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jly13,eod,tf

Mike, Where Art Thou?

By P.O.D. in Saturday Night, Toronto.)

The other day we sat down at an nfamiliar soda-fountain—not that e are a frequenter of such places r have a list of favorite resorts, but nce in a long while a morbid crav- g for something fizzy comes upon s, and we go into the handiest haunt phosphate-fiends and order it.

We sat down at the marble slab—cidentally the things always make s think of a sarcophagus. There a funeral pomp about them—pro- ably in recognition of the fact that ost of the drinks are dead ones.

There was something very familiar bout the appearance of the pink- aced, sleek-headed man behind the ounter. Not in years had we seen at plump and philosophic counten- nce, and yet. . . .where could it ave been? He fixed upon us an ert but inscrutable eye, and he aned forward confidentially.

"What are you havin'?" he asked the sympathetic and respectful ne of Ganymede inquiring of great ve what special brand of ambrosial ectar he would like with the second ourse.

Immediately we knew. No ordinary oda-fountain clerk had that suave d dignified air, that ability to con- r an almost ceremonial importance the mere business of buying a ink—and a temperance drink at at! The average sundae-slinger is cold and haughty young man, who es to give the impression that he a member of the sociological staff the University and is doing this rt of thing as an experiment in umming. Not so the fat official in e spotless white coat—this also is stinctly unusual in soda-fountain tendants, who are generally stained th ice-cream and fruit juices right to their blond pompadours.

"Didn't you use to tend bar at m's place?" we asked on a sudden spiration.

"Ten years," he said, and a wistful mile flickered across the rosy ex- nse of his countenance. "I recog- ed you at once, sir."

We repeat his statement about his mediate recognization of us—ch was our passion for historical curacy—though we realize it was rely a phrase of politeness. We ust that the reader realizes this, . We would hate to have the reader nk that we were in any sense a fre- ent visitor at that former empor- n of liquid joy Once in a while, know, when we were overtaken a sudden chill as we were passing door—or an old friend insisted—we might be feeling a little tired d lacking in appetite after a hard 's work—or we had an invitation dinner in a Methodist family—or was a very cold or warm or wet or day—but not oftener. Certainly

"How do you like this sort of job?" we asked.

Oh, it ain't so bad," he said with the tolerant philosophy of his profession. "The work ain't hard, though the customers is a good deal more finicky about their drinks. Some of them women is certainly fierce—it takes 'em about fifteen minutes of discussion to decide whether they'll have a cherry soda or a banana split."

We murmured as one man of the world to another that women were like that, and one had to be prepared for those feminine caprices—that's what makes the little dears so charming.

"It ain't only the women," he assured us with the air of a stern but just judge. "Some of the men is even worse. Why, there are fellows comin' in here that used to be reg'lar customers of mine at Jim's. In the old days them guys always took the same brand day in and day out. Just as soon as I saw 'em push the swingin' door open, I reached for their special. You ought to hear them fellas now—they're always changin' the drinks and the flavors, and arguin' about how much syrup I put in, and whether it's cold enough or not."

We suggested sympathetically that perhaps they kept trying different drinks and combinations in the hope of finally hitting on something that had accidentally fermented a little. He shook his head sadly.

"Nothin' doin'! When the dope in them pretty bottles ferments, it don't do nothin' but get sour. Perhaps it's just as well, for I've seen girls sittin' here by the hour puttin' different mixtures down—if it had any kind of a kick in it, it would blow the fronts out of their pinneys."

This was a new and somewhat alarming aspect of the question, and we agreed that a "kick" under the circumstances might be distinctly regrettable. Then there was a pause, while he fixed us with a mildly inquiring eye, and on a venture we named the first brand of chemical fruit-flavoring that occurred to us—we have not yet got to the stage where we are particular about such matters.

Automatically he reached for the bottle, pulled it out of the nickled compartment in the fountain and pushed it over to us with a glass. He expected us to pour our own!—such is the force of long habit. But he recovered himself immediately—also the bottle.

"What do your know about that?" he said. "The boss would fire me if he saw me pull a bonehead like that. I thought I was back at Jim's."

Old memories crowded about us as we watched the smooth celerity with which he concocted the pink poison we were having, and the discreet flourish with which he laid it in front of us—very different indeed from the slipshod amateur methods and clumsy recklessness of the ordinary soda-slopper.

As we sipped it, sitting on our stool, he leaned on the counter and in a resigned tone chatted of the various aspects of his new calling.

"The thing I miss most of all is the conversation," he said, somewhat to our surprise, for we had not thought of the old-fashioned bar as a very favoreble place for the development of that delightful art. But we were wrong, as he made clear to us.

