

Thursday. I haven't a hearty manner, and it's one of the things that can't be faked. I'm just not a mixer and I don't see what earthly good it would do anyone if I tried to pretend that I am. My enthusiasms run slowly. I'm perfectly ready to do my share for the community if I can lunch at a club where nobody sings and they cook individual portions."

Hardly anyone is considered such a snob as Gerald Palmer. Not even Mr. Blenker. Mr. Blenker has many friends but few intimates. He always lives at arm's length. Even those of us who have talked to him for hours on end have somehow never got to the first-name point. He is a man well on in middle age, always courteous, always entertaining. He is delightful to talk to, for he has a wealth of knowledge and not only on points of law. He understands people as well as books, knows character as well as places. He is certainly not an optimist but he is a pleasant companion and a great diner-out during these last few years since he has become adjusted to his wife's death. He dines out continually but not indiscriminately. He knows various groups of people, and yet he is called a snob, not once or twice, but commonly so by people who have seen him draw fine mental lines between this and that, by hostesses whose invitations he will not accept, by those who have had no opportunity to know him, and never will have. For Mr. Blenker goes to those houses only in which he thinks he will be pleased with the company. He has a sincere liking for cultivated and educated people, good food, gin that is not synthetic, bridge that is not impulsive. He does not pretend otherwise. The thing he will never admit is that he is a snob.

## II

There is a quality among these four men and women that repeats itself even

in this scant description. They show not only a power of discrimination but an accomplishment of selection. That is why they are resented, why they are tagged as snobbish. The very fact that they have a sense of direction seems to annoy people. It excites jealousy, and of course that is not unnatural. For so many people are fumbling, even in regard to their own ambitions, that they are bound to envy and resent a firm, defined attitude and inevitably moved to cry it down.

I have taken rather obvious cases. I have not mentioned Miss Helen Graff, who was the most intellectual woman I have ever known and who always appeared to be sifting people and things through the superfine mesh of her mind. She did it obviously. She did it not so mercilessly as scientifically. There was very little worth saving when her sifting was done, not very much fit for her use. She was a teacher and not popular among her confrères. I have since heard it said that she was always a mental snob.

A mental snob, to be sure, is supposed to be of a higher order than other snobs. The men or women who choose their friends only among those who give peace or stimulus to the mind, who will not bother with the unintelligent, may be no better liked than the social snobs, but the pack is never after them quite so hard. They may set themselves apart, draw themselves up, close themselves off, but if their reason is that they wish to devote their time to high thinking, they will be more easily forgiven than if they devoted their energies to high living. I suppose that not so many people covet the former as the latter kind of life, and tolerance breeds accordingly. Then too there may still be a lurking tradition left from the days when most philosophers and poets and teachers sought retreats instead of crowds.

I know one woman who is quite

ruthless in her judgments on intelligence, who will not endure the society of many people. She lets that be freely known. She is entirely frank about her criticisms and judgments and, strangely enough, she has created a certain vogue for them and for her own spirited highhandedness. People who do not even know her will be heard defending her point of view, asking why so clever a person as she is should "bother with" stupid companionship. She is conceded to be a snob, but the concession seems to have little sting in it. Yet one of her friends who, with infinite grace and tact, draws invisible lines about a highly desirable and glamorous social circle arouses the intense envy and dislike of those without it.

If, as this would seem to prove, one person is sometimes granted a right to be exclusive which is contested in another, we should be able to unearth a code of rules. What gives an unchallenged right to establish values and go one's way? Is it the mind, or the accident of birth, or the large house on the hill, or publicity, or achievement, or power? How high must one go before one is given authority in these matters? Is it proper for the wife of a President but unseemly in the daughter of a Governor? How many banks must one own? How many books must one have published? Is it the *Social Register* or "Who's Who" which decides in the end? Is it a matter of local option? Does it get down to a consideration of small puddles or big frogs?

This can become very confusing and very difficult to work out in any kind of social mathematics. We cannot even be sure whether we are dealing with pyramids or concentric circles, with plane or solid geometry. The only thing to do is to get back to the individual. No one can deny the right of each person to set up his own values

of life if they are not socially destructive.

