

Snobbish on Principle

THINKING about snobbery, and going, as usual, to the Oxford Dictionary (reluctantly, as usual, because that's something that Cambridge hasn't done better), I read with delight the following:

... 4-2. Cambridge slang. Any one not a gowmsman, a townsman. 1865. c. One whose ideas and conduct are prompted by a vulgar admiration for wealth and social position. Also *transl.* of intellectual superiority. 1848.

So I am a snob, not on count C., but on the two others, the last of which, you see was born, appropriately enough, in the Year of Revolutions. Yes, I am a snob. First, in the Cambridge sense, and, second, in the sense that the only aristocracy I'll admit to is that of intellect, though it would add character as well—character which makes something of intellect instead of leaving it easily dormant.

Put in undictionary terms, it means this: that, to me, the people who should be venerated and admired, used as examples for ourselves and for our young, when the holding-up of an example is likely to be beneficial (which is seldom enough)—the people who are to me the salt of the earth are those who by force of intellect and character stand head and shoulders above us. I am wholly joyful and unrepentant in this belief, and don't give a tinker's cuss who knows it, or who reproaches me with it. I will go further still, being slightly defiant this morning, and say that this snobbery is being sedulously passed on to my child, who had two famous grandfathers, and is (by me) constantly reminded of it. It is something he should remember and be proud of, especially in an egalitarian society such as this in New Zealand, where the safe and unspectacular average is aimed at, in our schools and many other places, and to be in any way remarkable in one's intellect or behaviour is generally deeply suspect. If I can bring him up as a New Zealander with a reverence for

brains and character, rather than with a distrust of both qualities, I shall have achieved something. If, for instance, he grows up with the feeling that A. R. D. Fairburn, whom he loved and admired, and Helen Wilson, whom he met last year, are even more likely to have enriched the stream of our national life than this year's, next year's, or any other year's Captain of the All Blacks, he will, in my opinion, be all the better for being a snob in categories +2 and the last, but not first, section of C. (It's interesting to read the whole Oxford Dictionary definition, by the way, and see how many meanings the word "snob" has, and how it has changed in those meanings from time to time.)

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NOW to an occasion wholly lacking in any snobbery at all, a Festival of the Arts on the North Shore, organised by the Community Arts Service, and coming to a triumphant conclusion with a panel discussion arranged by the Arts and Crafts Circle of the North Shore Women's Club. For a week or so beforehand there had been the show itself, to which thousands thronged, rather startling the organisers, who had not realised that so much interest would be taken: and then, on the night of the discussion, we all assembled, with the pictures, the pottery and the sculpture still around us, to hear a panel of one painter, two potters, and a sculptress, with an architect in the chair, discussing first "What is Art?" and second, even more provocatively, "Why is Art?"

This may not be startling at all to Wellington, whose art is, I am told, both more vocal and more well established than ours. But for those of us who have in the last five years or so watched our North Shore growing in awareness, and have felt like pioneer wives looking out on what had been bush, but is now grassy paddocks sustaining fat kine or woolly sheep—for

those of us last Saturday's meeting was a milestone. I won't maintain that all those who came to mock remained to pray, but I will declare that very few people who came in honest doubt about the more advanced of the examples or around the walls, went away feeling so perplexed, or so worried—or so irritated. Let's put it this way: A chink was made, by the pleasantest means possible, in many a mind: and light will come through.

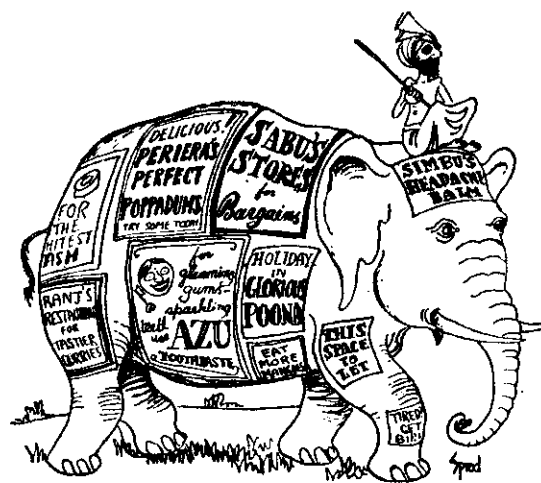
For, in spite of one local newspaper's doubts, here was the talent of the Shore being shown to the Shore, the local practitioners in the arts meeting those local people interested in the arts, on equal terms, each side acknowledging that the other is necessary to communal life of any richness whatever, each asking questions, each answering questions. We had Arthur Thomson, the painter, explaining with forthright honesty why the painter paints at all, and why he himself paints as he does: we had Mollie McAllister, the sculptor, talking about the impossibility of modelling a child's head in bronze and producing a speaking likeness: You have to forget about

colour and living texture—you have to feel the child's head, get the essence of that feeling into a medium as different from flesh and blood as it well could be. This, for many people like myself not at all *au fait* with sculpture, was a most revealing and significant remark: we shall look at bronzes now with a feeling of having been in at birth, of having had a hand in the joys of the struggle, and being therefore more able to meet the finished product on its own ground. Finally, the two potters, Betty Brooks and Martin Beck, talked of their craft with that dogged love which survives many a disaster of glazing, firing, and sheer accident.

