

Art of Complaining Keeps Growing

WHENEVER someone responds to the familiar greeting "How are you?" with the remark, "Oh, I can't complain!" what does it mean?

A few of these fellows were asked: "Why not? Nearly everyone else does." Two or three said, "It wouldn't do any good to complain." Others said: "Because nobody would listen." There seemed to be good reason to infer that the responders "couldn't complain" because they were better off than they cared to admit.

Not that there is any shortage of complaining. Ever since a small town weekly newspaper reported that "Grandma Jones is enjoying a spell of sickness this week," the business of complaining has been gradually whetted into a fine art.

Organizations have been created to develop complaints. Many businesses maintain "Complaint Departments" and some include little notices with statements of accounts advising customers where to send their complaints.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services has issued a guide ti-

tled "Where to Complain." Some federal agencies encourage complaints.

Many decades ago, when we rode in buggies and wagons, the great wit, Josh Billings, said: "I hate to be a kicker and generally stand for peace, but the wheel that does the squeaking is the one that gets the grease."

There may be times when nothing except loud complaining will get evils corrected. Still, there is wisdom in the observation: "You can complain because roses have thorns or you can be grateful that thorn bushes have roses."

Because much of the mail congressmen receive consists of complaints, a system was developed long ago to dispose of them without taking up the congressmen's time. Stenographers replied.

When electronic word processors replaced ordinary typewriters, congressmen could give more personal attention to complaints. They dictated brief responses into machines on a variety of subjects. Operators need only to copy in addresses and

salutations like "Dear Joe," punch coded keys according to topics mentioned and, presto, "personalized letters" go out from congressmen to constituents.

Businesses often use similar systems. One came up with a counter-complaint system. A firm in Virginia has classified census enumerations into 215,000 districts which can be used to generate an avalanche of complaints to congressmen (or anyone else) on almost any subject.

The computerized letters are personalized, with different letterheads, paper colors, typewriter typefaces, etc. They might get computerized responses, but still get into statistical files.

Even so, complaining is not a new technique. Advice about complaining is found in the Bible. A lot of people nowadays are complaining about religion and those who practice it. One might wonder if God could find anything to complain about in them!

The antonym of complaining is contentment.