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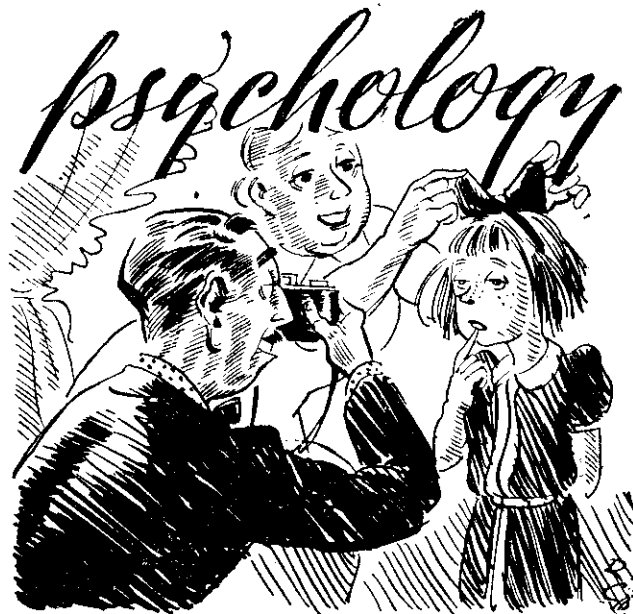
Name.....

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A lesson in psychology

A
SHORT
STORY

By
G. I.
FORD



PEOPLE often ask me how I manage to make a living biking round the country taking photographs of farmers' kids. Yes, your photographs are very nice, Mr. Hopkins, they say. But it must be such hard work biking all day like you do, and don't you find not many people can afford to have photographs taken, even if they are so very cheap?

YOU'D be surprised, I think to myself. We are frail and vain human creatures all of us, as God knows, and when you tell a woman that her moth-eaten kid is the loveliest child you have seen in a hundred miles don't you think she'll be tickled pink and be an easy mark for a dozen eight-by-tens mounted at four pounds ten the lot?

That's the whole secret of my profession, I don't mind telling you. Call it kidstrokes and trading on the vanity of silly women if you like. I didn't make them that way, and if I don't take their money someone else will.

YOU may be interested to learn how I came to take up my profession. I was always keen on fooling around with cameras. I had quite a good little folding one-twenty size outfit and developed the films and made enlargements myself.

One day I took a photograph of a particularly mouldy child belonging to an aunt of mine. I couldn't get it to stay still and after a while I just let it play and then took one while it wasn't looking. Talk about exhibition shots, you should have seen this one. My aunt, who is a most obnoxious female, as I said, took a great liking to it and said, Oh Lionel, isn't it lovely? Will you run me off half-a-dozen big ones like a dear boy? I ran them off, whole plate on a good paper, and then because she could afford it and because I disliked her so much I charged her good and hard. She paid up without a murmur, and that set me thinking.

It was obvious that if one silly woman was nuts over a photograph of her kid there would be plenty of others the same way. So there and then I invested about fifty quid in a Leica with a three five lens and a coupled rangefinder and a good enlarger. Six months later when I had got the hang of the Leica and could turn out a passable sort of picture under most conditions I chucked my job and set out on a bicycle to chisel a bit of butterfat from farmers' wives.

Of course the selling side isn't easy, and I knew enough to take some lessons in the psychology of the game from a friend of mine who is a crack vacuum-cleaner salesman. Everything depends on psychology—the right approach, when to put the pressure on, how to deliver the photographs after you've taken them, and so on.

I FLATTER myself I've got it down to a pretty fine art by now. I usually find out the name of the woman in the next house as I go along, so that when she opens the door I lift my hat and turn on the personality and say, My name is Hopkins, Mrs. So-and-So, and I represent the Superior Portrait Company We Take Them in Your Own Home. Mrs. So-and-so down the road thought you would like to see some of our outstanding child studies. Of course we are not looking up everybody in this district, just calling on a few people for the sake of advertising. Have you a table handy?

And before you can say Lionel Hopkins I am inside and opening my sample case on the dining room table. There, I say with a flourish, isn't that lovely, Mrs. So-and-So? And because the sample is enough to smack anyone in

the eye, she says, Yes, they are beautiful, aren't they Mr.—? I'm afraid I didn't catch your name.

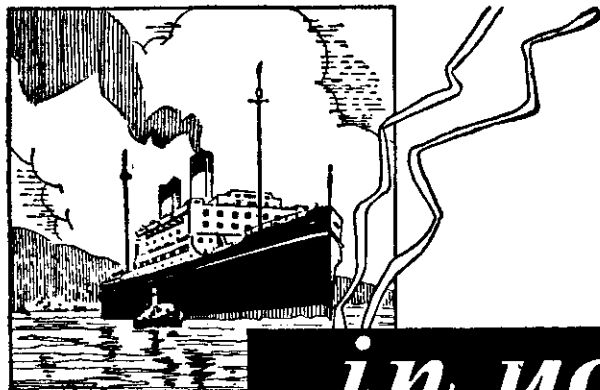
Hopkins, madam, I say. Hopkins of the Superior Portrait Company We Take Them in Your Own Home. Now here is what we are doing in this district. And then suddenly I see a grubby looking infant hanging on to her skirts and wiping its nose on its sleeve and I say, Well, well, Mrs. So-and-So, what a lovely child you have. Now there, if I may say so, is the type of child who makes the most beautiful study of all. Photogenique is what they call it in Hollywood. Some children I wouldn't attempt to take an artistic picture of, but if you don't mind my putting it that way here is a child study in a thousand.

And believe it or not, in ten minutes' time she has put a clean pair of pants on the kid, blown its nose, and I have taken three or four shots of it in various positions. Then I pat the kid on the head and say, That's all for to-day my little man, and I remind this Mrs. So-and-So that she's getting the pictures at a ridiculously low price on condition that she recommends my work to her friends. You wouldn't mind doing that would you Mrs. So-and-So? Oh no, she says, and that's psychology too, because she's agreeing with you all the time and it puts her under an obligation. Before I leave I inquire the name of one or two other doting mothers in the district, and off I go to crack the next prospect.

SOMETIMES of course you strike a tough one. Some of them can't get it out of their head that you're not selling insurance or something like that. I remember one woman who was a bit deaf and even though I bellowed at her all she would say was, No I don't want any insurance, thank you, I'll have the pension in ten years' time and that will be enough for me, no I don't want any insurance thank you.

Then there is the type which is very pleasant and butter won't melt in their mouth and they agree with you all the time and say, Yes, they are very nice photographs, and, Yes I would like Ethel's picture taken, but when it comes to the point and you start putting on the pressure you can't somehow manage

(Continued on next page)



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