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PICTURES




# How to be Inimitable

GEORGE MIKES









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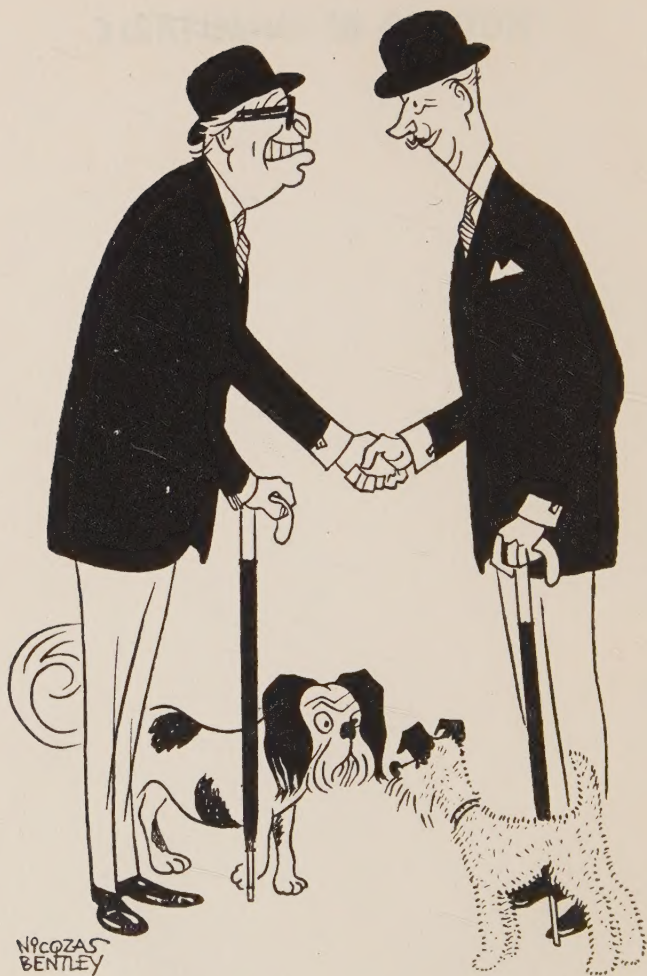
gute Besserung  
und hoffentlich halb  
so beschriebene Obern,  
wie es jetzt aussieht.

März 61                      Hans-Christoph



# HOW TO BE INIMITABLE





NICOZAS  
BENTLEY

*The sincerest form of flattery*



# HOW TO BE INIMITABLE

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*Coming of Age in England*

by

GEORGE MIKES

*Nicolas Bentley drew the pictures*



ANDRE DEUTSCH

*By the same Author*

★

HOW TO BE AN ALIEN  
HOW TO SCRAPE SKIES  
WISDOM FOR OTHERS  
MILK AND HONEY  
EAST IS EAST  
DOWN WITH EVERYBODY!  
SHAKESPEARE AND MYSELF  
ÜBER ALLES  
EIGHT HUMORISTS  
LITTLE CABBAGES  
ITALY FOR BEGINNERS

★

THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION  
A STUDY IN INFAMY

# CONTENTS

COMING OF AGE	7
I. NEW ENGLISH	9
HOW TO BE PROSPEROUS	11
ON TRYING TO REMAIN POOR	14
HOW TO BE CLASS CONSCIOUS	19
THE NEW RULING CLASS	22
HOW TO AVOID TRAVELLING	25
ON WINE SNOBBERY	29
ON SHOPPING	34
HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD	36
HOW TO BE FREE	41
IN PRAISE OF TELEVISION	43
ON THE ART OF CONVERSATION	49
ON ADVERTISEMENTS	51
ON POLITICS	53
HOW TO STOP ROAD TRAFFIC	57
II. OLD ENGLISH	63
HOW TO TAKE YOUR PLEASURE SADLY	64
ON NOT KNOWING ENGLISH	67
ON NOT KNOWING FOREIGN LANGUAGES	70
ON NOT KNOWING ANYTHING	72
ON THE DECLINE OF MUDDLE	74
HOW TO DIE	77
ON BEING UNFAIR	79
ON MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS	82
SEX	84
HOW TO AVOID WORK	85
EVERYBODY IS HUNGARIAN	87



## COMING OF AGE

IT WAS twenty-one years ago that England and I first set foot on each other. I came for a fortnight; I have stayed ever since. As a man I am in my forties; as an inhabitant of Britain I am just twenty-one. I was only seven when my first child was born. I have come of age; which is more than England can boast of.

In these past twenty-one years England has gained me and lost an Empire. The net gain was small. I used to pronounce my name Me-cash but nowadays most people say Mikes to rhyme with *likes*. The Empire now pronounces its name *Commonwealth* – to rhyme with nothing at all.

Many things have changed in the last two decades. The Britain of 1960 is vastly different from the Britain of 1938, and even from the Britain of 1946, when I first published my impressions of this country under the title *How to be an Alien*. The time has come, I feel, to revisit England.

When I first came here, Englishmen were slim and taciturn, while today they are slim and taciturn. Then, they were grunting and inscrutable; today they are grunting and inscrutable. Then, they were honest, likeable but not too quick on the uptake; today they are honest, likeable but no quicker on the uptake. Then, they kept discussing the weather rather dully; today they keep discussing the weather much more dully. Then, their main interests were cricket, horses and dogs, while today their main interests are dogs, horses and cricket. Then, the main newspaper topics were sex, crime and money, while today it is money, money, money and crime with a little sex somewhat perfunctorily thrown in. Then, Britain was being inundated

by blooming\* foreigners and she did not like it. Today foreigners are called *visitors*, *tourists* and other fancy names – and in extreme emergency, when shortage of foreign currency is too pressing – even Distinguished Europeans. We must all exercise the greatest care, because the resemblance between a Distinguished European and a bloody foreigner is most misleading.

Then, Britons travelled to the Continent, drank tea with milk in Paris, ate roast beef and Yorkshire pudding in Monte Carlo, kept to one another's company everywhere and were proud of their insularity; today they drink tea with milk in Paris, eat roast beef with Yorkshire pudding in Monte Carlo, keep to one another's company everywhere and are proud of how cosmopolitan they have become.

In those happy days – Munich crisis or no Munich crisis – no one really knew where Czechoslovakia was: the problem was too small. Today we have the Bomb of Damocles hanging over our heads, but nobody cares: the problem is too big. In those days 'reaching for the moon' was still a metaphor and not a short-term programme. The 'idle rich' was still the *rentier* and not the boilermaker on strike. We had no espresso bars, and no rock 'n roll. Then, the fashion was to look forward with dismay and not to look back in anger. After the war it seemed that we would hardly survive the blow of victory; nonetheless, today we are nearly as well off as the Germans themselves. We tell each other confidently that we've never had it so good but what we really mean is that we are all right, Jack.

Oh yes, if you want to be a modern Briton – a Briton of the sixties – you have to follow an entirely new set of rules. Here they follow.

G. M.

\* This is a euphemism for *bloody* – a word you should never use.

## I. NEW ENGLISH

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*Prosperity versus riches*



## HOW TO BE PROSPEROUS

IF YOU want to be a modern Briton, you must be prosperous, or, preferably, rich. Richness has this in common with justice that it is not enough to be rich, you must also manifestly appear to be rich. The English, however, are a basically modest race, so you cannot just show off. In fact, you must hide your richness in an ostentatious, pseudo-modest manner, as if you were really poor. The greatest advantage of this being that you may, in fact, be really as poor as you like.

A short while back it was much more difficult to be rich, but as riches were then quite out of fashion – indeed, rather vulgar – this did not matter. A few years ago a Rolls Royce or a Bentley was a must and to have a palatial residence was advisable. Today, only the get-rich-quick businessmen, the vulgar, commercial barons and the lower layer of television comedians buy new Rollses and Bentleys. The patricians use Austin Sevens, Miniminors, scooters and bicycles, perhaps *very* ancient Rollses, or else Jensens and Bristols (the last two costing about £4000 each but unrecognised by the masses).

It would take too long to codify the entire art of how to look prosperous and how to behave in this Age of Prosperity, but the main elementary rules are these:

1) You must get a place in the country. You remark casually: 'Oh – we have a tumble-down old barn in Suffolk . . .' If you can throw such a sentence away nonchalantly and especially if you learn to blush modestly while uttering it, you will unfailingly give the impression of possessing a ducal mansion on 227 acres, with thirty-four

tithe cottages, eighteen liveried servants and five racing stables. Whenever I have visited the ducal mansions owned by my friends, I have invariably found dilapidated little huts where you cooked on primus stoves and where, if you needed water, you were at liberty to walk half a mile for it. You were allowed, however, to call half a mile four furlongs which sounds incomparably superior.

2) You must become amphibious and get hold of a watercraft of some sort. Here again, you must refer to 'my little launch' or even 'dinghy' with an air as though she were a yacht to put Onassis to shame. But a launch or a second-hand rubber dinghy or any superannuated rowing boat will do fine.

And it is a good idea to appear at the office – especially on Monday morning – in a dark blue blazer with shiny metal buttons; in a nautical cap instead of a bowler; and to carry in a leisurely manner and with an air of absent-mindedness a sextant, an anchor and a propeller.

3) You must choose your friends with the greatest possible care. Titles are out of fashion. If you have one, keep it under your hat and in cold storage: it may come in useful again in the future. Dukes, nowadays, are not called 'Your Grace' but Bobby and Reggie; Archbishops are called 'archbish'; and second daughters of earls are spoken to as if they were ordinary human beings. Ex- and would-be debutantes are only of use if they work in publishing houses. The most sought-after people are Greeks as there is a notion afloat that every Greek is a millionaire; Italian models (female) are also very popular; Swedes (male) are in order, if tall and very sad. Persians and foreign princes might be used in an emergency.

4) If you happen to be a butcher or a lorry driver you

will be helped along the way of prosperity by periodical wins of £ 225,000 on the football pools. It is *de rigueur* on such occasions to declare that your win will not make the slightest difference to your way of life (after all, what does a quarter of a million matter if you already have a washing machine and a television set?), and you would not dream of giving up your £7.10.0 a week job.

5) Finally, in this Age of Prosperity you simply must play the Stock Exchange. You have to learn a few new expressions for the occasion, such as 'stock', and 'day of settlement', and 'consideration' and 'unit trust'. You must remember that your stockbroker will call the market 'easy' when it is very difficult. When reading the financial columns you must bear in mind that when the journalist says that 'steels shine today' he is using the one and only joke permitted to a poor City Editor and you'd better smile. Otherwise the very simple basic idea is that you buy shares rather cheaply, wait until they go up and up and up and then sell them. It is no good to buy shares (I beg your pardon, I mean stock) at a high price and wait until they go down and down and down.

I personally do not play the Stock Exchange, because it is immoral. I lend my money, most morally, to my bank, let *them* play with it and make 120 per cent profit for themselves and pay me 2 % fixed interest out of which I can pay income tax and feel a virtuous and useful member of the community.

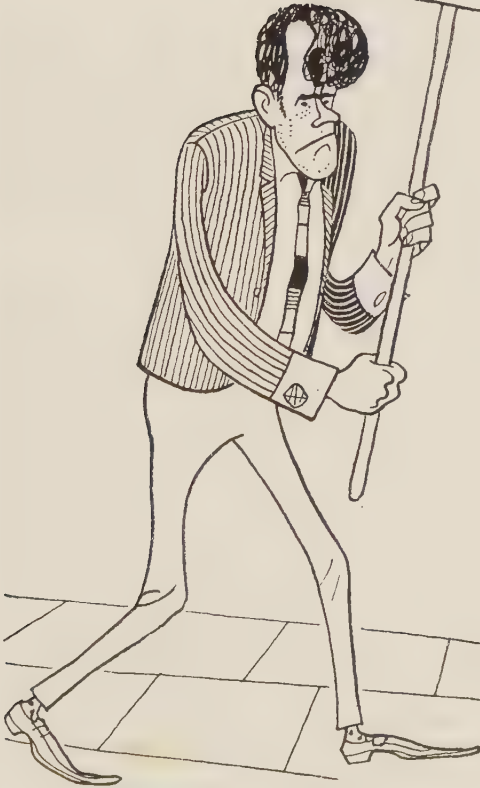
## ON TRYING TO REMAIN POOR

It is much more difficult to try and remain poor. Indeed, one has to ask oneself: is it worth while? Let's face it: the joy has gone out of poverty.

It was soon after the war that the suddenly impoverished classes gained much in prestige. These New Poor were loud and boastful – real *nouveaux pauvres*. There was no end to their swaggering about, claiming how poor they were. As soon as you suggested a coach-trip to Hitchin or just the idea of buying a chocolate ice-cream, their eyes gleamed with pleasure and they told you with glittering pride: 'We can't afford it.' Their poverty was as ostentatious and vulgar as a gold-plated Daimler with leopard skin upholstery would be at the other pole of the financial globe, but while the display of commercial riches was *vieu jeu*, the New Poor were, at least, a new social phenomenon. Not being able to afford anything made them happy; jeering at other people's pleasures cheered them up no end. Their eyes and their trousers shone with pride.

Then the Prosperity of the early fifties descended on us and ruined it all. It took the Poor unawares and disorganised their legions. For a year or two they accepted Prosperity with a sigh. Gone were the book-keepers who dressed like bohemians; every bohemian now dressed like a book-keeper. Then, a few years after the initial blow, the revolt against respectability broke out. The flag-bearers, the most conspicuous and vociferous *avant-garde*, were the Teddy Boys but they were not alone. Everybody who mattered protested in his own way. Filth, dirty pullovers and unshaven faces became the fashion once again; others greeted

DAHN WIV  
RESPECABILITY!



NICOZAS  
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the convulsions and hoarse groans of graceless teenagers as a new art; angry young men spat at the middle classes; others, again, hurriedly exchanged their antique furniture for new and uncomfortable chairs and sofas. And a few people gave two months' holiday to their uniformed chauffeurs and went on a hitch-hiking tour in France and lived in tents.

But there was no getting away from it. That damned Prosperity had caught up with all of us. The angry young men went on spitting at the middle classes and made a tidy little fortune on the proceeds; the convulsive young singers began to shake their manes while they groaned, and that made them even richer than the angry young men; the hitch-hikers and tent-dwellers returned and money kept pouring in to all and sundry.

How to remain poor? – the worried practitioner asks himself. It is not easy. The New Poor of yester-year are fighting a losing battle. To remain poor needs the utmost skill and ingenuity. (And only old-age pensioners and a few other unwilling people manage to achieve it – to our shame). Everything, really is conspiring against the poor and trying to deprive them of their poverty. They had bad luck too. They moved, for example, to such districts as Islington to show how needy and destitute they were. Instead of establishing their misery, however, they managed to turn Islington into a fashionable district.

What else is left? It is no use saying that you cannot afford a car because everybody can afford a car. It is pointless to allege that you have no money because all you have to do is put your head into your bank manager's office and before you have time to say, 'Sorry, wrong room,' he will throw a couple of hundred pounds at you. (I am always

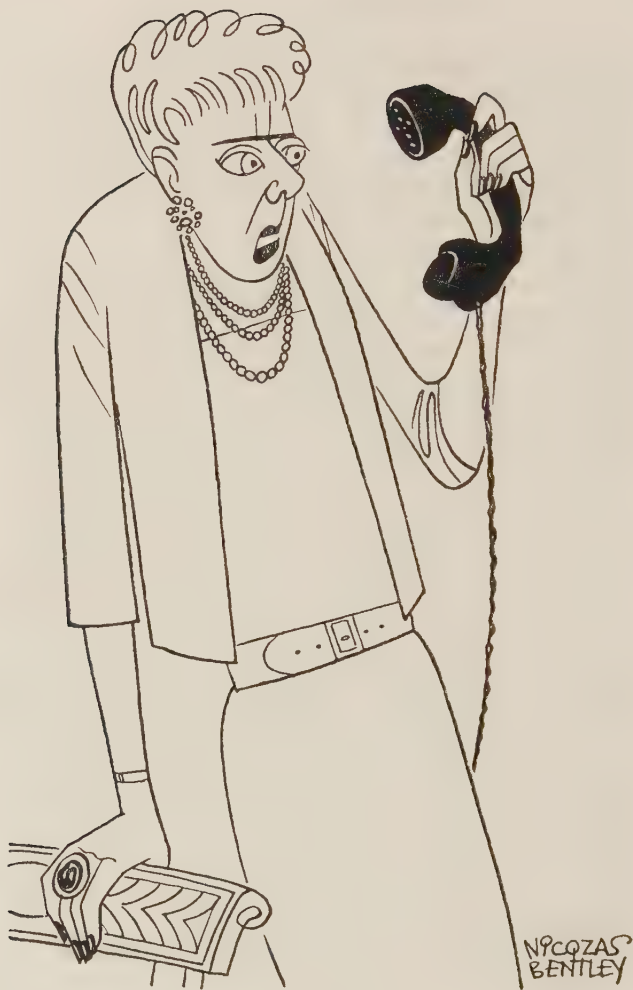
puzzled why people bother to rob banks. Can't they *ask* for the money?)

How to remain poor then? I can give no fool-proof recipe, only a few pointers.

1) Gambling, I believe, is almost always safe. There is no amount the horses and the dogs cannot take care of. The safest way of losing money is chasing it.

2) Try farming. It lends weary clothes-manufacturers and harassed directors of chain-stores a fresh country air, and besides it helps to get rid of any amount of money. After the war I saw a letter written by Marcel Pagnol to Sir Alexander Korda; it ran something like this (I quote from memory): 'I have discovered a truly magnificent way of losing money. It's called farming. Film-making is nothing compared with it. A film may be successful after all and you may make money on it. Never on farming. Farming is safe. You needn't worry: it will ruin you in no time.'

3) Then there is always the path of dishonesty. I mean you can always fake poverty, just in order to keep the confidence and affection of your friends. Who can prevent you from going round trying to borrow half-a-crown while you have quite a decent little nest-egg tucked away at home? Being well-off, of course, is not your shame, only your misfortune, but some people will not understand this. Alas, having money causes a great deal of discord, faction and superfluous unhappiness. In a Soho espresso I once saw an unfortunate young man in deep despair, ostracised by his fellows because he had bought a record player and they had found out that the cheque he had given for it had not bounced.



*Vox Populi*



## HOW TO BE CLASS CONSCIOUS

IF YOU want to be a modern Englishman you must become class-conscious.

1) If you belong to the so-called higher spheres of society you will, of course, never be flagrant about this. You simply look down (not with a superior, simply with a pitying smile) upon those miserable and ridiculous creatures who do not know the conventions of your world. Nothing can possibly amuse you more than hearing someone address the third son of a marquess in the style due to the second daughter of an earl.

I must admit that I still often find these rules confusing. The other day I received an invitation to a party from a friend of mine who is a baronet. The invitation was signed by his wife - RSVP. From my reference books I sought advice on how to address an envelope to a baronet's second wife. 'If the daughter of a commoner . . .' I read, then I stopped, picked up the telephone, rang the lady in question and asked her: 'I say, Eileen, are you the daughter of a commoner?'

She said: 'What the bloody hell do you mean?'

I told her: 'That will do. You are a commoner. And getting commoner and commoner every day.'

That solved that problem. Many other problems, however, still remain. One of the most exasperating cases you may come across is a Dame of the Order of the British Empire married to a baronet or a peer. Skill, ingenuity and determination may solve even that. But if you hear of the third daughter of a marchioness married to an archbishop you should carefully avoid the combination.

2) Another excellent device of the British aristocracy to drive poor foreigners – primarily Americans – crazy is the changing of names. The fact that Lord Upperstone's elder son is called Lord Ipswich while his younger son is Mr Hinch does not mean that they are both bastards. The younger daughter of the noble Lord may be the Hon. Mrs Cynthia Cunliffe-Green and his younger daughter the Hon. Mary Cumberland – just for good measure. And if even that does not drive the poor onlooker raving mad, then the 'as he then was' business comes in. You find such passages in field-marshal's memoirs:

'I then went to the Viceroy's Lodge and asked to see Lord Irwin (as he then was) without delay. I shook Lord Halifax (as he then was not yet) by the hand in the friendliest manner but spoke to him sternly: 'Mr Wood,' I began, '(as he no longer was) I've just had a message from Mr Churchill (as he then was) about 2nd Lieutenant Birch (as he still is) etc. etc.'

3) Should you belong to any other class (except the lower-middle – see below) you may boast of your origins constantly. If you come from Bermondsey (or Stockton-on-Tees or Hartley Witney) then you keep repeating that 'the people of Bermondsey (or Stockton-on-Tees or Hartley Witney) are the finest people in the world.' This is just another way of saying that you, too, are one of the finest people in the world and that you love, respect and admire yourself.

4) The one class you do *not* belong to and are not proud of at all is the lower-middle class. No one ever describes himself as belonging to the lower-middle class. Working class, yes; upper-middle class: most certainly; lower-middle class: never! Lower-middle class is, indeed, *per*

*definitionem*, the class to which the majority of the population belongs with the exception of the few thousand people you know.

5) In the old days people used to aspire to higher classes. Since the angry young man literature has made its impact, quite a few people assert that they are of lower origin than they, in fact, are. (I am using here the word 'lower' in the worst snobbish sense.) The place of the upstart is being taken by the downstart. I know people who secretly visit evening elocution classes in order to pick up a cockney accent. Others are practising the Wigan brogue. And I know others again who would be deeply ashamed if the general public learnt that their fathers were, in fact, book-keepers and not dustmen, village grocers and not swine-herds, solicitors and not pickpockets.



## THE NEW RULING CLASS

THE ENGLISH talk – and talk a great deal – of upper, middle, and working classes. They also talk of upper-middle and lower-middle classes, and more recently they have started mentioning a top-working class – just to fit in between the middle-working class and the lower-middle class. This, of course, makes them fully conscious how pitifully inadequate their language is to describe the other 120 clearly defined castes and 413 sub-castes of English society. What about the lower-middle-upper layer of the lower-upper-middle class? What about the middle-middle of the middle-middle class? And how can you really clearly distinguish between the upper-upper-middle people who by no means qualify yet for the bottom-upper?

While all this goes on, the English remain staunch believers in equality. Equality is a notion the English have given to humanity. Equality means that you are just as good as the next man but the next man is not half as good as you are.

Slowly but inescapably, however, the whole structure is being turned upside down. Oh yes, we still have an aristocracy consisting of two main branches: the old families of the peerage who look down upon the business-barons; and the business-barons and stock-exchange-viscounts who look down upon the ancient peers. But while people still insist on sending their children to a good school (and a good school must not be confused with a school where they teach well); while for a few it is still a serious problem how to address the eldest daughter of a viscount married to an archdeacon; while some people, having obtained firsts in



*Our puzzling peerage*

Phoenician history at Cambridge, still expect to become directors of breweries as their birthright; while doctors and barristers are still angry that chartered accountants and actuaries should call themselves 'professional people' and while the lot of them still believe that professionals do have some prestige left – while all this still goes on the Big Businessman takes over the leading role in society with a firm hand and a quiet smile.

