

What Posterity Has Done For Us

AN experiment with time, which need not be described too closely, recently allowed "The Listener" to inspect a number of books that have not yet been written. These books, all belonging to the middle years of the next century, are social histories and reports which give some attention to our present situation in New Zealand. They are, of course, without the intimate knowledge that we ourselves have of our social habits; but it is sometimes salutary to look through the wrong end of the telescope, and we thought it prudent to copy out a few passages before the experiment came to an end. In printing them below, we may be excused for mentioning that the opinions of posterity are not necessarily our own.

20TH CENTURY SPORT

(From REPORT DG 1001—*Fun and Games in Old New Zealand*; prepared for safe deposit, pending completion of a building for the National Archives.)

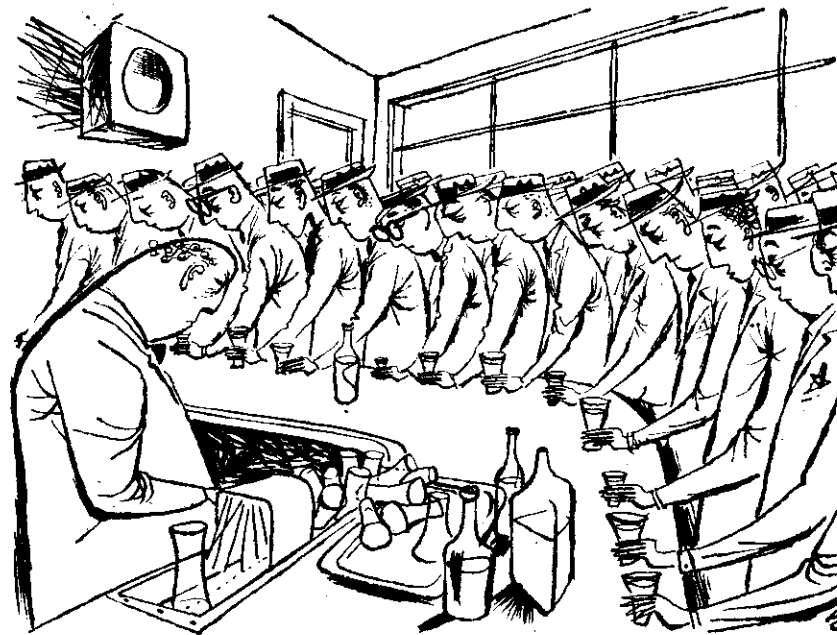
LOOKING back at the photographic records of the nineteen-fifties, Dr. Boon, professor of sociology at the University of Taihape, drew my attention to a very puzzling phenomenon. It was the very frequent occurrence of people wearing highly-coloured jackets, sometimes piped round the edges, but in every case bearing a monstrously emblazoned badge on the left breast. It usually took some highly symbolic form of inconsiderable artistry, with a penumbra of hieroglyphics, and, quite often, a succession of figures such as 1950 1951 1952 1953 1954.

It did not take our mathematics department more than a month or two to determine that these numbers bore no reference to lottery numbers, but were, in fact, date designations in the calendar of that day. It was almost accidentally that the honour fell to me of discovering that these peculiar short coats were called "blazers"; that everybody seemed to possess one, two or three of them; that they did not have any religious or political significance; and that they were, in short, the insignia of various sporting fraternities or codes. (Incidentally I was awarded an honorary doctorate for pointing out this technical term to the English department: they had been greatly puzzled to elucidate a phrase of those days, "get to blazes," until I suggested that it was an obvious corruption of "blazers" into which, at a command from the club captain, these people scrambled joyously on two days of the week or more.)

Working on a United States of the Pacific Scholarship, I embarked on a special study of sport in those times, and now very briefly sketch some of my findings. Most of the records were destroyed when the atom bomb factory blew up in the eighties, so they may be subject to some slight correction.

The most popular sport was Football, played partly with the hands—a rudely healthy game devoted to the pursuit of a leather bladder inflated (the scientific research department has determined) to 2.4 atmospheres. It was presided over by a referee, who blew a whistle to encourage both sides to stand still and glower at one another, while the crowd cheered or booed. How they would have loved to see our teams of today, where no referee is needed, and both sides freely award penalties against themselves, should they occur, taking and leaving the field in the knowledge that the final score is predetermined at nil-all.

Another sport entailed the use of horses. This had a tremendous vogue, being eagerly followed by many who had never ridden or perhaps even seen a horse. There was apparently more to the game than we may imagine, and



"They stood stock still, their heads bowed in reverence"

it involved a complexity of mathematics, and a fervour of fanaticism, that now afford much fruitful research to our mathematical and theological departments.

I shall mention Golf very briefly. Nowadays, of course, the sonic hole, the homing ball and the radar-control club have reduced it to a game which all can play (though a caddy with a degree in science is desirable). It did not occur to the turf-trampers and tee-toppers of the primitive steel and wood days that science would transform the game into a matter of grace-strokes.

