

Men We Meet

Number Two in a Series of Six Benevolent Satires

MEN I AVOID—By ASHLEY STERNE

HOWEVER good a man's intentions may be, however much he may desire to be charitably minded towards all and sundry of his fellow-creatures, there are certain types of people with whom he finds it absolutely detrimental to his health and temper to come into direct contact.

When I first embarked upon the good ship, Career, I formed the noble resolve that I would march through the sandy desert of life without falling down the old crevasse of Enmity; and to this course I tuned my lyre, until one day I realized the fact that, though I was not making enemies, I was not manufacturing any friends. This naturally gave me cause for wonder, as I was not generally supposed to be aloofish. However, I soon arrived at the bottom of the problem, to epitomize which is to say that the man who never makes an enemy never makes a friend.

Bearing this point in mind I therefore set to work, and made friends and enemies freely with both hands. The result is, that to-day I am in danger of being tossed between the two stools of Scylla and Charybdis, for each class of person has individual members that it is expedient for me to avoid if I am to enjoy that peace of mind to which, as a rate and tax payer I am morally entitled. Hence I felt it incumbent upon me to warn you against the following types who, from many years' experience, I can honestly say are better shunned than cultivated.

FIRST, there is the Bore. Strange to say he usually belongs to the "friend" group, for he is really a good fellow at heart, and is absolutely stone-blind to his own very annoying idiosyncrasies. He sincerely believes that his conversation is an enthralling and uplifting entertainment to you, and he would feel terribly hurt if he tumbled to the fact that his society merely tended to alienate all your sympathy and interests. His stock-in-trade always consists of things that don't matter. He treats you, for example, to a long and intricate account of why his wife's aunt first had reason to think that she was suffering from appendicitis. He enters into a wealth of technical detail that only a coroner could fully appreciate. He recounts fully the minutiae of the doctor's prognosis and diagnosis. He tells you her temperature to two places of decimals. And then it ultimately transpires that she hadn't got appendicitis at all; that she was suffering from nothing more serious than a malady which a pinch of bi-carbonate of soda would remedy.

Then, before you have time to run away and disguise yourself, he is at you again with a rambling rhapsody concerning his progeny. They are so remarkable that it appears that they have formed the habit of getting up before they go to school. There they go through the unheard-of curriculum of receiving instruction in the sundry arts, crafts, and sciences. Then they return home, and perform the marvellous feat of assimilating nourishment; and finish the day, these astonishing children, by actually going to bed.

The Bore carries his character consistently in all that he does—I will say that for him. He even makes his last will and testament so tedious that the beneficiaries themselves are weary of it long before they know what he has bequeathed to them. His funeral arrangements—provided for at length in the document in question—are laboriously elaborate, and his tombstone of gorgonzola marble remains a perpetual eyesore ever after.

ANOTHER type I avoid is the Man who talks in the Train. No matter whether he knows anybody in the smoking-car or not, he will talk somehow or other. If you do happen to be ever so slightly mutually acquainted, he will commence his siege of you with the inept and idiotic remark:

"Folks all well?"

As if you would be travelling to town, callously immersed in a halfpenny daily, if your whole household were stricken with any one, or all, of the seven plagues! If, however, he is a stranger to all, he bursts into loquacity through the medium of the man who has jurisdiction over the window. If it's down, he will ask him if he minds its being up. If it's already up, he will ask if there's any objection to having it down. If there isn't any window, he will remark to the assembled company that it's

a confounded scandal; and then if anybody has the temerity to volunteer even so much as a monosyllable in reply, the wretch will construe it as an open invitation to make further incursions into the others' privacy. Thus, before the train has travelled a hundred yards, he will have set the whole compartment literally by the ears, and their subsequent unspoken profanity will be by far the most eloquent silence he will ever have experienced.

However, he is easily avoided in future by the simple expedient of your entering a different carriage to the one he is occupying; or, if he invades the one you already chance to be seated in, you can make a dramatic and effective exodus by exclaiming "Hi!" to a supposititious friend on the platform, and hastily alighting, contrary to the by-laws of the company, while the garrulous one is depositing his business impedimenta in the hat-rack.

