

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SMOKING

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When the American Indians made known to the European discoverers the wonderful properties of a weed which they called "tabaco," they gave to the white men a treasure in return for which the poor savages eminently deserve to live forever in the grateful memory of all nicotians. The red men have sadly decreased in numbers, but they must not be forgotten. Let their memory live in benediction for having taught our forefathers to cherish and cultivate the peaceful art of smoking. With the Indians it was always one of the arts of peace, so much so, in fact, that the smoking of the calumet, or pipe of peace, almost amounted to a sacred rite, which was performed in friendly fashion when wars were ended, compacts formed and treaties concluded. The discovery of tobacco and its use took place under peaceful auspices that augured well for the benevolent mission which this fragrant weed was thenceforth to fulfill among men in all parts of the world.

From the New World tobacco was first introduced into Spain by a Spanish physician about the year 1559. This marks the beginning of that fondness for smoking which is so characteristic of the Spanish people. Since then they have always been connoisseurs in the matter of cultivating and smoking tobacco, and their keen appreciation of the best grades of it is so old and so inveterate that it may be truly said to be with them bred in the bone and part of the flesh. It likewise points to the fact that this country was discovered by Spain.

There is an amusing incident told in connection with the introduction of tobacco into England. The dashing young courtier, soldier and navigator, Sir Walter Raleigh, had on a voyage to America been initiated into the nicotian mysteries. One evening, while at home, he sat down by the fireplace, filled the bowl of a long pipe with some excellent tobacco, lit the same with a live coal from the fire, and leaning back in his comfortable chair proceeded to blow smoke-wreaths at the ceiling. While he sat there lost in thought, a servant entered and began to busy himself about the room when he suddenly noticed the clouds of smoke that hung around his master. Thinking that Sir Walter's clothes had caught fire from the hearth, the servant snatched a large bumper of ale from a table nearby and dashed the liquor over his master's elegant person. The shock experienced by Raleigh may be more

easily imagined than described. The situation must have been tense for some time, and it is safe to say that he took certain preventive measures against the possibility of any future exhibition of such mistaken zeal on the part of his well-meaning valet. All of which goes to show that in the early days of the history of tobacco its devotees were made the victims of misunderstanding.

Outside the circle of the "illuminati" violent prejudice and protest arose, as was to be expected. Curiosity is inborn, but still people do not, as a rule, jump at every novelty. On the contrary, they often do the very opposite. So it happened that when the use of tobacco began to spread in Europe, the ecclesiastical as well as the civil power became alarmed and tried to prevent it. Pope Urban VIII is even said to have excommunicated those who indulged in the weed. "The Counterblast to Tobacco," written by King James I, is a matter of history. However, nobody is to blame, since at that time the medical fraternity could not yet be reasonably expected to make any statement concerning the new drug which would have established its good repute.

In spite of all opposition, however, the consumption of the bitter-sweet narcotic spread all over Europe. In France it was introduced in 1560 by Jean Nicot, from whom nicotine, the active principle in tobacco, received its name. In England, especially, did smoking gain ground rapidly, and in a short time tobacco-taverns became as numerous and popular as the grog-shops. An interesting bit of observation made during these times has come down to us from the pen of Ben Jonson: "I marle what pleasure or felicitie they have in taking this roguish tobacco! it's good for nothing but to choke a man, and fill him full of smoke and embers."<sup>1</sup> If Ben is here speaking from personal experience; that is, if, in an attempt to smoke a pipe, he put the wrong end of the said instrument into his mouth, he has a perfect right to marvel that men find pleasure in smoking. We may sincerely sympathize with him in his misfortune, but we cannot accept his conclusion because a man who shows the proclivities of a fire-eater cannot be in a position to judge impartially concerning the fine art of smoking. He must have written that before his conversion, or perversion, if you prefer. At any rate, he could not long frequent the Mermaid Tavern without becoming aware of his mistake, and without sooner or later succumbing to the

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<sup>1</sup>"Every Man in His Humour," III, 5.

charms of Milady Nicotine, who daily made new conquests among the goodly company which in those days patronized and made that ale-house famous. From the days of "goode Queene Bess" down to our own time, the art of smoking has been spread and cultivated to such an extent that tobacco is today, of all narcotics, the most universally used.

