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I WORK IN THE DARK

The Technique
of Pamphlet
Distribution

Written
for "The Listener"
by W.M.

"... Well, I will lie,
And so bestow these papers as you
bade me."—"Julius Caesar," Act 1,
Scene III.

I DIDN'T become a distributor of election pamphlets by intention—perhaps nobody does. It happened this way with me. Having indiscreetly expressed interest in Mr. A. candidate, I was approached some days later by one of the electoral committee and asked if I would spare an hour or two for the Cause. I agreed, thinking vaguely of a little light clerking in the committee rooms with a few congenial spirits. Instead, my friend consulted some kind of map and announced that they were short of a distributor in Block III. I was to be at the corner of — and — Streets at 8 o'clock on Thursday. I had become an official distributor.

I work in the dark. Of the rewards and perils of daylight distribution I know nothing. I am told that the work takes longer in the daytime, and calls for a different technique. One should be able to pass a few words with the housewife, have a smile for the baby, deal pleasantly with an aggressive champion of the opposite camp. Daylight distributors must be able to take it, and hand it out as well. I leave all this to braver spirits. But when shadows fell last Thursday night, with hat well down over the ears and coat collar well up over the chin, and no doubt a somewhat furtive air, I kept my tryst. As I neared our rendezvous, I could see that someone was already there studying a diagram under the street lamp. It didn't take a Sherlock Holmes to realise that this was my man. After a few preliminaries, we set off.

We Hunt in Pairs

Distributors hunt in pairs. An electorate is divided off into blocks, the number of houses being reckoned up and divided by the number of available distributors—two usually being allotted to each block. Our block covers about 700 houses—fortunately a compact suburban district. Pamphlets are done up in fifties, and it is our job to leave one (already folded) in each letterbox. There won't be much I don't know about letter boxes by the time this Election's through.

For perhaps the first 10 minutes of my distribution, I had a sense of mission. I imagined each leaflet being carefully read and weighed by the elector, and its obvious merits recognised. But that didn't last. For one thing, I recollected that there are at least four active candidates in this district, and for another



I couldn't help remembering the distressing uses to which such material had been put in my own household. So soon I was just shoving them in and hoping for the best.

Night Life

The suburbs are strangely quiet between 8 and 10 p.m. An occasional motor-car, a few bicycles, now and again a dim figure—that is all. Dogs seem to be on the decrease—being outnumbered by cats by about 9-1. But then it is the cat season, I suppose. Sometimes it happens that my co-worker and I have to retrace our steps down a blind street. We compare notes, or fall into a companionable silence. We have our moments of light-heartedness when we come on a colony of Government houses with their letter-boxes arranged in groups. This is something like...

Time marches on. A distant clock strikes. "Ten o'clock and 56 to go," says my friend. I check mine... 52. We turn up the next street.

Theories About Letterboxes

I am beginning to develop theories about letterboxes. Here is a virgin field for the social sciences. Can a man's character be judged by his letterbox? Of course I am not in a position to say—the man-behind-the-letterbox remains an unknown quantity to me. I await the answer from some enterprising undergraduate about to embark on a thesis. Ah! I know is that when at last I stagger home, climb wearily into bed, shut my eyes and await the blessed oblivion of sleep, my letterboxes pass before me in unending parade. Large and small, tall and short, fat and thin; with wide generous slots or narrow reluctant openings; standing bodily in the open or hidden in shrubbery; fancifully conceived or sternly austere—there they go, my 350 letterboxes, their brows stubborn, their mouths slit in a uniform leer. I am completely at their mercy, and they know it.

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