OTHER aggressive individuals are the Man who has done the round in "ten under bogey, my boy," and the Man who has just bought a motor-car. From the manner in which they speak of their respective achievements you might reasonably infer that the former had discovered a certain, short, and easy bridle-track to Paradise, and that the latter had magnanimously purchased the whole of the German Fleet, and presented it with his compliments to the British Admiralty. I would commit any offence known to criminology in order to escape meeting either of these two individuals. They both employ a jargon which is as unintelligible to me as Tamil or Sanskrit. They can neither stand nor sit still while they are gibbering at you, but they must needs be continually jumping about in order to demonstrate something to you, or else going through a piece of bewildering pantomime with the idea of driving home some point which they think you have failed to appreciate proportionately.

The golf-ghoul will borrow your silver-mounted walking-stick in order to impress upon you the exact stance he assumed when he did the fourth hole in one. The motor-maniac will attempt to drag you off to his garage, then and there, to show you how a particular crank works—in spite of your protestations that you have already seen how one not over particular crank works, and are not anxious to increase your knowledge.

As I said before, I would go to any length to deprive myself of the society of either of these two types, and once, in order to avoid an encounter with a man whose handicap had recently been increased,

I went so far as to beat a prompt retreat into a small fancy-embroidery shop, where a young lady was examining—with a view to purchase—a number of garments to which one alludes, as a rule, in the most pianissimo of whispers. I forget what I asked for; I think it was for poker-work pyjamas.

OF other men I avoid there is the Man with an Imaginary Grievance. He's an appalling person, for the reason that he can never see anything except in the distorted proportions with which the work of the Futurist turps-slingers has made us familiar. He is the kind of person who invariably attributes all the little side-slips and mis-cues of life to a personal spite against himself. He is always over-assessed for his rates, he will tell you—the consequences being that the local press is the richer by a quantity of gratuitous copy in the shape of alleged "correspondence."

He is dissatisfied, too, with the remuneration he is receiving from his firm in the city. It appears that they have had the impertinence to raise his salary so disproportionately that his net income is now less than formerly, owing to his being unable to obtain anything like an adequate abatement of income tax. At least, he tells you so, and shows you several printed forms to prove his contention; but, rather than read any more government literature than you are actually obliged, you accept his statement. Anyway, you don't contradict it.

Then, too, he peevish incessantly at the way parliament is governing him. Everyone except himself, it would seem, is in receipt of special ameliorative legislation. He grumbles out his grievances all through his mundane life, and I should not be surprised if, on the day he enters Heaven, the welkin rings with his allegations that he has been supplied with a harp of an inferior metal to that which he had been led from earliest childhood to expect.

AND finally, there comes a group of men over whom it is not worth while to squander the contents of the dictionary, since their hideous characteristics are so widely recognized. There is the man who prods you with his finger when he wishes to emphasize some point which the poverty-stricken nature of the English language precludes him from performing otherwise. There is the man who has apparently no other mission in life than to circulate stock exchange or racing tips, which have as much likelihood of coming off as Nelson from his monument. Not so much, in fact.

There is the man who has urgent need of a five dollar bill—and, really, if you once meet him and accede to his appeal for assistance, you'll never have to bother about avoiding him again. He'll do all the avoiding; and I cannot help thinking that the deprivation will be worth the capital outlay.

And that has given me an idea. If one could only dispose of all the other objectionable types at the same price, it would be a thoroughly sound investment to sink a paltry hundred pounds, in order to purchase perpetual immunity from molestation.



FIVE BEAUTIFUL ENGLISH WOMEN.

An At-Home and Sale of Work Was Held in London Recently by the Duchess of Sutherland in Aid of the Cripples' Guild. Our Picture Shows the Duchess, on the Left, and Her Assistants, Lady Rosemary Leveson-Gower, Miss De Trafford, Miss Millington Drake, and Lady Sybil Grey at the Opening of the Sale.