Perhaps the most aesthetic of their sports was Bowls as we still play it. Even then it was much favoured by elderly young men who found Tennis too much for the temperament and Cricket rather too slow. But at the time of which I write there seems to have been some disappointment over Cricket.

There were hundreds of other games—yachting, auto-cycling, swimming, shove-ha'penny and the like—for which you will have to consult my twenty-volume work (not the abridged one, on which I get rather smaller royalties). But there is one sport of which I can find only meagre records, and which I may modestly claim as my own great contribution to research. It was the sport of Tourist Baiting. One of the rules was that when an enlightened government department did all in its power to lure wealthy visitors to the country, and thus broaden their outlook, the sturdy and semi-barbaric inhabitants of the place would do everything in their power to make them thoroughly uncomfortable. The result, in terms of sport, was that tourists were unable to eat or drink except at times dictated by their tormentors, and thus fell an

easy prey to the hardy natives. They were not in any other way positively encouraged to leave the country.

But indeed the subject is endless. (Purchasers of my twenty volume work will have noted that another fifteen are ready for the telepress.) The significance and universality of sport in that epoch may perhaps best be brought home by pointing out that the usual form of greeting, from the highest to the lowest in the land, was "Hiya, Sport!"

—Denis Glover

HOW THEY HELD THEIR LIQUOR

(From ROUGH ISLAND STORY: A Social History of New Zealand in the 20th Century, a Report published 2054 A.D. by the Department of Internal Affairs.)

LOOKING back, we find it a matter for regret that the old-time "pubs" were either destroyed, or ruined by renovation during the 'fifties and 'sixties. One initial cause of this was perhaps the curious linking of the business of providing lodgings for travellers with that of purveying beer, wine and spirits to the general public—an irrational survival from the old horse-and-buggy, bona-fide traveller days of New Zealand's infancy. It led, on the one hand, to the ordinary drinker having to subsidise the commercial traveller and the tourist (for every hotel relied on its bar trade for most of its takings, and ran its accommodation service at a heavy loss); and on the other hand to a sustained effort, on the part of the Licensing Commission of the day, to "improve" hotels for tourists by compelling them to provide luxurious bedrooms and other amenities, and to reconstruct their bars so that they looked like scientific laboratories. In this process of "improvement" (carried out, one must reiterate, at the expense of the ordinary bar-drinker, who obtained no benefit from it), most of the historic

pubs, with their friendly atmosphere and pleasant associations, were either abolished, or so changed by vulgar and pretentious "modernisation" that today the few that remain are unrecognisable.

But this was merely part of a larger process. During the period from about 1950 onwards, the drinking of alcoholic liquor in hotels became increasingly so expensive and so unpleasant that it was only the reforms of 1984, which made liquor available in restaurants, cafés and grocers' shops, that prevented the nation-wide adoption of mescaline, the cactus drug popularised by the novelist Aldous Huxley, in place of the traditional stimulants.

As for the drinking habits of that generation when they were in their own homes, an interesting sidelight on the customs of the day is supplied by that grand old man Lord Heathcote (formerly Sir Denis Glover) in his recently-published book of memoirs, *Arawata and After: or, From Bowyang to Bell-topper*. He writes: "Parties," as we used to call them, were an almost nightly occurrence in those days, and gay affairs they were. For my own part, I found myself much too busy during the 'Nifty Fifties' to pursue an active social life—I was, during that period, working almost uninterruptedly on my biographies of Walter D'Arcy Cresswell and Hector Bolitho. But I can remember being told of many occasions when, on leaving such a convivial gathering, a guest was compelled to step over the recumbent figures of a dozen or twenty revellers in order to get to the door. Those were rollicking days."

Another writer of the period, a traveller from the, at that time, somewhat uncivilised continent of North America, gives a vivid description of a native ceremony he inadvertently interrupted one Saturday afternoon: "The public bar, as they call it, was packed with men, but no women were present. They stood stock-still, their heads bowed in reverence, each holding a glass of liquor, while (as it seemed) the voice of a priest was heard intoning the service. His nasal monotone, which was amplified to fill every cranny of the building, rose in a slow crescendo to a crisis of religious emotion, and then sank again quickly and ceased. Glasses were applied to the lips in an act of devotion. Attitudes were relaxed, and soon there was a babel of animated conversation. The intense concentration of all present while the service was in progress, and the eager discussion of it that followed, were strong evidence of the devoutness of these New Zealanders."

—A. R. D. Fairburn

THE BOOKS THEY WROTE

(From *FADING FOOTMARKS, or Who Passed This Way?* a study of abortive nationalism in early literature, by "Severus," 2054 A.D.)

THE New Zealand of mid-20th Century, ten or fifteen years after the celebration of the first Centennial—an event made the occasion for a series of historical publications instinct with the national mystique—produced literature of an agonising self-consciousness. Each writer was a crusader for "New Zealandness," feverishly endeavouring to establish in his dialogue (if he wrote stories) or in his diction (if he wrote verse) the authentic idiom of his countrymen. Now that Free English is the universal language in a united world, and national boundaries and peculiarities quite meaningless, this desire to

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