

THE MONEY-OR THE BAG?



WE heard it on the evening air. The contestant was bright. He'd answered all the questions with barely a moment's thought. Nothing seemed to stop him. Then it came! The seven-cubic-foot question! "Tell me," said the Quizmaster, "who wrote *Pride and Prejudice*?" The clever one leapt at it. "Oh," he said airily, "we were discussing that only last night! It was Noel Coward!"

We shrivelled for him. Through our discomfiture we heard the reproachful clucking of the Quizmaster's tongue. What, we wondered, was the fate of such a man? Was he found, weeks later, walking bemused through the streets? Amnesia perhaps? Did his psyche fixate on the one woman—Jane Austen, Jane Austen, Jane Austen—till the end of his days? Or did he take the easy way?

And what of the poor man's wife? Did she weigh in her mind the man and the home freezer? Was the man found wanting? Or was he taken in kindly, and perhaps give the babies to mind?

With questions like these in mind, we invited ourselves to a session where the answers might be found. The venue was Wellington's Town Hall: the programme, two *It's In the Bag*, with assorted artists sandwiched between. The takings would be devoted to the cause of Amateur Theatre: the show itself to the sale of soap.

The auditorium was packed. It holds 2300, and Thespian faces looked satisfied even before the show started. We awaited the entrance of the Master.

Last time we saw Mr. Toogood he was the Moor of Venice. His tragic figure lay with a sword in its breast—"No way but this, killing myself, to die upon a kiss." He seemed, however, to have made a good recovery. He glowered at the assembly: "Anyone here hasn't listened to my show on the air?" A man shuffled uncomfortably. The eyes that had been glazed in *Othello* lit on him—"Infidel!" The grand manner remained.

And so, to business. (The prizes gleamed on the stage: Three kinds of refrigerator, two kinds of washing-machine, two kinds of vacuum-cleaner, a record-player, an electric shaver. There were others, too, lurking in the bags. Things like all-day suckers, 3d stamps, rubber bands, doses of castor oil and the like.) "All those who want to take part step up front, please—ladies first!"



LEFT: Would-be contenders for "The Bag" at Wellington Town Hall wait patiently while the first draft is put through the mill



There was a demure pause. Then, in ones and twos at first, later in tens and dozens, the hopeful housewives came forward. Now the men's turn, and the stream became a tide, the auditorium sucked dry by the successive waves. There were hundreds, literally hundreds—and not one among them thinking of the all-day sucker! Mr. Toogood watched the queue and manfully concealed his horror—"First train for the Hutt at five past six tomorrow."

But it was over inside of an hour, and the queue cut down to size. The weapon used: a rapid-fire series of questions. Effective, if not entirely painless.

The first one made it, and took her seat in the space set aside for the elect. And rightly, too. How *did* she know the Oxford-Cambridge boat race was rowed upstream?

Casualties, however, were heavy: "Who was New Zealand's Sportsman of the Year for 1953?"

The young man was positive. "Don't know," he said. "I'm Welsh."

We had to admire the Cambrian logic. Had not the tribe who fled to Wales staved off for centuries the invasions of the outer world? But there remained an uneasy suspicion this man hadn't heard of the All Blacks either. Anyway, he left the stage in company with an intellectual gentleman who considered there were two backs in a Rugby team.

It was a pleasant release from tension to spot Mr. Dearnley, sometime Trans-Tasman Quiz Champ, waiting his turn. Oh, it was easy! Spain and Portugal were on the Iberian Peninsula. We'd known all along, and better still, we'd know Mr. Dearnley would know. There was something comforting about it. We could face the next comer with renewed faith:

"What is the 'Wavy Navy'?"

The lady scouted about for the most probable. "The American Navy?" she said.

Ah, well, how could they expect a woman to answer that one! Could she ever have been drilled by a petty officer: "The R.N.'s the gentlemen trying to be seamen. The R.N.R.'s the seamen trying to be gentlemen. And the R.N.V.R. (that's the Wavy Navy, and that's *you*) is the neither trying to be both!"

By this the hopefuls had shrunk to a mere 60 or so. Mr. Toogood gestured to the technician, raised his arms, and the show was on—with an obedient blast of applause from the audience.

The speed bewildered. There came a kind of Twenty Questions, with bells and buzzers and red lights flashing, and before we knew it a woman walked off-stage with a fat cigar she'd got for naming Africa's largest lake. Then there was "packet-time," with the questions at rapid-fire, and 10 packets of soap at stake. We waited for the big-time.

It came, after a kind of knock-out competition between two contestants at a time. An elderly man brought a gasp from the audience with the information that a wattle was a kind of acacia (hardly *anybody* had known that), but it was a woman who led the field. The questions fell like hammer-blows. The audience leaned forward. People mumbled the answers to themselves, if they knew, or adopted the Oh-it's-just-on-the-tip-of-my-tongue look, if they didn't. The Town Hall cat, a black one,

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