

# "Why Do They Do It?"



By ELMO SCOTT WATSON  
Drawing by Ray Walters.

**W**HEN you mail a letter in the post box on the corner, do you pull down the slot, drop in your letter, release the slot and then walk away? Or, after dropping the missive in, do you give the slot a series of vigorous bangs before you are satisfied that it is really mailed and that you can safely go away and leave it to the care of Uncle Sam?

Unless you're a most unusual person, you do the latter. Why the vigorous bangs? There's a psychological reason, so let a psychologist, Dr. Thaddeus L. Bolton of Temple university, answer. He says:

Everybody—or nearly everybody—rattles the mail slot two or three times after posting a letter. Why? Various reasons—first, caution; second, conceit, and third, egoistic hunger that finds satisfaction in making a noise. The cautiousness springs from the fact that at some time or another we have found the mail box full, and our tiny letter could only be wedged in by a series of flappings with the lid of the mail box. The element of conceit enters in the form of pride in our own written word. We want to make sure that nothing goes wrong to prevent our words reaching the recipient. A great deal of energy has probably gone into the letter. At any rate it is our own written word, so we snap the mail box opening several times "just to make sure."

The last and probably the greatest reason people rattle the mail box slot is because it makes a satisfying noise, and the noise is an expression of our capacity to do things. We make ourselves realizable. When we make a big noise we reassure ourselves that we are alive, and our egoistic hunger for the moment is satisfied.

And that is the scientific explanation for the mail box banging. Any one of the three reasons would be sufficient to cause many persons to rattle the slot, but all three together result in at least 90 per cent of us doing it. Stand near a mail box some day and make your own observations! Nor is it only the mail box which gives us an opportunity to satisfy our egoistic hunger. Doctor Bolton says further:

After all we never get very far from the "rattle stage" even in our so-called growing up state. We must confess that, sophisticated as we may be, we like to rattle things. This makes us kick tin cans, run umbrellas along picket fences, and otherwise make ourselves conspicuous. We will walk along the sidewalk, carefully avoiding the cracks—or walking on one brick at a time. All these maneuvers are attempts to make ourselves felt. I once observed an iron post with an iron ring attached to the top—one of those old-time hitching posts. Of the 100 people I watched as they passed, more than 90 rattled the iron ring or tossed it from one side to the other.

So the proverbial small boy making a deafening racket by drawing a stick along a picket fence can't be explained by "child's love for noise." He is satisfying his egoistic hunger and reassuring himself that he is alive. So we're all small boys, to that extent, for we all do it.

Ever work a cross-word puzzle? Probably! Even if you have thus far escaped golf, radio, bridge, mah-jongg, or any of the other popular modern

fads it's likely that you succumbed to the lure of the little black and white squares. Why did you do it? And why did the solving of puzzles, which has been practiced by man since the earliest days, wait until 1924 and 1925 to become a universal pastime?

Here is what Dr. H. E. Jones and Prescott Leck of Columbia university, in a recent article in Popular Science Monthly, have to say about it:

The second question possibly is the most easily answered.

Cross-word puzzles never could have flourished in the past, for the reason that the level of general education, even a score of years ago, was much lower than at present, and solving the puzzles requires at least an elementary education.

Another reason for their success is that cross-word puzzles are almost the first fad of history the practice of which costs virtually nothing and requires the development of no special physical dexterity, the acquisition of no unusual equipment, the learning of no rules.

To the psychologist, however, readily occurs an even more potent reason for the amazing popularity of this newest fad. Successfully working out cross-word puzzles, more than any other similar amusement of recent history, satisfies a long list of the fundamental desires of human kind. Social distinction, sex, imitation, group loyalty, cooperation, competition, pleasure, play, amusement, humor, curiosity, activity and constructiveness—all of those ingrained, instinctive wants of man are satisfied merely by printing letters in the proper squares.

Cross-word puzzles are supposed by many to increase our power of concentration, to help our memory and our reasoning ability, and, by demanding decisive judgments, are even regarded as an aid to the will. It would require a whole course in psychology to present an adequate criticism of these views. Suffice it to say that we no longer believe in vague, general "faculties of the mind." You may strengthen your biceps by pulling chest weights and find the increased strength useful in playing baseball or hoeing potatoes, but the brain does not behave in the same way. Mental habits are usually quite specific, so, though cross-word puzzles may increase your vocabulary and play a useful role in keeping you out of mischief, neither they nor any other single discipline can be expected to have much effect in "improving the mind." The one reason for doing cross-word puzzles is for the fun of it. They are innocent amusement—nothing more nor less!

Although psychology can explain much of "why we behave like human beings," it can't explain all of our apparently unnecessary and meaningless doings. For superstition comes in to claim responsibility for making us do certain things or to refrain from doing them. For instance why do some people regard the number 13 as unlucky, refuse to sleep in Room 13 at a hotel, sit at a table with 12 other guests or have a part in any action in which that number is involved? Just where this superstition originated is unknown. In Biblical days the Hebrew word for 13 was associated with the word death and in Norse mythology the number is one of ill omen because of the tradition that the sun god Baldr had to die because there were 13 gods in Valhalla, an intolerable situation. The fear of 13

dinner guests may date from the Last Supper when Christ and his 12 disciples made 13 at the table. Christ was crucified on Friday and that makes Friday, the 13th, doubly unlucky.

