

the last two winters in Britain have been disastrous for plants with thin skins and soft hearts.

That is encouraging enough. But better follows in an article supplied by another contributor, who says that the chief reason why this fossil-age survival has found its way round the world in eight years is "the ease with which it can be propagated vegetatively." Though plants have not yet become political, it would appear that the supply of seeds from China ceased early in 1949, and the seeds received in 1948 have not yet produced trees old enough to yield fertile seeds of their own. But it has been discovered that cuttings will grow whether they are the soft wood of spring or tougher pieces collected in summer. Perhaps it would be safer to say that cuttings have been grown by gardeners with the knowledge, patience and skill called for to grow cuttings of any kind. That unfortunately does not include me, or other blunderers as careless as I am, and with as long a record of failures. Directly, the information is important for those gardeners only who can thrust a walking-stick into the ground today and tomorrow, or after a sufficient number of morrows, gather flowers or figs. Indirectly, however, it is a message of hope for those who can do nothing with trees but sit in their shade, and I confess that I find it mildly exciting.

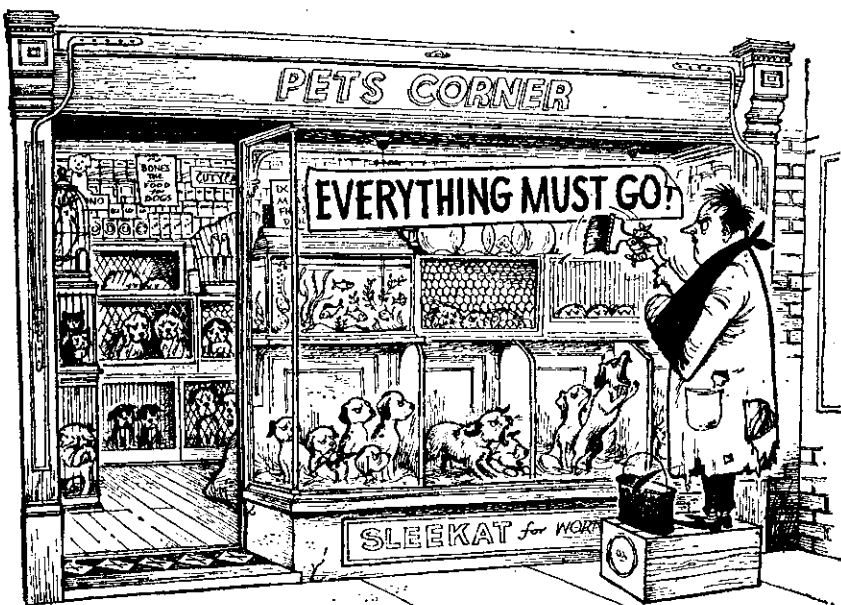
SOMEONE, I read recently, but have already forgotten who—Cobden or Bright or Beaconsfield or Burke—said that every man who reaches 70 with an unsatisfied ambition becomes a desperado. Women, I think, become dangerous sooner than that, but not from such unworthy frustrations. Even in the animal world, however, age, without any disappointments of which the creature is conscious, is usually

OCTOBER 12 marked by crustiness. A rogue elephant is not simply a rutting elephant, but a rutting old elephant without a mate. An old bull develops a worse temper than a young bull if you tie him all day to a stake, and if he is not more dangerous than a young bull that

is because he is not so agile; never because age has mellowed and sweetened him. Old dogs are notoriously irritable, and almost invariably jealous. My roosters seldom become rancorous during their first year. On the contrary, they will jump on my knee and eat out of my hand. During their second year they are quite likely to peck my hand instead of the wheat; to do it by accident at first, then by design, then (if I don't check them) by malicious, savage, and utterly hostile design. Roosters, of course, have two ambitions only; but in youth they show a shadowy sense of chivalry in the pursuit of these, and lose it when age makes the pursuit more difficult. It is a miserable trick of nature to implant desires and ambitions without implanting at the same time tolerances that grow stronger and faster.

After all, who has satisfied ambitions? Not sinners, who always want one thing more. Not saints, who sigh for one last victory over weakness and can never accept it as the last. Not scholars, who feel till they die that they have not sufficiently harrowed all their ground. Not philosophers, who never cease knowing that they don't know. Not artists or poets or musicians or seers, who hardly begin to express themselves before they are aware of the things inside that they can't drag out. Not statesmen or politicians, who live on public recognition, and never feel that they have had enough. The teddy-boy who smashes a window or a policeman's face; the woman who ulcerates her stomach with daily doses of hate for her prettier, richer, or more popular neighbour; the man who kicks his dog when his neighbour gets an O.B.E.; the team that disintegrates when its rivals win a shield; the stag that leaves the mountains when the hinds admire another voice; the grapes that turn sour when they have to share the sun with the gooseberries—what are these but the helpless victims of unsatisfied ambitions? What is a murderer but a man entangled in someone else's entrails and hating them? What is a desperado but the helpless hater of other men who get in his way until they drive him mad?

(To be continued)



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