The great conquest by money is on. A title will not bring in money; money will bring in the title. The great fight is warming up every day. Battalions of company directors riding on the white chargers of prosperity, waving their expense accounts, their faces painted red with Burgundy, and howling their famous battle-cry: 'Long live Capital Gains!', are battering at the ancient walls of privilege. The pillars of the established order – never even cracked by the Socialists – are crumbling under their assault. Brilliant sons no longer aspire to become Lord Chancellors: they dream of controlling large advertising agencies. Soon people do not boast of being descended from a long line of generals or judges but from a long line of stockbrokers. Talent will soon mean talent to make money. A genius is one who makes a lot of money.

Soon it will come – that final take-over bid, in which Big Business will make its deadly offer to the Establishment. And if the deal goes through – as go through it will – the former people in charge will not be asked to remain at their posts.

## HOW TO AVOID TRAVELLING

'TRAVEL' is the name of a modern disease which became rampant in the mid-fifties and is still spreading. The disease – its scientific name is *travelitis furiosus* – is carried by a germ called prosperity. Its symptoms are easily recognisable. The patient grows restless in the early spring and starts rushing about from one travel agent to another collecting useless information about places he does not intend to visit, studying handouts, etc.; then he, or usually she, will do a round of tailors, milliners, summer sales, sports shops and spend three and a half times as much as he or she can afford; finally, in August, the patient will board a plane, train, coach or car and proceed to foreign parts along with thousands of fellow-sufferers not because he is interested in or attracted by the place he is bound for, nor because he can afford to go, but simply because he cannot afford not to. The disease is highly infectious. Nowadays you catch foreign travel rather as you caught influenza in the twenties, only more so.

The result is that in the summer months (and in the last few years also during the winter season) everybody is on the move. In Positano you hear no Italian but only German (for England is not the only victim of the disease); in some French parts you cannot get along unless you speak American; and the official language of the Costa Brava is English. I should not be surprised to see a notice in Blanes or Tossa-de-Mar stating: *Aquí Se Habla Español* – Spanish spoken here.

What is the aim of all this travelling? Each nationality has its own different one. The Americans want to take photographs of themselves in: (a) Trafalgar Square with the pigeons, (b) in St Mark's Square, Venice, with the pigeons

and (c) in front of the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris, without pigeons. The idea is simply to collect documentary proof that *they have been there*. The German travels to check up on his guide-books: when he sees that the Ponte di Rialto is really at its proper venue, that the Leaning Tower is in its appointed place in Pisa and is leaning at the promised angle – he ticks these things off in his guide book and returns home with the gratifying feeling that he has not been swindled. But why do the English travel?

First, because their neighbour does and they have caught the bug from him. Secondly, they used to be taught that travel broadens the mind and although they have by now discovered the sad truth that whatever travel may do to the mind, Swiss or German food certainly broadens other parts of the body, the old notion still lingers on. But lastly – and perhaps mainly – they travel to avoid foreigners. Here, in our cosmopolitan England, one is always exposed to the danger of meeting all sorts of peculiar aliens. Not so on one's journeys in Europe, if one manages things intelligently. I know many English people who travel in groups, stay in hotels where even the staff is English, eat roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays and Welsh rarebit and steak and kidney pudding on weekdays, all over Europe. The main aim of the Englishman abroad is to meet people; I mean, of course, nice English people from next door or from the next street. Normally one avoids one's neighbour ('It is best to keep yourself to yourself' – 'We leave others alone and want to be left alone' etc., etc.). If you meet your next door neighbour in the High Street or at your front door you pretend not to see him or, at best, nod coolly; but if you meet him in Capri or Granada, you embrace him fondly and stand him a drink or two; and you may even



discover that he is quite a nice chap after all and both of you might just as well have stayed at home in Chipping Norton.

All this, however, refers to travelling for the general public. If you want to avoid giving the unfortunate impression that you belong to the lower-middle class, you must learn *the elementary snobbery of travelling*:

1) Avoid any place frequented by others. Declare: all the hotels are full, one cannot get in anywhere. (No one will ever remark hotels are *full of people who actually managed to get in.*)

2) Carry this a stage further and try to avoid all places interesting enough to attract other people – or, as others prefer to put it – you must get off the beaten track. In practice this means that in Italy you avoid Venice and Florence but visit a few filthy and poverty-stricken fishing villages no one has ever heard of; and if your misfortune does take you to Florence, you avoid the Uffizi Gallery and refuse to look at Michelangelo's David. You visit, instead, a dirty little pub on the outskirts where Tuscan food is supposed to be divine and where you can listen to a drunken and deaf accordion player.

3) The main problem is, of course, *where* to go? This is not an easy question. The *hoi polloi* may go to Paris or Spain, or the Riviera or Interlaken but such an obvious choice will certainly not do for anyone with a little self-respect. There is a small international set that leads the fashion and you must watch them. Some years ago they discovered Capri, but now Capri is teeming with rich German and English businessmen, so you can't go near the place. Ischia became fashionable for a season or two but it too was invaded by the businessmen, so Ischia is out. Majorca was next on the list, but Majorca has become quite ridiculous in the last few years: it is now an odd mixture of

Munich and Oxford Street, and has nothing to offer (because, needless to say, beauty and sunshine do not count). The neighbouring island of Ibiza reigned till last year but the businessmen have caught up with Ibiza too so it will stink by next summer. At the moment I may recommend Tangier; Rhodes is fairly safe, too. The year after that, who knows, Capri may be tried again.

Remember: travel is supposed to make you sophisticated. When buying your souvenirs and later when most casually – you really must practise how to be casual – you refer to any foreign food, you should speak of these things in the vernacular. Even fried chicken sounds rather romantic when you speak of *Backhendl*; and you will score more points by remarking casually – very casually, I repeat – that you went to a little *Madkurve kan medbrings* near Copenhagen, than by admitting that you went to a place where you ate your own sandwiches and only ordered beer.

It is possible, however, that the mania for travelling is declining. I wonder if a Roman friend of mine was simply an eccentric or the forerunner of a new era in snobbery.

‘I no longer travel at all,’ he told me. ‘I stay here because I want to meet my friends from all over the world.’

‘What exactly do you mean?’ I asked.

‘It is simple,’ he explained. ‘Whenever I go to London, my friend Smith is sure to be in Tokyo and Brown in Sicily. If I go to Paris, Dupont is sure to be in London and Lebrun in Madagascar or Lyons. And so on. But if I stay in Rome, all my friends are absolutely sure to turn up at one time or another. The world means *people* for me. I stay here because I want to see the world.’

And he added after a short pause:

‘Besides, staying at home broadens the mind.’

## ON WINE SNOBBERY

A SIGNIFICANT development of the last decade is that wine-snobbery has definitely arrived in England. Before the war only a few retired scientists of University level were aware of the fact that other wines existed besides sherry and port. If you had asked (of course you never did) for wine in a pub, the publican would have taken you for a dangerous lunatic and dialled 999; today most of the pubs in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands are proud to serve you 'wine per glass'.

The trouble, however, is with the wine served in restaurants. Should you, when taking a lady out to lunch, show yourself ignorant in the matter of wine, she will regard you as an unsophisticated rustic boor. It is indeed fortunate that you can get away with the most abysmally ignorant observation as long as it sounds right, because your lady-friend will know nothing about wine either. Any man who is aware that Graves is white Bordeaux, Chablis is white Burgundy, and Claret is red Bordeaux can qualify for the first Chair of Wine Snobbery to be established at a British university. Most people know no more than that a Hock is a white Rhine wine, and are constantly astonished at the ignorance of the Germans themselves who have never heard of Hock.

Genuine expertise comes in, of course, when you begin to be able to recognise the type and the vintage of the wine served. There are two – and only two – ways of doing this: (1) Have a quick glance at the label when no one is watching. (2) Bluff.

There is no other way. I was once the guest of one of the

most famous Alsatian wine-growers whose ancestors as far as he can trace them were all vine-growers. I asked him if he could recognise a wine by tasting it. He said that while he would not take a Madeira for a Mâcon or his own wine for Spanish sherry, he could not be sure. Would he be able to recognise his own wine? Not necessarily, he replied. Would he be able to tell the vintage year? Well, he said, there were certain very characteristic years and he would not mix up, say, a 1952 wine with a 1948 – but, apart from typical cases, he could not be sure. Wine of the same vintage may differ according to what side of the hill it comes from; and even bottles coming from the same barrel may taste different to the expert. What can the poor amateur wine-snob do then? You cannot possibly nod all the time when the waiter pours out wine for you and asks you to taste it. A low constant murmur of approval merely gives the impression that you are no connoisseur of wine, and that is more than any self-respecting Englishman can bear nowadays. I can give you three important tips in this field. But whichever you may choose (and all three may be tried on successive occasions) you must first practise at home. You must, first of all, learn the names of a few famous wines (Traminer, Ribeauville, Pouilly-Fuissé, etc.) and you must also learn what goes with what when ordering. There was one school which tried to be terribly broad-minded by ordering, say, red Burgundy with fish, accompanied by the exclamation: 'I am broad-minded, I just take what I like' – but this is on the decline and not recommended. Your lady-companion may be worried lest people at the next table, unaware that you are being broad-minded, may regard you as an ignorant lout. I should mention here that while you are studying the wine list, your lady-friend may



*An impertinent little Margaux*

come up with a helpful suggestion. She may say: 'Oh, we had a wonderful Herriko-Arnoa in the Basque country. Please, Jack, order Herriko-Arnoa.'

The answer in such cases is this:

'Herriko-Arnoa is indeed a magnificent wine. But I am afraid it *does not travel well*.'

A man who knows how various wines travel is simply irresistible. But to return to your home work: you must practise at home, putting a little wine in your mouth and making it travel around inside your mouth while you adopt a meditative, pensive expression. Without this expression the whole show is worthless; any answer thrown out without gargling or looking thoughtful, gives you away as a dilettante. And after gargling, you may say one of four things:

1) In the case of white wine you may always say – very thoughtfully, – that it is not cold enough. This is not too witty or too original but it is better than nothing. Incomparably better than nodding feebly and not criticising at all.

2) In the case of red wine, you say: 'It is not *chambré* enough.' With a little bit of luck your lady-friend will not know what *chambré* means. But even if she does, the phrase is still magnificent.

3) A brand new device – a variation on the theme: you click your tongue with irritation and send back a bottle of white wine because it is *too cold*, red because it is *too chambré*. (It is amazing how long it took to think up that one.)

4) This version is the *pièce de résistance*; it is to be used only on rare occasions when the impression you wish to make is of decisive importance. You gargle with the wine, go into a species of coma and then declare – more to yourself than to the lady:

'This comes from the sunny side of the hill . . .'

The remark is known to have turned the heads of the haughtiest and least impressionable of women.

Wine snobbery, by the way, is unknown on the Continent. There you find whisky, gin, and dry Martini snobberies, in turn, or – this is the latest – beer snobbery in Italy. A friend of mine – a Frenchman with a considerable reputation as a lady-killer – told me once that nowadays he offers a little wine and plenty of *cognac* to his lady-friends. He sighed and remarked: 'I used to say it with flowers . . . More gallant, no doubt . . . But with *cognac* it is so much quicker.'



## ON SHOPPING

MY GREATEST difficulty in turning myself into a true Britisher was the Art of Shopping. In my silly and primitive Continental way, I believed that the aim of shopping was to *buy* things; to buy things, moreover, you needed or fancied. Today I know that (a) shopping is a social – as opposed to a commercial – activity and (b) its aim is to help the shopkeeper to get rid of all that junk.

Shopping begins with queueing. If you want to become a true Briton, you must still be fond of queueing. An erstwhile war-time necessity has become a national entertainment. Just as the Latins need an opportunity of going berserk every now and then in order to let off steam, so the British are in need of certain excesses, certain wild bouts of self-discipline. A man in a queue is a fair man; he is minding his own business; he lives and let live; he gives the other fellow a chance; he practises a duty while waiting to practise his own rights; he does almost everything an Englishman believes in doing. A man in a queue is as much the image of a true Briton as a man in a bull-ring is the image of a Spaniard or a man with a two-foot cigar of an American.

When your turn comes at last in the shop, disregard the queue behind you. They would feel let down if you deprived them of their right to wait and be virtuous. Do not utter a word about the goods you wish to buy. Ask the shopkeeper about his health, his wife, his children, his dogs, cats, goldfish, and budgerigars; his holiday plans, his discarded holiday plans and about his last two or three holidays; his views on the weather, the test match; discuss the topical



and more entertaining murder cases, etc., etc., and, naturally answer all *his* questions.

A few further rules for true Britons:

1) Never criticise anybody's wares, still less return anything to the shop if it turns out to be faulty, rotten or falling to bits. Not only might this embarrass the shopkeeper but it might also infringe one of the fundamental civil rights of all Englishmen, secured in Magna Carta: to sell rubbish to the public. This system has its own impenetrable logic. With tailors, dressmakers and hairdressers you may be as unreasonable as you choose. But to give back a singularly thick piece of meat to a butcher when you have asked for a singularly thin one is fussing. To insist on records of *Aida*, failing to be content with *Tristan und Isolde* or *The Mikado* instead (when the dealer has made it clear that he would rather get rid of these two) is extremely un-English. Milder and truer types of Britons are known to have bought typewriters instead of tape-recorders, bubble-cars instead of bedroom suites and grand pianos instead of going to the Costa Brava for their holidays.

2) Always be polite to shop assistants. Never talk back to them; never argue; never speak to them unless spoken to. If they are curt, sarcastic or rude to you, remember that they might be in a bad mood.

3) If there happens to be no queue in a shop when you arrive, never be impatient if no one takes the slightest notice of you. Do not disturb the assistants in their *tête-à-tête*; never disturb the one who stands in the corner gazing at you with bemused curiosity. There is nothing personal in the fact that they ignore you: they are simply Miltonists. All English shop assistants are Miltonists. A Miltonist firmly believes that 'they also serve who only stand and wait.'

## HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD

ONLY ONE shortage in England survived the Seven (or was it Fourteen?) Lean Years: the shortage of Good Causes. When I first came to this country, there were plenty of serious problems to get excited about: Nazism, Fascism, Appeasement, the Spanish Civil War, etc. What is left of all these? Nothing – absolutely nothing.

Anti-Communism has been played out. Even the ex-Communists have nothing left to say. Besides, Mr Krushchev passes nowadays as the favourite clown of the free world – such a witty, jovial old boy. *Because* he has a sense of humour, the English (these incomparable champions of the *non sequitur*) are convinced that he is a dear old-fashioned liberal. If only he had not fired that poor little dog Laika into space, he might have successfully claimed to be elected Chancellor of Oxford University.

It is true that we have some minor issues left on our hands, such as nuclear disarmament, South African apartheid, Notting Hill, Little Rock, swastika daubings and such like, but apart from a few dotty intellectuals no one gets really worked up about these. All this is a great pity, because ways and means of fighting for good causes (or for bad ones) have improved beyond recognition.

Take for example nuclear disarmament. Are you for or against blowing up our planet with hydrogen bombs? According to the Public Opinion Polls, 2.2 % are for it, 1.7 % are against it and the rest (96.1 %) don't know. Suppose you yourself are against it and you are convinced that the best way to secure our safety is to destroy our own bombs, persuade the Americans to do the same and put our



*The World's favourite Clown, or the life and soul of the Party*

loyal trust in Mr Nikita Krushchev, that dear old liberal (but for that dog, Laika). You may write a very excellent and persuasive book on the subject: it will be reviewed at length in the quality newspapers and political weeklies – in other words, it will remain unnoticed; you may lecture about your ideas to this or that learned society; you may form a club or a party to propagate your thesis; you may hold mass meetings in Caxton Hall – no one will blink an eyelid. But should you, along with a few of your followers, lie down in front of the main gateway at Harwell so that the police have to remove you, you will then be front page news all over the world. Should your disciples do their act in top-hats, pictorial coverage will be quite superb – indeed, you will practically monopolise television news bulletins and other news features for three days.

Here I give you some elementary advice on how to propagate good or bad causes:

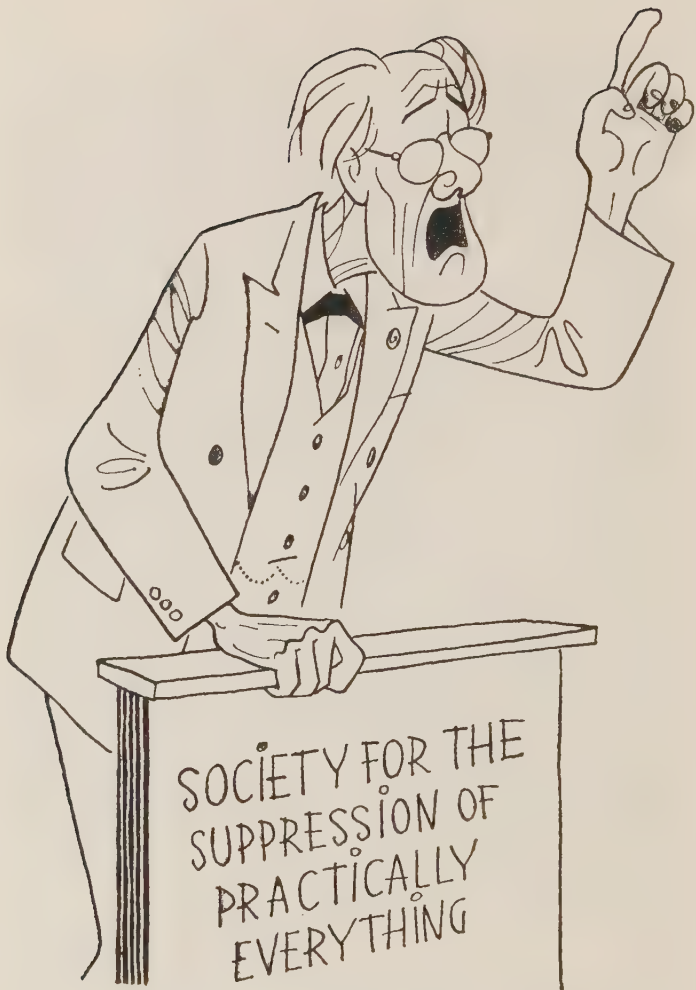
1) If you have discovered a wonderful new dietary system which might benefit humanity to no small degree, do not bother about the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*; forget about scientific institutions. All you have to do is walk from John o'Groats to Land's End. Thousands will come out to cheer you, traffic will stop when you pass through a town and you will become a national figure whether you like it or not, however shy you may be, and however honest and noble your original intentions may have been. Your advice and views will henceforth be sought on every question under the sun (with the simple exception of dietetics).

2) If you believe in the old glories of the Empire, all you have to do is to go to other people's meetings, wave rattles, make cat-calls and blow horns. If that does not

convince the world that your ideas on the Empire are sound, nothing will.

3) If, as a poet of genius, you are dissatisfied with selling four poems a year and living on a total annual income of £3.12.6, your course of action is clear. Grow a picturesque beard, put on a purple robe, prepare two sandwich-boards for yourself, stating: STARVING POET and FAIR DEAL FOR GENIUSES! and start selling your poems, printed on pillow-cases, in front of a church where a top social wedding is just being solemnised. Your future will be safe. Your poems will be in such demand that you will not be able to turn out enough of the stuff. You will make millions and will continue to be revered as the 'Starving Bard in Purple'.

4) Generally speaking, organise mass marches, wave banners and sell your memoirs on the slightest provocation. You may kill someone and – with a little bit of bad luck – your crime may pass practically unnoticed in the press, but should you refuse to pay a £ 1 parking fine and go to prison for your principles (if any) you will find that your publicity will far outdo anything attained by the late Dr Crippen. Suppose you have really hit upon the Word, that you have seen the Light and can at last give us the Creed to save erring humanity, all you have to do is go and dance a cha-cha-cha in your bare feet for an hour or two in front of the House of Lords, wearing a turban. The victory of your ideas is assured.



SOCIETY FOR THE  
SUPPRESSION OF  
PRACTICALLY  
EVERYTHING

## HOW TO BE FREE

THE MODERN Englishman is jealous of his civil liberties and rightly so. Modern freedom is an English invention – or at least an excellent English adaptation of the original Greek. The ancient and essential liberties are well known to us all; here I only want to say a few words on the new interpretation of some old ideas:

1) FREEDOM OF SPEECH. You may say whatever you like *as long as you circulate in one copy only*. You may go to Hyde Park and say whatever you fancy (with certain exceptions) as long as you do not appear in duplicate and are not mass-produced in any shape or form. This is called Freedom of Speech. The trouble is that it may seem a little hard to rouse millions by delivering speeches, however eloquent they may be, in Hyde Park. To make any real impact you would need the Freedom of the *Daily Express* or the Freedom of Independent Television. But as none of us (including the *Daily Express* or Independent- or BBC- Television) has anything of shattering importance to say just now, you might as well stick to Hyde Park.

Modern traffic has produced a number of new freedoms, unlisted in the old statutes:

2) THE FREEDOM OF JAY-WALKING. Englishmen in cars are prepared up to a point to obey traffic signals; but the very idea that an English pedestrian should wait for the green light is absolutely outrageous. The Englishman's right to walk under the wheels of lorries was secured in Magna Carta and ours is not the generation to squander such ancient liberties.

3) THE RIGHT TO REFUSE BLOOD-TESTS – or breathing

tests – is another basic right. In fact, you often hear people *defending themselves* by saying that they only had three whiskies, eight gins and five pints of beer. Anyone who tries to deprive Englishmen of their right to kill on the road is far worse than a tyrant: he is a spoil-sport.

4) Zebra crossings have produced a peculiar new type of mentality in an increasing number of people. This has its new correlated freedom: THE RIGHT TO ZEBRA-CROSS. If Freud were still alive he would certainly be able to define this new psychological trait, this zebra-complex. For those afflicted, life is simply a huge zebra-crossing: as soon as they step into the arena, they expect all movement to come to a standstill and give way to them. In very bad cases the patient expects people to watch him admiringly and wave to him with friendly smiles.





## IN PRAISE OF TELEVISION

WHEN I first came to England, television was still a kind of entertainment and not a national disease. During the happy war years it was off the air altogether but afterwards it returned with a vengeance.

In the early post-war period, television drew a peculiar dividing line in society. While people boasted wildly of not being able to afford a half of bitter or a pair of new shoe-laces, they always *refused* to have television sets. No one ever admitted that he could not afford one. You 'cannot afford' to fulfil a dream; but a television set was rejected on its merits as something belonging to the lower orders. The English middle class were as proud of not possessing television sets as they are of not knowing foreign languages.

Television, however, has slowly conquered – in varying degree – all layers of society and, whether we like it or not – it has come to stay.

