

THINK OF A NUMBER

But Be Sure It's The Right One



THIS is not a story about the numbers which come to you (at a shilling a time), in a sealed folder, from the Guy at the End of the Bar. Those numbers affect you only on Mondays, when the week-end totalisator results are printed. The ones I have in mind are around and about you all the time, as thick as primroses on the Broad Way that leads to Destruction, or thieves on the road to Jericho. And ready to do you dirt from the cradle to the grave. Or so I'm told.

I was told all about it the other day by an old acquaintance who is at the moment suffering from mild anxiety neurosis and if I can't talk it out of my system I'll be getting his complaint myself. Then all the good work the two of us have been doing will go for nothing.

You see, we have been acclimatising ourselves to the rhythm of life in Civvy Street again. In terms of diversional therapy, this has been a simple affair. We spend a proportion of our day in the lifts of the taller city buildings, we are invariably at the private box department of the chief post office at mail delivery times to watch the graceful comings and goings of the office girls.

And we never fail to take morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea at those secluded cafeterias where business executives are invariably hidden when they are most urgently wanted.

IT was at lunch last Tuesday that the numbers question came up. I had mentioned, with becoming casualness,

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sound out their consonants, really sing the words as they are written and make it worthwhile for the poets! The English language is a good language to sing in, but I wish these young singers would use it properly and vigorously."

We went down the stairs with Mr. Hill; he brushed aside our suggestion that he should wait for the lift.

"Now I expect you to listen to me when I have my broadcast and I expect you to tell me how you liked it. And I don't want soft-soap," he said, shaking his finger at us; "I want the truth and I want criticism if I deserve it."

that my sister-in-law had recently presented me with a nephew, whereupon he asked the date of the happy event (if I may coin the phrase). When I said that it was the eighth ultimo, he said "Oh" in a somewhat depressed tone, then, after a moment's thought, "Oh, good gracious me, how unfortunate!" (or words to that effect).

"Why?" I asked. It seemed the obvious conversational gambit and I am always ready for conversation when I eat in public. It helps to keep my mind from dwelling on the amount of indigestion that is going on all around me.

"Eight is a very dangerous number," he explained. "Napoleon was born on the eighth; so was Catherine the Great of Russia..."

"Well, Napoleon died in his bed and Catherine (if memory serves) died of apoplexy, probably in bed, too."

"At any rate, they died," he rejoined, not a whit ruffled, "and anyway, the eighth of last month is even worse than usual. It's eight three ways."

"Yes," I said, faintly.

"Yes, eight in its own right (so to speak), and then it's the eighth of the ninth month—eight and nine is 17 and seven and one is eight, see?"

"But..." I protested.

"But that's not all," he was now in full cry, "it's the eighth of the ninth month of the 45th year: eight and nine is 17, and 17 and 45..." he paused, "... 17 and five is 22, carry two, and four is six..."

"Make six," I was faint but pursuing.

"Make six, then; that's 62, and six and two is eight. You couldn't have picked a worse date in the entire century."

I pointed out that the date was one on which I could scarcely have had the minutest influence, adding "But you don't mean to say you believe all that rot about numbers?"

"Don't mock," he warned me severely. "Numbers Rule the Universe. But there are good numbers as well as bad ones. As a matter of fact, what I'm trying to do at the moment is work out a good date to go back to work. I don't want it to be too early a date, of course, but it might be a good idea to get back before the Christmas holidays began. Now the 28th of next month is quite a good date. Eight and two's ten, and one and nought is one, and one is a very strong number—just about the best of them—then it's the 11th month, one and one is two, and two's not bad, though it's not much good either, kind of neutral, if you see what I mean. But 28 and 11 is 39, three and nine's 12, and one and two's three. Three is a good number too. Strong and with a very favourable vibration. Threes and sixes and nines are all good numbers. In fact, December 3 might be a better date. Let's see, three and 12's 15, and 15 and 45 is... 15 and five's 20, nought and carry two..."

HE was still counting gravely on his fingers when I left him five minutes later. I also left him the meal check. I felt I should. It was a good strong number, too.

—J.A.



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