto

But of all the men who have grace public life in his lifetime, Hunt re serves his supreme accolade fo General of the Army Douglas Mac Arthur. "He was the Man of the Century," says Hunt, alongside of whom Churchill shrank to the status of a mere phrasemaker.

Hunt spotted the Man of the Century during the war in the Pacific He noted how MacArthur reorga nized Japan and then, fighting val antly against subversives and i competents in Washington, tried win—really win—the Korean W All this made Hunt his devotee. 1952, shortly after MacArthur's d missal, Hunt called on him at aerie at the Waldorf Towers in N York to try to persuade him to se the Republican nomination for t Presidency. (During a visit to N York last September Hunt proud announced that he was occupying t MacArthur suite.)

"I told him it had to be him Ike," Hunt said, "but he didn't see that way. He said it would be Ta and he didn't want to deprive him the chance he so richly deserved."

Hunt didn't give up. He journey around the country, trying to line u support. He opened headquarters i Chicago and for once, apparentl sent the money in, a reported $150,000 (Hunt denies this). The General made the keynote address at the convention, but the stampede that Hunt had hoped for turned out to be little more than a rustle.

Hunt says he sent emissaries to MacArthur, including Former President Herbert Hoover, asking only for the slightest nod of encouragement, but the old soldier never wavered.

"He wouldn't let anyone talk to him about it," Hunt said sadly. "It was too bad. He would have made a perfect President."

There is a good deal of confusion about Hunt's political contributions. Occasionally he announced large gifts to candidates, only to have their managers say the money hadn't been received. Other times, when Hunt dismissed his benefactions as mere pittances, the word circulated that he had been reasonably generous.

Hunt helped George Wallace become Governor of Alabama but says he discouraged his third-party run for the Presidency because he doesn't believe in third parties. Former Major General Edwin Walker received

Hunt's encouragement when he sought the Democratic nomination for governor of Texas, but the friendship cooled when he finished last in a field of ten candidates.

Hunt says that over the years he has given small sums to hundreds of candidates, but that he is more interested in getting bad men defeated than in getting good men elected. "Anybody who followed a program I was in favor of probably couldn't get elected in the first place," he said. "If he did get elected he couldn't get reelected without changing his position on most things."

Political fund-raisers used to visit Hunt with hands outstretched, hoping for sums that might seem like crumbs to a billionaire but would look like election insurance to them. All but a handful have had such little luck that their number, and Hunt's influence as a potential source of campaign gold, has diminished sharply. So much so that when he visited both the Democratic and Republican conventions, as is his habit, he got a rather frosty welcome. In 1960, Jake Jacobson, an assistant to Price Daniel, then the Governor of Texas, told of seeing Hunt wandering through Democratic headquarters in Los Angeles "like a lost soul."

"I didn't know what he wanted to do, but he didn't seem to be doing much of anything except trying to find somebody who would talk to him," Jacobson said. "He wandered into Lyndon's suite, which was right next to ours. There were a lot of people in there but they were all too busy to talk to Hunt, so he wandered on down the hall and talked with me. I thought, 'What the hell, here's a man with all that money who can't get anybody to talk to him.' "

In 1964, in Atlantic City, where the Democrats were meeting, he held a brief, noncommittal press conference at the airport. When it was over, a woman broke through the police line and took his big hand. "I just want to shake your hand," she said. "To touch the hand that made all that money."

Hunt didn't get onto the convention floor at all. The tall, shambling figure was seen by several persons in hotel corridors, slipping *Life Line* pamphlets under doors.

In 1952, when McCarthyism was at its zenith, Hunt decided that the time had come to spread the word as widely as possible. He took the rubber band off his bankroll and started a daily fifteen-minute radio program called *Facts Forum*. With a hard-hitting former F.B.I. man named Dan Smoot as his commentator, Hunt took out after communism, pinkoism, liberalism, subversion, sedition, welfare-statism, one-worldism, bleeding-heartism, fiscal irresponsibility, union thuggery, progressive education and the twentieth century in general. The program endeavored, through a debate that Smoot conducted with himself, to present both sides of these issues, but people tended to think that the same side always won.

It apparently didn't seem so to Hunt, for in 1957 he replaced *Facts Forum* with *Life Line*, which presents only what Hunt describes as "the constructive" view of events. The rat-tat-tat F.B.I. machine-gun voice of Smoot, who has since set up in the anti-subversive pamphleteering business for himself, was replaced by the soothing-syrup delivery of a succession of Fundamentalist lay preachers. They stand foursquare for home, motherhood, free enterprise, patriotism and filial piety. They oppose the drift toward socialism in melodeon tones of mauve and umber.