It is only when there is an attempt to force these values on everyone else that the thing becomes insolent. I have never been affronted by anybody, no matter how aloof or aloft he might hold himself, if he was willing to let other people's habits and philosophy alone. There are a good many roads by which one may approach satisfaction and happiness and accomplishment, and each individual has a right to choose his own way and follow it without interference. But he has no right to assume that it is the only way, and I have felt the air as heavy with assumptions of that sort at a Communist meeting as in certain drawing-rooms and at Republican banquets.

The trouble with those snobs whom the dictionary describes is that they must have an audience, or a claque at least, even if they pretend to ignore it. They are never self-sufficient. They want to impose their ideas of what is important and fitting on someone else. They want reassurance and applause, even if it comes from the rabble outside the fence. That kind of snobbishness would die out very quickly on a desert island.

The woman who sits down beside me and insists on dragging the reluctant talk to the story of her daughter's debut is obviously trying to reassure herself of the value of that event by forcing me to act as audience. Those wearying and transparent persons who are always inserting irrelevant names and dates and tales of past triumphs into a conversation are only trying rather pathetically to bolster up a shaky importance. Snobs of this type know that it is impossible for them to stand alone. It is perhaps a secret doubt of the values which they have accepted and which they must pass on even if they are half aware they are putting counterfeits into circulation.

## III

I am inclined to believe that the whole difference between such snobs and a person like Mary Blake lies in their perceptions of reality. It is the reason why Mary is self-sufficient and why they are not. Without talking very much about it, Mary sees her part for what it is. She knows that she has the luck to be more finely bred and better educated than the average. She knows too that she will never know or understand all kinds of people. Certain pleasant things have come her way, and she enjoys them. She does not pretend to share all of them. For she thinks that life is highly personal and must be limited and that her business is to make the most of her fragment of it. She is an individualist, like Gerald Palmer, going her own way because it seems the only honest, unfaked, sensible thing one can do. She deals in small quantities of people and makes up her groups of persons she likes according to her taste. Individualists are often confused with snobs, and possibly by this time the meaning of the latter word has become so loose and scattered that it includes individualism. In that case, there really should be a little revision of that fragment of Webster's dictionary to which I have referred. It has become necessary.

Catherine Eliot is not an individualist. She is a social person but she too has a clear perception of what is actual. She sees herself fitted into the pattern of society, part of its mosaic. The power of money is one thing she understands very well. Rich people usually do. She knows how craven most people become before wealth and she has no idea of confusing flattery with friendship or adulation with liking. It is obvious to her that she must always be cut off from many things and that it is a common experience. There

is, so far as she can see, no solution in pretense. That is why she is quickly out of patience with a child-study class which is only a masquerade for a few social ambitions. Mr. Blenker, who has met her once or twice, and likes her, calls her one of the "unblinded rich." No doubt he feels that she has something of his own feeling toward society. He knows that its group manifestations are artificial and largely material, that living is distinctly pleasanter when the company is good, and that there is not very much one can do when the company is poor. He is sure that he would not be a desirable addition to a dull group so why should he enter one?

If there is something inherently snobbish in seeing things clearly, then both Catherine and Mr. Blenker may be the snobs that so many people consider them. Otherwise, they and others like them should be promptly cleared of the accusation.

Beyond a doubt the word is a splendid catch-all. Looking my own acquaintance over, it seems to me that almost everyone I know who has individuality, who makes no pretenses to a false or romantic order of living, who admits that social contacts are what they are, has at one time or another been referred to as a snob. It seems such an unfortunate and inadequate description of their qualities of discrimination and personal reservation and developed tastes. When I hear the word snob, these people do not come to my mind as illustrations. I recall instead a woman who uses up all the air in the room describing how her grandmother used to live in pomp and splendor. I think involuntarily of those who make social capital out of incidental contact with celebrities. I am reminded of a newcomer to the city who cautiously asked whom she should cultivate so that she "wouldn't make any mistakes." I can never forget