

"PLEASE, SIR—"

The Art of Making Excuses

A SOUTH ISLAND magistrate is known for his impatience with people who appear before him bearing lame and hastily-thought-up excuses. He has often remarked from the Bench: "Couldn't you find a better one than that?"

But magistrates are not the only people to become repositories of quaint reasons why rules and regulations are broken. Ask any traffic inspector in your home town to tell you of some of his adventures in the course of duty and you'll be amazed at the curious quirks of human nature in awkward positions. He will probably tell you, as one of them told *The Listener*, that in spite of restrictions on the issue of petrol and tyres, the road accident figures have not shown the decrease that one would expect. The main reason given is that in the last three or four years many people who never drove a car before have had to do so in the course of their duties. Another reason might be that private drivers save up their petrol for holiday times and then all take to the road together—some of them, possibly, quite out of practice. But those are not the reasons they give.

Urgent Business

A doctor speeding in his car is generally on his way to an urgent case; a lawyer who exceeds the parking time allowed has, of course, been held up by a client, while the business man has been attending an important conference which took longer than he anticipated, or he so enjoyed the community sing at the luncheon that he quite forgot the time. The ordinary citizen has simply been delayed because the shop was packed and he had to wait a long time to be served.

We occasionally read announcements that the Government has received "conscience money." This indicates that someone has offended and been smitten with remorse. Conscience can weigh heavily on traffic inspectors, too, for there is on record a case of an inspector who prosecuted himself for a car-parking offence. He wanted to prove that there was no fear or favour in his Department.

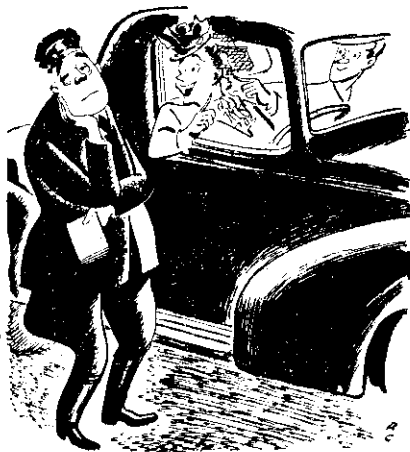
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"We're just asking the customers to co-operate," he reiterated, just as if I had been saying nothing for the past five minutes. "There's a war on, you know. Everyone should be willing to do their bit."

That was supposed to make me feel like a worm. Perhaps it did. But I was thinking of after the war. It is easier to surrender one's rights than to recover them. I was also thinking of something else by this time.

"Oh, very well," I said to the baker and went inside.

I'VE decided. Someone else can marry Tom and fetch and carry and boost the population figures. I'm going to take the job with the Automatic Home Aids Co. Ltd. I think receptionist would be a nice quiet dignified sort of occupation. Don't you?



A patrol-man had to call on the mother of a young man who had a noisy motor-cycle. The neighbours complained of the clatter he made in the early hours of the morning. "The mother told me such a moving story of her son's innate goodness, his virtues and his high-mindedness, and of the poverty of the household, that I was nearly in tears," he said. "Then there is the blusterer who thinks he can bluff his way out of anything and even wants to fight. We know how to deal with him."

The Sick Wife Tale

"One young fellow I caught speeding told me that his wife was just out of hospital and he was rushing home to see how she was getting on. Three weeks later he was caught again, and again his wife had just come out of hospital. He was anxious to get home and prepare a meal for her. I suggested that this wife had a curious habit of popping in and out of hospital, and then he came clean. He wasn't even married."

Still, we said, there must be urgent cases when a man can offer a reasonable excuse for some minor breach.

"That's true," said the inspector. "But when you get so many men hurrying home from the all-night dispensary with medicine urgently required, you're apt to wonder why the town has suddenly gone sick."

The old dodge of giving an officer a false name and address fails to work these days because inspectors can check up on the spot and stop any nonsense about identity, as a youth found to his cost. He had been speeding and when the patrol man caught up with him he gave a certain name and address. "Oh," said the patrol-man, after consulting his little book, "you're a bishop, are you?" The correct information was then forthcoming.

Good, But Unavailing

The composition of excuses is an art at which only the expert has any chance of success. A certain journalist was once chatting to a magistrate on a city street corner. The conversation was a long one and in the meantime a traffic inspector had taken the number of his car which had been parked beyond the time limit. Next day the journalist appeared before the very magistrate he had been talking to.

"Well, what's your excuse?" asked the Bench.

"A good one this time, your worship," replied the reporter. "You held me up too long explaining that game of bowls."

"Ten shillings and costs!"

—E.R.B.

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