

## Of Smoking

Concerning Cigarette Smoking: It hath been well observed by a certain philosopher that this is a practice commendable enough, and pleasant to indulge in, ``when you're not smoking''; wherein the whole criticism of the cigarette is found, in a little room. Of the same manner of thinking was one that I knew, who kept by him an ample case bulging with cigarettes, to smoke while he was filling his pipe. Toys they be verily, nugæ, and shadows of the substance. Serviceable, nevertheless, as shadows sometimes be when the substance is temporarily unattainable; as between the acts of a play, in the park, or while dressing for dinner: that such moments may not be entirely wasted. That cigarette, however, which is so prompt to appear after dinner I would reprehend and ban and totally abolish: as enemy to that diviner thing before which it should pale its ineffectual fires in shame -- to wit, good drink, ``la dive bouteille''; except indeed when the liquor be bad, as is sometimes known to happen. Then it may serve in some sort as a sorry consolation. But to leave these airy substitutes, and come to smoking.

It hath been oftentimes debated whether the morning pipe be the sweeter, or that first pipe of the evening which ``Hesperus, who bringeth all good things," brings to the weary with home and rest. The first is smoked on a clearer palate, and comes to unjaded senses like the kiss of one's first love; but lacks that feeling of perfect fruition, of merit recompensed and the goal and the garland won, which clings to

the vesper bowl. Whence it comes that the majority give the palm to the latter. To which I intend no slight when I find the incense that arises at matins sweeter even than that of evensong. For, although with most of us who are labourers in the vineyard, toilers and swinkers, the morning pipe is smoked in hurry and fear and a sense of alarums and excursions and fleeting trains, yet with all this there are certain halcyon periods sure to arrive -- Sundays, holidays, and the like -- the whole joy and peace of which are summed up in that one beatific pipe after breakfast, smoked in a careless majesty like that of the gods -- when they lie beside their nectar, and the clouds are lightly curled." Then only can we be said really to smoke. And so this particular pipe of the day always carries with it festal reminiscences: memories of holidays past, hopes for holidays to come; a suggestion of sunny lawns and flannels and the ungirt loin; a sense withal of something free and stately, as of "faint march-music in the air," or the old Roman cry of "Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement."

If there be any fly in the pipe-smoker's ointment, it may be said to lurk in the matter of "rings." Only the exceptionally gifted smoker can recline in his chair and emit at will the perfect smoke-ring, in consummate eddying succession. He of the meaner sort must be content if, at rare heaven-sent intervals -- while thinking, perhaps, of nothing less -- there escape from his lips the unpremeditated flawless circle. Then "deus fio" he is moved to cry, at that breathless moment when his creation hangs solid and complete, ere the particles

break away and blend with the baser atmosphere. Nay, some will deny to any of us terrene smokers the gift of fullest achievement: for what saith the poet of the century? "On the earth the broken arcs: in the heaven the perfect round!"

It was well observed by a certain character in one of Wilkie Collins's novels (if an imperfect memory serveth me rightly) that women will take pleasure in scents derived from animal emanations, clarified fats, and the like; yet do illogically abhor the "clean, dry, vegetable smell" of tobacco. Herein the true base of the feminine objection is reached; being, as usual, inherent want of logic rather than any distaste, in the absolute, for the thing in question. Thinking that they ought to dislike, they do painfully cast about for reasons to justify their dislike, when none really exist. As a specimen of their so-called arguments, I remember how a certain fair one triumphantly pointed out to me that my dog, though loving me well, could yet never be brought to like the smell of tobacco. To whom I, who respected my dog (as Ben saith of Master Shakespeare) on this side idolatry as much as anything, was yet fain to point out -- more in sorrow than in anger -- that a dog, being an animal who delights to pass his whole day, from early morn to dewy eve, in shoving his nose into every carrion beastliness that he can come across, could hardly be considered arbiter elegantiarum in the matter of smells. But indeed I did wrong to take such foolish quibbling seriously; nor would I have done so, if she hadn't dragged my poor innocent dog into the discussion.

Of Smoking in Bed: There be who consider this a depravity -- an instance of that excess in the practice of a virtue which passes into vice -- and couple it with dram-drinking: who yet fail to justify themselves by argument. For if bed be by common consent the greatest bliss, the divinest spot, on earth, "ille terrarum qui præter omnes angulus ridet"; and if tobacco be the true Herb of Grace, and a joy and healing balm, and respite and nepenthe, -- if all this be admitted, why are two things, super-excellent separately, noxious in conjunction? And is not the Bed Smoker rather an epicure in pleasure -- self indulgent perhaps, but still the triumphant creator of a new "blend," reminding one of a certain traveller's account of an intoxicant patronised in the South Sea Islands, which combines the blissful effect of getting drunk and remaining sober to enjoy it? Yet I shall not insist too much on this point, but would only ask -- so long as the smoker be unwedded -- for some tolerance in the matter and a little logic in the discussion thereof.

Concerning Cigars: That there be large sums given for these is within common knowledge. 1 d., 2 d., nay even 4 d., is not too great a price, if a man will have of the finest leaf, reckless of expense. In this sort of smoking, however, I find more of vainglory and ostentation than solid satisfaction; and its votaries would seem to display less a calm, healthy affection for tobacco than (as Sir T. Browne hath it) a "passionate prodigality." And, besides grievous wasting of the pocket, atmospheric changes, varyings in the crops, and the like,

cause uncertainty to cling about each individual weed, so that man is always more or less at the mercy of Nature and the elements -- an unsatisfactory and undignified position in these latter days of the Triumphant Democracy. But worst and fatallest of all, to every cigar-smoker it is certain to happen that once in his life, by some happy combination of time, place, temperament, and Nature -- by some starry influence, maybe, or freak of the gods in mocking sport -- once, and once only, he will taste the aroma of the perfect leaf at just the perfect point -- the ideal cigar. Henceforth his life is saddened; as one kissed by a goddess in a dream, he goes thereafter, as one might say, in a sort of love-sickness. Seeking he scarce knows what, his existence becomes a dissatisfied yearning; the world is spoiled for him, its joys are tasteless: so he wanders, vision-haunted, down dreary days to some miserable end.

Yet, if one will walk this path and take the risks, the thing may be done at comparatively small expense. To such I would commend the Roman motto, slightly altered -- *Alieni appetens, sui avarus*. There be always good fellows, with good cigars for their friends. Nay, too, the boxes of these lie open; an the good cigar belongs rather to him that can appreciate it aright than to the capitalist who, owing to a false social system, happens to be its temporary guardian and trustee. Again there is a saying -- bred first, I think, among the schoolmen at Oxford -- that it is the duty of a son to live up to his father's income. Should any young man have found this task too hard for him, after the most strenuous and single-minded efforts, at least he can

resolutely smoke his father's cigars. In the path of duty complete success is not always to be looked for; but an approving conscience, the sure reward of honest endeavour, is within reach of all.