I have watched a large number of programmes from the nadir of most variety shows up to the upper-middle-brow *Monitor*. I have watched innumerable statesmen boarding and leaving aeroplanes with heavy, meaningful faces and have always been astonished to find that the same platitudes can be expressed in so many different ways. During our periodically recurrent strikes, I have listened to trade union leaders and employers on Mondays and was impressed to learn that no concessions could be made in matters of principle; only to be told on Wednesdays that their relinquishing of these principles was – on *their* part – victory for common sense and a true service to the community. I have heard innumerable party politicians explaining that

defeat is victory, and that it is high time to save civilisation by restoring hanging, birching and flogging. I am always fascinated at the sight of mild, slightly bewildered people putting up with the insolent and aggressive questions of those interviewers who buttonhole them in the street or drag them into a studio. I like the Brains Trust, too – its poets and interior decorators with the gift of the gab, who are able to utter weighty opinions on every subject under the sun without a moment's reflection. I am fond of watching people in Tanganyika or Madagascar catching rats, snakes and worms for pets while black ladies with bare bosoms look on. (Personally, I should like black ladies with bare bosoms to appear in all my programmes.)

The basis and main pillar of the art of television is the TELEVISION PERSONALITY. If you want to become a Television Personality, you need a personality of some sort. It may be unattractive or simply repulsive; but a personality is indispensable.

On the whole I like television very much indeed. The reasons for my devotion are these:

- 1) Television is one of the chief architects of prosperity. Certain television personalities can give away money with great charm on the slightest provocation. It is their habit – indeed, their second nature – to give you a refrigerator or a motor-scooter if you happen to pass near them. Should you chance to know what the capital of France is called, or who our war-time Prime Minister was with the initials of w.s.c. – if you are able to scratch your left ear with your right foot while lying on the floor blindfold and watched by ten million giggling spectators, then you are practically certain to be sent to Majorca for a three weeks' holiday. If you can tell whether *polygamy* is something to eat or some-



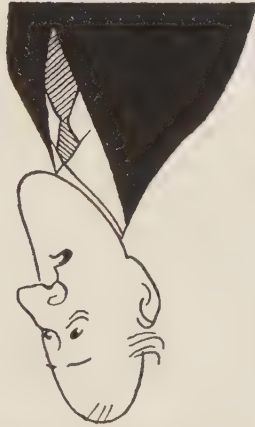
*'... no concessions must be made.'*



*'... must be a certain amount of give and take.'*



*'... look forward to an era of increasing stability.'*



*'... we are living in a topsy-turvy world.'*

thing you find in coconut-trees, or recognise the features of a fourth-rate comedian or fifth-rate guitarist in *Dotto*, you are almost bound to get an annuity for life.

2) Television is also one of the main architects of slumps. A short while ago *Panorama* made a report on the stock-exchange boom, in the course of which one or two people made some cautious remarks about the boom not lasting forever, and recalled the Wall Street crash when people threw themselves out of the windows of skyscrapers. Next day hordes of people sold their shares, thus causing a fall unknown since the days of the Suez crisis. The bank rate had to be raised three days later and if *Dotto* and a few other programmes had not rectified the country's economic balance by giving away even more washing-machines, bubble-cars and tea-sets, we would have faced utter and irretrievable ruin.

3) Television has united the family – by keeping the family at home, gaping at it round the family hearth.

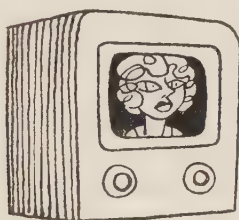
4) Television causes more friction in family life than any other single factor by offering unique scope for quarrels as to which programme to watch.

5) Television is of great educational value. It teaches you while still really young how to (a) kill, (b) rob, (c) embezzle, (d) shoot, (e) poison, and generally speaking, (f) how to grow up into a Wild West outlaw or gangster by the time you leave school.

6) Television puts a stop to crime because all the burglars and robbers, instead of going to burgle and rob, sit at home watching *The Lone Ranger*, *Emergency Ward Ten* and *Dotto*.

7) Television has undeniably raised the general level of culture throughout the country. Some people allege that

it has killed the habit of reading and thinking – but there is no truth in this. I have yet to meet a person who gave up his methodical study of, say, early Etruscan civilisation in order to be able to watch more of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* or who has stopped reading Proust or Plutarch because he could not tear himself away from *What's My Line?* or *Spot the Tune*. I believe that in most cases the devotees are better off watching *Army Game* than listening to one another's conversation. And this brings me to my last point – overleaf.





*Weather Report*

## ON THE ART OF CONVERSATION

THE MAIN and the most glorious achievement of television is that it is killing the art of conversation. If we think of the type of conversation television is helping to kill, our gratitude must be undying. The trouble is that it has not yet killed enough of it. Some of it is still alive and flourishing in Britain.

A few days ago I was observing two sisters and their brother at a seaside resort. The sisters – around sixty years of age – lived at Bexhill and their brother, a few years younger, at Folkestone. These three – because of the great distances involved, amounting to something like fifty miles – had not met for over ten years. The reunion was a happy and uproarious occasion. They had so much to tell each other that they often stayed up chatting till after midnight. I could not help overhearing a great deal of their conversation. It went like this:

BROTHER: It struck me when I was out before supper, that the wind is going round to the south . . .

1ST SISTER: Yes . . . definitely. What do you think, Muriel?

MURIEL: I couldn't agree with you more. Yes. Southerly. Definitely. Yes.

BROTHER: I don't like south winds. Not in these parts. Do *you*, Grace?

GRACE: Oh no . . . Heaven forbid. No south winds for me. Not in these parts. What do you think, Muriel?

MURIEL: I couldn't agree with you more. No south winds. No, thank you. Oh no. No, no, no.

BROTHER: Get a lot of south winds at Bexhill, Grace?

GRACE: Not a lot. A fair amount. We get our fair share of

south winds. You know how it is. One has to take the rough with the smooth.

BROTHER: I like west winds, personally. West winds are fun.

GRACE: Oh yes. I do enjoy a good west wind. We often get west winds at Bexhill, don't we, Muriel?

MURIEL: Fair amount. I couldn't agree with you more. Not too much though. But we mustn't complain, must we?

GRACE: No.

BROTHER: Yes.

GRACE: Yes.

MURIEL: Oh yes . . . definitely. I couldn't agree with you more.

GRACE: No.

BROTHER: Oh no.

MURIEL: Yes.

And so on, and so on. I listened for another hour or two, then I jumped up, went to the television set and shouted:

'I am thirsty for the pleasures of the pure intellect! *Dotto* for me!'



## ON ADVERTISEMENTS

ALL ADVERTISEMENTS – particularly television advertisements – are utterly and hopelessly un-English. They are too outspoken, too definite, too boastful. Why not evolve a national British style in television advertising instead of slavishly imitating the American style of breathless superlatives, with all their silly implications (buy our shampoo and you'll get a husband; buy our perfume and you are sure to be attacked by hungry males in Bond Street; smoke our pipe-tobacco and you will become a sun-tanned Adonis)? I feel sure that the effect of these advertisements could be vastly improved if they were made more English. Some ads, for example, could be given an undertone of gambling:

'GRAPIREX: It may relieve your headache. Or, of course, it may not. Who can tell? Try it. You may be lucky. The odds against you are only 3 to 1.'

Or:

'Try your luck on BUMPEX Fruit Juice. Most people detest it. You may be an exception.'

Or appeal to the Englishman's sense of fairness. A beautiful, half-nude girl (you cannot do without them in any advertisement, British, American or anything else) might call to the public:

S.O.S. We are doing badly. Business is rotten. Buy Edgeless Razor Blades and give us a sporting chance. Honestly, they're not much worse than other makes.

Or appeal to the Englishman's inborn honesty:

Use BUBU Washing Powder. By the way, have you ever tried the *whiteness* test? Here is Mrs Spooner from Framlingham. Now, Mrs Spooner, which would you

say is the whiter of these two pairs of knickers?

MRS SPOONER: This one.

ANNOUNCER: You are perfectly right, Mrs Spooner. That is the one washed in PRIDE. So you don't get your five pounds, Mrs Spooner – no fear. Nevertheless, ladies and gentlemen, just go on using BUBU. Who likes that blinding, ugly vulgar whiteness, in any case? After all, people don't see your knickers. At least they shouldn't. BUBU WASHES GREYEST.

Or, just moderate your language. Make no extravagant claims; be vague and incoherent; in other words natural.

CRANFIELD chocolate is rather nourishing. Never mind the taste.

Or:

Drink DANFORD'S beer. It's dirt cheap and you CAN get used to it.

Or else:

Can you tell the difference between our margarine and our hair tonic? WE can't.

## ON POLITICS

THE FUNDAMENTAL concept of British political life is the two-party system. The essence of the two-party system is that there are either 358 parties or one; but never, in any circumstances, are there two. To explain: both parties reflect such a vast spectrum of opinion from left to right that the left wings of both parties are poles apart from their right wings and in no other country would politicians ideologically so remote from each other even dream of belonging to the same political organisation. In the two main parties – with the Liberals thrown in for good measure – there is enough raw material – I have just checked it again – for  $358\frac{1}{2}$  parties. (The half being a minor group which advocates the nationalisation of the button-manufacturing industry in so far as it consists of firms employing more than 33.7 workers. The .7 of a worker is, of course, on part-time.)

Or else, as I have mentioned, you may say that while the Labour Party has a few real leftists and the Tories a few real rightists (and vice versa), the rest of the two parties simply overlap and one single party would do quite adequately instead of two. In many cases it is really just a toss-up whether Mr X or Mr Y joins this party or that. To cross and recross the floor of the House is not unheard-of; it does not necessarily ruin your chances within your own party. Sir Winston Churchill, for example, managed reasonably well in the Conservative Party after his temporary absence in the ranks of their rivals. (There is nothing illogical in this. My whole point is: in most cases it does not really matter which party you belong to.)

The period after 1945 was exceptional. Then the Labour Party really had a programme (I personally believe an admirable one) and carried it out. The trouble was that they did not have *enough* programme and used up the little they had too quickly. Then they started scratching their heads in embarrassment: what to do next? While scratching, they fell from power and then a 1066-ish period started for them. I do not refer to the actual period of the Norman conquest; I refer to the book *1066 and All That*. A violent dispute ensued (on various levels of intelligence and literacy) on whether nationalisation was a Good Thing or a Bad Thing. Whether it was better to be Leftist than to be in Power? Whether a change to a Tory programme would ensure, at last, a Labour victory?

While dispute is still raging and while some Socialists are still trying to convince one another that their leader would be more at home in the Tory Party, the Tories are carrying on a normal and by no means extremist Socialist policy. They speak of the blessings of the Welfare State as if they had not opposed it tooth and nail; they assure us in all their manifestos that they are doing more for the poor, the old-age pensioners, the down-trodden, the workers, the underdog and even now and then for the overdogs such as the landlords, than Labour ever did. In other words, they are riding on the crest of world prosperity – and they are pretty good riders.

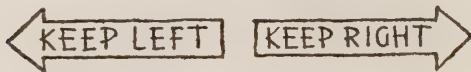
And while the Tories are trying to establish a mild, non-Marxist, faintly paternal Socialist regime, the House of Lords is being filled up with Socialist peers. A lord becoming a Socialist would be a normal phenomenon in any country; for a Socialist to become a lord would be nonsense anywhere



NYCOZAS  
BENTLEY

*The Two-Party System*

else. It is absolute nonsense in England, too, but absolute nonsense is the normal run of things here. Indeed, the customary reward for a life spent in a determined fight against privilege, seems to be an elevation to the peerage. If you go into the House of Lords and contemplate Lords Attlee, Morrison, Alexander, Silkin, Dalton, Shawcross, Lucan, Burden, Kershaw, Haden-Guest, etc., all in one row, you are at first a little perplexed. Then suddenly you may realise – as I did – the devilish pattern behind it all. The Labour Party, for once, is being really Machiavellian. As they are obviously, or so it seems, unable to take over from the Conservatives through elections, they enforce a Changing of the Guard by more subtle methods: they let the Tories carry out a Socialist policy in the Commons while they gradually and almost unnoticed form the new aristocracy and gain a majority in the House of Lords.



## HOW TO STOP ROAD TRAFFIC

THE GREATEST change in my twenty-one years is the way Britain has become motorised. When I first came only a rich person could afford a car; today only a rich person can afford to be without one.

This motorisation has developed into a war between the motorists and the authorities. A feature of other wars is mobilisation; the main feature of this one is immobilisation.

The conduct of the war itself clearly reflects British genius at its best. The authorities were quick enough to discover that cars are a menace and a nuisance and should be stopped at all costs. So the Police, the Ministry of Transport, local authorities and quite a few other official bodies joined forces to form a secret society under the name of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Motor Transport.

Each constituent body of the RSPMT has its own function in the society's stratagem. The general idea is to make roads and streets impassable and bring traffic to a standstill in the shortest possible time and thus free us from the danger of motor traffic for ever. The Ministry of Transport's job is to deprive the country not only of motorways – as is generally believed – but of *all sorts of roads*. This aim is achieved by the devices known as (1) road building, (2) road repairs and (3) improving the Highway Code which is, in fact, a clever way of spreading confusion.

1) The Minister of Standstill – as he is commonly referred to in RSPMT circles – in spite of occasional flurries of activity and waves of self-advertisement – has various means at his disposal for preventing road-building. The laws of the land are, of course, of the utmost help; also the adminis-

trative methods: several hundred local authorities can cause larger and healthier confusion than the Ministry could by its own unaided efforts, efficient though the Ministry is.

Everyone in England is clamouring for more roads through the other fellow's land and skirting other people's towns - your own land and immediate neighbourhood being, of course, sacred and exempt.

So the first seven years of any road-building programme are taken up with appeals against the plan by those who desperately want more roads. If, in spite of its efforts, the Ministry cannot prevent the sporadic conclusion of a small stretch of motorway here and there, it need not lose heart. To accept defeat would not be the British way. There are two main methods of retaliation:

a) If, in spite of every effort, a stretch of motorway is actually opened, it should be closed again as soon after the ceremonial opening as political considerations permit;

b) if you cannot prevent traffic on the motorway itself, block it at the entrances and exits.

2) Road repair is an even more effective way of driving motorists insane. Under the excuse of 'keeping the road in good repair', half the roads and streets of England may be constantly blocked, closed, halved, quartered, made one-way, etc. A secret order of the Ministry of Standstill reads:

Inasmuch as after seven or eight years of strenuous work, minor road-repairs must unfortunately be terminated, the co-operation of the local authorities is now sought. As soon as the road is covered by the new asphalt, but before it dries, it is to be torn up again by the gas authorities; the same procedure is to be repeated by the Water Board authorities; by telephone linesmen; by the Sanitary authorities; by the Inland





*An executive officer of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Motor  
Transport must be ready for action at any time . . .*

Revenue; by the local education authorities; by the Chelsea Pensioners. As soon as the last-named body has completed operations, ordinary road-repairs may safely recommence.

3) Another trick of the Minister of Standstill is to spread confusion, alarm and despondency among the ranks of motorists. Not long ago, for example, the Minister decided to *clarify* the rules of priority on the roundabouts.

He decreed: *there are no rules of priority on the roundabouts*. It is as simple as that. It is a strict rule that there is no rule. Having made this clear to everyone once and for all, he abolished the 'overtake me' signal, adding in a statement that he hoped motorists would go on using it.

4) The Police are responsible for inventing that sublime doctrine: *cars should move but never stop*. The Police are perfectly right, of course. You do not need an expensive motor vehicle down in the street if you are up in an office. In fact, if you want to *stay* somewhere, you do not need a car at all. The most heinous offence known to the Police is officially called 'obstructing the Queen's Highway'. The Queen is brought into it to underline the close connection between a parking offence and high treason.

The Police insist – as full members of the RSPMT should – that taxis should always pick up and put down passengers in the middle of the streets and stop there without signals. And they dote on their main henchmen, the refuse-lorries, and work out complicated patterns for them to ensure that these Refuse Collecting Vehicles (as they are fondly called) and their happy crews should block the largest number of streets for the longest possible time. They encourage double parking, dangerous parking, careless parking everywhere but they may tow away your car from a peaceful suburban

street just to show that they have the Public Good at heart.

5) Parking rules – whether in the temporary Pink Zone or outside – is one of those mysterious English ways a foreigner will never understand.

a) There are streets (in Soho, for example) where parking is absolutely and totally prohibited during the day-time. These streets are chock-full of cars all down one side. If the other side fills up too, that is all right. The ‘total prohibition’ was only a joke.

b) Most High Streets all over the country are filled with the cars of the shopkeepers and their assistants from 9 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. If delivery vans or customers want to park, they must – and indeed do – double park. The streets become first dangerous, then impassable. The police wink a benevolent eye at this. After all, it is only fair that the British shopkeeper should try to keep customers away from his shop by barricading his entrance with his own car; and it is equally fair that the customer should not take such an attitude lying down.

c) Secrets, generally speaking, are not very well kept nowadays. With reporters and television cameras all round us, the secrets of conference chambers, however well guarded, become public knowledge in no time. There can be no doubt that the best kept secret in England is: where one can park a car and where not. Not even the Lord Chief Justice of England can be sure about that. The law is this: parking is allowed, really, everywhere; ‘causing obstruction’ is strictly prohibited everywhere. But parking is defined as causing obstruction; consequently it is allowed and prohibited at the same time, everywhere. Just another triumph of that clear English way of thinking which – I believe – they are fond of calling empirical.

Many people believe that the motorisation of the land has greatly changed the British character. A member of the Government has recently declared that as soon as an ordinary Briton touches the steering wheel he reverts to a savage cave-man. This, I feel, is an empty boast on the minister's part. I have driven cars in New York, Paris, Rome and Tokyo as well as in London and I am certain that while the British, no doubt, have their fair share of road-hogs, neurotics and incompetent asses among their drivers, on the whole they are the most courteous and civilised of all motoring nations. Personally, I am used to French driving and like it; but most Britons regard an English Bank Holiday jam as a sheer joy-ride compared with a normal, week-day drive round the Arc de Triomphe. But the French, in turn, are still the incarnation of tact, old-world chivalry and timidity compared with the Japanese. Why then do ministers boast of our rudeness on the roads? Why do drivers regard their fellow-drivers (commonly referred to as 'the other idiot') as cave-men and barbarians? Simply because, deep in the English soul, there is a deep-seated desire and a passionate longing to be rude. Rudeness is one of the admired and coveted vices of virility. I know that whenever I call an Englishman rude he takes it as a compliment; by now I have learnt to call people rude only when I want to flatter them. Yet the English are fighting a losing battle. With an effort they may manage to be silly, lazy, indolent, selfish, and obstinate; now and then they may even manage to be cruel. But rude? Never.

## II. OLD ENGLISH

## HOW TO TAKE YOUR PLEASURE SADLY

I DO not know how the silly phrase 'the English take their pleasures sadly' originated. Slavs take their pleasures sadly. A Russian cannot really enjoy himself without sobbing for an hour or two on another Slavonic bosom. But Englishmen? They, in their moments of pleasure, may be unemotional, shy, phlegmatic – but sad? Oh no, not sad.

The English, instead of taking their pleasures sadly, endure them bravely, in a spirit worthy of their Puritan ancestors. I often imagine a modern Grand Inquisitor summoning an Englishman and sending him on a normal summer holiday. He pronounces sentence:

'One: tomorrow morning you will get into your car and take twelve and a half hours to cover a four-hour journey. The journey back will take you fifteen hours and the fumes will nearly choke you.

'Two: when you reach your destination, you will queue up twelve times a day: three times for ice-cream, twice for deck-chairs, three times for beer, once for tea, twice for swings for the children and once just for the hell of it.

'Three: whenever you feel unbearably hot, I order you to accept the additional torture of drinking hot tea.

'Four: when it gets still hotter, you will drive down to the seaside and sit in the oven of your car, for two hours and a half.

'Five: wherever you go, there will never be less than two thousand people around you. They will shout and shriek into your ear and trample on your feet and your only consolation will be that you, too, trample on *their* feet. There is no escape from them. You may try the countryside



*May it please thee, O Lord, to grant that thy humble servant shall submit to whatsoever earthly pleasures shall afflict him with grace and forbearance worthy of thy Holy name . . .*

but the countryside, too, will be transformed into an everlasting Bank Holiday fairground, strewn with paper bags and empty tins and bottles. Furthermore, to add to your sufferings, I order you to take a portable radio everywhere with you and listen to 'Housewives' Choice' and 'Mrs Dale's Diary' incessantly!

If all this were meted out as dire punishment, proud, free Englishmen everywhere would rise against it as they have always risen against foul oppression. But as, on top of it all, they have to spend a whole year's savings on these pleasures, they are delighted if they can join the devotees anywhere.

Britain has been the marvel-country of the world for a long time. Many people used to regard her as decadent, decaying and exhausted until they learned better. How has Britain come out of her many trials, not only victorious but rejuvenated? The secret of the British is very simple: if they can endure their summer holidays, they can endure anything.





## ON NOT KNOWING ENGLISH

I THINK it is vital that I give some instructions concerning the English language. I cannot do better than to repeat – with slight alterations – what I have said on this subject before.\*

When I was sent to England in 1938 I thought I knew English fairly well. In Budapest my English proved quite sufficient. I could get along with it. On arrival in this country, I found that Budapest English was quite different from London English. I should not like to seem biased, but I found Budapest English much better in many ways.

In England I found two difficulties. First: I did not understand people, and secondly: they did not understand me. It was easier with written texts. Whenever I read a leading article in *The Times*, I understood everything perfectly well, except that I could never make out whether *The Times* was for or against something. In those days I put this down to my lack of knowledge of English.

The first step in my progress was when people started understanding me while I still could not understand them. This was the most talkative period of my life. Trying to hide my shortcomings, I went on talking, keeping the conversation as unilateral as possible. I reached the stage of intelligibility fairly quickly, thanks to a friend of mine who discovered an important linguistic secret, namely that the English mutter and mumble. Once we noticed a sausage-like thing in a shop window marked PORK BRAWN. We mistook it for a Continental kind of sausage and decided to buy some for our supper. We entered the shop and I said: 'A

\* *Shakespeare and Myself*, George Mikes. Drawings by David Langdon. André Deutsch. 8s 6d. Order your copy *now*.

quarter of pork brawn please.' 'What was that?' asked the shopkeeper looking scared. 'A quarter of pork brawn, please,' I repeated, still with a certain nonchalance. I repeated it again. I repeated it a dozen times with no success. I talked slowly and softly; I shouted; I talked in the way one talks to the mentally deficient; I talked as one talks to the deaf and finally I tried baby-talk. The shopkeeper still had no idea whether we wanted to buy or sell something. Then my friend had a brain-wave. 'Leave it to me,' he said in Hungarian and started mumbling under his nose in a hardly audible and quite unintelligible manner. The shopkeeper's eyes lit up: 'I see,' he said happily, 'you want a quarter of pork brawn. Why didn't you say so?'

