

that when men come together to profess a creed, they come courageously, though it is to hide in catacombs and caves. But when they come together in a clique they come sneakishly, eschewing all change or disagreement, though it is to dine to a brass band in a big London hotel. For birds of a feather flock together, but birds of the white feather most of all.

## THE FOOL

For many years I had sought him, and at last I found him in a club. I had been told that he was everywhere; but I had almost begun to think that he was nowhere. I had been assured that there were millions of him; but before my late discovery I inclined to think that there were none of him. After my late discovery I am sure that there is one; and I incline to think that there are several, say, a few hundreds; but unfortunately most of them occupying important positions. When I say "him," I mean the entire idiot.

I have never been able to discover that "stupid public" of which so many literary men complain. The people one actually meets in trains or at tea parties seem to me quite bright and interesting; certainly quite enough so to call for the full exertion of one's own wits. And even when I have heard brilliant "conversationalists" conversing with other people, the conversation had much more equality and give and take than this age of

intellectual snobs will admit. I have sometimes felt tired, like other people; but rather tired with men's talk and variety than with their stolidity or sameness; therefore it was that I sometimes longed to find the refreshment of a single fool.

But it was denied me. Turn where I would I found this monotonous brilliancy of the general intelligence, this ruthless, ceaseless sparkle of humour and good sense. The "mostly fools" theory has been used in an anti-democratic sense; but when I found at last my priceless ass, I did not find him in what is commonly called the democracy; nor in the aristocracy either. The man of the democracy generally talks quite rationally, sometimes on the anti-democratic side, but always with an idea of giving reasons for what he says and referring to the realities of his experience. Nor is it the aristocracy that is stupid; at least, not that section of the aristocracy which represents it in politics. They are often cynical, especially about money, but even their boredom tends to make them a little eager for any real information or originality. If a man like Mr. Winston Churchill or Mr. Wyndham made up his mind for any reason to attack Syndicalism he would find out what it was first. Not so the man I found in the club.

He was very well dressed; he had a heavy but handsome face; his black clothes suggested the City and his gray moustaches the Army; but the whole suggested that he did not really belong to either, but was one of those who dabble in shares and who play at soldiers. There was some third element about him that was neither mercantile nor military. His

manners were a shade too gentlemanly to be quite those of a gentleman. They involved an unctious and over-emphasis of the club-man: then I suddenly remembered feeling the same thing in some old actors or old playgoers who had modelled themselves on actors. As I came in he said, "If I was the Government," and then put a cigar in his mouth which he lit carefully with long intakes of breath. Then he took the cigar out of his mouth again and said, "I'd give it 'em," as if it were quite a separate sentence. But even while his mouth was stopped with the cigar his companion or interlocutor leaped to his feet and said with great heartiness, snatching up a hat, "Well, I must be off. Tuesday!". I dislike these dark suspicions, but I certainly fancied I recognised the sudden geniality with which one takes leave of a bore.

When, therefore, he removed the narcotic stopper from his mouth it was to me that he addressed the belated epigram. "I'd give it 'em."

"What would you give them," I asked, "the minimum wage?"

"I'd give them beans," he said. "I'd shoot 'em down shoot 'em down, every man Jack of them. I lost my best train yesterday, and here's the whole country paralysed, and here's a handful of obstinate fellows standing between the country and coal. I'd shoot 'em down!"

"That would surely be a little harsh," I pleaded. "After all, they are not under martial law, though I suppose two or three of them have commissions in the Yeomanry."

"Commissions in the Yeomanry!" he repeated, and his eyes and face, which became startling and separate, like those of a boiled lobster, made me feel sure that he had something of the kind himself.

"Besides," I continued, "wouldn't it be quite enough to confiscate their money?"

"Well, I'd send them all to penal servitude, anyhow," he said, "and I'd confiscate their funds as well."

"The policy is daring and full of difficulty," I replied, "but I do not say that it is wholly outside the extreme rights of the republic. But you must remember that though the facts of property have become quite fantastic, yet the sentiment of property still exists. These coal-owners, though they have not earned the mines, though they could not work the mines, do quite honestly feel that they own the mines. Hence your suggestion of shooting them down, or even of confiscating their property, raises very&mdash;"

"What do you mean?" asked the man with the cigar, with a bullying eye.

"Who yer talking about?"

"I'm talking about what you were talking about," I replied; "as you put it so perfectly, about the handful of obstinate fellows who are standing between the country and the coal. I mean the men who are selling their

own coal for fancy prices, and who, as long as they can get those prices, care as little for national starvation as most merchant princes and pirates have cared for the provinces that were wasted or the peoples that were enslaved just before their ships came home. But though I am a bit of a revolutionist myself, I cannot quite go with you in the extreme violence you suggest. You say&mdash;"

"I say," he cried, bursting through my speech with a really splendid energy like that of some noble beast, "I say I'd take all these blasted miners and&mdash;"

I had risen slowly to my feet, for I was profoundly moved; and I stood staring at that mental monster.

"Oh," I said, "so it is the miners who are all to be sent to penal servitude, so that we may get more coal. It is the miners who are to be shot dead, every man Jack of them; for if once they are all shot dead they will start mining again...You must forgive me, sir; I know I seem somewhat moved. The fact is, I have just found something. Something I have been looking for for years."

"Well," he asked, with no unfriendly stare, "and what have you found?"

"No," I answered, shaking my head sadly, "I do not think it would be quite kind to tell you what I have found."

He had a hundred virtues, including the capital virtue of good humour, and we had no difficulty in changing the subject and forgetting the disagreement. He talked about society, his town friends and his country sports, and I discovered in the course of it that he was a county magistrate, a Member of Parliament, and a director of several important companies. He was also that other thing, which I did not tell him.

The moral is that a certain sort of person does exist, to whose glory this article is dedicated. He is not the ordinary man. He is not the miner, who is sharp enough to ask for the necessities of existence. He is not the mine-owner, who is sharp enough to get a great deal more, by selling his coal at the best possible moment. He is not the aristocratic politician, who has a cynical but a fair sympathy with both economic opportunities. But he is the man who appears in scores of public places open to the upper middle class or (that less known but more powerful section) the lower upper class. Men like this all over the country are really saying whatever comes into their heads in their capacities of justice of the peace, candidate for Parliament, Colonel of the Yeomanry, old family doctor, Poor Law guardian, coroner, or above all, arbiter in trade disputes. He suffers, in the literal sense, from softening of the brain; he has softened it by always taking the view of everything most comfortable for his country, his class, and his private personality. He is a deadly public danger. But as I have given him his name at the beginning of this article there is no need for me to repeat it at the end.