

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SOMEBODY

By Edgar Saltus

TO know yourself is all very well; not to know your neighbor is better; but to be known is celebrity. People who cannot be celebrities occasionally attempt to be somebodies, and, failing in that, try to look as though they had succeeded. The effort is commendable; it is also easy, in addition to being important.

Yes, indeed. Hereabouts, if you are nobody you are nothing, and abroad you are nowhere. Either condition has its inconveniences. In Paris they are particularly depressing. In Paris, French is a dead language. Germany, you know, conquered there twice: first with her bayonets, latterly with her beer, the result being that in the best hotels only the impurest Berlinese is spoken. French, when not on the bill of fare, is regarded as an extra and charged as such. This item only dukes and ambassadors dispute.

Dukes and ambassadors are somebodies. If you are thinking of going abroad a good plan will be to model your deportment after theirs. In so doing, when anyone presumes to address you, you will find it distinctly impressive, if you cannot answer rudely, not to answer at all.

But rudeness is to be preferred. An ounce of insolence is worth a pound of Ollendorf. It is worth more. It will take you further than any acquaintance, however superficial, with French and even with Berlinese. It will cause you to be mistaken, at least temporarily, for somebody, and, even temporarily, it is always advantageous to be mistaken for that.

An outward and visible sign of this sort of thing is what foreigners call decorations. Here they are infre-

quent. Abroad they abound. In France they are omnipresent. But there their tenure is threatened. A bill providing for their abolition has been recently proposed.

What the grounds are for this measure we are uninformed. But we hope that it will not pass. Our reasons are purely personal. The last time we went to a theatre in Paris we lost the check for our coat. On inquiring at the cloak-room the woman in charge asked what kind of a coat it was. We told her that there was no decoration in the buttonhole. She produced it instantaneously. It was the only one of the kind in the place. Had this measure been operative, we might be inquiring still. Decorations are therefore highly serviceable to those that have none. If only on that account it may be hoped that this measure will not pass.

There are graver reasons. In this country, where every other man you meet has something colorful in his coat, we, as a people, do not believe in decorations. We believe in badges. The wearing of these little things is a custom, of course, and, to the wearers, a custom that must be agreeable. But it is one that has been imported. Obviously, therefore, were this measure to pass and were it then adopted by other nations, we Americans would be the only decorated people. Whereupon, being a civilized race, and, as such, accustomed to follow the fashions, we would have to relinquish our badges, and with them the satisfaction which they presumably induce. That, we cannot help feeling, would be regrettable.

Decorations have, therefore, their

uses. They are serviceable if you have not got any, and if you have they make you feel as if you were somebody. So important is that feeling that men of determination who have been unable to acquire it officially have provoked it surreptitiously. The statement may seem fantastic. Here is an agreeable instance.

Recently, at the Paris Élysée—the White House of France—a gentleman was observed wearing a decoration which struck an amateur as being so beautiful that he ventured to ask whether, without indiscretion, he might be permitted to inquire what it was. "Oh," said the gentleman, with a little diffident laugh, "it is my own invention."

After all, why not? Besides, did it not show enterprise? No one else having recognized his claims to be somebody, he had done it himself. There is the right spirit.

There is, though, a method that is perhaps superior. At Versailles, on the occasion of the refounding of the German Empire, there appeared the late Mr. Washburne, who, at the time, was the American representative. There also appeared a mob of sovereigns and, with them, a swarm of envoys, legates, aides, equerries, generalissimi. The assembly was gorgeous. There were uniforms radiant as rainbows, and on these uniforms crosses without number, a constellation of stars, every decoration under the sun. There was not a man there not tricked out in a fashion absolutely stunning. No, not one, except Mr. Washburne, who stood about, quite unadorned, in democratic black. Said Bismarck: "He is the most distinguished-looking person present."

Which rather goes to show, don't you think, that a good way to attract attention is to differ a bit from your neighbor? In that difference and its maintenance is the whole art of being somebody. The secret of it is simple. You have but to intensify your individuality. If you have no individuality, cultivate one.

