

FOUND: A New Pleasure

by CALIBAN

THE New Zealand social historian of 50 years hence looks like having to reserve at least a page or two in his book to coffee. And, though no doubt a little premature, it's already possible to reflect a little on what has so far occurred; on the amazing proliferation in our cities of dimly-lit, "atmospheric" coffee shops (or, to be strictly up-to-date, coffee "bars").

There was a time when such a thing would have been frowned upon universally. Tea (a staple diet) was consumed with as little thought for alternatives as water is used for washing. If you wanted to break the morning or afternoon in two, you made for "tea-rooms," where you would be presented with tea in a silver service flanked by three plates of food: sandwiches, scones and ornamental eclairs. This was quite a formal ritual. It was also a ritual limited to the daylight hours. After 4.0 p.m., these tearooms, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist. And if in the evening you wanted a rough substitute, a milk bar, a grillroom, or at worst a piecart would have to do.

It's quite true, of course, that a lot of these places are still with us—that you can still take tiffin in an elegant mirrored hall, and enjoy yourself amid the silver, the floral bone china, and the stiff white linen. You can also still buy a plate of oysters at a grillroom, speedily eat them, and twice as speedily repair to the nearest bar (if open) to drink a glass of stout, in the hope that illusions of continuity will not wholly be destroyed.

But it is now possible, and it is becoming increasingly popular, to dispense with tea and cakes, stout and oysters. For, creeping southwards from Auck-

land (whence we are told all good things come), these coffee bars have steadily begun to usurp the function of their more staid and less imaginative antecedents.

They have come with liberal quantities of posters displaying the provocations of Cannes and the Champs Elysees. They have come with venetian blinds, Chinese prints, Japanese fishnet, American music, Swedish wall-board, and French waiters. And they have come with a number of recipes for coffee and a welcome disregard for the time. In them you can lounge (in low cane chairs) or perch (on elevated iron and plush stools). No longer need lovers, deep in conversation, pace deserted streets. They may now talk in muted tones over steaming coffee.

Now this talking is important, and not only for lovers. In the past, the delicate manipulation of a silver teapot with a scalding handle, or a full-blooded attack on a steak, tended to reduce conversation to monosyllables like "Quite" and "Huhhh." But go into "La Giaconda" (or any place exotically enough named), and you'll find that after a bucolic "black, please," you have an evening free to discuss anything you like.

Admittedly a lot of this doesn't ring quite true. "La Giaconda" when you see it at noon is just concrete walls draped in muslin, and your waiter isn't French but Dutch with a French accent, and the concoction masquerading under the elegant name of Capuccino is probably American blend buried beneath an excess of synthetic cinnamon. So we have



to admit that there's an element of spoof in the whole thing.

Is there, however, something else behind it? For instance, have New Zealanders decided they like coffee—that tea is not only the cheapest drink in the world, but also the dullest? It's no doubt true that hitherto we have tended to identify "coffee" with the liquid which goes under that name on railway stations, and which is apparently meant to keep travellers on

the Main Trunk in a state of appreciative wakefulness. Inevitably, then, there are new devotees. Thus we also have to admit that a lot of this rage is genuine.

Yet I venture to suggest that "La Giaconda" would keep open even if her coffee cups were filled with vinegar, and her South American open sandwiches with seaweed. You could strip the fishnet off the walls, insist that the waiter drop his *langue d'oil*, burn every poster, break every disc, but "La Giaconda" would still remain.

For it seems likely that New Zealand has found, apart from a new fad and a new drink, a new tongue. In "La Giaconda" you may discuss Suez, the state of three per cents, or the length of your neighbour's hair. And if you're alone you can listen in quite well to someone else talking about Rilke or the condition of the roads.

It is perhaps too hopeful to think that New Zealand will benefit the world by belching forth a crop of latter-day philosophies, but she may benefit herself by helping to make leisure and leisured talk institutions instead of luxuries. On the other hand, this diagnosis may be wrong. The hopes expressed may be frustrated. Red ink may be destined shortly to become *de rigueur* in her ledgers, but for me, long may "La Giaconda" smile.