Right here we collide with the question, "Why do men smoke?" But before we proceed to cudgel our brains for an answer, we must, like good scholastics, define our terms. By smoking, in the broad sense, we mean the process of drawing the smoke of burning tobacco into the mouth and then exhaling it through the mouth or nostrils. Smoking thus practised may, and generally does, cause nausea to the unhabituated, but aside from that it is as innocent as milk in comparison with whisky. It merely gives the taste of tobacco to the palate, conveys nothing to the system, and is nothing more than the mechanical process of using the mouth as a bellows to promote the combustion of tobacco. It is a pastime resembling that in which a baby engages when it sucks the nipple of an empty feeding-bottle. It is really surprising how many people smoke in this way. Here, then, we have a psychological problem. Why do they smoke? They smoke in accordance with what is called in psychology the law of imitation. A boy instinctively does what he sees his fellows do in order that he may have full title of access to his group and equality with all its members. He does not want to seem effeminate; on the contrary, he wants to be "one of the boys." Of course he does not reason this out, he does not analyse his actions. He need not even advert to the fact that he is imitating anybody; he simply sees others smoke and reacts to that example—and all from the innate tendency to imitate which is closely connected with the gregarious instinct.

But now we come to the art of smoking in its strict sense, as it is practised by the "Inner Temple" of the savants of tobacco. These worthies inhale the fragrant fumes into their lungs, where the narcotic affects the nerves. This produces first a gentle exhilaration and then a state of physical and mental quiet very gratifying to the habituated. Horrors! Now we've done it, for, upon hearing this, our Puritan friend is shocked and throws up his hands in dismay. When he has sufficiently recovered his mental balance he pulls down the medical tomes and proceeds to give us an edifying lecture on the dangers of smok-

ing. If the terrible things he says are not enough to deter us, and if his zeal is great, he dashes out dramatically and inaugurates a campaign to induce the Government to prohibit the use of this vile weed. But if our well-meaning friend is reasonable, he soon learns that in regard to this matter he is sitting in utter darkness. The facts, briefly, are these:

Though nicotine, which is tobacco's active principle, is a volatile, poisonous alkaloid, though its chemical symbol is  $C_{10}H_{14}N_2$ , and though it causes a nervous reaction,—all of which looks very scientific and very serious—still, it is not half as awful as it seems. Medical authorities agree that the moderate use of tobacco is not at all injurious to health. In fact, one meets few physicians who do not smoke, but, be it always remembered, they smoke moderately. In speaking of mental and bodily derangement caused by tobacco, they invariably attribute the same not to the use but to the abuse of the stimulant. Tobacco is certainly injurious, but so are bon-bons when taken in immoderate quantities.

Tobacco and alcohol are drugs in which a Christian may lawfully indulge. Like all good things in this world, they are liable to abuse. Their use is good and lawful, their abuse criminal. Moderation is the watchword that must guide him who makes use of either. Nature shuns and punishes abuse, but she also powerfully assists man in all the affairs wherein he acts reasonably. Smoking, rationally indulged in, is an art; immoderately practiced, it is a vice. But in either case civilized society has adopted it and it is here to stay. In view of this fact, physicians counsel moderation in the use of tobacco, and they agree that if their advice is followed no injury will result. During the Great War a national campaign was carried on to supply our soldiers with tobacco, and the medical men did not hesitate to promote this cause.

In answer to the question proposed above it is perfectly safe to say that almost all men take to smoking in imitation of others. Later on they may become masters of the art, but if they do not, they continue all their lives to imitate others. This latter class of smokers has been considered above and very little psychology applies to them. But the masters, the inveterates, are more interesting. A brilliant college professor once said that men smoke because they like to watch the glow of burning tobacco and the graceful clouds of smoke. But he was probably conducting a little experiment in order to find out whether or not his bright,

young disciples were ripe enough for a bit of psychological research. It is quite true that fire fascinates children and savages, but it takes more than that to make people smoke. The fire in a pipe may be covered with ashes; smoke is invisible in the dark; and still smoking affords equal pleasure at all times. We must look for another explanation.