The next stage was that I began to understand foreigners but not the English or the Americans. The more atrocious a foreign accent someone had, the clearer he sounded to me.

But time passed and my knowledge and understanding of English grew slowly. Until the time came when I began to be very proud of my knowledge of English. Luckily, every now and then one goes through a sobering experience which teaches one to be more humble. Some years ago my mother came here from Hungary on a visit. She expressed her wish to take English lessons at an LCC class, which some of her friends attended. I accompanied her to the school and we were received by a commissionaire. I enquired about the various classes and said that we were interested in the class for beginners. I received all the necessary information and conducted a lengthy conversation with the man, in the belief that my English sounded vigorous and idiomatic. Finally, I paid the fees for my mother. He looked at me with astonishment and asked: 'Only for one? And what about you?'



NPCQZAS  
BENTLEY

*'Can't you understand plain English?'*

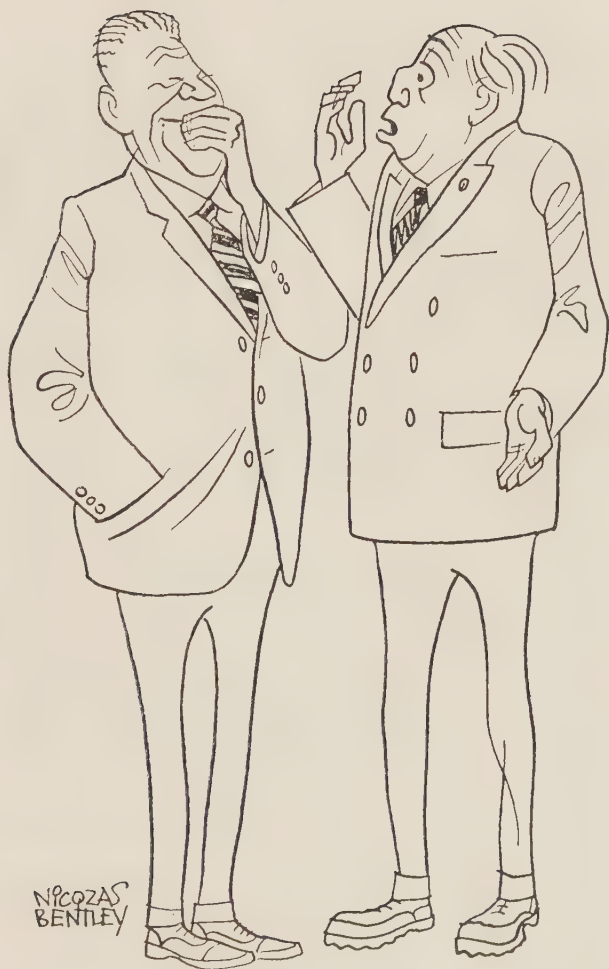
## ON NOT KNOWING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

A TRUE-BORN Englishman does not know any language. He does not speak English too well either but, at least, he is not proud of this. He is, however, immensely proud of not knowing any foreign languages. Indeed, inability to speak foreign languages seems to be the major, if not the only, intellectual achievement of the average Englishman.

1) If you, gentle reader, happen to be an alien and are in the process of turning yourself into a proper Briton, you must get rid of your knowledge of *all* foreign languages. As this includes your own mother tongue, the task does not seem an easy one. But do not lose heart. Quite a few ex-aliens may proudly boast of having succeeded in forgetting their mother tongue without learning English.

2) If you are an Englishman, you must not forget that the way foreigners speak English is an endless source of hilarity and mirth. It is not funny that you yourself may have been living in Stockholm, Winterthur or Lahore for forty-three years without picking up even broken Swedish or Schwitzerdütsch or even pidgin Punjabi; it is on the other hand always excruciatingly funny if an English-speaking taxi-driver in Lima splits his infinitives or a news-vendor in Oberammergau uses an unattached participle.

3) If you – in spite of all precautions – cannot help picking up a foreign language or two (sometimes it is in the air and you catch it as you catch flu) – then you *always* refer to the language you know as Italian, Spanish, Japanese, etc. A language you do not know at all should always be referred to as ‘that lingo’.



*English as she is spoke*

## ON NOT KNOWING ANYTHING

ONE THING you must learn in England is that you must never really learn anything. You may hold *opinions* – as long as you are not too dogmatic about them – but it is just bad form to *know* something. You may *think* that two and two make four; you may ‘rather suspect it’; but you must not go further than that. *Yes* and *no* are about the two rudest words in the language.

One evening recently I was dining with several people. Someone – a man called Trevor – suddenly paused in his remarks and asked in a reflective voice:

‘Oh, I mean that large island off Africa . . . You know, near Tanganyika . . . What is it called?’

Our hostess replied chattily:

‘I’m afraid I have no idea. No good asking me, my dear.’ She looked at one of her guests: ‘I think Evelyn might . . .’

Evelyn was born and brought up in Tanganyika but she shook her head firmly:

‘I can’t remember at the moment. Perhaps Sir Robert . . .’

Sir Robert was British Resident in Zanzibar – the place in question – for twenty-seven years but he, too, shook his head with grim determination:

‘It escapes me too. These peculiar African names . . . I know it *is* called something or other. It may come back to me presently.’

Mr Trevor, the original enquirer was growing irritated.

‘The wretched place is quite near Dar es Salaam. It’s called . . . Wait a minute . . .’

I saw the name was on the tip of his tongue. I tried to be helpful.

'Isn't it called Zan . . .'

One or two murderous glances made me shut up. I meant to put it in question form only but as that would have involved uttering the name sought for, it would not do. The word stuck in my throat. I went on in the same pensive tone:

'I mean . . . What I meant was, isn't it Czechoslovakia?'

The Vice-President of one of our geographical societies shook his head sadly.

'I don't think so . . . I can't be sure, of course . . . But I shouldn't think so.'

Mr Trevor was almost desperate.

'Just south of the equator. It sounds something like . . .'

But he could not produce the word. Then a benevolent looking elderly gentleman, with a white goatee beard smiled pleasantly at Trevor and told him in a confident, guttural voice:

'Ziss islant iss kolt Zsantsibar, yes?'

There was deadly, hostile silence in the room. Then a retired colonel on my left leaned forward and whispered into my ear:

'Once a German always a German.'

The bishop on my right nodded grimly:

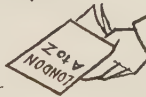
'And they're surprised if we've prejudiced against them.'

## ON THE DECLINE OF MUDDLE

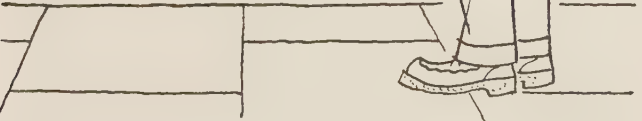
I HAVE always been immensely proud of English muddle and thought that in this respect we were absolute and unbeatable masters with no serious rivals. I never look at any of my books once they are published, but until recently I used to read and re-read with swelling pride a chapter on 'How to Build a Muddle' in one of my earlier works. The English idea of giving neighbouring streets almost identical names – such as Belsize Gardens, Belsize Road, Belsize Villas, Belsize Crescent, Belsize Park Road, etc., was most ingenious, likely to confuse the most cunning foreigner; and if a few of them were not confused by this, then the numbering of the houses came in: numbers running consecutively along one side of the road and back along the other; giving names to houses instead of numbers. A subtle variation is to *name* your house 'Twenty Seven' when its number is really 359. I was also delighted to spend two years of my life as an inhabitant of Walm Lane, North-West London. I was proud of Walm Lane. Walm Lane performs the unique trick – unique even in this country – of, suddenly and unexpectedly, becoming its own side-street.

But a terrible shock awaited me. I was informed by letter from Germany – of all places – that in a small town (I am afraid I have forgotten its name and lost the letter) they have done much, much better than we do in England. House numbers there run in chronological order: in other words, the house built first is 1, the house built next at the other end of the road is 2, then one in the middle is 3 and so on, and so on. Needless to say, the confusion achieved is consummate and the apparently daring English idea of





BELSIZE PARK GARDENS NW3  
Leading to BELSIZE CRESCENT  
← Nos. 1-125 : Nos. 2-124 →  
NO THROUGH ROAD TO  
BELSIZE VILLAS



running the numbers up one side and back down the other seems childish and amateurish in comparison.

I did not mind the loss of India. I was prepared to accept British nationality even after the Empire was gone. I even survived the loss of the Ashes. But that the Germans – the most orderly, the most tidy-minded of all peoples – should beat us at our own game and should be able to produce more senseless and more glorious muddle in their towns than we can, that, I am afraid, is the mark of our real decadence.

What next? Are we going to be thrashed at cricket by the Bulgarians? Are the Albanians going to teach us how to make Scotch whisky? Or are we – no, we cannot sink quite as low as that – are we going to introduce some sense into our weights and measures next? I am inclined to exclaim: *Après moi le déluge!* (That is a cry of despair and it means: After me the decimal system of coinage!)

## HOW TO DIE

THE ENGLISH are the only race in the world who enjoy dying. Most other peoples contemplate death with abject and rather contemptible fear; the English look forward to it with gusto.

They speak of death as if it were something natural. It is, of course, more natural than birth. Hundreds of millions of people are not born; but all who are born, die. During the bombing raids of the last war people on the Continent prayed: 'God, even if I have to be hit and maimed, please spare my life.' The English said: 'If I have to die, well, I couldn't care less. But I don't want to be made an invalid and I don't want to suffer.' Foreign insurance agents speak of 'certain possibilities' and the 'eventuality' that 'something might happen to you'; the English make careful calculations and the thought that the insurance company will have to pay up always sweetens their last hours. Nowhere in the world do people make so many cruel jokes about the aged and the weak as here. In Continental families you simply do not refer to the fact that a parent or a grandparent is not immortal. But not long ago my two children burst into my room and asked me:

'Daddy, which of us will get your camera when you die?'

'I'll let you know,' I replied. 'By the way, I am sorry to be still alive. It's not my fault. I can't help it.'

They were a little hurt.

'Don't be silly. We don't really mind at all. We only wanted to know who'll get the camera.'

And when the moment comes, the English make no fuss. Dead or alive, they hate being conspicuous or saying any-

thing unconventional. They are not a great people for famous last words.

I shall never forget the poor gentleman who once travelled with me on the Channel boat. Only the two of us were on deck as a violent storm was raging. A tremendous gale was lashing mountainous seas. We huddled there for a while, without saying anything. Suddenly a fearful gust blew him overboard. His head emerged just once from the water below me. He looked at me calmly and remarked somewhat casually:

‘Rather windy, isn’t it?’



## ON BEING UNFAIR

BRITAIN – to its true glory – is the only country in the world where the phrase, ‘it isn’t fair,’ still counts as an argument. The word *fair* exists in no other language and if something vaguely similar does exist, it conjures up utterly different notions. The English themselves are not quite clear as to what *fair* really means. I have two famous dictionaries in front of me – both renowned for their brief and lucid definitions – but they are rather unsatisfactory on this particular word. They say between them that, *fair* (adj.) is: of moderate quality, not bad, pretty good, favourable, promising, gentle, unobstructed, frank, honest, just, not effected by insidious or unlawful methods, not foul, civil, pleasing, honourable, etc., etc. Well, fair enough. But *fair* is really something more and also much less. If something strikes the Englishman as not quite in order for one reason or another, not quite equitable, then the thing just ‘isn’t fair’.

Use the argument, ‘this isn’t fair,’ to any Continental and he will gape at you without any sign of understanding. Who the hell *wants* to be fair?

On the other hand, tell an Englishman that he is stupid – and he will smile benevolently; tell him that he is obstinate, insular, selfish, cruel, uneducated, ignorant and his neck is dirty to begin with – he will shrug his shoulders. But tell him that he isn’t fair and he will be pained and angered. Tell a legislator that his bill or programme will create a bloody revolution and he will be undeterred; but prove to him that it is genuinely unfair to one group or another and he will abandon it. Or face an English assassin with a chopper in his hand and warn him that should he dare to



*'Dummkopf!'*

kill you he will be hanged – he will kill you without any further ado and argument. It is only fair that a criminal should take a chance; that is in the nature of his chosen profession. But convince him that it is unfair to rob you and he will take his cap and leave. He does not greatly mind being hanged; but no English robber and murderer worthy of the name would tolerate the stigma of being unfair.

## ON MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS

THIS IS one of the basic English virtues. It is not to be interpreted as really minding your own business (getting on with your job, keeping your promises, etc.); it simply means that you are not to interfere with others. If a man happens to be standing on your foot in the bus, you must not ask him to get off, since it is clearly his business where he chooses to stand; if your neighbour's television or radio is blaring military marches till midnight, you may not remonstrate with him because it is his business what he pleases to listen to and at what time; if you are walking peacefully in the street and someone pours two gallons of boiling water over your best bowler through his bathroom overflow, the pipe of which is aimed at the street (see: ANCIENT LIBERTIES) you should proceed without uttering a word – however short – because it is obviously the other fellow's business when he has his bath and how hot he likes it.

In the late nineteen-fifties, a man committed a murder in the Midlands, splashing himself with blood in the process. Afterwards, near the scene of the crime a man covered with blood was seen to board a bus with about fifty people on it. Yet when he got off, leaving a pool of blood on the floor, not one single passenger bothered to ask him what he had been doing lately. They were true Britons, minding their own business.

If another man had been carrying some victim's decapitated head under his arm, that would not make the slightest difference. The parcel you carry is your own business.



I remember an old story from my childhood which ought to be one of the basic ideological parables of English life:

A man bends down in a London street to tie his shoelace. While he's at it, someone kicks him in the behind with such force that he falls on his nose. He gets up somewhat bewildered and looks at his assailant questioningly. The latter explains:

'I *am* sorry. I seem to have made a mistake. I thought you were my friend, Harry Higgins. I meant this as a joke.'

The man (presumably of foreign origin) is not altogether satisfied with this explanation and remarks plaintively:

'But even if I had been Harry Higgins . . . must you kick him quite so hard?'

The other man replies coolly and pointedly:

'What has it got to do with you *how* hard I choose to kick my friend, Harry Higgins?'

## SEX

THIS SEEMINGLY most immutable of all social habits changes too – and changes fast. In an earlier volume of mine – a treatise on the English character\* – I wrote a very brief chapter on this subject. It ran: ‘Continental people have sex life: the English have hot-water bottles.’ That was all. It has now become hopelessly out-of-date. How right was the kind (and to me unknown) lady who wrote to me in a letter:

‘You are really behind the times. In this field, too, things have changed and – this is the most important – techniques have advanced. We are using electric blankets nowadays.’

And, no doubt, things will go on changing. I do not know for certain but I feel sure that AID – Artificial Insemination by Donor – was invented by Englishmen as a labour-saving device. Knowing the English character, and its marked lack of enthusiasm in this particular field, I am convinced that AID will grow immensely popular in no time and that soon it will be the rule rather than the exception.

I foresee the time – not in the too distant future, either – when a shy young man will be asked at a party:

‘How are you, old man? And how’s your wife? Have you AID-ed any more family lately? What’s it going to be this time: a boy or a girl?’

And the bashful young man will blush and reply:

‘I can’t be sure . . . You see, we don’t AID our children. I’ve got a “Do It Yourself” kit.’

\* *How to be an Alien*, by George Mikes. Nicolas Bentley drew the pictures. André Deutsch, 7s 6d. Available at all better class bookshops. Order *two* copies now.

## HOW TO AVOID WORK

MANY MAY wonder how the English acquired their reputation of not working as hard as most Continentals. I am able to solve this mystery. They acquired this reputation by not working as hard.

It is, by the way, all due to their lack of rhythm and nothing else. Let me explain what I mean.

In my young days there used to be a joke about a silly aristocrat – the type of hero the Austrians called Count Bobby. Count Bobby comes home from shooting and his friend, Aristide, asks him how he got on.

‘Badly. I got nothing,’ Bobby informs him.

‘But how’s that possible? It’s so easy to shoot rabbits. They always run in zig-zags.’

‘That’s true,’ Bobby nods sadly, ‘but I was out of luck. Whenever I shot at zig, he was in zag; when I shot at zag, he was in zig.’

The same is true of Englishmen in general, When they work (or are in zig) they rest (zag); when they rest (zag), they work hard (zig).

On the rare occasions when two groups of Englishmen are vying with one another as to who should perform a certain job, the result is most surprising. You would naïvely assume that both groups are keen to do the job. Not at all. Whenever the Boilermakers’ Union starts a quarrel with the Shipwrights’ as to who should drive wooden nails into metal or metal nails into wood, they call a strike for two or three months. In other words (and this is the Basic Law of English Labour) if two Englishmen are equally eager to do a job, the job is sure to be left undone.

Normally, in the factory, workshop or office, they use their working day to build up energy for those fatiguing hours of leisure when they weed, dig and hoe the garden, play golf, redecorate the spare bedroom, build a shed in the backyard, etc., etc. It is little wonder that when at last they go to bed they are inclined to believe that the time for rest has arrived. They are in zag again all right.



## EVERYBODY IS HUNGARIAN

BUT THE time has come to stop prevaricating. For the last eighty odd pages of this book – I am sorry to admit this, but it's true – I have been doing nothing but raise false hopes. You cannot become an Englishman, try as you may. Because the simple truth is this: everybody is Hungarian. This is a basic and irrefutable theorem like that of Pythagoras.

Pythagoras was no relation of mine; but I am proud to report that the second theorem was discovered by my wife. One evening, while reading a certain biography, I exclaimed: 'Oh! . . .' She looked at me enquiringly from the other armchair. I explained that I had just discovered that the parents of Alfred Adler were Hungarian. She replied briefly and concisely:

'So what?'

I do not like the expression, particularly when my important and sensational statements are greeted with it. Before I could protest, however, my wife added:

'Why shouldn't they be Hungarian? Everybody is Hungarian.'

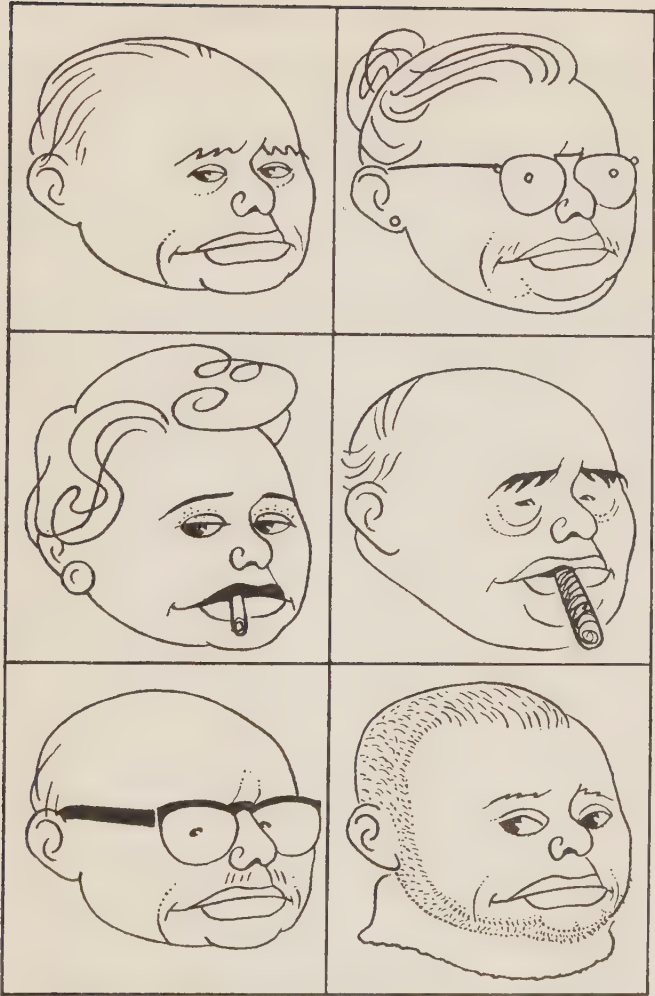
And she returned to her book.

I do not know how Pythagoras's spouse received the news when her husband first said to her: 'I say, darling, did it ever strike you that the square on the hypotenuse, etc., etc.' But it certainly stands to my everlasting credit that as soon as my wife uttered *her* theorem I saw the light. I knew it was true and irrefutable. Of course, everybody is Hungarian. It seemed incredible that no one had thought of this theorem before.

It is true on various planes.

1) London is a great English city, but it is also a small Hungarian village. Most Hungarians living in London will tell you that while they do not avoid other Hungarians, it so happens that they do not know any of them. Well, of course, their immediate circle consists of Hungarians – a few former school-mates, relations, etc. – but apart from these thirty or forty people, they simply do not know any Hungarians in London. A few minutes afterwards you happen to ask them to recommend a doctor, a solicitor, a dentist, or a dressmaker and they will recommend a Hungarian doctor, solicitor, dentist, or dressmaker who is reputed to be the best in England. They happen to know a Hungarian cobbler round the corner who is a genius of his craft and a Hungarian tailor who puts Savile Row to shame. We all know where to buy Hungarian salami, sausages and apricot brandy. We all go to various Hungarian restaurants where they cook exactly as our mothers did. We go to see Hungarian dancers in Shaftesbury Avenue, to listen to Hungarian violinists in Wigmore Hall, to applaud Hungarian runners at the White City, to watch Hungarian football players at Wembley – and so on, there is always something. I do not quite know how it is with others; but I, personally, have not seen an Englishman in London for over two years.

2) Yes, of course, everybody is Hungarian. And if he isn't then his father or his grandmother was. Alexander Korda, the father of the British film industry, is one of the very obvious examples. When Leo Amery – one of the flag-bearers of the British Imperial idea – died, I learned from his obituaries that his mother had been Hungarian. Leslie Howard, the incarnation, indeed the prototype – both in manners and in appearance – of the modern Briton, was



*We are all Hungarians*

. . . Well, need I go on? I am Hungarian; André Deutsch is Hungarian. Nicolas Bentley, by now, is at least half Hungarian. Queen Mary was not a Hungarian. But whenever she received a Hungarian she was fond of telling him that two of her grandparents were.

3) You may ask: 'But what about those few – infinitesimal as their number may be – who are, in spite of everything, not Hungarians?'

Well, they are being Magyarised at breath-taking speed. I know quite a few Hungarians who have not learnt one single word of English in all the years they have been living here. In fact, they regard it as a crying shame and personal insult that people should talk English in this country. They go on speaking Hungarian everywhere and to everybody and if others fail to understand, that is their worry. The population of London, I must say, has made remarkable progress in the Hungarian language. There is a small café – frequented by Hungarians – where a young Yorkshire girl greeted me the other day with '*Kezétcsókolom, aranyos!*', which means, 'I kiss your hand, darling!' I know of a grandmother – recently arrived from Budapest – who in the course of two years has managed to teach her two British-born grandchildren, an Irish maid and a Spanish governess reasonably fluent Hungarian without herself learning a single word of English, Irish or Spanish. The prize for good educational work, however, must go to another Hungarian matron who was travelling on a No. 2 bus from Baker Street, meaning to get off at Platts Lane. She missed her stop, however. Reaching Cricklewood Lane and finding the surroundings unfamiliar, she jumped up, walked to the conductor – a fine and honest cockney, born and bred – and said:



'Platts Lane? *Erre?* (pointing one way) *Arra?*' (pointing the other way).

