

In defense of swish

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subscribers in every state and virtually every country of the civilized world.

A bit of information which would spare much letter-writing: no American publication (ONE, or any other) is at present permitted to carry «PERSONAL» advertisements, such as appear in many European homophile magazines. Nor can ONE secure correspondents for its readers, exchange letters between them or in any way act as a clearing-house of that type. Also, many pictures such as are commonly published in European homophile magazines would in America be considered erotically stimulating. As published in a periodical devoted to homosexuality this would give the postal authorities cause for barring a publication from the mails, despite the fact that quite similar pictures appear in other magazines not devoted to such a subject. For this reason all photographs and illustrations in ONE must be carefully designed to avoid such objections.

Biggest obstacle of all to the success of ONE has been the homosexual himself, or rather his largely dormant sense of his own rights and duties. For, centuries of religious and legal persecution, social ostracism and «scientific» misinformation have so nearly convinced most homosexuals that they are in fact as bad as they have been painted, that a vast apathy seems to weigh them down. The few more independent spirits found tend to be so undisciplined, so lacking in group experience as to find it most difficult to work together in any cooperative undertaking.

In addition, social pressures have often made it so hard merely to keep a good job and work out some measure of domestic stability that there are few who have the energy left to undertake any philanthropic labors.

Having faced and to some degree overcome these various obstacles ONE has now completed its first two years, and is growing sturdily. Each forward step still comes a something of a surprise to its friends, and confounds its enemies. A doctor expressed this well, saying, «Each time the postman brings my copy I pick it up and say to myself, This can't happen in America . . . But it HAS!»

In Defense of Swish

by James Barr

A growing malady among American homosexuals today, as we are forced into a more closely united group, seems to be a particularly irrational snobbery directed against our more effeminate members. The accusations begin with, «It's because of these obvious, limp-wristed types who congregate at bars to scream at one another that the rest of us are finding social acceptance so difficult,» and usually end with, «I suppose they *do* have a right to live, but I simply can't stand to be around them!» Every time I hear this sort of criticism, I am tempted to quote Gertrude Stein's overworked but pithy verse about a rose being a rose being a rose,

which is simply a poetic way of saying that cheese is still cheese no matter how you slice it.

Basically each of us is individually and predominantly a male, or a female, of the species and we remain so through the vicissitudes of five or ten decades of life; but to make life more lifelike we find heterosexuals scorning homosexuals, yellow men scorning white men, North-men South-men, river-men mountain-men, fair men dark men, and on and on in a passionate if unreasonable assertion of individuality by fancied superiorities. Much of all this is natural to civilized man's infancy since he is at best, only forty thousand years old, and undoubtedly at the end of another few thousand years, a more mature civilized man will have learned the secret of uniting his concepts of individuality and social harmony into one, thereby looking with amusement upon our present efforts to remain individual by such puny means as prejudice and contempt. This will be very fine for man of the future, but what of man today? Generally speaking, is anything desirable accomplished by these snobberies and most particularly, is any homosexual — who has been the target of so much hatred and misunderstanding — acting rationally when he seeks to degrade within his own group? Naturally we cannot stop such thinking and behavior, but perhaps a few of us are capable of prophesying universal toleration and social tranquility. Certainly all of us are capable of setting our own thinking straight, which is usually a prelude to facing greater questions. A good beginning might be one's attitude toward the more effeminate types.

In the first place it has always seemed to me to be especially brutish behavior in anyone to strike out at a weaker target in order to emotionally salve the wound sustained from a stronger force, and for the more masculine (or normal) appearing homosexual to join the forces of heterosexuality against his effeminate brother is not only playing jackal to a lion, it is, politically speaking, pulling another Trojan Horse inside the walls of another strong citadel of defense. Mankind's experience is rich in warnings against such foolhardiness — «Divide and conquer,» «The house divided,» and «Hand together or separately» to name only a few - but today's fashion seems to be to brand all proverbs as *clichés* and ignore them as such in spite of any wisdom they might contain. Be that as it may, it is obvious to me that these «masculine brutes» among us are voicing prejudices unrelated to thought or understanding; a case indeed of all bar-bell and no brain.

But should one successfully penetrate this first layer of inanity, the next question one is sure to hear is, «But why do they have to be so damned obvious?» In other words, what makes the effeminate man effeminate? The answer — the same thing that makes the homosexual homosexual, only a little more so. Any basic psychology text will explain that, as in other groups, homosexuals are in constant competition with each other for the attentions of the paragons of the group, (which oddly enough in our case invariably possess the very attributes most often lacking in the average invert, that is, the attributes of the heterosexual.) Physically, those in the group most nearly like this ideal type seem to feel they need to do very little to attract this attention, whereas those quite unlike the ideal feel called upon to compensate in other ways for

bulging biceps, Herculean silhouettes, commanding baritones and so forth. These latter think and act in accordance with those attributes nature has given them. If they are effeminate, it is easier, and sometimes the results more successful, to emphasize the fact than to overcome it, and as physical characteristics lead, the mind so often follows. Give the most effeminate man you know the physique of a heavy weight prize fighter and you will probably see much of that effeminacy disappear within days of the transformation. And, incidentally, the obverse of the premise seems to follow in much the same way. This is certainly a plausible reason for tolerance for one type of effeminacy.

Psychiatrists tell us that the more obvious manifestations of effeminacy, such as screaming, dressing up, etc., which so many people find so objectionable are in reality excellent safety valves for emotional pressure and are necessary to assure mental stability in certain cases. In addition, the contrast afforded to the enforced norm of acceptable behavior is an excellent tonic for the individual sense of the ridiculous which often makes the misfortunes of living so much less horrible.

Recently, while on a business trip to Texas, I brought together quite by accident two of my casual acquaintances who were very good friends, although I did not know of it at the time. Both of these men have suffered heart breaking tragedies in their lives, both are well adjusted homosexuals. Both are in their thirties, stand six feet tall or over, weigh about 180 and 200 pounds, one has been married and divorced, and both are very attractive to women and, normally, anything but limp-wristed. Yet greeting each other in my hotel room, they literally changed shape before my eyes. «Mae!» shrieked the newer arrival. «Gwendolyn!» chortled the other. Women would have blushed at the shrewd and witty parody of feminine foibles and mannerisms that these two carried on for the next hilarious quarter hour, and, as I was to learn later, they were quite serious in some of the fun they were creating. All of which should illustrate that it isn't always the doll-like man that sees a sarong in every bath towel or a Jacques Fath original in a handy bed sheet. And I must truthfully report these two do not always confine their camp meetings to the privacy of hotel rooms as I learned when we went out to dinner a few hours later. Yet, objectionable as all this might have been to some, I would never recommend anyone criticising either of them to his face for his behavior.

Personally I find very little that is objectionable in the mannerisms of the effeminate man or the more masculine Lesbian, and I am not notoriously broad minded on the subject of behavior. I do find that many of them make quite as good friends as any to be found in the group and are usually far more entertaining companions, particularly if they possess keen senses of humor and charitable instincts for the faults of others. As a writer looking for material I find their observations more often than not incisive and, surprisingly enough, even practical. Then too, the Pagliacci contrast between their jester-like antics and their profoundly miserable lives never fails to attract my desire to understand them better. Sadly, their stories are too often the same with very little variation, but the poignancy of each is forever fresh. And above all, it is they who need our friendship most desperately of all.