"There ain't no talk in this business," he continued, "just a lot of wommen gabblin', and I don't take no interest in them beautiful guys in the movies and what kind of a blouse you can get for eleven dollars and a half at a bargain sale. When a man comes in now he comes in all by himself, and when he gets his drink he throws it down and gets out—it don't put him in no mood to talk. Now, in the old days. . ." and he looked thoughtfully out into the street.

We reminded him that in the good old days there must have been a lot of talk going on on the unsober side of the bar which was hardly worth any man's time to listen to. In fact, we used sometimes to wonder how barkeeps managed to retain their sanity, and not give way to homicidal impulses.

"Oh, a few careless guys would take a little too much and shoot off their bazons," he said, as one dismissing a trifle. "But there was a lot of real fellas, business men and lawyers and fellas like that, and they'd get together and chin—I used to pick up a lot of mighty interestin' information. And then there was the sporting crowd—a fella could hear about the races and the ball-games and the prize-fights. It was like livin' in the real world. Now I might as well be a nurse in the old ladies' home.

It was certainly a sad come-down for a man who had associated with bankers and men of affairs in their hours of ease—not to speak of the ignominy of having to spend one's days putting cherries on top of little dabs of ice cream, instead of in glasses of amber liquid where they looked so much prettier and where their flavor was so much heightened.

"What's become of the older boys?" "Are they all tossing milk-shakes?"

He explained that a few of the more fortunate and provident members of his genial profession had retired from work altogether and were living on their capital.

"You see, some of the boys used to get tips from brokers and fellas like that, and they made money playin' the market. But I was never much for gamblin'—it's too risky for a family man."

Some, he said, had been kept on as waiters in the hotels where they used to serve in a more romantic and convivial capacity. In fact, we had seen two or three passing the soup and pushing out the pie with something of their old-time imperturbable ease. Others had become commercial travellers and insurance agents. There was even one who was studying for the ministry.

After all, why not? The good barkeep was a man who should succeed in almost any walk of life. He was courteous, he was attentive, he was patient with bores, he was sympathetic with human failings and distress of every kind. Who was more solicitous of his customer's comfort and pleasure? Who more skilled to quell disorder with a word or a look? Who more temperate and restrained in his own habits? And think what a lot of people he knew—knew thoroughly in their weakness as well as in their strength.

Personally, we have thought that temperance enthusiasts, in their psychoanalysis of the fatal attractiveness of the saloon for poor feeble human nature, have always been inclined to overestimate the alcholoic factor at the expense of the social. Certainly they have never given sufficient credit—or, as they would say, discredit—to the genial person in the white jacket, who usually made other contributions to the spirit of the occasion than the kind he poured out of his bottles. What a boon a few good barkeeps—converted, of course—would be to the Y.M.C.A.! How they would warm up the social atmosphere of that virtuous but somewhat chilly institution!

There was Mike, for instance, Mike of the lofty and translucent brow and the manner of ambassaroda- ial suavity and calm. He permitted lesser mortals like ourself to call him "Mike" much as great Jupiter himself in moments of divine unbending may have let the little gods on high Olympus address him as "Jupe." Mike had snow-white hair and he looked like a rather sporting dignitary of the Church of England. In fact, there was something quite episcopal about the unction of his address, only it was more sympathetic—more suggestive of the dear old family butler welcoming home the long-lost heir.

"God give you good day, my merry gentlemen," Mike would say, for he loved a certain archaic senority of speech. "And whither doth your fancy stray this blithe afternoon? Shall I tap the ancient butt of Malmsey, or jostle ye a brace of Martinis? Or is it a couple of foaming breakers of the right October brew ye would sip?"

We never could quite figure out where Mike got his language, whether he was an LL.D. in disguise, or had merely caught the habit from waiting on a lot of inebriated college professors. It is true there were slight traces of a brogue about Mike's accent, but no more than an Elizabethan might acquire from spending his early years in Cork.

Where is Mike to-day? Is he devoting a scholarly retirement to an investigation of the real identity of Shakespeare? Has he perchance sought some more hospitable and more convival land where his gifts as a Ganymede, a rather elderly Ganymede, would be better appreciated? Has he become a Judge?

"Mike, where are thou?" we ask, wistfully recalling his former glory. But there is no answer—nothing but the mournful tinkle of ice in the cocktail-shaker of memory.

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"Does my hat annoy you?" she asked loftily.

"No, miss," replied the young man behind her.

A few minutes later, fearing she had been ungracious, she again turned.

"Perhaps my plumes interfere with your view?" she suggested, more amiably.

"Oh, no, thank you—not now," was the reply. "I've bent them back."

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