Combustion is the best method of liberating the drug called nicotine. In the vaporized state this produces a physical effect, namely, gentle exhilaration and physical quiet. There follows mental tranquillity, which is a distinctly psychological effect; and there is the answer to our question. This psychological effect is similar to that produced by gentle music. Both prepare the mind for thought, they induce the reflective mood, they soothe the mind. Tobacco produces the same effect in all men, and though there are different degrees of perception corresponding to different degrees of physical and psychological sensitiveness, all men react to its benevolent influence.

"Sublime tobacco! which from east to west  
Cheers the tar's labour or the Turkman's rest."<sup>2</sup>

Its unique power to make a man good-natured is aptly enshrined in the favorite dictum of the kindly old Cardinal in Henry Harland's novel, "The Cardinal's Snuff-box." "Tobacco," says the prelate, "is the preservative of the milk of human kindness." It is a great aid to intellectual work. Scientists, statesmen, artists and literary men have always shown special fondness for smoking. Raleigh, Spenser, Milton, Locke, Addison, Burns, Byron, Campbell, Scott, Lamb, Thackeray, Daniel Webster, Clay, General Grant and many other celebrities were all devout tobacco-eaters. Lamb, however, smoked to excess, and when forced by his physician to abjure, he did so in the humorously pathetic verses entitled, "Farewell to Tobacco." The truly inspired poet, Francis Thompson, was a life-long smoker. All he left behind him when he died, besides a few manuscripts, was a tin box containing old pens that would not write and pipes that would not draw. The great men of the past as well as those of today evidently smoke for a good reason. Tobacco cheers their lonely hours, dulls the edge of adversity, stimulates the spirit to work and makes the business of life more agreeable and fruitful. Who would have the temerity to say that the fulfillment of this kindly mission is not the end for which the fragrant herb was created?

<sup>2</sup> Byron, "The Island," II, 19.

So much for the individual. But studied now from the angle of the psychological influences that make up social intercourse, smoking presents some very curious points of interest. The mandates of conventionality are as amusing as they are imperious. The use of cigarettes was once considered very bad form. This was due to the fact that when they were invented they first became popular among people of a questionable class. But today the pendulum is slowly swinging to the opposite view. In Spanish society it is an insult to refuse a proffered cigar or cigarette, and in the old days duels were fought to repair such an offence. George Sand was the first woman to smoke in Europe, and naturally she was frowned upon. Conventionality has long dictated the belief that the consumption of stimulants and narcotics by women is unwomanly. But as Ross rightly observes:<sup>3</sup> "No contrast between the male and female nervous systems that should cause the one to benefit by stimulants and narcotics and not the other has ever been brought to light. Among the American pioneers the women smoked as freely as the men. . . . It is amusing to witness the horror of a convivial Southerner at the use of the mint julep and the cigar among women of the 'swagger set.'" The conventional view still prevails, except in the fashionable circles of Europe and America, where smoking is becoming very popular among women. And if men may smoke there is no physical or moral reason why women should be forbidden. But conventionality is not all wrong. It preserves chivalry when it demands that no gentleman may smoke in a lady's presence without first asking her permission, which she need not give if she objects to the odor of tobacco.

This whole subject might be pursued more at length and its finer points searched out more in detail. But enough has been said to show the reasons why tobacco is used today. The excellence of moderation has been pointed out, and in general enough has been indicated to demonstrate the unreasonableness of intolerant views concerning the practice of the art of smoking. Tobacco, moderately used, is an innocent plant. Smoking, pursued with discretion, is a fine art and has a very definite and very wholesome physical and psychological mission to perform in this weary world.

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<sup>3</sup>"Social Psychology," p. 118.