I think a great many people besides myself came away from that evening meeting with a whole lot of new ideas and comprehensions fizzing in our minds, with a feeling that we have started something, for ourselves, which it was very necessary that we should start. The idea of the Shore as a mere satellite of Auckland is dying faster than the bridge is rising, and won't be revived even if, and when, the working

of that bridge seems to enforce the position. Like Sydney's North Shore our own is growing fast, in character as in size: the time will soon come, when people live on this side by preference, not because they can find nowhere else to live. And in this birth of strong community feeling the Community Arts Service has used a wise midwife's technique, slapping the newborn into full cry and then starting him off on his own, as an independent life. May this life be as long, as well-filled, as rich as we could wish for any other child.

—Sarah Campion



(C) Punch

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a long time ago, before South Molton Street became really fashionable, and nobody took any notice. How W.I. has changed. The house of George Frederick Handel (a rather rough type, one gathers) has had its ground floor turned into an espresso coffee lounge run by a Negro—great people for style, some of these Jamaicans. Hardie Amies makes dresses for the Queen where Richard Brinsley Sheridan lived (he might have got by here today, though).

I once met a rather trying character, an Australian who was in London studying sociology or something. He seemed to think I didn't know London at all.

"You should get around a bit," he said. "There are other places in London besides South Molton Street and Bond Street."

"If you mean there are Savile Row, Old Burlington Street, Regent Street, Albemarle Street, Berkeley Square (I go through it on the way to Shepherd's Market), and all round that way," I said, "I know them perfectly well. Why, I walk along Savile Row every second day, and I like it because there's never anybody there. I was only saying to the doorman at Hardie Amies..."

"Oh, get away from all that kind of thing," he said contemptuously. "Go down to Whitechapel Road and have a look round. That will open your eyes."

I went down there—I remember it well; it was about the time that lip-

stick changed from pink to coral. But there was absolutely nothing of interest at all. Most of the men were wearing trousers that simply weren't the correct width. I don't know why their tailors let them—surely it's just as easy to do things the right way as the wrong way. Some of them looked as though they hadn't any tailors at all. I have no idea where their clothes came from. And there were women wearing hats matching their suits that obviously hadn't been specially designed for them by their milliners. With all the money now round this area, too. Miss Blossom always said that if you wanted to wear a hat matching your suit you simply *had* to have it specially designed for you. Otherwise—well, it just wasn't right, that's all.

She was certainly a remarkable and versatile woman, Miss Blossom. She had a complete knowledge of two subjects, gowns and hats.

"When I was head milliner in a firm in Bond Street," she said, "I used to tell the girls in the workroom that nothing was impossible. 'If you just try,' I said, 'nothing is impossible. Absolutely nothing.'"

I realised how right Miss Blossom was when I looked at the hats around W.I.

Of course, there were people who didn't fit into South Molton Street at all. Bert, who came to work with us, lived at the Elephant.

"Some firms wouldn't give you a job if you gave your address as the Elephant," said the presser. Of the Elephant, which is short for the Elephant and Castle, a pub which gives its name to the district, I can say little except that the London County Council has announced its intention of making it the Piccadilly Circus of South-east London. Well, I ask you, could they? But the things they say about it can't all be true.

Bert did not stay very long, even though he was a conscientious, thrifty type who would pick up every cigarette butt he saw lying around when he was out. He suffered from a mysterious ailment which attacked him once a week, and sometimes he was not able to get to work at all on Mondays. He was very vague about it, something to do with the stomach, I think. The cost of living must have been very high at the Elephant, for he was regularly short of money on his return at the beginning of the week. His troubles must have soured him, for he made scathing comments about the good people round W.I., who were doing their best to show a brave face to the world in spite of their worries about high taxation and the constantly changing fashion. In the end he probably could not bear it any longer, for his absence one Monday was followed by his disappearance altogether. Of course, he was in South

Molton Street at an awkward time: Paris had decided to shorten skirts, London to lengthen them. People did not know where they were. About this Miss Blossom kept her head. "Wait and see what Rome will do," she said wisely.

Of course, there were other things as well as style and fashion in South Molton Street. Let me think now—there was Bowes-Lyon of Mayfair (marvellous Devonshire teas at only 15/-, closed in August, of course); Jno Judd, clock-maker since 1770; Denise, the Lady Desbrough; Susan's; Barraud, chocolatier, confiseur; Gimpel Fils, paintings—oh, yes, the Women's Advisory Council on Solid Fuel; I suppose it gave advice on how to buy a bag of coal and burn it, and things like that. There was a meeting once a month; big cars would roll up and very stylish ladies would get out. Sometimes a policeman would be detailed to keep a space clear for a special car. Whenever I asked him whom it was for he would invariably reply: "B and K."

At first I thought he was having me on, but now I begin to wonder. When I read about Mr Khrushchov I notice signs of an elegance of manner, a polish and finesse, an indefinable something that could only have been picked up in South Molton Street, W.I. Perhaps he slipped over now and again to report on how women were getting on with solid fuel in Russia. I may have stumbled on a top secret.