

Smoking

Fred Howatt, '39

Many persons, both male and female, are cigarette smokers, but few consider deeply their reasons for smoking or the effects, mental, physical, and moral of the habitual use of tobacco.

One of the chief reasons for smoking cigarettes is to have something to do with the hands. Often when in company we wish to appear at ease, but do not know what to do with those bothersome members. To thrust both into the pants' pockets is not the best of fashion, to fold the arms is awkward, to twiddle the thumbs is impolite, and to sit on the hands is ridiculous. One may, however, thrust one hand into a pocket and with the other gracefully manipulate a cigarette. This gives a certain poise and appearance of "savoir faire."

Did you ever see the advertisement: "Be nonchalant ! Reach for a——." ? There is sound psychology behind this admonition. For example, let us suppose we are at a bridge party. Our partner is a sourish lady who takes her bridge very seriously. We are, of course, ignorant of the finer points of the game. Madame Partner has made an ambitious bid, one just possible of fulfilment. But we, in our ignorance, make a misplay. Immediately partner pounces on us. We acquire a reddish tinge and earnestly wish for the floor to open up and swallow us.

In confusion we reach for a smoke, and lo ! embarrassment fades. We are on familiar ground once more. We may be poor bridge players, but here is something we can do well. With polished technique, acquired by years of practice, we light the cigarette and inhale a long drag. Over us comes that faint glow of satisfaction produced by a good job well done.

Besides supplying occupation for nervous fingers, smoking gives a certain pleasurable sensation in the throat and lungs. This sensation is so slight as not to be noticed by many habitual tobacco-users, but it is nevertheless present. What experienced smoker could enjoy a cigarette if he did not inhale ?

The sight of smoke rising from a cigarette or from the lips and nostrils has a quieting effect on the nerves. The study of the phenomena of smoke-rings, spirals, and clouds is one of the very best methods of wasting time.

Did you ever enter the smoking compartment of a railroad car? There you find the most patient and seemingly interested observers of smoke in its various forms. The occupants, being for the most part strangers to each other, will sit for hours exhaling grey clouds of smoke and watching them disappear in space.

But it is to be feared that the true scientific spirit is lacking, for as soon as some bold soul ventures a remark to "break the ice" smoke is forgotten. It has, however, served to pass the time.

Some individuals appear to smoke solely for the pleasure they derive from blowing smoke-rings. These fanatics are, fortunately, rare. One gentleman of my acquaintance spent years in trying to blow a square ring. Recently, after much fruitless endeavour, he came to the conclusion that his time had been wasted.

But in idle moments, and who can say he has none, watching the little curls and spirals of smoke is an innocent and diverting pastime. One condition only is necessary to its enjoyment,—the smoke must be seen. This will afford some clue as to why a cigarette is less enjoyable when smoked in complete darkness.

The use of tobacco has been upheld in some circles as an aid to thought. This has, perhaps, some basis of truth, for it is well known that during examination times at colleges the consumption of cigarettes is increased threefold.

The habit-forming properties of tobacco have also been put forward as a reason for its continued use. After some slight research and inquiry into the matter I have come to the conclusion that this reason should be given only minor consideration. Smoking is primarily a nervous habit. If a smoker were given in some other form the various drugs contained in a cigarette, it is unlikely that he would be rid of his desire for a smoke.

In these few paragraphs on the reasons for smoking some mention has been made of the beneficial effects. Now we shall turn our attention to the harm said to be done by the use of the "weed."

Certain Anti-Tobacco Societies have amassed great quantities of statistics concerning the harmful effects of tobacco. These figures need worry no one. They are too numerous to be bothered with. The average person is notoriously careless of his health, and certainly will

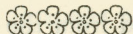
not look through reams of uninteresting figures in order to prove harmful a habit of which he is quite fond.

The tobacco habit is said to dull the wits. On this I can make no comment, as I haven't the slightest idea of how much keener my mind would be if I did not smoke. Nor do I care. I believe most smokers will agree with this attitude.

To my mind the worst effect of smoking is "psychological." A person running out of tobacco will often resort to borrowing in order to satisfy his desire for a cigarette. This is demoralizing. The smoker, once receiving a cigarette by this means, will readily perceive how easy it is to thus replenish his supply, and will be loath to buy his own in the future. There is a grave danger of his becoming a parasite, a "bum." Some active mind should devise a sure method of squelching these pests.

The other effects of tobacco-cutting off the wind, tobacco heart, and so-on-are too well known to be discussed here. They are, however, relatively unimportant.

To sum up, it is obvious that the benefits of tobacco far outweigh its disadvantages. Even if this were not true, it is doubtful if anyone would give up the habit. It has become a social pastime.



Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

—*Shakespeare.*

Rich gifts wax poor when the giver proves unkind.

—*Shakespeare.*

Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour, and to wait.

—*Longfellow.*