In thirteen years Hunt spent more than $4,000,000 to support the two programs. These were tax-deductible dollars, for the shows had been granted tax exemption as an educational foundation by the Treasury. But Senator Neuberger had declared war on Hunt. She held hearings and investigated until, in 1965, she got the exemption removed.

Hunt stopped giving, but *Life Line* has been able to keep going, and even expand, by selling its tapes for $5 to $70 a week, depending on the size of the station, which then sells sponsorship. H.L.H. Foods does its part, as do businesses that Hunt buys things from, banks he banks with, and concerns headed by men who share his philosophy. Each day the program is heard on 428 stations in virtually every state, and *Life Line* puts its audience at 5,000,000 or more. One of its most faithful listeners is H. L. Hunt. He arranges his schedule so that, without fail, he is seated at his supper table with the radio at his side when *Life Line* goes on at six-fifteen.

Hunt became a published author, at his own expense, in 1960. The work was *Alpaca*, a curious combination of sentimental novella, political analysis and model constitution. (A couple of years ago the main street of a new Dallas subdivision was named Alpaca Pass in the book's honor. No independent judgment of its merits was implied by this geographical distinction: Hunt's sons had financed the development.)

Alpaca tells how an idealistic young citizen of the dictator-oppressed "little six-province nation" in Latin-America of the title tours Europe. He wants to talk to Europe's wisest men in hopes of devising a constitution that will give his country its first sta- ble, representative government. Whil there he meets and falls in love witl a beautiful opera singer—Hunt i fond of the opera—who is a country woman of his. They return togethe work out the details of the new na tional charter with a group of youn enthusiasts, and in short order get i adopted.

Although the story comes first Hunt assigned the writing of what h calls "the romance parts" to "an ol lady." His main interest was Alpaca' model constitution. It provides fo universal suffrage, but the top ter percent of the nation's taxpayers have seven bonus votes, the next ten per- cent six bonus votes, and so on. The constitution also creates a currency unit, the pack, that shifts in value so as to be "equal to ten kilos of standard-grade wheat or rice, whichever is the lesser value," limits the size of public political meetings and seems to forbid labor unions.

Hunt says he made up his mind to write *Alpaca* on a night flight from Buenos Aires to Caracas in 1956 as he was winding up a long tour of Latin America. "I hadn't seen a stable government in all the months I spent down there," he said, "and I began to wonder if a person could supply a constitution so that they could govern themselves."

Few critics took *Alpaca* seriously. Those who did called the multiple-voting scheme undemocratic. Hunt replied by saying that he wasn't recommending the constitution for the United States, but for underdeveloped nations where the rich and powerful tend to get all the power anyhow. Graduated voting, he said, might provide a degree of limitation.

Even so, Hunt apparently took this criticism to heart, for he has now revised the constitution to limit the number of extra votes to five. This interim arrangement will last only until a brand new charter, now in preparation, is presented in a new work that will be titled *Yourtopia*.

Although no nation has shown any interest in adopting his constitution, Hunt keeps trying. Within a few weeks of Vietnam's elections last fall, he had the constitution translated into Vietnamese and sent to every member of the constituent assembly.

Since *Alpaca*, Hunt has published two less significant works. *Fabians Fight Freedom* contains warmed-over allegations of treason and moral turpitude. *Why Not Speak?* is a useful handbook on public speaking, based on the author's experiences. It includes several masterpieces of oratory, including Hunt's address on the occasion of the unveiling of a wax figure of MacArthur at the Texas State Fairgrounds.

A couple of years ago Hunt began writing a newspaper column, *Hunt for Truth*. It is carried by eighty dailies and weeklies. Hunt is proud of the fact that they think well enough of it to pay for it. "I am the best writer I know," he has said, "except that I'm slow." Hunt usually dictates the column to one of his three secretaries. Sometimes Hunt strikes a charming, homely note that no ghost could provide.

It is Hunt's belief that adult audiences that would snooze through the most impassioned address by their worthiest peers will listen attentively to brief patriotic speeches by young men and women. To test this theory last year he began a project called "teen teams." Squads of adolescent talkers are being sent to Elks Clubs and Baptist suppers in Texas, Oklahoma and California, and Hunt is enthusiastic about results.

