

HOW WELL-KNOWN MEN GIVE THE GENTLE HINT TO THEIR CALLERS

THE unsuccessful business man, like our student friend Peter Stirling, faces the problem of receiving visitors to his office; the man who has solved that problem, like our older friend Peter Stirling, faces the more difficult problem of how to dismiss his callers. The successful man is successful because he has learned to use every minute of his time: because he has systematized affairs in his office and follows a routine. It stands to reason, therefore, that his business turns—maybe only slightly, but turns, nevertheless—when some one who does not appreciate this fact (some business bonehead) prolongs a visit beyond the time actually necessary for the transaction of his business.

Ex-President Roosevelt was never successful with anything more than with his scheme for terminating visits of callers to the White House. The number of visitors waiting in the Cabinet room was so regulated that there was never a crowd, nor so few that the President would feel obliged to give undue time to any one caller. He would come right to the point: "Just exactly what do you want me to do?" thus bringing out the business of the visitor. And when that business was stated there was nothing for the caller to do but to leave.

If the visitor to the White House during the present Administration is not there solely out of curiosity but has a matter of business to attend to he can note the difference between the methods of President Taft and his immediate predecessor. Or, if he should happen to be one of the long line ushered to the privilege of a handshake and the "smile that has made Taft famous," then, also, he can discern the difference in the two men.

After the dark-complexioned doorkeeper

has taken the name and business of the caller to the President's secretary and has returned with a verbal "O. K.," the visitor is conducted to the President's reception room—circular in form, bur-lapped walls splashed with green and gold, and furnished with a huge mahogany desk, a chair or two, and a settee. This desk is supposed to portray a lack of spare time. It is as splendid a stage setting for the hint evasive as even David Belasco could devise. Centring its top is a mighty green blotting paper. Papers are scattered all over—bills passed by Congress and considerately set aside to await the President's signature until the Executive has shaken the hand of Uncle Si of Succasunny or Pick-'Em-Off Pete of Pawnee—for all the unsophisticated visitor can tell. At any rate, there seems a mighty lot of work waiting to be done, and a sensible man won't keep his Chief Magistrate away from it any longer than he can help.

To each visitor Mr. Taft extends his right hand, and—mark this—holds his caller's hand while he talks. The caller says something; the President listens, smiles, makes an answer—usually humorous, so as to thrust aside the timidity the caller evinces in the presence of a double greatness—and then he drops the hand. It is the hint. The same thing is done all along the line.

Now, then, suppose the visitor has a serious purpose: The smile disappears; the President listens attentively. Finally he nods and terminates the visit abruptly by turning to some one else. The nod, the renewed smile, and the quick turn supply the cue. The visitor departs.

Other men have other ways of giving the gentle hint that further presence is undesirable. But always is the success-

ful man tactful, bringing unduly prolonged visits to an end in a manner calculated to foster pleasant relations. Unhappy is the business man who cannot rid himself of the incubus of the overstayer. He has to resort to many tactics.

One of the most common is to establish a rule that visitors are admitted only by appointment, and having them wait in an outer office until they get out of patience and depart unsatisfied. The unsatisfactory side of this lies in the ill-feelings that are germinated and the consequent strain in business relationship. This is to be deplored. Never is such a system maintained by a man of high repute.

Paul Morton, head of the Equitable Life Assurance Society and a man through whom Thomas F. Ryan transacts a great share of his financial affairs, is, although otherwise a most democratic man, extremely unapproachable in his office. On "first nights" he is to be seen mingling with the critical theatre crowd or seated in the orchestra circle; but they are indeed few and favored who see him behind his mahogany.

To these select ones he displays the courtesousness which made him a popular member of the governmental family under Roosevelt, and which is one of the cardinal virtues upon which his business success is based. He realizes that his vis-a-vis has run the gamut. There have been office boys, under secretaries, and the private secretary to face, answer, and satisfy. Mr. Morton has been prepared for the visit. He is acquainted with his caller's motive for calling. Nonetheless, he listens. When the interview has reached the logical conclusion he arises and walks his visitor politely to the door.

The walking is done as a matter of course, but it is as forceful and effective as though the visitor were taken by the nape of the neck and roughly ejected. That spells finesse; psychologists term it auto-suggestion.

I want to tell you about that famous financier, John D. Rockefeller. In interviewing prominent men for the sole purpose of observing an idiosyncrasy or system or scheme which may consume no more time than does the waving of a hand I did not forget the man who has wealth enough to buy and sell some countries and whose digestible apparatus was advertised a while ago as being sadly out of kilter. His method—he being a model methodical man—would lend weight to such an article as this. But, bless your soul! it's easier in this day of biplanes and navigable dirigibles that carry twenty passengers on a nine-hour journey to swing telegraph lines from Mars to Jupiter than it is to catch John D. in an office. He has retired, you know, and never goes to an office; therefore he is superlatively unapproachable.

On the golf links? To be sure. And he'll chat with you if you happen to run up against him with a golf stick in your hand. But for the purpose in point why go to the links for information obtainable only, if at all, in an office?

His son, John D., Jr., then, you may ask. Again, he is out of it. He is devoting his time to the vast charitable work his father has founded, and beyond public duties—among which may timely be mentioned his activities as foreman of the Grand Jury investigating sociological conditions in New York City—has no other interest. Rockefeller, it is safe to say, is no longer of the business world; the name

suffices. I'm truly sorry for this, too, because it prevented me from discovering what must have been a strong example of the hint persuasive.

Let me, however, take you visually into the presence of George Westinghouse. He is made aware of your visit by means of a telephonic conversation between the office boy who admits the caller and his private secretary—the secretary informing him of the identity and business of the applicant for interview. He is patient enough while the matter in hand is pertinent, but just as soon as the last necessary word is said he gives the hint by looking out of the window. In other words, the break in the continuity of his concentration is made plain by the side turn of his eyes—a trick that never offends and never fails.

It must be forever borne in mind that the best way to terminate a visit is that which seems the least obvious. Take the method of Jacob Schiff, favorably known as financier and philanthropist, and who is at present devoting his energies to perfecting rules of highways, to the end that danger of life or limb from speeding automobiles may become the smallest instead of the greatest of modern bugaboos. He always welcomes any one who has something to say, provided the fact can be guaranteed that he has something to say. He listens attentively, and interjects remarks of an advisory, amendatory, or contradictory nature. When he has fathomed the full purpose of the visit he reveals his desire for the other's retirement—if that retirement is not then willingly made—in a sort of acquiescent impatience. He answers quickly. And always "Yes! Yes! Yes!" in staccato tones. The visitor must be dense who does not take the hint.