In case it is only your grandmother who was Hungarian and you yourself are not, I ought to add that *erre* means *this way*, and *arra* means *that way*.

The conductor was a little taken aback by this pantomime and asked her:

'Platts Lane, lady? If you want Platts Lane . . .'

The lady shook her head. English was not a language to which she could listen with patience. She interrupted the conductor with some irritation:

'Platts Lane? *Erre?* *Arra?*'

The conductor raised his voice and tried again:

'Look, lady, I'm just trying to tell you that . . .'

The lady interrupted again, this time quite peremptorily:

'Platts Lane: *erre?* *arra?*'

The conductor sighed and pointed backwards:

'Platts Lane? *Arra!*'

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gute Besserung  
und hoffentlich halb  
so beschriebene Othern,  
wie es jetzt aussieht.

März 61

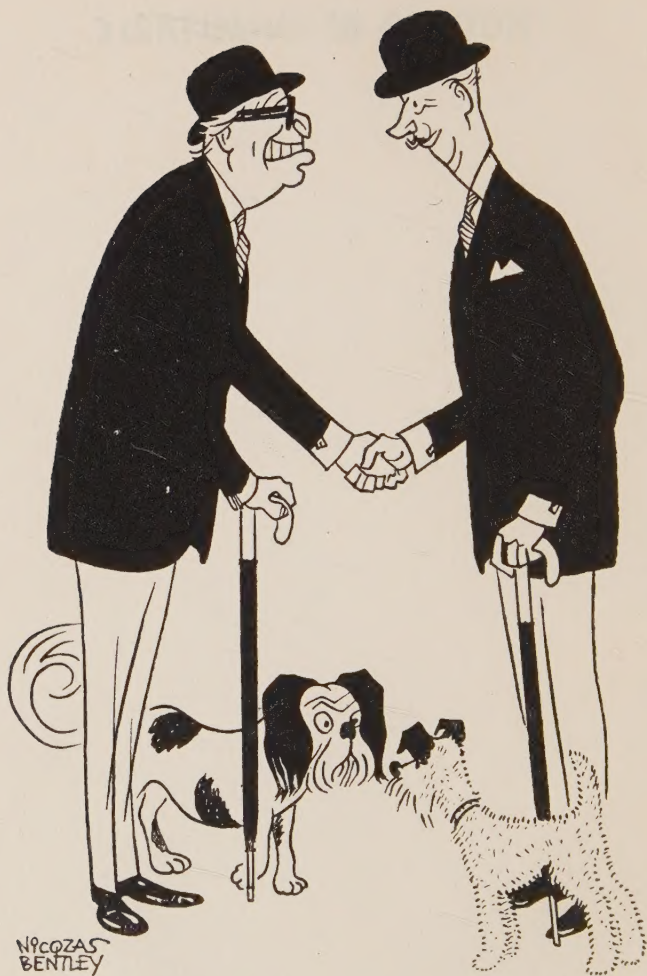
Haus-Christophen





# HOW TO BE INIMITABLE





*The sincerest form of flattery*

# HOW TO BE INIMITABLE

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*Coming of Age in England*

by

GEORGE MIKES

*Nicolas Bentley drew the pictures*



ANDRE DEUTSCH

*By the same Author*

★

HOW TO BE AN ALIEN  
HOW TO SCRAPE SKIES  
WISDOM FOR OTHERS  
MILK AND HONEY  
EAST IS EAST  
DOWN WITH EVERYBODY!  
SHAKESPEARE AND MYSELF  
ÜBER ALLES  
EIGHT HUMORISTS  
LITTLE CABBAGES  
ITALY FOR BEGINNERS

★

THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION  
A STUDY IN INFAMY

# CONTENTS

COMING OF AGE	7
I. NEW ENGLISH	9
HOW TO BE PROSPEROUS	11
ON TRYING TO REMAIN POOR	14
HOW TO BE CLASS CONSCIOUS	19
THE NEW RULING CLASS	22
HOW TO AVOID TRAVELLING	25
ON WINE SNOBBERY	29
ON SHOPPING	34
HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD	36
HOW TO BE FREE	41
IN PRAISE OF TELEVISION	43
ON THE ART OF CONVERSATION	49
ON ADVERTISEMENTS	51
ON POLITICS	53
HOW TO STOP ROAD TRAFFIC	57
II. OLD ENGLISH	63
HOW TO TAKE YOUR PLEASURE SADLY	64
ON NOT KNOWING ENGLISH	67
ON NOT KNOWING FOREIGN LANGUAGES	70
ON NOT KNOWING ANYTHING	72
ON THE DECLINE OF MUDDLE	74
HOW TO DIE	77
ON BEING UNFAIR	79
ON MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS	82
SEX	84
HOW TO AVOID WORK	85
EVERYBODY IS HUNGARIAN	87



## COMING OF AGE

IT WAS twenty-one years ago that England and I first set foot on each other. I came for a fortnight; I have stayed ever since. As a man I am in my forties; as an inhabitant of Britain I am just twenty-one. I was only seven when my first child was born. I have come of age; which is more than England can boast of.

In these past twenty-one years England has gained me and lost an Empire. The net gain was small. I used to pronounce my name Me-cash but nowadays most people say Mikes to rhyme with *likes*. The Empire now pronounces its name *Commonwealth* – to rhyme with nothing at all.

Many things have changed in the last two decades. The Britain of 1960 is vastly different from the Britain of 1938, and even from the Britain of 1946, when I first published my impressions of this country under the title *How to be an Alien*. The time has come, I feel, to revisit England.

When I first came here, Englishmen were slim and taciturn, while today they are slim and taciturn. Then, they were grunting and inscrutable; today they are grunting and inscrutable. Then, they were honest, likeable but not too quick on the uptake; today they are honest, likeable but no quicker on the uptake. Then, they kept discussing the weather rather dully; today they keep discussing the weather much more dully. Then, their main interests were cricket, horses and dogs, while today their main interests are dogs, horses and cricket. Then, the main newspaper topics were sex, crime and money, while today it is money, money, money and crime with a little sex somewhat perfunctorily thrown in. Then, Britain was being inundated



by blooming\* foreigners and she did not like it. Today foreigners are called *visitors*, *tourists* and other fancy names – and in extreme emergency, when shortage of foreign currency is too pressing – even Distinguished Europeans. We must all exercise the greatest care, because the resemblance between a Distinguished European and a bloody foreigner is most misleading.

Then, Britons travelled to the Continent, drank tea with milk in Paris, ate roast beef and Yorkshire pudding in Monte Carlo, kept to one another's company everywhere and were proud of their insularity; today they drink tea with milk in Paris, eat roast beef with Yorkshire pudding in Monte Carlo, keep to one another's company everywhere and are proud of how cosmopolitan they have become.

In those happy days – Munich crisis or no Munich crisis – no one really knew where Czechoslovakia was: the problem was too small. Today we have the Bomb of Damocles hanging over our heads, but nobody cares: the problem is too big. In those days 'reaching for the moon' was still a metaphor and not a short-term programme. The 'idle rich' was still the *rentier* and not the boilermaker on strike. We had no espresso bars, and no rock 'n roll. Then, the fashion was to look forward with dismay and not to look back in anger. After the war it seemed that we would hardly survive the blow of victory; nonetheless, today we are nearly as well off as the Germans themselves. We tell each other confidently that we've never had it so good but what we really mean is that we are all right, Jack.

Oh yes, if you want to be a modern Briton – a Briton of the sixties – you have to follow an entirely new set of rules. Here they follow.

G. M.

\* This is a euphemism for *bloody* – a word you should never use.

## I. NEW ENGLISH

N9CQZAS  
BENTLEY



*Prosperity versus riches*

## HOW TO BE PROSPEROUS

IF YOU want to be a modern Briton, you must be prosperous, or, preferably, rich. Richness has this in common with justice that it is not enough to be rich, you must also manifestly appear to be rich. The English, however, are a basically modest race, so you cannot just show off. In fact, you must hide your richness in an ostentatious, pseudo-modest manner, as if you were really poor. The greatest advantage of this being that you may, in fact, be really as poor as you like.

A short while back it was much more difficult to be rich, but as riches were then quite out of fashion – indeed, rather vulgar – this did not matter. A few years ago a Rolls Royce or a Bentley was a must and to have a palatial residence was advisable. Today, only the get-rich-quick businessmen, the vulgar, commercial barons and the lower layer of television comedians buy new Rollses and Bentleys. The patricians use Austin Sevens, Miniminors, scooters and bicycles, perhaps *very* ancient Rollses, or else Jensens and Bristols (the last two costing about £4000 each but unrecognised by the masses).

It would take too long to codify the entire art of how to look prosperous and how to behave in this Age of Prosperity, but the main elementary rules are these:

1) You must get a place in the country. You remark casually: 'Oh – we have a tumble-down old barn in Suffolk . . .' If you can throw such a sentence away nonchalantly and especially if you learn to blush modestly while uttering it, you will unfailingly give the impression of possessing a ducal mansion on 227 acres, with thirty-four

tithe cottages, eighteen liveried servants and five racing stables. Whenever I have visited the ducal mansions owned by my friends, I have invariably found dilapidated little huts where you cooked on primus stoves and where, if you needed water, you were at liberty to walk half a mile for it. You were allowed, however, to call half a mile four furlongs which sounds incomparably superior.

2) You must become amphibious and get hold of a watercraft of some sort. Here again, you must refer to 'my little launch' or even 'dinghy' with an air as though she were a yacht to put Onassis to shame. But a launch or a second-hand rubber dinghy or any superannuated rowing boat will do fine.

And it is a good idea to appear at the office – especially on Monday morning – in a dark blue blazer with shiny metal buttons; in a nautical cap instead of a bowler; and to carry in a leisurely manner and with an air of absent-mindedness a sextant, an anchor and a propeller.

3) You must choose your friends with the greatest possible care. Titles are out of fashion. If you have one, keep it under your hat and in cold storage: it may come in useful again in the future. Dukes, nowadays, are not called 'Your Grace' but Bobby and Reggie; Archbishops are called 'archbish'; and second daughters of earls are spoken to as if they were ordinary human beings. Ex- and would-be debutantes are only of use if they work in publishing houses. The most sought-after people are Greeks as there is a notion afloat that every Greek is a millionaire; Italian models (female) are also very popular; Swedes (male) are in order, if tall and very sad. Persians and foreign princes might be used in an emergency.

4) If you happen to be a butcher or a lorry driver you

will be helped along the way of prosperity by periodical wins of £ 225,000 on the football pools. It is *de rigueur* on such occasions to declare that your win will not make the slightest difference to your way of life (after all, what does a quarter of a million matter if you already have a washing machine and a television set?), and you would not dream of giving up your £7.10.0 a week job.

5) Finally, in this Age of Prosperity you simply must play the Stock Exchange. You have to learn a few new expressions for the occasion, such as 'stock', and 'day of settlement', and 'consideration' and 'unit trust'. You must remember that your stockbroker will call the market 'easy' when it is very difficult. When reading the financial columns you must bear in mind that when the journalist says that 'steels shine today' he is using the one and only joke permitted to a poor City Editor and you'd better smile. Otherwise the very simple basic idea is that you buy shares rather cheaply, wait until they go up and up and up and then sell them. It is no good to buy shares (I beg your pardon, I mean stock) at a high price and wait until they go down and down and down.

I personally do not play the Stock Exchange, because it is immoral. I lend my money, most morally, to my bank, let *them* play with it and make 120 per cent profit for themselves and pay me 2 % fixed interest out of which I can pay income tax and feel a virtuous and useful member of the community.

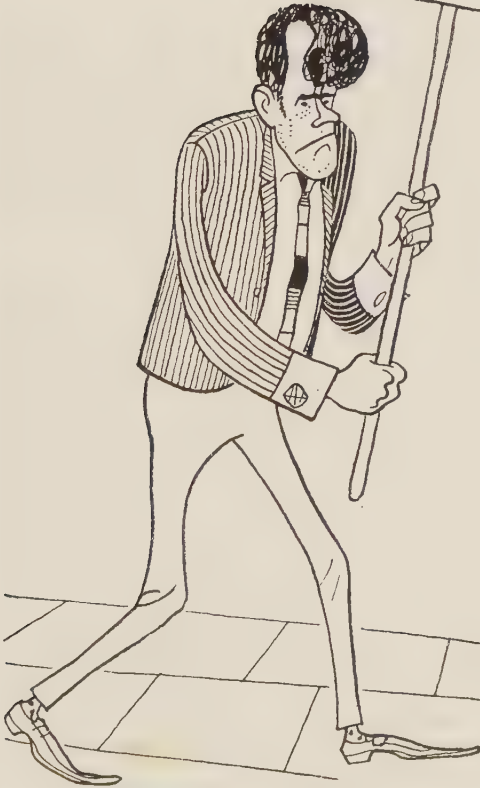
## ON TRYING TO REMAIN POOR

It is much more difficult to try and remain poor. Indeed, one has to ask oneself: is it worth while? Let's face it: the joy has gone out of poverty.

It was soon after the war that the suddenly impoverished classes gained much in prestige. These New Poor were loud and boastful – real *nouveaux pauvres*. There was no end to their swaggering about, claiming how poor they were. As soon as you suggested a coach-trip to Hitchin or just the idea of buying a chocolate ice-cream, their eyes gleamed with pleasure and they told you with glittering pride: 'We can't afford it.' Their poverty was as ostentatious and vulgar as a gold-plated Daimler with leopard skin upholstery would be at the other pole of the financial globe, but while the display of commercial riches was *vieu jeu*, the New Poor were, at least, a new social phenomenon. Not being able to afford anything made them happy; jeering at other people's pleasures cheered them up no end. Their eyes and their trousers shone with pride.

Then the Prosperity of the early fifties descended on us and ruined it all. It took the Poor unawares and disorganised their legions. For a year or two they accepted Prosperity with a sigh. Gone were the book-keepers who dressed like bohemians; every bohemian now dressed like a book-keeper. Then, a few years after the initial blow, the revolt against respectability broke out. The flag-bearers, the most conspicuous and vociferous *avant-garde*, were the Teddy Boys but they were not alone. Everybody who mattered protested in his own way. Filth, dirty pullovers and unshaven faces became the fashion once again; others greeted

DAHN WIV  
RESPECABILITY!



NICOZAS  
BENTLEY



the convulsions and hoarse groans of graceless teenagers as a new art; angry young men spat at the middle classes; others, again, hurriedly exchanged their antique furniture for new and uncomfortable chairs and sofas. And a few people gave two months' holiday to their uniformed chauffeurs and went on a hitch-hiking tour in France and lived in tents.

But there was no getting away from it. That damned Prosperity had caught up with all of us. The angry young men went on spitting at the middle classes and made a tidy little fortune on the proceeds; the convulsive young singers began to shake their manes while they groaned, and that made them even richer than the angry young men; the hitch-hikers and tent-dwellers returned and money kept pouring in to all and sundry.

How to remain poor? – the worried practitioner asks himself. It is not easy. The New Poor of yester-year are fighting a losing battle. To remain poor needs the utmost skill and ingenuity. (And only old-age pensioners and a few other unwilling people manage to achieve it – to our shame). Everything, really is conspiring against the poor and trying to deprive them of their poverty. They had bad luck too. They moved, for example, to such districts as Islington to show how needy and destitute they were. Instead of establishing their misery, however, they managed to turn Islington into a fashionable district.

What else is left? It is no use saying that you cannot afford a car because everybody can afford a car. It is pointless to allege that you have no money because all you have to do is put your head into your bank manager's office and before you have time to say, 'Sorry, wrong room,' he will throw a couple of hundred pounds at you. (I am always

puzzled why people bother to rob banks. Can't they *ask* for the money?)

How to remain poor then? I can give no fool-proof recipe, only a few pointers.

1) Gambling, I believe, is almost always safe. There is no amount the horses and the dogs cannot take care of. The safest way of losing money is chasing it.

2) Try farming. It lends weary clothes-manufacturers and harassed directors of chain-stores a fresh country air, and besides it helps to get rid of any amount of money. After the war I saw a letter written by Marcel Pagnol to Sir Alexander Korda; it ran something like this (I quote from memory): 'I have discovered a truly magnificent way of losing money. It's called farming. Film-making is nothing compared with it. A film may be successful after all and you may make money on it. Never on farming. Farming is safe. You needn't worry: it will ruin you in no time.'

3) Then there is always the path of dishonesty. I mean you can always fake poverty, just in order to keep the confidence and affection of your friends. Who can prevent you from going round trying to borrow half-a-crown while you have quite a decent little nest-egg tucked away at home? Being well-off, of course, is not your shame, only your misfortune, but some people will not understand this. Alas, having money causes a great deal of discord, faction and superfluous unhappiness. In a Soho espresso I once saw an unfortunate young man in deep despair, ostracised by his fellows because he had bought a record player and they had found out that the cheque he had given for it had not bounced.



*Vox Populi*

## HOW TO BE CLASS CONSCIOUS

IF YOU want to be a modern Englishman you must become class-conscious.

1) If you belong to the so-called higher spheres of society you will, of course, never be flagrant about this. You simply look down (not with a superior, simply with a pitying smile) upon those miserable and ridiculous creatures who do not know the conventions of your world. Nothing can possibly amuse you more than hearing someone address the third son of a marquess in the style due to the second daughter of an earl.

I must admit that I still often find these rules confusing. The other day I received an invitation to a party from a friend of mine who is a baronet. The invitation was signed by his wife - RSVP. From my reference books I sought advice on how to address an envelope to a baronet's second wife. 'If the daughter of a commoner . . .' I read, then I stopped, picked up the telephone, rang the lady in question and asked her: 'I say, Eileen, are you the daughter of a commoner?'

She said: 'What the bloody hell do you mean?'

I told her: 'That will do. You are a commoner. And getting commoner and commoner every day.'

That solved that problem. Many other problems, however, still remain. One of the most exasperating cases you may come across is a Dame of the Order of the British Empire married to a baronet or a peer. Skill, ingenuity and determination may solve even that. But if you hear of the third daughter of a marchioness married to an archbishop you should carefully avoid the combination.

2) Another excellent device of the British aristocracy to drive poor foreigners – primarily Americans – crazy is the changing of names. The fact that Lord Upperstone's elder son is called Lord Ipswich while his younger son is Mr Hinch does not mean that they are both bastards. The younger daughter of the noble Lord may be the Hon. Mrs Cynthia Cunliffe-Green and his younger daughter the Hon. Mary Cumberland – just for good measure. And if even that does not drive the poor onlooker raving mad, then the 'as he then was' business comes in. You find such passages in field-marshal's memoirs:

'I then went to the Viceroy's Lodge and asked to see Lord Irwin (as he then was) without delay. I shook Lord Halifax (as he then was not yet) by the hand in the friendliest manner but spoke to him sternly: 'Mr Wood,' I began, '(as he no longer was) I've just had a message from Mr Churchill (as he then was) about 2nd Lieutenant Birch (as he still is) etc. etc.'

3) Should you belong to any other class (except the lower-middle – see below) you may boast of your origins constantly. If you come from Bermondsey (or Stockton-on-Tees or Hartley Witney) then you keep repeating that 'the people of Bermondsey (or Stockton-on-Tees or Hartley Witney) are the finest people in the world.' This is just another way of saying that you, too, are one of the finest people in the world and that you love, respect and admire yourself.

4) The one class you do *not* belong to and are not proud of at all is the lower-middle class. No one ever describes himself as belonging to the lower-middle class. Working class, yes; upper-middle class: most certainly; lower-middle class: never! Lower-middle class is, indeed, *per*

*definitionem*, the class to which the majority of the population belongs with the exception of the few thousand people you know.

5) In the old days people used to aspire to higher classes. Since the angry young man literature has made its impact, quite a few people assert that they are of lower origin than they, in fact, are. (I am using here the word 'lower' in the worst snobbish sense.) The place of the upstart is being taken by the downstart. I know people who secretly visit evening elocution classes in order to pick up a cockney accent. Others are practising the Wigan brogue. And I know others again who would be deeply ashamed if the general public learnt that their fathers were, in fact, book-keepers and not dustmen, village grocers and not swine-herds, solicitors and not pickpockets.



## THE NEW RULING CLASS

THE ENGLISH talk – and talk a great deal – of upper, middle, and working classes. They also talk of upper-middle and lower-middle classes, and more recently they have started mentioning a top-working class – just to fit in between the middle-working class and the lower-middle class. This, of course, makes them fully conscious how pitifully inadequate their language is to describe the other 120 clearly defined castes and 413 sub-castes of English society. What about the lower-middle-upper layer of the lower-upper-middle class? What about the middle-middle of the middle-middle class? And how can you really clearly distinguish between the upper-upper-middle people who by no means qualify yet for the bottom-upper?

While all this goes on, the English remain staunch believers in equality. Equality is a notion the English have given to humanity. Equality means that you are just as good as the next man but the next man is not half as good as you are.

Slowly but inescapably, however, the whole structure is being turned upside down. Oh yes, we still have an aristocracy consisting of two main branches: the old families of the peerage who look down upon the business-barons; and the business-barons and stock-exchange-viscounts who look down upon the ancient peers. But while people still insist on sending their children to a good school (and a good school must not be confused with a school where they teach well); while for a few it is still a serious problem how to address the eldest daughter of a viscount married to an archdeacon; while some people, having obtained firsts in



*Our puzzling peerage*



Phoenician history at Cambridge, still expect to become directors of breweries as their birthright; while doctors and barristers are still angry that chartered accountants and actuaries should call themselves 'professional people' and while the lot of them still believe that professionals do have some prestige left – while all this still goes on the Big Businessman takes over the leading role in society with a firm hand and a quiet smile.

The great conquest by money is on. A title will not bring in money; money will bring in the title. The great fight is warming up every day. Battalions of company directors riding on the white chargers of prosperity, waving their expense accounts, their faces painted red with Burgundy, and howling their famous battle-cry: 'Long live Capital Gains!', are battering at the ancient walls of privilege. The pillars of the established order – never even cracked by the Socialists – are crumbling under their assault. Brilliant sons no longer aspire to become Lord Chancellors: they dream of controlling large advertising agencies. Soon people do not boast of being descended from a long line of generals or judges but from a long line of stockbrokers. Talent will soon mean talent to make money. A genius is one who makes a lot of money.

Soon it will come – that final take-over bid, in which Big Business will make its deadly offer to the Establishment. And if the deal goes through – as go through it will – the former people in charge will not be asked to remain at their posts.