I heard one of these speeches. One afternoon Hunt presented an attractive dark-haired girl named June Maynard, a summer employee of his company. Slender, budding June, with an earnest smile, gave me what I later found out was speech No. 1 from the book of samples that Hunt has prepared.

"Patriotism, liberty, freedom are names for a philosophy the story of which is not being properly told," she said. "We teen-agers can tell this story and tell it most effectively. And that, with your help, is what we intend to do! [Here the text contained the direction, 'Look intently at the audience.'] Will you help us?"

Hunt asked me what I thought. I told him that the effect was indescribable.

In his writings, Hunt has devised a couple of new terms. One is "constructive." He uses it to describe himself and the policies he advocates, and invariably signs his letters, "constructively yours." A constructive, in the Hunt lexicon, is a conservative without the old-fogy, mossback connotations. The second is "the mistaken." It takes in the numberless people who don't agree with him.

Extremists of the right and left usually get on with each other pretty well; they reserve their deepest scorn for weak-kneed moderates who keep looking for a way to avoid Armageddon. Their refusal to stand up and be counted, Hunt says, does more harm than the far left. He believes there is no excuse for the way such men as the Rockefeller brothers and Henry Ford II, who had the beneficial influence of their grandfathers, have let the side down.

The lamentable drift to the left among the rich all over the country except, possibly, in Texas, is explained by another Hunt theory: that the Communist plant red-tainted nurses alongside their cribs when they are young, and party-lining mistresses in their playrooms when they are old. "It has happened again and again," he said.

At one point I asked Hunt why, since his beliefs seemed hardly distinguishable from those of the John Birch Society, he had never joined that organization. The inability of various elements of the far right to work together, I suggested, had sharply reduced its influence.

Hunt said that in fact he had been invited by Robert Welch, the founder of the society, to attend its organizational meeting at a motel in Indianapolis in December, 1958. Even earlier, Hunt said, he had been asked to attend an abortive meeting Welch arranged in St. Louis. Hunt declined both times.

"I kind of felt Welch should have joined me," he said.

In his psychoanalytical study of history, *Life Against Death*, Norman O. Brown writes: "Freudian theory derives character from repressed perverse sexual trends; the prudential calculating character (the ideal type of *Homo economicus*) is an anal character. . . . Prudential calculation as such is an anal trait; the theory of the anal character is a theory of what Max Weber called the capitalist spirit, and not just of deviant exaggerations such as the miser."

Interpreting Marx, he adds, "The desire for money takes the place of all genuinely human needs. Thus the apparent accumulation of wealth is really the impoverishment of human nature, and its appropriate morality is the renunciation of human nature and desires—asceticism."

For medieval man the natural oil sinks, the flatulent gases that oozed from the earth, stinking of sulphur and set afire by lightning, were taken as infallible proof of the devil's infernal kingdom below. His artists painted the devil black, the color of filth and corruption—and of oil, which is itself the product of organic decay.

"Experience taught Luther," says Brown, "that the Devil is lord of this world—the experience of his age, the waning Middle Ages, and the rise of capitalism. All around him Luther felt the irresistible attraction and power of capitalism, and interpreted it as the Devil's final seizure of power in this world, therefore foreshadowing Christ's Second Coming and the Devil's final overthrow. . . ."

Hunt, too, has often knocked or at least de-emphasizes the pleasures of being a billionaire. "A man who has $200,000 is about as well off, for all practical purposes, as I am," he has said. He has referred to money, moreover, as simply a device to make bookkeeping convenient. "Money as money is nothing," he has declared. On another occasion Hunt said he would almost enjoy losing his billions for the fun of trying to accumulate them again. "I don't take any pride in money, but I do get a lot of satisfaction out of accomplishment," he has said.

On the other hand, he refuses to think the worse of himself because he happens to have a lot of money. "People can reach a point of being ashamed that they've prospered," he has said, "as if they have been selfish." Despite his riches, he has refused to stop doing his part to advance the free-enterprise

system. "Everything I do," he is fond of saying, "I do for a profit."

Nor can he bring himself to lighten his burden. His benefactions are extraordinarily well-controlled. To explain his attitude, he has devised several complementary theories. "I'm not going to bribe people to maintain their liberty," sums up one. Another is that philanthropy calls attention to great wealth and thus helps the Communists. A third is that the flickering flame of enterprise and initiative can be smothered by charity. And, as a practical matter, Hunt finds that virtually all of the institutions that might be candidates for his bounty are red-tinged.