Why do people fear to have a black cat cross their path? That is a superstition that goes back to the ancient days when the cat was worshipped in Egypt. In fact many of our superstitions go back thousands of years to the dawn of history. The swastika as an emblem of good luck enjoyed a great popularity within recent years, but this design is as old as mankind. It was a religious symbol in both the Orient and among the Mayas and Incas of Central and South America. Finding the horseshoe is lucky for three reasons (all of them based upon superstition, however). Anything in the shape of a crescent has always been regarded as something to bring luck; since early times iron has been a good luck metal and English mythology has always held the horse to be a lucky animal. So a combination of the three makes the horseshoe an emblem of good luck.

But not all superstitions are based upon blind, unreasoning belief. Some of them have a very common-sense foundation, even though we are more inclined to think of the superstition than of the common-sense foundation. If you started out the day by breaking a mirror while dressing and then spilling the salt at breakfast, you'd probably think that it was going to be an unlucky day for you, wouldn't you? And you'd probably be right, for those two acts might indicate that your nerves were a bit shaky, and if you weren't quite up to form mentally, you might easily make other blunders. Opening an umbrella in the house and walking under a ladder are unlucky, aren't they? Certainly, for if you open the umbrella you may knock some bric-a-brac off the table or pictures from the wall and if you walk under a ladder it might be just at the moment when the painter dropped his bucket or some other workman dropped a hammer. Either would be unlucky for you, all right. But the main thing about the umbrella and the ladder is that if you do these things you probably will be doing them absent-mindedly. And absent-mindedly you might walk directly in front of a street car or automobile or step into a deep hole.

Gamblers believe that the person who lends money to a fellow-player during the game will be unlucky and the borrower will be lucky. They're perfectly right for it's a matter of simple economics. The lender has decreased his available capital and the borrower is playing on borrowed money with consequent increase of his chances to make it produce more.

So some of the "why-do-they-do-its" are easy enough to answer. They do it because, quite aside from the superstition connected with it, it's a perfectly logical and natural thing to do.

## Have Kidneys Examined By Your Doctor

Take Salts to Wash Kidneys if Back Pains You or Bladder Bothers

Flush your kidneys by drinking a quart of water each day, also take salts occasionally, says a noted authority, who tells us that too much rich food forms acids which almost paralyze the kidneys in their efforts to expel it from the blood. They become sluggish and weaken; then you may suffer with a dull misery in the kidney region, sharp pains in the back or sick headache, dizziness, your stomach sours, tongue is coated, and when the weather is bad you have rheumatic twinges. The urine gets cloudy, full of sediment, the channels often get sore and irritated, obliging you to seek relief two or three times during the night.

To help neutralize these irritating acids, to help cleanse the kidneys and flush off the body's urinous waste, get four ounces of Jad Salts from any pharmacy here; take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast for a few days, and your kidneys may then act fine. This famous salts is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and has been used for years to help flush and stimulate sluggish kidneys; also to neutralize the acids in the system so they no longer irritate, thus often relieving bladder weakness.

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### Photographing Martians

It is possible that the question whether Mars has an atmosphere akin to our own and whether the planet is inhabited may be settled by color photography. According to a number of the Yerkes observatory staff, pictures taken by the use of colored light rays, notably the long "infra-reds," penetrate the atmosphere surrounding the planet and perhaps a much better picture than when ordinary light is used.

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### His Wife His Guardian

Because James A. Merron, twenty, of Brooklyn, N. Y., lacks one year of his majority, Supreme Court Justice Dunne has appointed his wife, Mrs. Mae Merron, twenty-one, as his legal guardian to bring an action for him to recover damages for injuries he suffered through being run down by an automobile.

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For economy's sake, why not buy a vermifuge which expels Worms or Tapeworm with a single dose? Dr. Perry's "Dead Shot" does it. 372 Pearl St., N. Y. Adv.

### Where He Belonged

"Smith," roared the boss, "you ought to be in a lunatic asylum. Go into my office at once."—Good Hardware.

## Says Dangerous Varicose Veins Can Be Reduced at Home

Rub Gently and Upward Toward the Heart as Blood in Veins Flows That Way.

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R. W. McLaren, 617 S. Angus St. Obtain the "Discovery" in tablets or liquid from your dealer, or, send 10c for trial pkg. to Dr. Pierce's Invalids' Hotel, Buffalo, N. Y., and write for free medical advice. Ever tried Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets to regulate bowels? 60 Pellets, 30 cents.

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### Girl Writes Backwards

Left-handed in everything except sewing, Nellie Apps, a thirteen-year-old girl of Colford, England, is called the "mystery girl" because she reads a book held up-side down and writes backwards unless directed by her teachers. She is perfectly normal physically, but is in classes with children of eleven.

Muscle is of as much importance in a scull race as brains are.

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