## HOW TO AVOID TRAVELLING

'TRAVEL' is the name of a modern disease which became rampant in the mid-fifties and is still spreading. The disease – its scientific name is *travelitis furiosus* – is carried by a germ called prosperity. Its symptoms are easily recognisable. The patient grows restless in the early spring and starts rushing about from one travel agent to another collecting useless information about places he does not intend to visit, studying handouts, etc.; then he, or usually she, will do a round of tailors, milliners, summer sales, sports shops and spend three and a half times as much as he or she can afford; finally, in August, the patient will board a plane, train, coach or car and proceed to foreign parts along with thousands of fellow-sufferers not because he is interested in or attracted by the place he is bound for, nor because he can afford to go, but simply because he cannot afford not to. The disease is highly infectious. Nowadays you catch foreign travel rather as you caught influenza in the twenties, only more so.

The result is that in the summer months (and in the last few years also during the winter season) everybody is on the move. In Positano you hear no Italian but only German (for England is not the only victim of the disease); in some French parts you cannot get along unless you speak American; and the official language of the Costa Brava is English. I should not be surprised to see a notice in Blanes or Tossa-de-Mar stating: *Aquí Se Habla Español* – Spanish spoken here.

What is the aim of all this travelling? Each nationality has its own different one. The Americans want to take photographs of themselves in: (a) Trafalgar Square with the pigeons, (b) in St Mark's Square, Venice, with the pigeons

and (c) in front of the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris, without pigeons. The idea is simply to collect documentary proof that *they have been there*. The German travels to check up on his guide-books: when he sees that the Ponte di Rialto is really at its proper venue, that the Leaning Tower is in its appointed place in Pisa and is leaning at the promised angle – he ticks these things off in his guide book and returns home with the gratifying feeling that he has not been swindled. But why do the English travel?

First, because their neighbour does and they have caught the bug from him. Secondly, they used to be taught that travel broadens the mind and although they have by now discovered the sad truth that whatever travel may do to the mind, Swiss or German food certainly broadens other parts of the body, the old notion still lingers on. But lastly – and perhaps mainly – they travel to avoid foreigners. Here, in our cosmopolitan England, one is always exposed to the danger of meeting all sorts of peculiar aliens. Not so on one's journeys in Europe, if one manages things intelligently. I know many English people who travel in groups, stay in hotels where even the staff is English, eat roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays and Welsh rarebit and steak and kidney pudding on weekdays, all over Europe. The main aim of the Englishman abroad is to meet people; I mean, of course, nice English people from next door or from the next street. Normally one avoids one's neighbour ('It is best to keep yourself to yourself' – 'We leave others alone and want to be left alone' etc., etc.). If you meet your next door neighbour in the High Street or at your front door you pretend not to see him or, at best, nod coolly; but if you meet him in Capri or Granada, you embrace him fondly and stand him a drink or two; and you may even

discover that he is quite a nice chap after all and both of you might just as well have stayed at home in Chipping Norton.

All this, however, refers to travelling for the general public. If you want to avoid giving the unfortunate impression that you belong to the lower-middle class, you must learn *the elementary snobbery of travelling*:

1) Avoid any place frequented by others. Declare: all the hotels are full, one cannot get in anywhere. (No one will ever remark hotels are *full of people who actually managed to get in.*)

2) Carry this a stage further and try to avoid all places interesting enough to attract other people – or, as others prefer to put it – you must get off the beaten track. In practice this means that in Italy you avoid Venice and Florence but visit a few filthy and poverty-stricken fishing villages no one has ever heard of; and if your misfortune does take you to Florence, you avoid the Uffizi Gallery and refuse to look at Michelangelo's David. You visit, instead, a dirty little pub on the outskirts where Tuscan food is supposed to be divine and where you can listen to a drunken and deaf accordion player.

3) The main problem is, of course, *where* to go? This is not an easy question. The *hoi polloi* may go to Paris or Spain, or the Riviera or Interlaken but such an obvious choice will certainly not do for anyone with a little self-respect. There is a small international set that leads the fashion and you must watch them. Some years ago they discovered Capri, but now Capri is teeming with rich German and English businessmen, so you can't go near the place. Ischia became fashionable for a season or two but it too was invaded by the businessmen, so Ischia is out. Majorca was next on the list, but Majorca has become quite ridiculous in the last few years: it is now an odd mixture of

Munich and Oxford Street, and has nothing to offer (because, needless to say, beauty and sunshine do not count). The neighbouring island of Ibiza reigned till last year but the businessmen have caught up with Ibiza too so it will stink by next summer. At the moment I may recommend Tangier; Rhodes is fairly safe, too. The year after that, who knows, Capri may be tried again.

Remember: travel is supposed to make you sophisticated. When buying your souvenirs and later when most casually – you really must practise how to be casual – you refer to any foreign food, you should speak of these things in the vernacular. Even fried chicken sounds rather romantic when you speak of *Backhendl*; and you will score more points by remarking casually – very casually, I repeat – that you went to a little *Madkurve kan medbrings* near Copenhagen, than by admitting that you went to a place where you ate your own sandwiches and only ordered beer.

It is possible, however, that the mania for travelling is declining. I wonder if a Roman friend of mine was simply an eccentric or the forerunner of a new era in snobbery.

‘I no longer travel at all,’ he told me. ‘I stay here because I want to meet my friends from all over the world.’

‘What exactly do you mean?’ I asked.

‘It is simple,’ he explained. ‘Whenever I go to London, my friend Smith is sure to be in Tokyo and Brown in Sicily. If I go to Paris, Dupont is sure to be in London and Lebrun in Madagascar or Lyons. And so on. But if I stay in Rome, all my friends are absolutely sure to turn up at one time or another. The world means *people* for me. I stay here because I want to see the world.’

And he added after a short pause:

‘Besides, staying at home broadens the mind.’

## ON WINE SNOBBERY

A SIGNIFICANT development of the last decade is that wine-snobbery has definitely arrived in England. Before the war only a few retired scientists of University level were aware of the fact that other wines existed besides sherry and port. If you had asked (of course you never did) for wine in a pub, the publican would have taken you for a dangerous lunatic and dialled 999; today most of the pubs in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands are proud to serve you 'wine per glass'.

The trouble, however, is with the wine served in restaurants. Should you, when taking a lady out to lunch, show yourself ignorant in the matter of wine, she will regard you as an unsophisticated rustic boor. It is indeed fortunate that you can get away with the most abysmally ignorant observation as long as it sounds right, because your lady-friend will know nothing about wine either. Any man who is aware that Graves is white Bordeaux, Chablis is white Burgundy, and Claret is red Bordeaux can qualify for the first Chair of Wine Snobbery to be established at a British university. Most people know no more than that a Hock is a white Rhine wine, and are constantly astonished at the ignorance of the Germans themselves who have never heard of Hock.

Genuine expertise comes in, of course, when you begin to be able to recognise the type and the vintage of the wine served. There are two – and only two – ways of doing this: (1) Have a quick glance at the label when no one is watching. (2) Bluff.

There is no other way. I was once the guest of one of the

most famous Alsatian wine-growers whose ancestors as far as he can trace them were all vine-growers. I asked him if he could recognise a wine by tasting it. He said that while he would not take a Madeira for a Mâcon or his own wine for Spanish sherry, he could not be sure. Would he be able to recognise his own wine? Not necessarily, he replied. Would he be able to tell the vintage year? Well, he said, there were certain very characteristic years and he would not mix up, say, a 1952 wine with a 1948 – but, apart from typical cases, he could not be sure. Wine of the same vintage may differ according to what side of the hill it comes from; and even bottles coming from the same barrel may taste different to the expert. What can the poor amateur wine-snob do then? You cannot possibly nod all the time when the waiter pours out wine for you and asks you to taste it. A low constant murmur of approval merely gives the impression that you are no connoisseur of wine, and that is more than any self-respecting Englishman can bear nowadays. I can give you three important tips in this field. But whichever you may choose (and all three may be tried on successive occasions) you must first practise at home. You must, first of all, learn the names of a few famous wines (Traminer, Ribeauville, Pouilly-Fuissé, etc.) and you must also learn what goes with what when ordering. There was one school which tried to be terribly broad-minded by ordering, say, red Burgundy with fish, accompanied by the exclamation: ‘I am broad-minded, I just take what I like’ – but this is on the decline and not recommended. Your lady-companion may be worried lest people at the next table, unaware that you are being broad-minded, may regard you as an ignorant lout. I should mention here that while you are studying the wine list, your lady-friend may



*An impertinent little Margaux*



come up with a helpful suggestion. She may say: 'Oh, we had a wonderful Herriko-Arnoa in the Basque country. Please, Jack, order Herriko-Arnoa.'

The answer in such cases is this:

'Herriko-Arnoa is indeed a magnificent wine. But I am afraid it *does not travel well*.'

A man who knows how various wines travel is simply irresistible. But to return to your home work: you must practise at home, putting a little wine in your mouth and making it travel around inside your mouth while you adopt a meditative, pensive expression. Without this expression the whole show is worthless; any answer thrown out without gargling or looking thoughtful, gives you away as a dilettante. And after gargling, you may say one of four things:

1) In the case of white wine you may always say – very thoughtfully, – that it is not cold enough. This is not too witty or too original but it is better than nothing. Incomparably better than nodding feebly and not criticising at all.

2) In the case of red wine, you say: 'It is not *chambré* enough.' With a little bit of luck your lady-friend will not know what *chambré* means. But even if she does, the phrase is still magnificent.

3) A brand new device – a variation on the theme: you click your tongue with irritation and send back a bottle of white wine because it is *too cold*, red because it is *too chambré*. (It is amazing how long it took to think up that one.)

4) This version is the *pièce de résistance*; it is to be used only on rare occasions when the impression you wish to make is of decisive importance. You gargle with the wine, go into a species of coma and then declare – more to yourself than to the lady:

'This comes from the sunny side of the hill . . .'

The remark is known to have turned the heads of the haughtiest and least impressionable of women.

Wine snobbery, by the way, is unknown on the Continent. There you find whisky, gin, and dry Martini snobberies, in turn, or – this is the latest – beer snobbery in Italy. A friend of mine – a Frenchman with a considerable reputation as a lady-killer – told me once that nowadays he offers a little wine and plenty of *cognac* to his lady-friends. He sighed and remarked: 'I used to say it with flowers . . . More gallant, no doubt . . . But with *cognac* it is so much quicker.'



## ON SHOPPING

MY GREATEST difficulty in turning myself into a true Britisher was the Art of Shopping. In my silly and primitive Continental way, I believed that the aim of shopping was to *buy* things; to buy things, moreover, you needed or fancied. Today I know that (a) shopping is a social – as opposed to a commercial – activity and (b) its aim is to help the shopkeeper to get rid of all that junk.

Shopping begins with queueing. If you want to become a true Briton, you must still be fond of queueing. An erstwhile war-time necessity has become a national entertainment. Just as the Latins need an opportunity of going berserk every now and then in order to let off steam, so the British are in need of certain excesses, certain wild bouts of self-discipline. A man in a queue is a fair man; he is minding his own business; he lives and let live; he gives the other fellow a chance; he practises a duty while waiting to practise his own rights; he does almost everything an Englishman believes in doing. A man in a queue is as much the image of a true Briton as a man in a bull-ring is the image of a Spaniard or a man with a two-foot cigar of an American.

When your turn comes at last in the shop, disregard the queue behind you. They would feel let down if you deprived them of their right to wait and be virtuous. Do not utter a word about the goods you wish to buy. Ask the shopkeeper about his health, his wife, his children, his dogs, cats, goldfish, and budgerigars; his holiday plans, his discarded holiday plans and about his last two or three holidays; his views on the weather, the test match; discuss the topical

and more entertaining murder cases, etc., etc., and, naturally answer all *his* questions.

A few further rules for true Britons:

1) Never criticise anybody's wares, still less return anything to the shop if it turns out to be faulty, rotten or falling to bits. Not only might this embarrass the shopkeeper but it might also infringe one of the fundamental civil rights of all Englishmen, secured in Magna Carta: to sell rubbish to the public. This system has its own impenetrable logic. With tailors, dressmakers and hairdressers you may be as unreasonable as you choose. But to give back a singularly thick piece of meat to a butcher when you have asked for a singularly thin one is fussing. To insist on records of *Aida*, failing to be content with *Tristan und Isolde* or *The Mikado* instead (when the dealer has made it clear that he would rather get rid of these two) is extremely un-English. Milder and truer types of Britons are known to have bought typewriters instead of tape-recorders, bubble-cars instead of bedroom suites and grand pianos instead of going to the Costa Brava for their holidays.

2) Always be polite to shop assistants. Never talk back to them; never argue; never speak to them unless spoken to. If they are curt, sarcastic or rude to you, remember that they might be in a bad mood.

3) If there happens to be no queue in a shop when you arrive, never be impatient if no one takes the slightest notice of you. Do not disturb the assistants in their *tête-à-tête*; never disturb the one who stands in the corner gazing at you with bemused curiosity. There is nothing personal in the fact that they ignore you: they are simply Miltonists. All English shop assistants are Miltonists. A Miltonist firmly believes that 'they also serve who only stand and wait.'

## HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD

ONLY ONE shortage in England survived the Seven (or was it Fourteen?) Lean Years: the shortage of Good Causes. When I first came to this country, there were plenty of serious problems to get excited about: Nazism, Fascism, Appeasement, the Spanish Civil War, etc. What is left of all these? Nothing – absolutely nothing.

Anti-Communism has been played out. Even the ex-Communists have nothing left to say. Besides, Mr Krushchev passes nowadays as the favourite clown of the free world – such a witty, jovial old boy. *Because* he has a sense of humour, the English (these incomparable champions of the *non sequitur*) are convinced that he is a dear old-fashioned liberal. If only he had not fired that poor little dog Laika into space, he might have successfully claimed to be elected Chancellor of Oxford University.

It is true that we have some minor issues left on our hands, such as nuclear disarmament, South African apartheid, Notting Hill, Little Rock, swastika daubings and such like, but apart from a few dotty intellectuals no one gets really worked up about these. All this is a great pity, because ways and means of fighting for good causes (or for bad ones) have improved beyond recognition.

Take for example nuclear disarmament. Are you for or against blowing up our planet with hydrogen bombs? According to the Public Opinion Polls, 2.2 % are for it, 1.7 % are against it and the rest (96.1 %) don't know. Suppose you yourself are against it and you are convinced that the best way to secure our safety is to destroy our own bombs, persuade the Americans to do the same and put our



*The World's favourite Clown, or the life and soul of the Party*

loyal trust in Mr Nikita Krushchev, that dear old liberal (but for that dog, Laika). You may write a very excellent and persuasive book on the subject: it will be reviewed at length in the quality newspapers and political weeklies – in other words, it will remain unnoticed; you may lecture about your ideas to this or that learned society; you may form a club or a party to propagate your thesis; you may hold mass meetings in Caxton Hall – no one will blink an eyelid. But should you, along with a few of your followers, lie down in front of the main gateway at Harwell so that the police have to remove you, you will then be front page news all over the world. Should your disciples do their act in top-hats, pictorial coverage will be quite superb – indeed, you will practically monopolise television news bulletins and other news features for three days.

Here I give you some elementary advice on how to propagate good or bad causes:

1) If you have discovered a wonderful new dietary system which might benefit humanity to no small degree, do not bother about the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*; forget about scientific institutions. All you have to do is walk from John o'Groats to Land's End. Thousands will come out to cheer you, traffic will stop when you pass through a town and you will become a national figure whether you like it or not, however shy you may be, and however honest and noble your original intentions may have been. Your advice and views will henceforth be sought on every question under the sun (with the simple exception of dietetics).

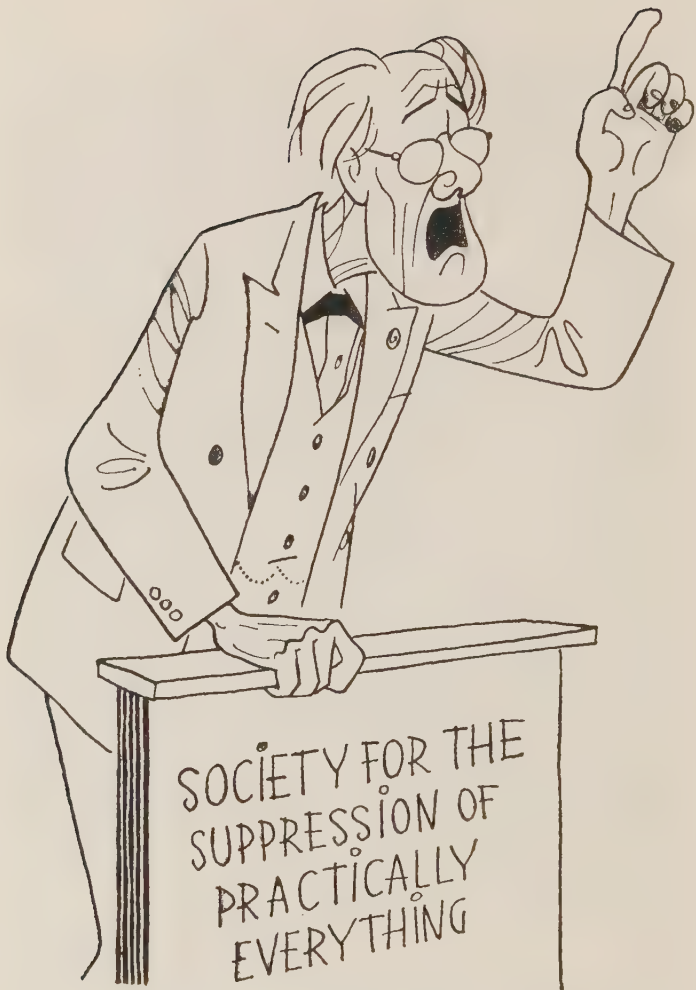
2) If you believe in the old glories of the Empire, all you have to do is to go to other people's meetings, wave rattles, make cat-calls and blow horns. If that does not

convince the world that your ideas on the Empire are sound, nothing will.

3) If, as a poet of genius, you are dissatisfied with selling four poems a year and living on a total annual income of £3.12.6, your course of action is clear. Grow a picturesque beard, put on a purple robe, prepare two sandwich-boards for yourself, stating: STARVING POET and FAIR DEAL FOR GENIUSES! and start selling your poems, printed on pillow-cases, in front of a church where a top social wedding is just being solemnised. Your future will be safe. Your poems will be in such demand that you will not be able to turn out enough of the stuff. You will make millions and will continue to be revered as the 'Starving Bard in Purple'.

4) Generally speaking, organise mass marches, wave banners and sell your memoirs on the slightest provocation. You may kill someone and – with a little bit of bad luck – your crime may pass practically unnoticed in the press, but should you refuse to pay a £ 1 parking fine and go to prison for your principles (if any) you will find that your publicity will far outdo anything attained by the late Dr Crippen. Suppose you have really hit upon the Word, that you have seen the Light and can at last give us the Creed to save erring humanity, all you have to do is go and dance a cha-cha-cha in your bare feet for an hour or two in front of the House of Lords, wearing a turban. The victory of your ideas is assured.





SOCIETY FOR THE  
SUPPRESSION OF  
PRACTICALLY  
EVERYTHING

## HOW TO BE FREE

THE MODERN Englishman is jealous of his civil liberties and rightly so. Modern freedom is an English invention – or at least an excellent English adaptation of the original Greek. The ancient and essential liberties are well known to us all; here I only want to say a few words on the new interpretation of some old ideas:

1) FREEDOM OF SPEECH. You may say whatever you like *as long as you circulate in one copy only*. You may go to Hyde Park and say whatever you fancy (with certain exceptions) as long as you do not appear in duplicate and are not mass-produced in any shape or form. This is called Freedom of Speech. The trouble is that it may seem a little hard to rouse millions by delivering speeches, however eloquent they may be, in Hyde Park. To make any real impact you would need the Freedom of the *Daily Express* or the Freedom of Independent Television. But as none of us (including the *Daily Express* or Independent- or BBC- Television) has anything of shattering importance to say just now, you might as well stick to Hyde Park.

Modern traffic has produced a number of new freedoms, unlisted in the old statutes:

2) THE FREEDOM OF JAY-WALKING. Englishmen in cars are prepared up to a point to obey traffic signals; but the very idea that an English pedestrian should wait for the green light is absolutely outrageous. The Englishman's right to walk under the wheels of lorries was secured in Magna Carta and ours is not the generation to squander such ancient liberties.

3) THE RIGHT TO REFUSE BLOOD-TESTS – or breathing

tests – is another basic right. In fact, you often hear people *defending themselves* by saying that they only had three whiskies, eight gins and five pints of beer. Anyone who tries to deprive Englishmen of their right to kill on the road is far worse than a tyrant: he is a spoil-sport.

4) Zebra crossings have produced a peculiar new type of mentality in an increasing number of people. This has its new correlated freedom: THE RIGHT TO ZEBRA-CROSS. If Freud were still alive he would certainly be able to define this new psychological trait, this zebra-complex. For those afflicted, life is simply a huge zebra-crossing: as soon as they step into the arena, they expect all movement to come to a standstill and give way to them. In very bad cases the patient expects people to watch him admiringly and wave to him with friendly smiles.



## IN PRAISE OF TELEVISION

WHEN I first came to England, television was still a kind of entertainment and not a national disease. During the happy war years it was off the air altogether but afterwards it returned with a vengeance.

In the early post-war period, television drew a peculiar dividing line in society. While people boasted wildly of not being able to afford a half of bitter or a pair of new shoe-laces, they always *refused* to have television sets. No one ever admitted that he could not afford one. You 'cannot afford' to fulfil a dream; but a television set was rejected on its merits as something belonging to the lower orders. The English middle class were as proud of not possessing television sets as they are of not knowing foreign languages.

Television, however, has slowly conquered – in varying degree – all layers of society and, whether we like it or not – it has come to stay.

I have watched a large number of programmes from the nadir of most variety shows up to the upper-middle-brow *Monitor*. I have watched innumerable statesmen boarding and leaving aeroplanes with heavy, meaningful faces and have always been astonished to find that the same platitudes can be expressed in so many different ways. During our periodically recurrent strikes, I have listened to trade union leaders and employers on Mondays and was impressed to learn that no concessions could be made in matters of principle; only to be told on Wednesdays that their relinquishing of these principles was – on *their* part – victory for common sense and a true service to the community. I have heard innumerable party politicians explaining that

defeat is victory, and that it is high time to save civilisation by restoring hanging, birching and flogging. I am always fascinated at the sight of mild, slightly bewildered people putting up with the insolent and aggressive questions of those interviewers who buttonhole them in the street or drag them into a studio. I like the Brains Trust, too – its poets and interior decorators with the gift of the gab, who are able to utter weighty opinions on every subject under the sun without a moment's reflection. I am fond of watching people in Tanganyika or Madagascar catching rats, snakes and worms for pets while black ladies with bare bosoms look on. (Personally, I should like black ladies with bare bosoms to appear in all my programmes.)