Southern Methodist University, for example, is ordinarily thought of as a pillar of conservative respectability in Dallas. Hunt himself sent several of his children there. But as a recipient of his generosity it fails to measure up because it hired someone whose record in the State Department Hunt disapproves of.

Not long ago, a group of people in Ramsey, Illinois, Hunt's birthplace, decided to restore the country church where, coincidentally, Hunt's father had worshipped. Hunt's sister, the only other of his parents' children who survives, told them she was certain H. L. would be glad to help. He did, sending a check for $5.

But even if his charitable impulses are not highly developed, Hunt need not reproach himself for having made his colossal fortune out of the blood and sweat of others. There are no slaving women or children, no beaten strikers, no poisoned factory workers in his past. The laws governing the ownership of oil in this country, its use and taxation, may be unwise and unjust—most nations of the world reserve the ownership of subsurface minerals to the central government—but it seems unreasonable to expect Hunt to want them changed.

So, although it is fashionable to regard Hunt as a great menace, I came to think of him as an amiable old devil, mildly eccentric perhaps, but hardly doing any more than reflecting the political notions of a hard-shell Republican of the Taft or Coolidge era. Where, I asked myself, could he have become a liberal of, say, the Chester Bowles persuasion? It was unlikely he had ever met a liberal until he was past sixty-five. And as far as making mischief went, I shuddered to think what might have happened if George Wallace, the nervous Alabama governor, or Barry Goldwater had had Hunt's all-out financial support in 1964. Suppose, too, that Hunt took it into his head to bankroll the Ku Klux Klan or the Minutemen or some other nut organization. All things considered, it was probably better that he kept the rubber band on his bankroll.

Hunt has lived in Dallas since 1937, when he bought the home he still occupies. It is an inexact copy of Mount Vernon, slightly larger than the original, that occupies a ten-acre tract in one of the city's finest residential sections. It has been assumed that Hunt is demonstrating his patriotism by occupying a house modeled on George Washington's residence, but the fact is that he got it at a distress price, $60,000 or thereabout.

The Hunts lived quietly. His own inclination was to preserve his privacy. Oilmen have never taken a leading part in the management of Dallas' affairs and Hunt's extensive holdings often took him out of the city for long periods.

In 1955 Hunt's quiet, patient wife suffered a stroke. Hunt and their six children flew with her in a chartered DC-6 to the Mayo Clinic, where she died within a few days. It was perhaps the only time in Hunt's thrifty life that he didn't go tourist.

Five of the children are married. They have made Hunt a grandfather many times. Two of his sons, Nelson Bunker Hunt and William Herbert Hunt, are officials in his oil ventures. The husbands of his two daughters also work for him. Lamar Hunt, the youngest son, is president of the Kansas City Chiefs of the American Football League.

However, it is the enduring sorrow of Hunt's life that his oldest child and namesake, Haroldson Lafayette Hunt III, can take no part in all this. The son, who is called Hassie, is forty-eight years old, a somewhat younger-looking replica of his father, right down to the shabby blue suit and bow tie. From the time Hassie was nineteen, just out of Culver Military Academy, until he was commissioned in the Army in World War II and assigned to help straighten out Nationalist China's petroleum-supply problems, he and his father worked as a team.

Again and again Hunt told me, "Hassie is the smartest man I ever knew. . . . Nobody knew more about the oil business than Hassie. . . . Hassie just *knew* where the oil was. . . . Hassie didn't drill any dry holes at all. . . . I never guaranteed any deals for him and by the time he was twenty-four he had production of his own of 10,000 barrels a day."

But in 1946 Hassie suffered an emotional breakdown. Despite extensive treatment and, finally, surgery, he has not yet fully recovered. Hunt is convinced that eventually Hassie's health will be restored. Against that day the office suite next to his remains furnished but unocc pied, with Hassie's name on th bronze plaque on the door.

Hassie lives quietly in a cottag next to the pool on the Hunt property. Most evenings he comes up to th house with his paid companion, lively, attractive blonde girl, for dinner. He is quiet and amiable an vague. Hunt says he is wort $250,000,000.

In 1957, Hunt married Mrs. Rut Ray Wright, a divorcee whom h had met many years before whil she was working in the Hunt Oi Company's office in Shreveport. She is an attractive, full-figured, dark-haired woman, probably thirty years younger than her husband. She is deferential to him, infinitely obliging, thoroughly "sweet," as they say down there.