There are people who will tell you

that it is better to have a regular income. That is a very middle-class view. Investments in the prose of life yield only dullness. You talk shop instead of subtleties, and degenerate into a mere man of means. But, given individuality, and though you have nothing you may have everything. At a bound you leap to the lips of men. Youths there are, full of promise, naturally fitted for that leap. Before the opportunity occurs they are deformed into conformity. They get what is called a thorough education. How delectably false that description is! The only things worth knowing are the things that cannot be taught. In spite of which, or perhaps precisely on that account, they are shown the highroads and told to follow them. The highroads are sterile. Yet on them they proceed, hoisting their neighbors' standards, expressing other people's opinions, or rather their absence of ideas, developing low passions for respectability, exhibiting generally the conventional in all its horrors, and, with it, the humdrum unredeemed by a single revolt, the spectacle of human sheep. In later life you find them interesting themselves in matters in which they have no concern, and discussing people who never heard of them. The wages of similitude is non-entity. The bulk of the census has that for reward.

To acquire something more ponderable, be different. Be different, and evermore be different. But be condescending. Nothing, except genius, can make you so well hated as a properly distributed potpourri of condescending airs. You may object that you do not want to be hated. That is because you do not know what is good for you. Animosity is the tribute that failure pays to success. Until you trail rancors as a torch trails smoke, you cannot claim to be anybody. Yet the moment you have induced a more or less general feeling of exasperation, such is the inane love of fair play that your best detractors will turn about and declare that there must be a good deal in you. They are certainly in error. But

no matter about that. You are somebody.

To be somebody is not, therefore, very difficult. In any event, you will find it more satisfactory than not being anybody. In a city, for instance, like New York, where everybody scoots about in a motor, a man who drove behind postilions might readily be mistaken for the real thing. The impression created could be heightened by giving theatre-parties to big rag dolls, with which, during *entr'actes* and interludes, the host did not omit to affect to converse. Supper, naturally, would follow, not for the dolls or necessarily for the host, but for his friends—better yet, for his enemies—a supper variegated with grains of nenuphar, eyes of angel-fish, salmis of quetzals, orchid wine, rose liqueur, the maxims of Confucius and chrysanthemum soup. The exoticism of these proceedings would be promptly written up and the originator become a subject of editorial discussion. He would be somebody, if but for a day.

In lieu of which aspirants take to making money instead of spending it, or, what is quite as futile, to writing. That is all so stupid and amateurish. In these latitudes, where everyone you know is beastly rich, it is a real distinction to be poor. As for writing, dear us! In these days, when you find the relaxations of cooks and crooks on every stall, it is more original to commemorate Epicurus, who was original, and who never wrote anything.

Besides, mere money and even a real masterpiece will not make people turn around and look at you. There is too much of the one and too few of those that care a rap about the other for either to differentiate you from your neighbor by a straw. To stand out you must omit to fall in. You must rigorously avoid any resemblance to tedious persons. When they talk platitude to you hand them paradox back. If you cannot do better, bark. Tell them that cannibalism is society in its ideal state, that Homer was born in Harlem, that Shakespeare was a woman who practiced dentistry, and that you are medi-

tating a comic history of the moon. Announce whatever they can least digest. The shock of it will alarm what little imagination they possess. They will complain of your eccentricities. And so much the better. In the complaint of your fellow-beings are the beginnings of fame.

Indeed they are. Originality is first abused and then annexed. Besides, the reproach of eccentricity is one that you may covert. Eccentricity is but an avoidance of the everyday. It means out of the common. The man who first wore a high hat was regarded as eccentric. The man who first carried an umbrella was regarded as worse. It was thought crazy of Swift to write about a broomstick. Yet today, do not the most respectable among us wear high hats, carry umbrellas—what is more typical, borrow them—and write about nothing whatever?

The primal charm of these novelties acceptance has vulgarized. To stand out you must find something new. But in a land where all men dress alike and all dress like undertakers, that is disgracefully easy. Promenade in winter in white broadcloth and in summer in raspberry serge and you will not merely stand out, you will be held up. Editors will despatch their young gentlemen to obtain your views on fashion, to snapshot you while they are at it, and your face, your form, too, multiplied indefinitely, may cause a little talk.

May, we say, for the result will be surer if instead of a new caprice you invent a new delight. A satrap once offered his satrapy for one. He failed to get it, of course, but the offer made him talked about, which perhaps was just what he was after. Satraps are frightfully insincere.

But then society was created by simpletons that satraps might live in it; and to live, to really live, although at first blush it may seem a very general occupation, is, on the contrary, curiously rare. Few there are that live. The existence of the bulk of humanity is comparable to that of ants. It is just as anonymous, quite as obscure.