The basis and main pillar of the art of television is the TELEVISION PERSONALITY. If you want to become a Television Personality, you need a personality of some sort. It may be unattractive or simply repulsive; but a personality is indispensable.

On the whole I like television very much indeed. The reasons for my devotion are these:

- 1) Television is one of the chief architects of prosperity. Certain television personalities can give away money with great charm on the slightest provocation. It is their habit – indeed, their second nature – to give you a refrigerator or a motor-scooter if you happen to pass near them. Should you chance to know what the capital of France is called, or who our war-time Prime Minister was with the initials of w.s.c. – if you are able to scratch your left ear with your right foot while lying on the floor blindfold and watched by ten million giggling spectators, then you are practically certain to be sent to Majorca for a three weeks' holiday. If you can tell whether *polygamy* is something to eat or some-



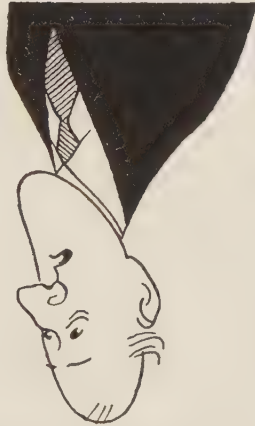
*'... no concessions must be made.'*



*'... must be a certain amount of give and take.'*



*'... look forward to an era of increasing stability.'*



*'... we are living in a topsy-turvy world.'*

thing you find in coconut-trees, or recognise the features of a fourth-rate comedian or fifth-rate guitarist in *Dotto*, you are almost bound to get an annuity for life.

2) Television is also one of the main architects of slumps. A short while ago *Panorama* made a report on the stock-exchange boom, in the course of which one or two people made some cautious remarks about the boom not lasting forever, and recalled the Wall Street crash when people threw themselves out of the windows of skyscrapers. Next day hordes of people sold their shares, thus causing a fall unknown since the days of the Suez crisis. The bank rate had to be raised three days later and if *Dotto* and a few other programmes had not rectified the country's economic balance by giving away even more washing-machines, bubble-cars and tea-sets, we would have faced utter and irretrievable ruin.

3) Television has united the family – by keeping the family at home, gaping at it round the family hearth.

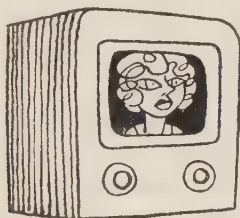
4) Television causes more friction in family life than any other single factor by offering unique scope for quarrels as to which programme to watch.

5) Television is of great educational value. It teaches you while still really young how to (a) kill, (b) rob, (c) embezzle, (d) shoot, (e) poison, and generally speaking, (f) how to grow up into a Wild West outlaw or gangster by the time you leave school.

6) Television puts a stop to crime because all the burglars and robbers, instead of going to burgle and rob, sit at home watching *The Lone Ranger*, *Emergency Ward Ten* and *Dotto*.

7) Television has undeniably raised the general level of culture throughout the country. Some people allege that

it has killed the habit of reading and thinking – but there is no truth in this. I have yet to meet a person who gave up his methodical study of, say, early Etruscan civilisation in order to be able to watch more of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* or who has stopped reading Proust or Plutarch because he could not tear himself away from *What's My Line?* or *Spot the Tune*. I believe that in most cases the devotees are better off watching *Army Game* than listening to one another's conversation. And this brings me to my last point – overleaf.







*Weather Report*

## ON THE ART OF CONVERSATION

THE MAIN and the most glorious achievement of television is that it is killing the art of conversation. If we think of the type of conversation television is helping to kill, our gratitude must be undying. The trouble is that it has not yet killed enough of it. Some of it is still alive and flourishing in Britain.

A few days ago I was observing two sisters and their brother at a seaside resort. The sisters – around sixty years of age – lived at Bexhill and their brother, a few years younger, at Folkestone. These three – because of the great distances involved, amounting to something like fifty miles – had not met for over ten years. The reunion was a happy and uproarious occasion. They had so much to tell each other that they often stayed up chatting till after midnight. I could not help overhearing a great deal of their conversation. It went like this:

BROTHER: It struck me when I was out before supper, that the wind is going round to the south . . .

1ST SISTER: Yes . . . definitely. What do you think, Muriel?

MURIEL: I couldn't agree with you more. Yes. Southerly. Definitely. Yes.

BROTHER: I don't like south winds. Not in these parts. Do *you*, Grace?

GRACE: Oh no . . . Heaven forbid. No south winds for me. Not in these parts. What do you think, Muriel?

MURIEL: I couldn't agree with you more. No south winds. No, thank you. Oh no. No, no, no.

BROTHER: Get a lot of south winds at Bexhill, Grace?

GRACE: Not a lot. A fair amount. We get our fair share of

south winds. You know how it is. One has to take the rough with the smooth.

BROTHER: I like west winds, personally. West winds are fun.

GRACE: Oh yes. I do enjoy a good west wind. We often get west winds at Bexhill, don't we, Muriel?

MURIEL: Fair amount. I couldn't agree with you more. Not too much though. But we mustn't complain, must we?

GRACE: No.

BROTHER: Yes.

GRACE: Yes.

MURIEL: Oh yes . . . definitely. I couldn't agree with you more.

GRACE: No.

BROTHER: Oh no.

MURIEL: Yes.

And so on, and so on. I listened for another hour or two, then I jumped up, went to the television set and shouted:

'I am thirsty for the pleasures of the pure intellect! *Dotto* for me!'

## ON ADVERTISEMENTS

ALL ADVERTISEMENTS – particularly television advertisements – are utterly and hopelessly un-English. They are too outspoken, too definite, too boastful. Why not evolve a national British style in television advertising instead of slavishly imitating the American style of breathless superlatives, with all their silly implications (buy our shampoo and you'll get a husband; buy our perfume and you are sure to be attacked by hungry males in Bond Street; smoke our pipe-tobacco and you will become a sun-tanned Adonis)? I feel sure that the effect of these advertisements could be vastly improved if they were made more English. Some ads, for example, could be given an undertone of gambling:

'GRAPIREX: It may relieve your headache. Or, of course, it may not. Who can tell? Try it. You may be lucky. The odds against you are only 3 to 1.'

Or:

'Try your luck on BUMPEX Fruit Juice. Most people detest it. You may be an exception.'

Or appeal to the Englishman's sense of fairness. A beautiful, half-nude girl (you cannot do without them in any advertisement, British, American or anything else) might call to the public:

S.O.S. We are doing badly. Business is rotten. Buy Edgeless Razor Blades and give us a sporting chance. Honestly, they're not much worse than other makes.

Or appeal to the Englishman's inborn honesty:

Use BUBU Washing Powder. By the way, have you ever tried the *whiteness* test? Here is Mrs Spooner from Framlingham. Now, Mrs Spooner, which would you

say is the whiter of these two pairs of knickers?

MRS SPOONER: This one.

ANNOUNCER: You are perfectly right, Mrs Spooner. That is the one washed in PRIDE. So you don't get your five pounds, Mrs Spooner – no fear. Nevertheless, ladies and gentlemen, just go on using BUBU. Who likes that blinding, ugly vulgar whiteness, in any case? After all, people don't see your knickers. At least they shouldn't. BUBU WASHES GREYEST.

Or, just moderate your language. Make no extravagant claims; be vague and incoherent; in other words natural.

CRANFIELD chocolate is rather nourishing. Never mind the taste.

Or:

Drink DANFORD'S beer. It's dirt cheap and you CAN get used to it.

Or else:

Can you tell the difference between our margarine and our hair tonic? WE can't.

## ON POLITICS

THE FUNDAMENTAL concept of British political life is the two-party system. The essence of the two-party system is that there are either 358 parties or one; but never, in any circumstances, are there two. To explain: both parties reflect such a vast spectrum of opinion from left to right that the left wings of both parties are poles apart from their right wings and in no other country would politicians ideologically so remote from each other even dream of belonging to the same political organisation. In the two main parties – with the Liberals thrown in for good measure – there is enough raw material – I have just checked it again – for  $358\frac{1}{2}$  parties. (The half being a minor group which advocates the nationalisation of the button-manufacturing industry in so far as it consists of firms employing more than 33.7 workers. The .7 of a worker is, of course, on part-time.)

Or else, as I have mentioned, you may say that while the Labour Party has a few real leftists and the Tories a few real rightists (and vice versa), the rest of the two parties simply overlap and one single party would do quite adequately instead of two. In many cases it is really just a toss-up whether Mr X or Mr Y joins this party or that. To cross and recross the floor of the House is not unheard-of; it does not necessarily ruin your chances within your own party. Sir Winston Churchill, for example, managed reasonably well in the Conservative Party after his temporary absence in the ranks of their rivals. (There is nothing illogical in this. My whole point is: in most cases it does not really matter which party you belong to.)

The period after 1945 was exceptional. Then the Labour Party really had a programme (I personally believe an admirable one) and carried it out. The trouble was that they did not have *enough* programme and used up the little they had too quickly. Then they started scratching their heads in embarrassment: what to do next? While scratching, they fell from power and then a 1066-ish period started for them. I do not refer to the actual period of the Norman conquest; I refer to the book *1066 and All That*. A violent dispute ensued (on various levels of intelligence and literacy) on whether nationalisation was a Good Thing or a Bad Thing. Whether it was better to be Leftist than to be in Power? Whether a change to a Tory programme would ensure, at last, a Labour victory?

While dispute is still raging and while some Socialists are still trying to convince one another that their leader would be more at home in the Tory Party, the Tories are carrying on a normal and by no means extremist Socialist policy. They speak of the blessings of the Welfare State as if they had not opposed it tooth and nail; they assure us in all their manifestos that they are doing more for the poor, the old-age pensioners, the down-trodden, the workers, the underdog and even now and then for the overdogs such as the landlords, than Labour ever did. In other words, they are riding on the crest of world prosperity – and they are pretty good riders.

And while the Tories are trying to establish a mild, non-Marxist, faintly paternal Socialist regime, the House of Lords is being filled up with Socialist peers. A lord becoming a Socialist would be a normal phenomenon in any country; for a Socialist to become a lord would be nonsense anywhere

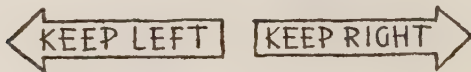


NYCOZAS  
BENTLEY

*The Two-Party System*



else. It is absolute nonsense in England, too, but absolute nonsense is the normal run of things here. Indeed, the customary reward for a life spent in a determined fight against privilege, seems to be an elevation to the peerage. If you go into the House of Lords and contemplate Lords Attlee, Morrison, Alexander, Silkin, Dalton, Shawcross, Lucan, Burden, Kershaw, Haden-Guest, etc., all in one row, you are at first a little perplexed. Then suddenly you may realise – as I did – the devilish pattern behind it all. The Labour Party, for once, is being really Machiavellian. As they are obviously, or so it seems, unable to take over from the Conservatives through elections, they enforce a Changing of the Guard by more subtle methods: they let the Tories carry out a Socialist policy in the Commons while they gradually and almost unnoticed form the new aristocracy and gain a majority in the House of Lords.



## HOW TO STOP ROAD TRAFFIC

THE GREATEST change in my twenty-one years is the way Britain has become motorised. When I first came only a rich person could afford a car; today only a rich person can afford to be without one.

This motorisation has developed into a war between the motorists and the authorities. A feature of other wars is mobilisation; the main feature of this one is immobilisation.

The conduct of the war itself clearly reflects British genius at its best. The authorities were quick enough to discover that cars are a menace and a nuisance and should be stopped at all costs. So the Police, the Ministry of Transport, local authorities and quite a few other official bodies joined forces to form a secret society under the name of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Motor Transport.

Each constituent body of the RSPMT has its own function in the society's stratagem. The general idea is to make roads and streets impassable and bring traffic to a standstill in the shortest possible time and thus free us from the danger of motor traffic for ever. The Ministry of Transport's job is to deprive the country not only of motorways – as is generally believed – but of *all sorts of roads*. This aim is achieved by the devices known as (1) road building, (2) road repairs and (3) improving the Highway Code which is, in fact, a clever way of spreading confusion.

1) The Minister of Standstill – as he is commonly referred to in RSPMT circles – in spite of occasional flurries of activity and waves of self-advertisement – has various means at his disposal for preventing road-building. The laws of the land are, of course, of the utmost help; also the adminis-

trative methods: several hundred local authorities can cause larger and healthier confusion than the Ministry could by its own unaided efforts, efficient though the Ministry is.

Everyone in England is clamouring for more roads through the other fellow's land and skirting other people's towns - your own land and immediate neighbourhood being, of course, sacred and exempt.

So the first seven years of any road-building programme are taken up with appeals against the plan by those who desperately want more roads. If, in spite of its efforts, the Ministry cannot prevent the sporadic conclusion of a small stretch of motorway here and there, it need not lose heart. To accept defeat would not be the British way. There are two main methods of retaliation:

a) If, in spite of every effort, a stretch of motorway is actually opened, it should be closed again as soon after the ceremonial opening as political considerations permit;

b) if you cannot prevent traffic on the motorway itself, block it at the entrances and exits.

2) Road repair is an even more effective way of driving motorists insane. Under the excuse of 'keeping the road in good repair', half the roads and streets of England may be constantly blocked, closed, halved, quartered, made one-way, etc. A secret order of the Ministry of Standstill reads:

Inasmuch as after seven or eight years of strenuous work, minor road-repairs must unfortunately be terminated, the co-operation of the local authorities is now sought. As soon as the road is covered by the new asphalt, but before it dries, it is to be torn up again by the gas authorities; the same procedure is to be repeated by the Water Board authorities; by telephone linesmen; by the Sanitary authorities; by the Inland



*An executive officer of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Motor  
Transport must be ready for action at any time . . .*

Revenue; by the local education authorities; by the Chelsea Pensioners. As soon as the last-named body has completed operations, ordinary road-repairs may safely recommence.

3) Another trick of the Minister of Standstill is to spread confusion, alarm and despondency among the ranks of motorists. Not long ago, for example, the Minister decided to *clarify* the rules of priority on the roundabouts.

He decreed: *there are no rules of priority on the roundabouts*. It is as simple as that. It is a strict rule that there is no rule. Having made this clear to everyone once and for all, he abolished the 'overtake me' signal, adding in a statement that he hoped motorists would go on using it.

4) The Police are responsible for inventing that sublime doctrine: *cars should move but never stop*. The Police are perfectly right, of course. You do not need an expensive motor vehicle down in the street if you are up in an office. In fact, if you want to *stay* somewhere, you do not need a car at all. The most heinous offence known to the Police is officially called 'obstructing the Queen's Highway'. The Queen is brought into it to underline the close connection between a parking offence and high treason.

The Police insist – as full members of the RSPMT should – that taxis should always pick up and put down passengers in the middle of the streets and stop there without signals. And they dote on their main henchmen, the refuse-lorries, and work out complicated patterns for them to ensure that these Refuse Collecting Vehicles (as they are fondly called) and their happy crews should block the largest number of streets for the longest possible time. They encourage double parking, dangerous parking, careless parking everywhere but they may tow away your car from a peaceful suburban

street just to show that they have the Public Good at heart.

5) Parking rules – whether in the temporary Pink Zone or outside – is one of those mysterious English ways a foreigner will never understand.

a) There are streets (in Soho, for example) where parking is absolutely and totally prohibited during the day-time. These streets are chock-full of cars all down one side. If the other side fills up too, that is all right. The ‘total prohibition’ was only a joke.

b) Most High Streets all over the country are filled with the cars of the shopkeepers and their assistants from 9 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. If delivery vans or customers want to park, they must – and indeed do – double park. The streets become first dangerous, then impassable. The police wink a benevolent eye at this. After all, it is only fair that the British shopkeeper should try to keep customers away from his shop by barricading his entrance with his own car; and it is equally fair that the customer should not take such an attitude lying down.

c) Secrets, generally speaking, are not very well kept nowadays. With reporters and television cameras all round us, the secrets of conference chambers, however well guarded, become public knowledge in no time. There can be no doubt that the best kept secret in England is: where one can park a car and where not. Not even the Lord Chief Justice of England can be sure about that. The law is this: parking is allowed, really, everywhere; ‘causing obstruction’ is strictly prohibited everywhere. But parking is defined as causing obstruction; consequently it is allowed and prohibited at the same time, everywhere. Just another triumph of that clear English way of thinking which – I believe – they are fond of calling empirical.

Many people believe that the motorisation of the land has greatly changed the British character. A member of the Government has recently declared that as soon as an ordinary Briton touches the steering wheel he reverts to a savage cave-man. This, I feel, is an empty boast on the minister's part. I have driven cars in New York, Paris, Rome and Tokyo as well as in London and I am certain that while the British, no doubt, have their fair share of road-hogs, neurotics and incompetent asses among their drivers, on the whole they are the most courteous and civilised of all motoring nations. Personally, I am used to French driving and like it; but most Britons regard an English Bank Holiday jam as a sheer joy-ride compared with a normal, week-day drive round the Arc de Triomphe. But the French, in turn, are still the incarnation of tact, old-world chivalry and timidity compared with the Japanese. Why then do ministers boast of our rudeness on the roads? Why do drivers regard their fellow-drivers (commonly referred to as 'the other idiot') as cave-men and barbarians? Simply because, deep in the English soul, there is a deep-seated desire and a passionate longing to be rude. Rudeness is one of the admired and coveted vices of virility. I know that whenever I call an Englishman rude he takes it as a compliment; by now I have learnt to call people rude only when I want to flatter them. Yet the English are fighting a losing battle. With an effort they may manage to be silly, lazy, indolent, selfish, and obstinate; now and then they may even manage to be cruel. But rude? Never.

## II. OLD ENGLISH



## HOW TO TAKE YOUR PLEASURE SADLY

I DO not know how the silly phrase 'the English take their pleasures sadly' originated. Slavs take their pleasures sadly. A Russian cannot really enjoy himself without sobbing for an hour or two on another Slavonic bosom. But Englishmen? They, in their moments of pleasure, may be unemotional, shy, phlegmatic – but sad? Oh no, not sad.

The English, instead of taking their pleasures sadly, endure them bravely, in a spirit worthy of their Puritan ancestors. I often imagine a modern Grand Inquisitor summoning an Englishman and sending him on a normal summer holiday. He pronounces sentence:

'One: tomorrow morning you will get into your car and take twelve and a half hours to cover a four-hour journey. The journey back will take you fifteen hours and the fumes will nearly choke you.

'Two: when you reach your destination, you will queue up twelve times a day: three times for ice-cream, twice for deck-chairs, three times for beer, once for tea, twice for swings for the children and once just for the hell of it.

'Three: whenever you feel unbearably hot, I order you to accept the additional torture of drinking hot tea.

'Four: when it gets still hotter, you will drive down to the seaside and sit in the oven of your car, for two hours and a half.

'Five: wherever you go, there will never be less than two thousand people around you. They will shout and shriek into your ear and trample on your feet and your only consolation will be that you, too, trample on *their* feet. There is no escape from them. You may try the countryside



NICOLAS  
BENTLEY

*May it please thee, O Lord, to grant that thy humble servant shall submit to whatsoever earthly pleasures shall afflict him with grace and forbearance worthy of thy Holy name . . .*

but the countryside, too, will be transformed into an everlasting Bank Holiday fairground, strewn with paper bags and empty tins and bottles. Furthermore, to add to your sufferings, I order you to take a portable radio everywhere with you and listen to 'Housewives' Choice' and 'Mrs Dale's Diary' incessantly!

If all this were meted out as dire punishment, proud, free Englishmen everywhere would rise against it as they have always risen against foul oppression. But as, on top of it all, they have to spend a whole year's savings on these pleasures, they are delighted if they can join the devotees anywhere.

Britain has been the marvel-country of the world for a long time. Many people used to regard her as decadent, decaying and exhausted until they learned better. How has Britain come out of her many trials, not only victorious but rejuvenated? The secret of the British is very simple: if they can endure their summer holidays, they can endure anything.



## ON NOT KNOWING ENGLISH

I THINK it is vital that I give some instructions concerning the English language. I cannot do better than to repeat – with slight alterations – what I have said on this subject before.\*

When I was sent to England in 1938 I thought I knew English fairly well. In Budapest my English proved quite sufficient. I could get along with it. On arrival in this country, I found that Budapest English was quite different from London English. I should not like to seem biased, but I found Budapest English much better in many ways.

In England I found two difficulties. First: I did not understand people, and secondly: they did not understand me. It was easier with written texts. Whenever I read a leading article in *The Times*, I understood everything perfectly well, except that I could never make out whether *The Times* was for or against something. In those days I put this down to my lack of knowledge of English.

The first step in my progress was when people started understanding me while I still could not understand them. This was the most talkative period of my life. Trying to hide my shortcomings, I went on talking, keeping the conversation as unilateral as possible. I reached the stage of intelligibility fairly quickly, thanks to a friend of mine who discovered an important linguistic secret, namely that the English mutter and mumble. Once we noticed a sausage-like thing in a shop window marked PORK BRAWN. We mistook it for a Continental kind of sausage and decided to buy some for our supper. We entered the shop and I said: 'A

\* *Shakespeare and Myself*, George Mikes. Drawings by David Langdon. André Deutsch. 8s 6d. Order your copy *now*.

quarter of pork brawn please.' 'What was that?' asked the shopkeeper looking scared. 'A quarter of pork brawn, please,' I repeated, still with a certain nonchalance. I repeated it again. I repeated it a dozen times with no success. I talked slowly and softly; I shouted; I talked in the way one talks to the mentally deficient; I talked as one talks to the deaf and finally I tried baby-talk. The shopkeeper still had no idea whether we wanted to buy or sell something. Then my friend had a brain-wave. 'Leave it to me,' he said in Hungarian and started mumbling under his nose in a hardly audible and quite unintelligible manner. The shopkeeper's eyes lit up: 'I see,' he said happily, 'you want a quarter of pork brawn. Why didn't you say so?'

The next stage was that I began to understand foreigners but not the English or the Americans. The more atrocious a foreign accent someone had, the clearer he sounded to me.

But time passed and my knowledge and understanding of English grew slowly. Until the time came when I began to be very proud of my knowledge of English. Luckily, every now and then one goes through a sobering experience which teaches one to be more humble. Some years ago my mother came here from Hungary on a visit. She expressed her wish to take English lessons at an LCC class, which some of her friends attended. I accompanied her to the school and we were received by a commissionaire. I enquired about the various classes and said that we were interested in the class for beginners. I received all the necessary information and conducted a lengthy conversation with the man, in the belief that my English sounded vigorous and idiomatic. Finally, I paid the fees for my mother. He looked at me with astonishment and asked: 'Only for one? And what about you?'



