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STREET TALKING

Few forms of amusement are more amusing and few forms of amusement cost less than to walk slowly along the crowded central thoroughfares of a great capital—London, Paris, or Timbuctoo—with ears open to catch fragments of conversation not specially intended for your personal consumption. It, perhaps, resembles slightly the justly blamed habit of listening at keyholes and the universally practised habit of reading other people's postcards; it is possibly not quite "nice." But, like both these habits, it is within the law, and the chances of it doing any one any harm are exceedingly remote. Moreover, it has in an amazing degree the excellent quality of taking you out of yourself—and putting you into some one else. Detectives employ it, and if it were forbidden where would novelists be? Where, for example, would Mr. Pett Ridge be? Once yielded to, it grows on you; it takes hold of you in its fell, insidious clutch, as does the habit of whisky, and becomes incurable. You then treat it seriously; you make of it a passkey to the seventy and seven riddles of the universe, with wards for each department of life. You judge national characteristics by it; by it alone you compare rival civilisations. And, incidentally,