It was probably her softly voiced suggestion, and possible intimations of mortality that caused Hunt to calm down. All at once, it seemed, he quit gambling and drinking, even cigar smoking, and joined the Baptist church.

In his new mood of domesticity, he adopted Mrs. Wright's four attractive children. He showers the second family with as much pride and affection as if they were his own. The two oldest are married now, but Swanee and June Hunt still live at home. They undoubtedly have much to be grateful for in being heiresses to the richest man in the United States, but at times it's no bed of roses. Daddy keeps drafting them for his pet projects. They are pillars of the teen-speakers program. When *Alpaca* was published they had to sing a song he wrote at a soiree at a Dallas bookstore. To the tune of *Doggie in the Window*, it went:

How much is that book in the window?
The one that says all the smart things.
How much is that book in the window?
I do hope to learn all it brings.
Alpaca! *Fifty cents!*

Such outings are the exception, though. The Hunts still live quietly and seldom entertain. The house is attractively, but not grandly, furnished, in a mixture of the antique and the merely old. Hunt is proud of his Oriental rugs, and they are in fact beautiful. One suspects that he is pleased in part because they, like the house, were a bargain. A Frederic Remington painting of an Indian encampment hangs in his study. He enjoys just standing and looking at it. "I don't know about you," he said one night, "but I think that's just about as pretty as a picture can be."

Hunt generally is up by eight o'clock. He goes to his office six days a week, driving himself in a deluxe Oldsmobile 98, one of a half-dozen cars on the place. It is the most expensive model he has ever owned. During the Fifties one of his trademarks was a battered black Plymouth.

His health is good and he keeps himself in shape, using a belt vibrating machine and sunlamp. Hunt has been described as a health-food nut, but I thought his precautions not unreasonable for a man whose attitude seems to be that if he can't take it with him he ain't a-goin'. He eats no white sugar, white flour or saturated fats. His whole-grain bread is baked in his kitchen from wheat grown in Deaf Smith County, where the water has a naturally large amount of fluorine.

Because Hunt prefers this diet to the food available at the Petroleum Club, he usually takes a light luncheon of a sandwich and fruit with him to the office to eat at his desk. One Christmas his stepchildren gave him a supply of the brown-paper bags he uses for the lunch with the printed label, "H. L. Hunt Gourmet Lunch."

No cocktails or wines are served in the Hunt household, and guests are liable to find his rigid adherence to the principles of sensible diet somewhat depressing. On both evenings I dined with him the entree was meat loaf. Hunt washed it down with a variety of vegetable and fruit juices while he listened to *Life Line* on the table radio.

Hunt seldom goes to the movies or watches television. He used to read a book in a couple of hours, he says, but has slowed down recently to the point where it hardly seems worth the trouble. He still enjoys music and singing, and when the Metropolitan Opera comes to Dallas on its spring tour, he usually attends all of its performances.

Most nights the Hunts are in bed by ten o'clock, but as it happened, on one of the nights I was staying with them, Mrs. Hunt received a telephone call from the minister of her church in Idabel, Oklahoma, where she was born. He said that he had brought a group of his older Sunday School children to sight-see in Dallas and asked if they might come out to use the swimming pool.

The hour was late and Mrs. Hunt had not been feeling well, but she kept trilling, "Wonderful," and "Oh, yes, *do* come. It's no trouble at all," until I came to believe that she meant it.

When the Oklahomans finally left and Hunt switched out the pool lights, I recalled a conversation I had had the day before with Ray Hunt, a pleasant young man who graduated in June of 1965 from S.M.U. We had been talking about the family sing-alongs that the Hunts like to have in the evening. "Get Mom and Dad to sing *Just Plain Folks* for you," he had said. "It's their favorite song."

So I asked them to sing it, and they did, she in a light choir-singer's soprano and the richest man in the country in a quavering tenor, out there on the porch of their white-columned house, under the yellow Texas moon.

To a mansion in the city
Came a couple old and grey
To see the son who left them years before.
He had prospered and grown wealthy
Since a youth he left his home.
Now his life was one of pomp and show.

But coolly did he greet them
For his friends stood by his side
Who'd often heard him speak of home so grand.
As the old man sadly gazed at him
He said with simple pride
While he gently took his dear wife by the hand.

We are just plain folks,
Your mother and me.
Just plain folks
Like our own folks used to be.
As our presence seems to grieve you,
We will go away and leave you.
We are sadly out of place here
'Cause we're just plain folks. ###