Auckland Letter

ACADEMIC RUMPUS

By SARAH CAMPION

THE present shenanigan in Auckland over the University site, which has been simmering for years and is now blowing a pretty head of steam, strikes some of us older academic types as very odd indeed. Mainly, I think, because we come from places in which the university and the market place live side by side, forever irritated by one another's different demands, habits and aims, but still mutually dependent, like a married couple approaching, with some weariness and even more wry amusement, the ecstasies of their diamond jubilee. We are not used to the idea of the market place rejecting even the physical presence of a university, as if it were a boil, or the H bug. The traders' booths, obedient to tradition, lie wide open to trade: the colleges obedient to theirs (which is monastic), are built in enclosed form. They turn their backs, for the most part, to the streets; and conduct their life, generally of a most un-conventional hilarity, noise and liveliness, in and about a series of courts. This architectural form seems to have been vetoed in Auckland, which puzzles me. Surely there would be room for it, in the present heart-of-the-city, top-of-the-hill site? And surely it would suit our climate admirably?

Secondly, the question of rateable value in property, of whether an academic foundation could, so to speak, be worth its space to the local tradesmen, did not, as far as I know, come into the question seriously in Great Britain,

even in the building of those later Redbrick establishments. There's a tradition, in one part of London, that if you covered the grass of Westminster School playing field with golden sovereigns, you still couldn't pay for it; and London University, also, must occupy one of the most valuable sites in the city.

Probably it boils down to this, that the conception of what a university is for has changed inevitably, and some would think disastrously, in the last 50 years. In the Cambridge of my youth, and more still nearly a 100 years ago in the Cambridge of my father's youth, the aim of the place was to extend, as athletically as possible, the minds of the dedicated young and old, whatever subject they studied. Nowadays, everywhere in New Zealand except in Scots Dunedin, "University" seems to be the place you go to directly after school because your buddies and coppers are going, and because there, by stretching your mind no more than is comfortably convenient, you can qualify for a fairly good job.

However, one cheering thing about the present affair has been the return of the broadsheet, or, more exactly, printed broadside. This assault on the public flank is a real spearhead of freedom, for, with one honourable but sometimes faltering exception, the Press

in democratic New Zealand is far more conservative than in bad old England. Now, as in Bradlaugh's day, it is still possible for a man of fiery conviction to bypass the entrenched newspapers with a pamphlet. Auckland's air is filled with the foul gases which blacken rate-payers' paint: but it may not be freshened by controversy of intense local interest. And future interest, too; since, if things go on like this, many of our children won't be able to go to university at all, no room having yet been built for them.

OTHER traditions have equally queer ways of growing. Here's a domestic snippet to show what I mean.

"Mum, I betcha don't know the story of Waltzing Matilda."

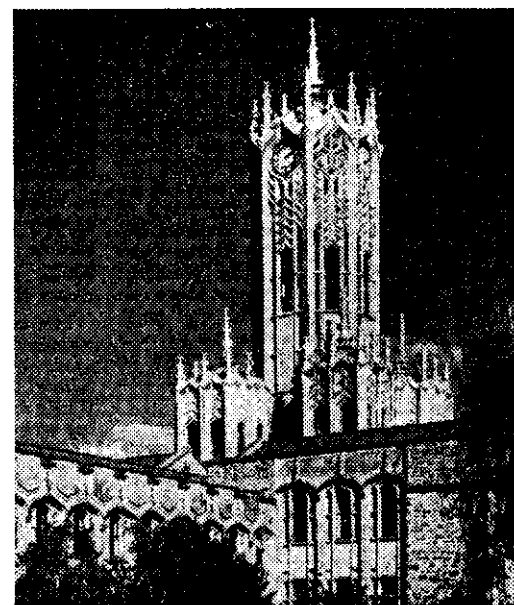
"Of course I do! There was an Australian called Banjo Paterson, and he was driving along an outback road in his buggy one day, and he met a swaggie who was singing . . ."

"That's not what everybody in Stanley Bay says! They say, there was a lady singing in a night-club in the last war and she was singing 'Waltzing Matilda,' and a man came up—he was a spy you, see, though he'd got an Aussie uniform

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on and everything—and he said, 'That's a nice song; that's new, isn't it?' and she said, 'Yes, isn't it nice,' and then she sent straight away and fetched the police, and he was arrested and done to death somehow. Good story, eh?"

"Very," says Mum dryly, much preferring Banjo Paterson, but having by now just enough sense not to say so. Or, for that matter, to mention poor Thomas Wood, who would be equally wounded by the above, were he to overhear it.



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