

the man who exclaimed proudly, "All the swells in town are on this committee of mine!"

Snobbery of this kind has no food value for truly important people. But it is, I suppose, many times the whole sustenance of the unimportant. A great many servants seem to use it as a drug, to dull an ignominy which they feel in their own position. It is a matter of pride to them that their employers are richer or more important than other servants' employers. Vicarious pride can, it is true, be a very fine and noble thing but only when the quality which arouses the admiration is understood and admired for itself, and not because it sheds reflected glory.

Last year in England I had a cook who claimed that she had been employed by the rich and illustrious in what she spoke of as great houses. She never allowed herself to forget that. Once I ordered some grapefruit, and on the following morning it appeared on the table, uncut, still in the rough. After breakfast I went to the kitchen and explained how grapefruit was served in the United States and what had to be done to make it appetizing to serve and comfortable to eat.

"Yes'm," she said, "I've seen it done that way in great 'ouses. But it's the work of the butler."

Apparently it was more than laziness with her. It was a matter of asserting superiority by claiming inferiority. She was by all odds as bad a snob as I have ever encountered. Her snobbishness was not only for herself. It was a vicarious snobbery for the English servant system. At any rate, I let the matter of the grapefruit go. That is one thing that can always be done with manifestations of snobbishness. You can ignore them, and the wind goes out of their sails almost immediately.

These are the kind of persons who seem to me to fit the accepted definition

of snob. But if men and women who are truly admirable are to come under the same appellation, there should be some extension of meanings. It must be admitted that there is sound snobbery as well as unsound snobbery or else there should be a penalty for flinging the word around so carelessly.

IV

For it hurts people. As I said in the beginning, it distresses or angers nearly everyone to be called snobbish. It is partly on account of the mentally unsightly, badly motivated lot one is thrown with. But even that hardly explains the worry of honest people over that particular accusation. There is a sting in it that gets under people's skins. Something inherent in the American consciousness makes us particularly sensitive to the charge, and I think the reason for that goes very deep into our tradition.

Without saying very much about it, most of us try to believe in democracy and at least prefer not to thwart it. To be called a snob is to be accused of being traitorous to an ideal that is our own, and of violating a fine tradition. I do not mean to suggest that we think this out whenever we are told that we are snobbish, but I should not be surprised if it is instinctive, and it may be the reason why the fear of becoming a snob arouses a sense of social responsibility. People defend themselves against the slur in a manner which is usually out of proportion to the consideration they give other criticisms. They worry about it, hunt in their own minds for traces of false values.

There is an innate fear that one would not belong anywhere if he were discovered to be a snob. It would be like being a person without a country. Snobs have no standing in the United States. There is no place for them here. There are countries in which

they are admired, or at least accepted. There is, on the other hand, Russia, where snobbery is disgraceful and individualism almost treason. But the United States remains neither fish nor fowl. Class distinction exists but recognition of it must stay under cover. Snobs are undemocratic. All men are free and equal.

It is outrageous to see what meanings have been read into that sentence. Too often the words have been made into a whip instead of a staff. They have been misinterpreted to mean that the natural selectivity of a developing culture was somehow wrong, and that the tendency of people to seek the company of those they enjoyed must not be carried too far for the sake of the safety of democracy itself. The sentence was made over into a slovenly one which claimed that "everyone is just as good as everyone else." To deny that is heresy.

Fortunately there does seem to be plenty of heresy. Every intelligent document written about present-day America denies that all of us are uniformly "good" (whatever that may mean), and seriously questions much of our equality and most of our freedom. A great many pretenses have their backs against the wall. But books are only books, and the ideal of equality as a fundamental of social life is implanted very deeply in children at a very early age. The danger to my mind is that this ideal may be like one of those laws, among them those regulating liquor control, which are on the statute books or even in the national Constitution but are nullified by common practice. It seems as if it would be much more wholesome to keep the ideal in consonance with actuality, with truth, and possibility. For otherwise children grow up with inhibitions which prevent them from admitting what they soon see, the vast differences between the natural capacities of men and the

even greater difference that education and habit and training and even the possession of money can make. It results in a great deal of surface falsity, because people know one thing and pretend that another is true. Business and politics find it very often to their advantage to encourage the pretense. They use it for flattery. They turn it into a makeshift camaraderie for use in campaigns and in some offices. And those who do not follow the procession along the indicated line of march are written off as snobs.

They do not like that. Many of these so-called snobs want deeply and rather wistfully to do their social duty, to be good citizens. It is that which makes them instinctively protest the word. Yet they must be guided by their own convictions. They know that the best they can do is to work through their own methods of limitation and selection and not try to beat down their own temperaments or environments.

Selectivity is still unpopular in America. Give it its head and there is no telling how far it might go. Certainly it would mean harder work for the politicians. So many of their truisms would be demoded. It would mean that tired phrases and clichés would be abandoned by many a roadside. But these are only things that float on the surface of politics, and underneath little that is valuable would be altered. There is no reason why it should be. In business the same thing is true. The assumption that everyone has an equal chance in the business world is nothing but an assumption and could be brushed away without altering facts. Even in social life things would remain much as they are. But a greater demonstration of frankness and honesty in social relations, a more natural acceptance of distinctions would put the poseurs and the trouble-makers out of jobs.

If this democracy were really the unpleasant mixture that so many of its professional defenders imply there would be little use or benefit in making even this much protest against a false situation. But it is not. Aristocrats and democrats, all thinkers, well aware of natural discriminations, founded it and they had no idea of going against nature. They intended to adjust a society to nature.

Perhaps we need a few fearless, strong-minded aristocrats—I may even mean snobs—now. I was talking to a very wise man only the other day about a public celebration he was managing. He is a very popular man,

with devoted, real friends everywhere. Nobody questions his hold on an immense public or his belief in and hopes for democracy. But as he outlined his plans I saw that they were marked by a careful selection of people. He accented the dignity and importance of some men at the expense of others. He picked his way among people, choosing here, rejecting there.

"But," I objected, "that appears rather snobbish. And you're not a snob."

He smiled, as if that were amusing.

"Oh, yes I am," he said, "and so is everybody else."

CHANGE OF SEASON

BY HELENE MAGARET

OFTEN I lay light-hearted on some hill,
 Giving my hair to grass, my feet to sod,
 Letting the world wheel over me until,
 Drunken with joy, I had no need of God;
 Happy to hear the windy blackbirds wing
 Over the corn, to see forsythia scatter
 Like fallen stars beneath the feet of spring,
 Happy believing God could never matter.
 I did not know how soon the rising corn
 Would stand with broken stalks, the blackbirds go,
 Leaving the prairie desolate, forlorn
 Before the long mortality of snow.
 Heedless and young, I did not reckon then
 How I would need my fathers' God again.