The Introvert

By J. D. Beresford

Nothing is more dispiriting than the practice of classifying humanity according to “types.” Your professional psychologist does it for his own purposes. This is his way of collating material for the large generalization he is always chasing. His ideal is a complete record. He would like to present us as so many samples on a labelled card—the differences between the samples on any one card being ascribed to an initial carelessness in manufacture. His method is the apotheosis of that of the gay Italian fortune-teller one used to see about the streets, with her little cage of love-birds that sized you up and picked you out a suitable future. Presently, we hope, the psychologist will be able to do that for us with a greater discrimination. He will take a few measurements, test our reaction times, consult an index avd hand us out an infallible analysis of our “type.” After that we shall know precisely what we are fitted for, and whether our ultimate destination is the Woolsack or the Workhouse.

But your psychologist has his uses, and it is the amateur in this sort, particularly the novel-writing amateur, who arouses our protest. He—I use the pronoun asexually—does not spend himself in prophecy, but he deals us out into packs with an air of knowing just where we belong. And his novels prove how right he was, because you can prove anything in a novel. His readers like this method. It is easy to understand, and it provides them with an articulate description of the inevitable Jones.

I cling to that as some justification for the habit, as an excuse for my own exhibition of the weakness, however dispiriting. It is so convenient to have a shorthand reference for Jones and other of our acquaintances. The proper understanding of any one of them might engage the leisure of a lifetime; and if for general purposes we can tuck our friends into some neat category, we serve the purposes of lucidity.

Lastly, to conclude this apology, I would plead that a new theme of classification, such as that provided by psycho-analysis, is altogether too fascinating to be resisted.

There is, for example, my friend David Wince, the typical “introvert,” and an almost perfect foil for my friend the “exuovert,” previously described. The two men loathe the sight of one another. Contempt on one side and fear on the other is a sufficient explanation of their mutual aversion. Wince, indeed, has an instinctive fear of anything that bellows, and a rooted distrust of most other things. He suffers from a kind of spiritual agoraphobia that makes him scared and suspicious of large generalisations, broad horizons and cognate phenomena. He likes, as he says, to be “sure of one step” before he takes the next. The open distances of a political argument astound and terrify him. He takes all discussions with a great seriousness, and displays an obstructive passion for definition and the right use of words. “What I should like to understand” is a favourite opening of his, and the thing he would like to understand is almost invariably some abstruse and fundamental definition.

The *á priori* method is anathema to him. He is, in fact, characteristically unable to comprehend it. He has little respect for a syllogism as such, because his mind seems to work backwards, and all his logical faculty is used in the dissection of premisses. When my exasperation reaches the stage at which hay: “But, my dear fellow, let us take it for granted, for the sake of argument. . . . “he wrings his hands in despair and replies: “But that’s the whole point. We *can’t* take these things for granted. If you don’t examine your premisses, where *are* you?” He has a habit in

conversation of emphasizing such words as those I have underlined, and a look of desolation comes into his face when he plaintively enquires where we *are*.

At those times I see his timid, irresolute spirit momentarily staring aghast at the threat of this world's immense distances; before it ducks back with a sigh of relief into the shelter afforded by his introspective analyses. "Let us be quite sure of our ground," he says, "before we draw any deductions." His ground is, I fancy, a kind of 'dug-out.'

He has had an unfortunate matrimonial experience. His wife ran away with another man, some three or four years ago, and he is trying to screw himself up to the pitch of divorcing her. For a man of his sensitiveness, the giving of evidence in Court upon such a delicate subject will be a very trying ordeal. He has confided very little of his trouble to me, but occasional hints of his, and the reports of another friend who knew Mrs. Wince personally, lead me to suppose that she was rather a large-minded, robust sort of woman. Perhaps he bored her. I can imagine that he would bore anyone who had a lust for action; and as they had been married for eight years and had no children, I am not prepared to condemn Mrs. Wince, off-hand, for her desertion of him. I have no doubt that Wince might be able to make out a good ethical case for himself. I picture his attitude towards his wife as being extremely self-denying, deprecatory and almost passionately virtuous. But I prefer to reserve judgment on the issue between them. I can imagine that his habit of procrastinating may have annoyed her to desperation. He has told me with a kind of meek pride that he has often been to the door of a shop, and then postponed the purchase he had come to make until the next day. He loathes shopping. He finds the mildest shopkeeper an intimidating creature. I do not know what would happen to him if his hairdresser died. He has been to the same man for over twenty years.

In politics he is a conscientious Radical, and his one test of politicians is "Are they sincere?" He distrusts the Tories because he believes that they must be working for their own personal ends, but he has had a private weakness for Mr. Balfour ever since he read *The Foundations of Belief*. His hero is W. E. Gladstone, whose opinions represent to him, I fancy, some aspect of his own, while Gladstone's courage, Wince says, was "perfectly glorious."

He adores courage, but only when it is the self-conscious kind. Our friend Bellows, for instance, does not appear to Wince as brave, but as callous, thick-skinned, or "simply a braggart." All Wince's resentment comes to the surface when the two men meet by some untoward accident. On one such occasion he magnificently left the room and slammed the door after him, but I think that he probably regretted that act of violence before he reached home. He has a nervous horror of making enemies. He need have no fear in this case. Bellows considers Wince as beneath his notice, and always speaks of him to me as "your hair-splittin' friend."

Now that I have documented Wince I feel chiefly sorry for him, but when I am in his company I frequently have a strong desire to shake him. I wonder if his wife began by being sorry for him, and if her escapade was incidentally intended as a shaking? Did she flaunt her wickedness at him in the hope of 'rousing him up'? If so, she failed, ignominiously. Shakings of that sort only aggravate his terror of life. Indeed, I do not think that anything can be done for him. If he survives the war, the coming of the New Democracy will certainly finish him. Talking of the possibility of a November Election, he told me that he meant to abstain from voting. He said that he could not vote for Lloyd George, and was afraid of putting too much power into the hands of the Labour Party. He did not think that they had yet had enough experience of government to he trusted with the control of a nation.

In the hallowed protections of the Victorian era he had his place and throve after his fashion. Life was so secure and the future apparently so certain. But he was not fitted to stand the strain

of coming out into the open. He is horrified by the War, but in his heart he is still more horrified by the thought of the conditions that will come with peace. He sees the future, I know, as a vast, formless threat. He sees life exposed to a great gale of revolution. He is afraid that his retreat will be no longer available, that one day he will find his burrow stopped and himself called upon to face, and to work with, his fellow-men.

But no doubt his natural timidity tends to over-estimate the probability of these dangers.