

George Jean Nathan

The Victim of an Entirely New Method of Biographical Assault

ONE of the most amusing literary atrocities perpetrated in New York in many a day is a little pamphlet which has just made its appearance, entitled "Pistols for Two" (Alfred Knopf would, of course, be the publisher of it). It is the work of Owen Hatteras—if such a person really exists—and is made up of two brief biographies, the first of them a minced-meat life of George Jean Nathan, one of Vanity Fair's most dauntless and debonair contributors (he invariably wears a cornflower—said to be artificial—as a boutonnière), the other a similarly chopped up biography of H. L. Mencken, a friend of Nathan's and, like Nathan, an incorrigible fellow of the literary stripe. Both of these desperate characters are devil-may-care reviewers, writers of pale lyrics, roisterers in type, bravos of the printed page. Mr. Hatteras's idea, as explained in his little scarlet pamphlet, is that biography as at present practiced is all wrong, Plutarch, all wrong. Who in the devil cares to know that a man was born, that he went to school, that he attended college, that he was married by a minister, that he had an illness, that he lived in Boston? Fatuous! Futile! Banal! No, none of that for the *soi disant* Mr. Hatteras. The really vital and important thing is, How does a man eat, What shirts does he wear, When does he wash, How often does he fall in love, How does he play? Put down these facts upon the printed page in any old order, in any old way, and let, whoever will, mess about among the debris and construct, from the scattered bits, a definite and symmetrical effigy.

So, here are a few of the more portentous facts concerning the life, diet, tooth powder, love affairs, and winter underwear of our sad, mad friend Nathan—the Pierrot of Broadway.

His boyhood ambition was to be an African explorer in a pith helmet; with plenty of room on the chest ribbon for medals to be bestowed upon him by the Crown Princess of Luxembourg.

He dislikes women over twenty-one, actors, cold weather, mayonnaise dressing, people who are always happy, hard chairs, invitations to dinner, invitations to serve on committees, railroad trips, public restaurants, rye whisky, chicken, daylight, men who do not wear waistcoats, the sight of a woman eating, the sound of a woman singing, small napkins, Maeterlinck, Tagore, Bataille, fried oysters, German soubrettes, French John Masons, American John Masons, tradesmen, poets, married women who think of leaving their husbands, professional anarchists of all kinds, ventilation, professional music lovers, men who tell how much money they have made, men who affect sudden friendships and then call him Georgie, women who affect sudden friendships and then call him Mr. Nathan, writing letters, receiving letters, talking over the telephone, and wearing a hat.

He never receives a woman caller save with his secretary in the room.

He can eat spinach only when it is chopped fine.

In his taste in girls, he runs to the demi-tasses. I have never heard of his showing any interest in a woman more than five feet in height, or weighing more than 105 pounds.

He never goes to weddings, and knows few persons who marry.



GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

The Pierrot of Broadway. Editor, critic, gourmet, bachelor, farceur, and—if you are credulous enough to believe everything he says—pessimist and despiser of the ladies

He drinks numerous cocktails (invariably the species known as "orange blossom," to which he has added two drops of Grenadine), a rich burgundy, and, now and then, a bit of brandy.

He has no use for women who are not sad at twilight.

He admires Max Beerbohm, Conrad, Dr. Llewellys Barker, Mozart, the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies and the songs in "Oh, Boy," sardines, ravioli, Havelock Ellis, chocolate cake, Molnar, Hauptmann, Royalton cigars, Anatole France, *Simplicissimus*, *E. W. Howe's Monthly*, an eiderdown blanket, a hard pillow, a thick toothed comb, a stiff brush, Schnitzler, bitter almond soap, George Ade, Richard Strauss, Pilsner, Huneker, and Florenz Ziegfeld.

He wears the lightest weight underwear during the coldest winter.

He owns thirty-eight overcoats of all sorts and descriptions. Overcoats are a fad with him. He has them from heavy Russian fur to the flimsiest homespun. . . . He owns one with an Alpine hood attachment.

His telephone operator, at his apartment, has a list of five persons to whom he will talk—so many and no more. He refuses to answer the telephone before five o'clock in the afternoon.

The living Americans who most interest him are Josephus Daniels and Frank A. Munsey.

He never visits a house a second time in which he has encountered dogs, cats, children, automatic pianos, grace before (or after) meals, women authors, actors, *The New Republic*, or prints of the Mona Lisa.

He is not acquainted with a single clergyman, Congressman, general, or reformer. He has never met any of the Vice-Presidents of the United States.

He is free of adenoids.

His knee jerks are normal.

A newspaper interviewer once asked him if money they have made, men who affect sudden friendships and then call him Georgie, women who affect sudden friendships and then call him Mr. Nathan, writing letters, receiving letters, talking over the telephone, and wearing a hat

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it was true that a certain disgruntled theatrical manager had alluded to him as a "pinhead." "That," replied Nathan, "is, on the face of it, absurd. 'Pinhead' is a word of two syllables."

He once observed that the reason the galleries of our theatres, as our theatrical managers lament, are no longer filled with newsboys is that all the newsboys are now theatrical managers.

He never writes love letters, and seldom reads them.

He cannot operate a motor car, cook anything, wind a dynamo, fix a clock, guess the answer to a riddle, or milk a cow.

He regards camping out as the most terrible diversion invented by man.

For the last two years he has received weekly anonymous letters from some woman in Bridgeport, Connecticut, who signs herself "L. G."

He takes a companion with him to the theatre only on rare occasions. He uses the extra seat sent him by the managers as a depository for his hat and overcoat.

He hasn't the slightest intention of ever getting married.

He gets squiffed about once in six weeks, usually in company with John Williams. He has a headache the next day.

He wears a No. 14½ collar and No. 7¼ hat. His favorite soup is Crème de Santé.

His valet's name is Osuka F. Takami. The latter has a penchant for polishing patent leather boots with sofa pillows.

He has never been in a Childs' restaurant.

He has been shot at three times, but never hit.

He likes chop suey, spaghetti, French pastry, horseradish sauce, Welsh rarebits, oysters *à la Dumas*, raw tomatoes, stuffed baked potatoes, green peppers, broiled lobster, halibut, mushrooms cooked with caraway seeds, and chipped beef.

His favorite hospitals are the Johns Hopkins, in Baltimore, and Galen Hall, in Atlantic City. Whenever he is ill he goes to one or the other of these hospitals.

Since 1901 he has loved seventeen different girls, and still remembers the names of all of them, and their preferences in literature, food, and wines. Of the seventeen, fourteen are happily married; one has been married and divorced, and the rest have gone West.

He wears pongee pajamas.

He knew Evelyn Nesbit when she was a baby.

He wears low, Byronic collars and rather gaudy neckties.

He is on good terms with but two members of his family.

He uses Calox tooth powder, Colgate's shaving soap, a double strength witch hazel, a Gillette razor, and Kitchell's Horse Liniment. He has never taken quinine, Peruna, Piso's Cough Syrup, Sanatogen, asperin, morphine, opium, or castor oil.

He gets a cinder in his eye twice a day, on an average.

He believes that George Bickel is the funniest comedian on the American stage, that Arnold Daly is the best actor, that Margaret Illington is the best actress.

His usual pulse is 71 a minute. After drinking it rises to 85.

His favorite name for girls is Helen.

He has never visited the battlefield of Gettysburg.