To escape from the horrors of that obscurity, to climb, however transiently, into view, to be obvious, to have a name, though it be a bad one, men have gone to the scaffold, occasionally to the altar and thence back again to the obscurity from which they came. Yet that, perhaps, is better than nothing. It may be dreadful to have your name in the papers; it is still more dreadful not to. To see it there is really something; but to see yourself caricatured is success. Only celebrities are lampooned.

To achieve that is the crowning grace. How to do it, though, is rather complex. Success is quite like etiquette. Both have their mysteries. A man wrote a book on "How to Behave." No sooner had it appeared than the wife of his bosom sued him for divorce. Another man wrote a book on "How to Succeed." His father-at-law had him jailed for embezzlement. Are not these delightful instances? Do they not show the intricacies of Satan and his pomps? Besides, a book on behavior must be hard labor, particularly when you come to consider that foreigners have no manners and Americans a great many, and all of them bad. Parallely, a book on success is bound to be the work of failures. The conditions of success are such that those who achieve it always have to get others to tell how it was done.

Success, as you may see, is therefore not merely complex but debilitating. Originality is just the reverse. Originality is an exhilarant. Its basic factor is an ability to do and say things which your neighbor cannot. That ability was Disraeli's. It was also Brummel's. These men emerged from nowhere into lampooning and renown. Individually their fates were

various. But that is a detail. They were somebodies in their day and are somebodies still.

In an effort to resemble them, however microscopically, avoid, as you would a cobra, new ways of being dull. These ways it is a mistake to regard as evidences of original thought. It is true that for them society has always an innocent love. Any fresh incentive to yawning strikes it as so nice. Efforts of this order may therefore gain you the passing attention of tea-cards. But they will not conduct you to fame. Only brag and bounce can do it. Only that, determination and conceit.

Conceit is not appreciated at its true value, except by the French, who have such a pretty name for it. They call it *amour propre*, which, to them, is one of the cardinal virtues, and should be to you. For it admonishes you to think well of yourself. If you omit to, who in the world will do it for you? If you do not look as though you owned the earth who can do it in your stead? Assert yourself. That is the way to get on. If one plan fail, try another—try a dozen others. Through them all assume a superiority, though you have it not. Insist on being somebody.

Otherwise your name will appear in the papers but once—but once!—and the world will learn of your existence only through hearing that you are dead. What is worse, it will not care, even then. Think of the martyr who discovered that modesty is its own reward. His name is lost, his identity forgotten. He was too retiring by half, in addition to being nobody. Of all obituaries that is the limit.

Insist, then, on being somebody. It is not only important, it is easy. You can fool everybody but yourself.



SHE—Mother heard you propose to me the other night.

HE—Heavens, what did she say about it?

"She said how many modern improvements there were since she was young."

# THE RETURN TO THE SPA

By John O'Keefe

THE place has changed but little in the years  
Since I the hourly glassful swallowed duly,  
But, oh! there is a change, and it appears  
Within yours truly.

I lift my glass of water with a frown,  
(Six in the day I'm told to take, at present!)  
And as my shrinking throat it courses down  
It's demned unpleasant!

Yet one fair morning, many years ago,  
I stood with Kittie, Eve's divinest daughter,  
At this same counter, eager for the flow  
Of sulphur water.

"How bitter!" Kittie said. I seized the chance—  
No whit abashed, though all the guzzling crowd hear—  
And I replied, with deep significance,  
"It isn't *now*, dear."

I saw her blushing face's image fall  
Upon the water; though the Spa director  
Had said the stuff was strongly mineral,  
He lied—'twas nectar!

But that was years ago—ah! how they've flown!—  
And I and Kittie parted, minus kisses.  
Today, I'm lifting glasses with my own  
True, lawful missus!

She does not peep at me across the rim;  
Her heavy lids are sorrowfully blinking;  
She's gouty in her dexter lower limb—  
That's why she's drinking.

And I'm no better off. Dyspepsia gnaws  
My vitals in a way beyond describing.  
Not love, but my physician, is the cause  
Of my imbibing.

Ah, Kittie, but the cup has altered quite!  
With you I drink to quench my burnings inner;  
Now, I would stir a vanished appetite  
In time for dinner.