

# Split-second Statistician

SEVERAL people have asked me about the graph on my wall. It extends from the van Gogh "Chair" hanging in the corner by the window, right round to the Wandering Willy above the fireplace—a distance of almost four yards. At the fireplace end I have had to tack a bit of paper on the top.

It all started, in 1955, with a morbid loneliness. I used to wander down the busier streets of Christchurch for an hour every weekday, simply counting the girls who immediately—indeed, instantaneously—struck me as being attractive. I would walk for an hour, between 12 and 1, and I spread my activities over four months—August, September, October and November. Every Sunday I would plot the tally for each day of the week. The length of the period explains the length of the graph, of course. But the interesting point, and the point I propose to discuss, was that the graph's tendency was for the most part upward. On August 1 there were only two girls worth graphing, but on November 30 a total of 53 observed in one hour forced me to extend my graph paper towards the ceiling.

That was in 1955. In 1956 I found myself in Wellington. By then I was no longer morbidly lonely, but I was certainly curious. So I did the same thing again. The times and extent of operation were kept as similar as possible to those in Christchurch, and ultimately the result was roughly the same—except that the almost constantly rising red line started, and maintained itself, about ten points higher in the vertical axis. On August 1 I counted 13, and when the trials ended on November 30 I was once more working on an extended diagram. The final tally for the city of my adoption was 61.

Now by utter coincidence the months chosen were roughly the months of

Spring. In the Spring we are told, fancy turns to thoughts of love. It could therefore be held that I was unconsciously plotting what a psychologist would perhaps call my own "basic emotional responses." I admit this is possible. Indeed, my self-confessed morbid loneliness during the Christchurch tests might be taken to indicate this. But by the time of the second series I found myself happily married. This, I suggest, left me thoroughly objective, and went to prove that both sets of statistics had been uncoloured by anything more basic than my own scientific curiosity.

There is, nevertheless, something significant in the fact that my red line crept higher on the wall as the buds grew greener, the skies bluer, and the animals lost their winter coats. And on this last point I am bound to admit that the subjects of my study tended to do the same.

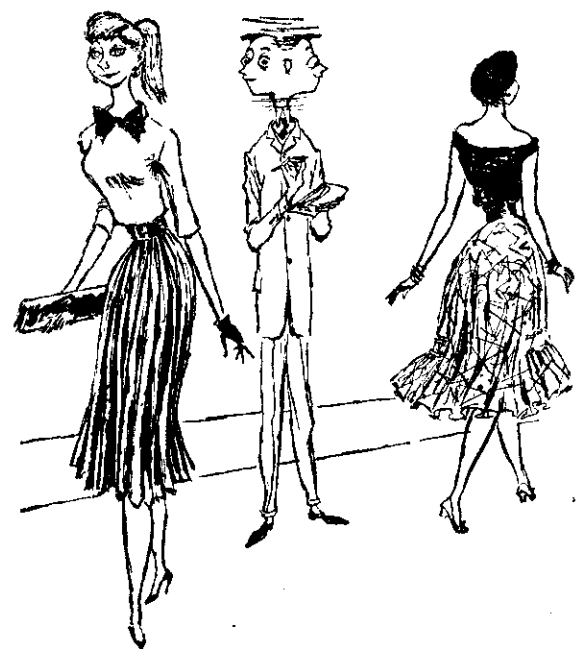
For, apart from the cold statistics on my wall, I also kept a notebook. You will recall that my judgments were "instantaneous"—it was the initial, overall impression which counted as far as the graph was concerned. But when I first saw the trend things were taking and, by mid-October, 1955, began wondering where it would all end, I started to keep a few details of my subjects. This did not change my graph in any way, but did something to explain it. Incidentally, I paid particular attention to those subjects who just missed appearing on the graph.

In the fraction of time which I gave myself to form a judgment I still had a chance to notice clothes. Here are remarks about three subjects, rejected in November, 1955:

One: Strawberry coat, strawberry handbag, strawberry gloves and shoes. All different strains strawberry.

By "CALIBAN"

"I was no longer morbidly lonely but I was certainly curious"



Two: Pity. Arms blue. Not wrapped up for cold.

Three: Nice plain charcoal suit. Head scarf in autumn tonings prompts decapitation.

Occupying a separate page, and marked September 3, 1956, is the following: "Ideal. Split-second definite. At last a young one with an unsophisticated hat."

But on the very next page was a failure of huge dimensions: "Nickname surely Baggy. Suit might fit without the stays."

Such comments as these are typical and suggest one thing. The operative factor is not biological so much as sartorial. I think this is confirmed by the many times on which I have noticed,

after a favourable split-second decision, that the subject was, in fact, quite homely. A couple of entries might illustrate this: "Tailor's credit. Missed legs badly bowed." And another: "Face through veil dishpan." So despite their shortcomings, these two ladies, on October 23, 1956, helped to swell the tally to 39.

The over-all tendency during the two trial periods was, of course, towards summer frocks, and there is no doubt that the number of legs and arms tastefully displayed increased proportionally with the height of my graph. This might throw further doubt on my objectivity. But as is evident from one of the above examples a bare arm, unseasonably ventured, always failed to impress me. I submit that there was another point displayed which was far more interesting: the weather for both trials was sometimes wet and there are significant falterings on my graph, coincident with this. This leads me to the conclusion that in both Christchurch and Wellington girls find it easier to win when the sun shines—that bad taste increases in proportion to falling temperature. My preference for summer frocks, as expressed in the graph, is therefore not because they reveal the figure so much as that they conceal the inability to wear with success anything at all subtle. In the 1955 trials my notebook reveals that I downgraded 101 girls for wearing heavy clothes badly. In 1956 the figure was 112.

This is, of course, merely an interim report. The true test will come when I get the chance to try this analysis in Dunedin and Auckland. The over-all superiority of totals in the Wellington graph suggests that the number of observable pretty girls per hour might increase as one approaches the equator. This may or may not be due to reasons other than increases in population.

So I am now awaiting the chance to do four-month surveys in the remaining two major cities. I cannot turn over the researches to other assistants since their standards would differ from my own. If you are interested, however, I have no objection to your initiating a survey of young ladies in decline—between March and July. But I suspect this would be far too dismal a business for words.

(Solution to No. 836)

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## Clues Across

- Treason's guise for one who agrees (8).
- Strangely enough, nothing in the fog gets damp (5).
- Could he be calm when this sauce is stirred (8).
- Part of the equipment of every Shakespearean villain (5).
- The more it's beaten, naturally, the stiffer it gets (3, 5).
- Just the diet for the rascally hero of "The Wind in the Willows" in one of his periodical scrapes? (4, 2, 3, 4).
- Mustard, for instance (3, 5).
- If you reverse the bobbin, would these be the result? (5).

## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- "He that fights and — May turn and fight another day" (18th century rhyme) (4, 4).
- Expression of indignation not seemingly in a sinner, nor in a saint (5).
- When high water is lowest in a deep tin (8).
- Within to the Romans (5).
- If her foot was cut off, would she take the resulting drug? (7).
- "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the — shall lie down with the kid" (Isaiah 11) (7).

## Clues Down

- Stormy result of a fuss after rent (7).
- Venomous serpent on a circuitous ride reached a great height (7).
- You'd need this to hold eight fans, especially if you were using them all! (7, 2, 4).
- Thanks to the legislator, I take a little company to this Mexican river (7).
- Rile Eve? On the contrary, put an end to her anxiety (7).
- He was ordered to make part of the ship's bows (5).
- Earthen mixture in a Persian city (7).
- An insect, standing on a girl standing on her head, puts out a feeler (7).

No. 837 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

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