

- It is astonishing the way people today allow themselves to be misled by brands, labels, and marks, including diplomas.

DON'T BE FOOLED BY LABELS

What's in a name? The answer, of course, is — a lot! We know what Shakespeare thought: "A rose, by any other name, would smell as sweet." The label was not important; the reality was what mattered. But today a rose by any other name would fetch a different price. It would be a different commodity. The reality matters little: it is the label that sells.

When I was a boy in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, I used to be sent to a shop across the street. It sold everything: mustard, starch, boot-polish, cough mixture, mops, string, seal ing-wax, pit-socks, and thick pink bloomers which dangled down from a criss-cross of lines over the counter. I would ask for a loaf of bread, a pound of butter, a bar of soap — just that. Nowadays, the shiny chromium supermarket deals with all this. The shelves carry dozens of

differently packaged kinds of bread: all sort of butters and margarines — all of which taste different, in spite of the fact that most of us cannot tell one from the other. Manufacturers brand their products: it is a monopolist's trick: cornering a market, giving a commodity a brand-image, a label, so impressive as to make it seem unique. "Don't ask for soap — ask for Joe Soap: the softest soap on the market!"

This cult of being wedded to the label rather than the reality has spread from products to people. Montaigne said long ago that we ought not to judge men by the kinds of shirts they wear. But we are more sophisticated than that. Not by shirts only, but by accents, educational backgrounds, examination qualifications, income-brackets, occupations, do we separate man from man. Of course we all believe that at bottom — wherever that may

be — a man's a man for a that: that is, so long as he is well-labelled about where he has come from and where he is going; so long as he has his credentials. We cannot feel really happy until we have everything labelled.

We all come into the world the same way, and in our first naked, crying humanity there is not much to distinguish us. My elder son was born in hospital, and I remember when I first went to see him I was taken into a room full of shelves of babies in aluminium baskets. They were all so much alike they had to have little labels of tape tied round their wrists to identify them. The first label — the family name: and it decides so much. Romeo and Juliet, for example, died because of the family labels they wore.

After this, the process of ticketing really goes to work. Human infants, innocent of what is happening, are labelled for their roles in society. They are "male". They are "Negroes", "Jews", "Europeans" and think what limitations, humiliations, and tragedies may stem from these labels. They are "working

class", "middle class" or "aristocracy", and the whole of their personal lives will be profoundly affected by whichever label is stuck upon their "I.Q.", by some examination, by some school, and this will largely determine their earnings, their security, their opportunities for happiness and fulfillment for the rest of their lives. What is frightening is that these labels are so inadequate.

"Male and female created He them." But this is a gross over-simplification. It should properly read: "Male and female, and the long-s e r i e s-o f-graduations-i-n-between, created He them." It is the same, in this connection, with labels "natural" and "normal" and "unnatural" and "abnormal". Sexual attributes called "natural" and "abnormal" are those with which nature has endowed the minority. Making the unnatural natural, and the abnormal normal, really boils down, unless we exercise great care, to forcing the minority to fit in with the majority — a repugnant and indefensible ethical principle.

But we do not only label children. We label adults, too — and our label is more often than not a judgement. When we call people "wild-cat strikers", "employers", "Roman Catholics", "homosexuals", "criminals," we think we are saying something about them as persons, but we are really judging categories.

Society could not go on without some labelling; but in our more complicated and wealthier society, falseness is not only more possible — it also pays. We are nearer to having equal opportunity to be unequal, and we are set at one another's throats by those who stand to gain from our snobbishness. We are so stuck up with false labels as to miss real qualities of living, like one of those touring motorists whose windows and wind-screens are so gummed up with ostention that he cannot see where he is going.

It is even old-fashioned now to speak of "keeping up with the Joneses" which has been defined as spending money you don't have on things you don't want, to impress people you don't

like. Now, we have to do all we can to be superior to them. If they get a 1961 car, we must exchange our 1959 for a 1962. If Mr. Jones is a "chief clerk", I must call myself an "office manager." In our highly specialized society, our occupation is a very important label. We love to try and corner a career. We love "differentials." In the social sciences, for example, I may stand little chance of promotion unless I stake out a particular specialism — a "field" — for myself. I may be interested in sociology, but that is not enough: I must specialize in educational sociology, or industrial sociology, some field. I may study the social life of Biggleswater, a village with fifty peasants, five pigs, a pub-cum-post office. I "do research" on it. Then I publish my thesis and a few articles, and I can claim to be a "rural sociologist." Since there may be only two other "rural sociologists" in the country, I may become an "authority", an "expert." And if I am sufficiently narrow-minded to persist in all this, I may become one of the 'names' in my field. My

own "name," even may become a "label." I have arrived. My future is secure.

But since many people are competing for 'fields' they are sensitive to boundaries. Chaps with SOCIOLOGY written across their chests and chaps with PSYCHOLOGY written across theirs are continually abusing each other, each claiming that the other's field is bogus. We must preserve our own professional distinctiveness, and so other people must be limited to their labels. But this is not peculiar to social scientists. It is the same everywhere.

We fit in with labels so much that we come to believe them. We really believe that if we are solicitors or executives in bowler hats and umbrellas we are superior to manual workers with shirt-sleeves and overalls. We really believe if we are middle-class housewives who drive round to the shops in cars and get our goods on account, that we are superior to the working class housewives from the council estate who walk — and pay cash. We become the labels

we wear. If we are not careful, we shall end up like a real and pathetic member of the Jones family whose plight is recorded on his gravestone:

Sacred to the memory of
Tammias Jones,

Who was born a man, and
died a grocer.

Between cradle and grave, Tammias had lost his humanity. Born an unspoiled human being, he died a bit of social machinery, a mere device for weighing sugar and tea. He had lost himself in fulfilling a social role.

Just as we come into the world by the same entrance, we leave it by the same exit. Equal in our way of birth, we are equal also in death. We cannot take our labels with us. The pity is that we have to spoil our lives between these two great levelers with so much that is bogus, unpleasant, and unjust. What can we do about it? I was much impressed, in a recent programme on open prisons, by a prison governor, who, when speaking of the people in her prison, would use the word "inmates," or indeed any

word other than "prisoners." She refused, as she said, "to put a prisoner label on women who come to this place." And why? Because it stood in the way of their regarding themselves as human beings; and stood in the way of other people treating them as human beings.

If we are sick of labels, then, there is one simple

thing, at least, that we can do — stop using them.

A man, whether black, white, working class, upper class, Christian, Muslim, atheist, Jew, American, Russian, intelligent, unintelligent, criminal, or virtuous — is a man, for a' that, and it is about time we acted as though we really believed it.
— R. Fletcher, *The Listener*.

THE NEED IS GOVERNMENT

Government is the thing. Law is the thing. Not brotherhood, not international cooperation, not security councils, that can stop war only by waging it. Where do human rights arise, anyway — security against the thief, the murderer, the footpad? In brotherly love? Not at all. It lies in government. Where does control lie — control of smoking in the theater, of nuclear energy in the planet? Control lies in government, because government is people. Where there are no laws, there is no law enforcement. Where there are no courts, there is no justice. — *E. B. White*.