*'Can't you understand plain English?'*

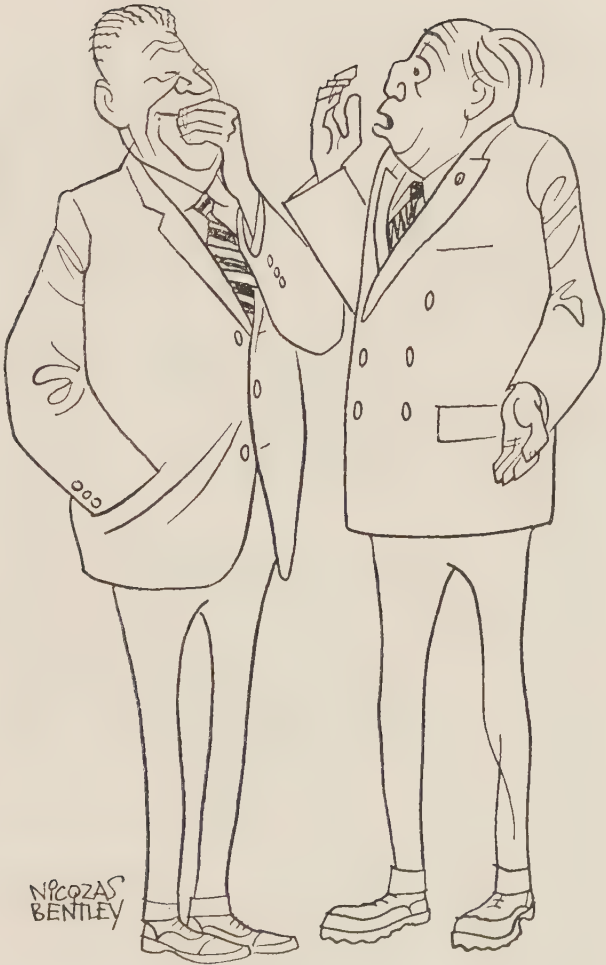
## ON NOT KNOWING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

A TRUE-BORN Englishman does not know any language. He does not speak English too well either but, at least, he is not proud of this. He is, however, immensely proud of not knowing any foreign languages. Indeed, inability to speak foreign languages seems to be the major, if not the only, intellectual achievement of the average Englishman.

1) If you, gentle reader, happen to be an alien and are in the process of turning yourself into a proper Briton, you must get rid of your knowledge of *all* foreign languages. As this includes your own mother tongue, the task does not seem an easy one. But do not lose heart. Quite a few ex-aliens may proudly boast of having succeeded in forgetting their mother tongue without learning English.

2) If you are an Englishman, you must not forget that the way foreigners speak English is an endless source of hilarity and mirth. It is not funny that you yourself may have been living in Stockholm, Winterthur or Lahore for forty-three years without picking up even broken Swedish or Schwitzerdütsch or even pidgin Punjabi; it is on the other hand always excruciatingly funny if an English-speaking taxi-driver in Lima splits his infinitives or a news-vendor in Oberammergau uses an unattached participle.

3) If you – in spite of all precautions – cannot help picking up a foreign language or two (sometimes it is in the air and you catch it as you catch flu) – then you *always* refer to the language you know as Italian, Spanish, Japanese, etc. A language you do not know at all should always be referred to as ‘that lingo’.



*English as she is spoke*



## ON NOT KNOWING ANYTHING

ONE THING you must learn in England is that you must never really learn anything. You may hold *opinions* – as long as you are not too dogmatic about them – but it is just bad form to *know* something. You may *think* that two and two make four; you may ‘rather suspect it’; but you must not go further than that. *Yes* and *no* are about the two rudest words in the language.

One evening recently I was dining with several people. Someone – a man called Trevor – suddenly paused in his remarks and asked in a reflective voice:

‘Oh, I mean that large island off Africa . . . You know, near Tanganyika . . . What is it called?’

Our hostess replied chattily:

‘I’m afraid I have no idea. No good asking me, my dear.’ She looked at one of her guests: ‘I think Evelyn might . . .’

Evelyn was born and brought up in Tanganyika but she shook her head firmly:

‘I can’t remember at the moment. Perhaps Sir Robert . . .’

Sir Robert was British Resident in Zanzibar – the place in question – for twenty-seven years but he, too, shook his head with grim determination:

‘It escapes me too. These peculiar African names . . . I know it *is* called something or other. It may come back to me presently.’

Mr Trevor, the original enquirer was growing irritated.

‘The wretched place is quite near Dar es Salaam. It’s called . . . Wait a minute . . .’

I saw the name was on the tip of his tongue. I tried to be helpful.

'Isn't it called Zan . . .'

One or two murderous glances made me shut up. I meant to put it in question form only but as that would have involved uttering the name sought for, it would not do. The word stuck in my throat. I went on in the same pensive tone:

'I mean . . . What I meant was, isn't it Czechoslovakia?'

The Vice-President of one of our geographical societies shook his head sadly.

'I don't think so . . . I can't be sure, of course . . . But I shouldn't think so.'

Mr Trevor was almost desperate.

'Just south of the equator. It sounds something like . . .'

But he could not produce the word. Then a benevolent looking elderly gentleman, with a white goatee beard smiled pleasantly at Trevor and told him in a confident, guttural voice:

'Ziss islant iss kolt Zsantsibar, yes?'

There was deadly, hostile silence in the room. Then a retired colonel on my left leaned forward and whispered into my ear:

'Once a German always a German.'

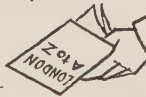
The bishop on my right nodded grimly:

'And they're surprised if we've prejudiced against them.'

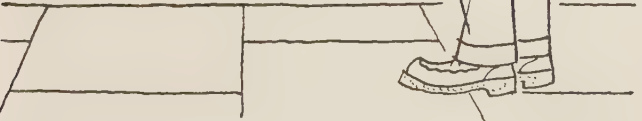
## ON THE DECLINE OF MUDDLE

I HAVE always been immensely proud of English muddle and thought that in this respect we were absolute and unbeatable masters with no serious rivals. I never look at any of my books once they are published, but until recently I used to read and re-read with swelling pride a chapter on 'How to Build a Muddle' in one of my earlier works. The English idea of giving neighbouring streets almost identical names – such as Belsize Gardens, Belsize Road, Belsize Villas, Belsize Crescent, Belsize Park Road, etc., was most ingenious, likely to confuse the most cunning foreigner; and if a few of them were not confused by this, then the numbering of the houses came in: numbers running consecutively along one side of the road and back along the other; giving names to houses instead of numbers. A subtle variation is to *name* your house 'Twenty Seven' when its number is really 359. I was also delighted to spend two years of my life as an inhabitant of Walm Lane, North-West London. I was proud of Walm Lane. Walm Lane performs the unique trick – unique even in this country – of, suddenly and unexpectedly, becoming its own side-street.

But a terrible shock awaited me. I was informed by letter from Germany – of all places – that in a small town (I am afraid I have forgotten its name and lost the letter) they have done much, much better than we do in England. House numbers there run in chronological order: in other words, the house built first is 1, the house built next at the other end of the road is 2, then one in the middle is 3 and so on, and so on. Needless to say, the confusion achieved is consummate and the apparently daring English idea of



BELSIZE PARK GARDENS NW3  
Leading to BELSIZE CRESCENT  
← Nos. 1-125 : Nos. 2-124 →  
NO THROUGH ROAD TO  
BELSIZE VILLAS



running the numbers up one side and back down the other seems childish and amateurish in comparison.

I did not mind the loss of India. I was prepared to accept British nationality even after the Empire was gone. I even survived the loss of the Ashes. But that the Germans – the most orderly, the most tidy-minded of all peoples – should beat us at our own game and should be able to produce more senseless and more glorious muddle in their towns than we can, that, I am afraid, is the mark of our real decadence.

What next? Are we going to be thrashed at cricket by the Bulgarians? Are the Albanians going to teach us how to make Scotch whisky? Or are we – no, we cannot sink quite as low as that – are we going to introduce some sense into our weights and measures next? I am inclined to exclaim: *Après moi le déluge!* (That is a cry of despair and it means: After me the decimal system of coinage!)

## HOW TO DIE

THE ENGLISH are the only race in the world who enjoy dying. Most other peoples contemplate death with abject and rather contemptible fear; the English look forward to it with gusto.

They speak of death as if it were something natural. It is, of course, more natural than birth. Hundreds of millions of people are not born; but all who are born, die. During the bombing raids of the last war people on the Continent prayed: 'God, even if I have to be hit and maimed, please spare my life.' The English said: 'If I have to die, well, I couldn't care less. But I don't want to be made an invalid and I don't want to suffer.' Foreign insurance agents speak of 'certain possibilities' and the 'eventuality' that 'something might happen to you'; the English make careful calculations and the thought that the insurance company will have to pay up always sweetens their last hours. Nowhere in the world do people make so many cruel jokes about the aged and the weak as here. In Continental families you simply do not refer to the fact that a parent or a grandparent is not immortal. But not long ago my two children burst into my room and asked me:

'Daddy, which of us will get your camera when you die?'

'I'll let you know,' I replied. 'By the way, I am sorry to be still alive. It's not my fault. I can't help it.'

They were a little hurt.

'Don't be silly. We don't really mind at all. We only wanted to know who'll get the camera.'

And when the moment comes, the English make no fuss. Dead or alive, they hate being conspicuous or saying any-

thing unconventional. They are not a great people for famous last words.

I shall never forget the poor gentleman who once travelled with me on the Channel boat. Only the two of us were on deck as a violent storm was raging. A tremendous gale was lashing mountainous seas. We huddled there for a while, without saying anything. Suddenly a fearful gust blew him overboard. His head emerged just once from the water below me. He looked at me calmly and remarked somewhat casually:

‘Rather windy, isn’t it?’



## ON BEING UNFAIR

BRITAIN – to its true glory – is the only country in the world where the phrase, ‘it isn’t fair,’ still counts as an argument. The word *fair* exists in no other language and if something vaguely similar does exist, it conjures up utterly different notions. The English themselves are not quite clear as to what *fair* really means. I have two famous dictionaries in front of me – both renowned for their brief and lucid definitions – but they are rather unsatisfactory on this particular word. They say between them that, *fair* (adj.) is: of moderate quality, not bad, pretty good, favourable, promising, gentle, unobstructed, frank, honest, just, not effected by insidious or unlawful methods, not foul, civil, pleasing, honourable, etc., etc. Well, fair enough. But *fair* is really something more and also much less. If something strikes the Englishman as not quite in order for one reason or another, not quite equitable, then the thing just ‘isn’t fair’.

Use the argument, ‘this isn’t fair,’ to any Continental and he will gape at you without any sign of understanding. Who the hell *wants* to be fair?

On the other hand, tell an Englishman that he is stupid – and he will smile benevolently; tell him that he is obstinate, insular, selfish, cruel, uneducated, ignorant and his neck is dirty to begin with – he will shrug his shoulders. But tell him that he isn’t fair and he will be pained and angered. Tell a legislator that his bill or programme will create a bloody revolution and he will be undeterred; but prove to him that it is genuinely unfair to one group or another and he will abandon it. Or face an English assassin with a chopper in his hand and warn him that should he dare to





NICCOZAS  
BENTLEY

*'Dummkopf!'*

kill you he will be hanged – he will kill you without any further ado and argument. It is only fair that a criminal should take a chance; that is in the nature of his chosen profession. But convince him that it is unfair to rob you and he will take his cap and leave. He does not greatly mind being hanged; but no English robber and murderer worthy of the name would tolerate the stigma of being unfair.

## ON MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS

THIS IS one of the basic English virtues. It is not to be interpreted as really minding your own business (getting on with your job, keeping your promises, etc.); it simply means that you are not to interfere with others. If a man happens to be standing on your foot in the bus, you must not ask him to get off, since it is clearly his business where he chooses to stand; if your neighbour's television or radio is blaring military marches till midnight, you may not remonstrate with him because it is his business what he pleases to listen to and at what time; if you are walking peacefully in the street and someone pours two gallons of boiling water over your best bowler through his bathroom overflow, the pipe of which is aimed at the street (see: ANCIENT LIBERTIES) you should proceed without uttering a word – however short – because it is obviously the other fellow's business when he has his bath and how hot he likes it.

In the late nineteen-fifties, a man committed a murder in the Midlands, splashing himself with blood in the process. Afterwards, near the scene of the crime a man covered with blood was seen to board a bus with about fifty people on it. Yet when he got off, leaving a pool of blood on the floor, not one single passenger bothered to ask him what he had been doing lately. They were true Britons, minding their own business.

If another man had been carrying some victim's decapitated head under his arm, that would not make the slightest difference. The parcel you carry is your own business.

I remember an old story from my childhood which ought to be one of the basic ideological parables of English life:

A man bends down in a London street to tie his shoelace. While he's at it, someone kicks him in the behind with such force that he falls on his nose. He gets up somewhat bewildered and looks at his assailant questioningly. The latter explains:

'I *am* sorry. I seem to have made a mistake. I thought you were my friend, Harry Higgins. I meant this as a joke.'

The man (presumably of foreign origin) is not altogether satisfied with this explanation and remarks plaintively:

'But even if I had been Harry Higgins . . . must you kick him quite so hard?'

The other man replies coolly and pointedly:

'What has it got to do with you *how* hard I choose to kick my friend, Harry Higgins?'

## SEX

THIS SEEMINGLY most immutable of all social habits changes too – and changes fast. In an earlier volume of mine – a treatise on the English character\* – I wrote a very brief chapter on this subject. It ran: ‘Continental people have sex life: the English have hot-water bottles.’ That was all. It has now become hopelessly out-of-date. How right was the kind (and to me unknown) lady who wrote to me in a letter:

‘You are really behind the times. In this field, too, things have changed and – this is the most important – techniques have advanced. We are using electric blankets nowadays.’

And, no doubt, things will go on changing. I do not know for certain but I feel sure that AID – Artificial Insemination by Donor – was invented by Englishmen as a labour-saving device. Knowing the English character, and its marked lack of enthusiasm in this particular field, I am convinced that AID will grow immensely popular in no time and that soon it will be the rule rather than the exception.

I foresee the time – not in the too distant future, either – when a shy young man will be asked at a party:

‘How are you, old man? And how’s your wife? Have you AID-ed any more family lately? What’s it going to be this time: a boy or a girl?’

And the bashful young man will blush and reply:

‘I can’t be sure . . . You see, we don’t AID our children. I’ve got a “Do It Yourself” kit.’

\* *How to be an Alien*, by George Mikes. Nicolas Bentley drew the pictures. André Deutsch, 7s 6d. Available at all better class bookshops. Order *two* copies now.

## HOW TO AVOID WORK

MANY MAY wonder how the English acquired their reputation of not working as hard as most Continentals. I am able to solve this mystery. They acquired this reputation by not working as hard.

It is, by the way, all due to their lack of rhythm and nothing else. Let me explain what I mean.

In my young days there used to be a joke about a silly aristocrat – the type of hero the Austrians called Count Bobby. Count Bobby comes home from shooting and his friend, Aristide, asks him how he got on.

‘Badly. I got nothing,’ Bobby informs him.

‘But how’s that possible? It’s so easy to shoot rabbits. They always run in zig-zags.’

‘That’s true,’ Bobby nods sadly, ‘but I was out of luck. Whenever I shot at zig, he was in zag; when I shot at zag, he was in zig.’

The same is true of Englishmen in general, When they work (or are in zig) they rest (zag); when they rest (zag), they work hard (zig).

On the rare occasions when two groups of Englishmen are vying with one another as to who should perform a certain job, the result is most surprising. You would naïvely assume that both groups are keen to do the job. Not at all. Whenever the Boilermakers’ Union starts a quarrel with the Shipwrights’ as to who should drive wooden nails into metal or metal nails into wood, they call a strike for two or three months. In other words (and this is the Basic Law of English Labour) if two Englishmen are equally eager to do a job, the job is sure to be left undone.

Normally, in the factory, workshop or office, they use their working day to build up energy for those fatiguing hours of leisure when they weed, dig and hoe the garden, play golf, redecorate the spare bedroom, build a shed in the backyard, etc., etc. It is little wonder that when at last they go to bed they are inclined to believe that the time for rest has arrived. They are in zag again all right.



## EVERYBODY IS HUNGARIAN

BUT THE time has come to stop prevaricating. For the last eighty odd pages of this book – I am sorry to admit this, but it's true – I have been doing nothing but raise false hopes. You cannot become an Englishman, try as you may. Because the simple truth is this: everybody is Hungarian. This is a basic and irrefutable theorem like that of Pythagoras.

Pythagoras was no relation of mine; but I am proud to report that the second theorem was discovered by my wife. One evening, while reading a certain biography, I exclaimed: 'Oh! . . .' She looked at me enquiringly from the other armchair. I explained that I had just discovered that the parents of Alfred Adler were Hungarian. She replied briefly and concisely:

'So what?'

I do not like the expression, particularly when my important and sensational statements are greeted with it. Before I could protest, however, my wife added:

'Why shouldn't they be Hungarian? Everybody is Hungarian.'

And she returned to her book.

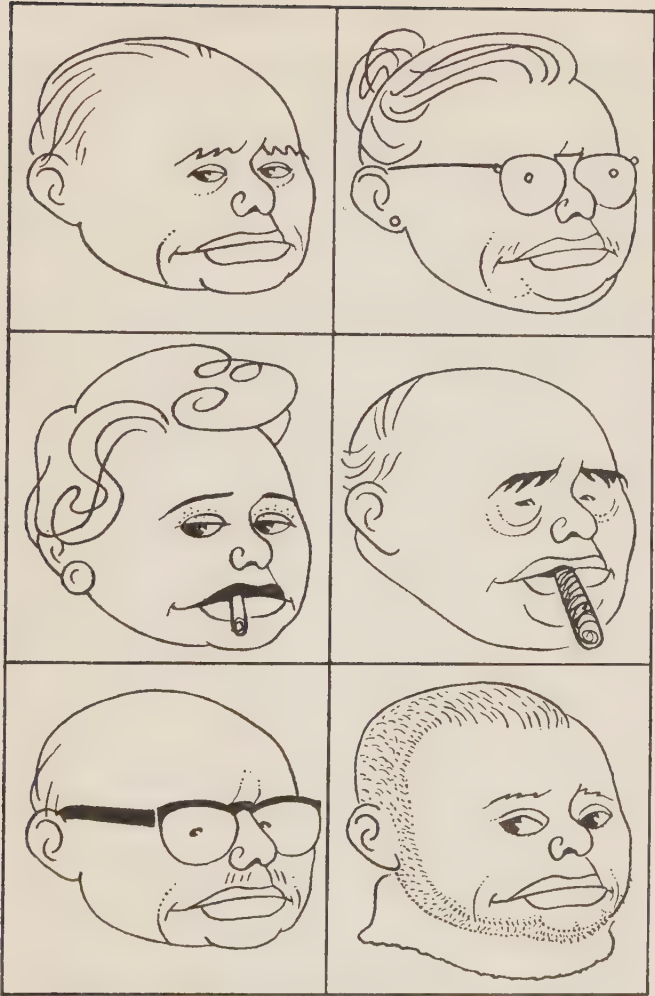
I do not know how Pythagoras's spouse received the news when her husband first said to her: 'I say, darling, did it ever strike you that the square on the hypotenuse, etc., etc.' But it certainly stands to my everlasting credit that as soon as my wife uttered *her* theorem I saw the light. I knew it was true and irrefutable. Of course, everybody is Hungarian. It seemed incredible that no one had thought of this theorem before.



It is true on various planes.

1) London is a great English city, but it is also a small Hungarian village. Most Hungarians living in London will tell you that while they do not avoid other Hungarians, it so happens that they do not know any of them. Well, of course, their immediate circle consists of Hungarians – a few former school-mates, relations, etc. – but apart from these thirty or forty people, they simply do not know any Hungarians in London. A few minutes afterwards you happen to ask them to recommend a doctor, a solicitor, a dentist, or a dressmaker and they will recommend a Hungarian doctor, solicitor, dentist, or dressmaker who is reputed to be the best in England. They happen to know a Hungarian cobbler round the corner who is a genius of his craft and a Hungarian tailor who puts Savile Row to shame. We all know where to buy Hungarian salami, sausages and apricot brandy. We all go to various Hungarian restaurants where they cook exactly as our mothers did. We go to see Hungarian dancers in Shaftesbury Avenue, to listen to Hungarian violinists in Wigmore Hall, to applaud Hungarian runners at the White City, to watch Hungarian football players at Wembley – and so on, there is always something. I do not quite know how it is with others; but I, personally, have not seen an Englishman in London for over two years.

2) Yes, of course, everybody is Hungarian. And if he isn't then his father or his grandmother was. Alexander Korda, the father of the British film industry, is one of the very obvious examples. When Leo Amery – one of the flag-bearers of the British Imperial idea – died, I learned from his obituaries that his mother had been Hungarian. Leslie Howard, the incarnation, indeed the prototype – both in manners and in appearance – of the modern Briton, was



*We are all Hungarians*

. . . Well, need I go on? I am Hungarian; André Deutsch is Hungarian. Nicolas Bentley, by now, is at least half Hungarian. Queen Mary was not a Hungarian. But whenever she received a Hungarian she was fond of telling him that two of her grandparents were.

3) You may ask: 'But what about those few – infinitesimal as their number may be – who are, in spite of everything, not Hungarians?'

Well, they are being Magyarised at breath-taking speed. I know quite a few Hungarians who have not learnt one single word of English in all the years they have been living here. In fact, they regard it as a crying shame and personal insult that people should talk English in this country. They go on speaking Hungarian everywhere and to everybody and if others fail to understand, that is their worry. The population of London, I must say, has made remarkable progress in the Hungarian language. There is a small café – frequented by Hungarians – where a young Yorkshire girl greeted me the other day with '*Kezétcsókolom, aranyos!*', which means, 'I kiss your hand, darling!' I know of a grandmother – recently arrived from Budapest – who in the course of two years has managed to teach her two British-born grandchildren, an Irish maid and a Spanish governess reasonably fluent Hungarian without herself learning a single word of English, Irish or Spanish. The prize for good educational work, however, must go to another Hungarian matron who was travelling on a No. 2 bus from Baker Street, meaning to get off at Platts Lane. She missed her stop, however. Reaching Cricklewood Lane and finding the surroundings unfamiliar, she jumped up, walked to the conductor – a fine and honest cockney, born and bred – and said:

'Platts Lane? *Erre?* (pointing one way) *Arra?*' (pointing the other way).

In case it is only your grandmother who was Hungarian and you yourself are not, I ought to add that *erre* means *this way*, and *arra* means *that way*.

The conductor was a little taken aback by this pantomime and asked her:

'Platts Lane, lady? If you want Platts Lane . . .'

The lady shook her head. English was not a language to which she could listen with patience. She interrupted the conductor with some irritation:

'Platts Lane? *Erre?* *Arra?*'

The conductor raised his voice and tried again:

'Look, lady, I'm just trying to tell you that . . .'

The lady interrupted again, this time quite peremptorily:

'Platts Lane: *erre?* *arra?*'

The conductor sighed and pointed backwards:

'Platts Lane? *Arra!*'

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