

A CHRONICLE OF THE REVIVAL OF MOLEHILL

OBLIQUE OBLIGE

Though there have been numerous proposals for rescuing Molehill from the clutches of decline, few have come to much. The banking houses of Molehill have contributed little to the revival and much to the inertia of our community. Even as it has become popular to respond vociferously in favor of every wayward and costly scheme designed to reinflate the Molehill image, the banks have found it unnecessary to risk a cent of Molehillian deposits on these bank-endorsed programs. It may be further noted that in some cases they have benefited greatly from good publicity in *The Business Flyer* pertaining to their alleged interest and participation in this project or that, the completion, let alone the actual undertaking, of which we have never heard of again — none being the wiser, least of all our newspapers.

You may remember, Fret Stormby is the relations man at the Bankers' Bank. Dear Fret has gone to the Bankers' Bank and subsequently to *The Business Flyer* with a plan for a bank-sponsored museum annexed to the bank's Molehill branch. This small museum, as I understand it, will be for the purpose of displaying local artifacts (when they can be found) for the education of the clerical plebs and the edification of desperate artists. Some Snappers have gone so far as to suggest that the bank's board of directors be put on display occasionally since they are rare sights in the Molehill vicinity. The exhibits are to be open only on weekdays, and this for two reasons: foremost, the Bankers' Bank does not like people getting too close to their money when the building does not house the safe ratio of employees to customers of at least 100 to 1; and, only incidentally, Molehillians would not for any reason be seen within a block of a museum on a weekend. In a word, Molehill sidewalks are no competition for wrestling matches and frontyard weed extermination campaigns; the streets are vacant but for the vehicle verifiers — those who spend weekends testing the limits of their speedometers, their engine's noise potential and vehicle maneuverability while being driven from the passenger side.

More of the Stormby proposal I do not know, except that he intends to have a reception preceding every exhibition and to serve wine and cheese. But please allow me a rather lengthy digression at this point to render my view of the state of Molehill's social and cultural life in general. After all, what, besides economics, is more important to the restoration of Molehill to its former glory, and what choice do you have but to suffer my rambling. Yes, you do have that one — good-bye. Those remaining who have not disallowed the following will have nothing to censure hereafter but their own poor judgement.

In that suspicions are bound to arise when the undertaker attempts to pass himself off as a physician, I reluctantly stray from history to offer diagnoses and remedies for Molehill life. However, I make no claims that my reader would draw similar conclusions if he were more qualified and writing this chronicle in my stead.

Those in the fray of events in Molehill can little afford to permanently offend those much akin to themselves: so few are publicly cogent here the dumb isolation

would be horrible. Amid all the bickering in Molehill one prominent characteristic deserves qualified commendation: we Molehillians are quick to forgive – sometimes to our detriment – and are in turn easily forgiven. This grace is bestowed without the usual penance in apology or remorse.

As I have mentioned previously, our primary interest in Molehill is amusement, but too little has been said by local historians even of the entertainment value of our politics. (The amusement motive, I think, accounts for the irresolute manner in which every controversy is quieted.) We are ever ready to be entertained and desirous of every opportunity to forget. Molehillians consider it a social obligation for our enfeebled aristocrats, our city government and, more frequently nowadays, our corporations to give us an occasional festival as well as an on-running burlesque of their respective roles in the community.

Though few of the heroic attributes, like an implacable revenge, survive in Molehill today, all the ancient virtues and vices persist in an adulterated and diluted state. One such diminution is our version of the feast, banquet and orgy – these varied forms of strange human behaviour we call generally the ‘party.’ The party, as I am familiar with it, is a monthly or annual duty: the type of function where one searches in vain for the opportune moment to exit from one’s initial step through the door. The chief combatants presented in this chronicle thus far also perform this ritual, both factionally and jointly.

It is deemed a very cruel act for our educators to school their students in the appreciation of rare tastes for which there are no provisions made in adult life, however, often that happens anyway; so impressarios of a sort are always in demand to assuage the hunger for refined consumption. The Snappers exemplify the effects this acquisition has on human expectations. Whether it be Fret Stormby all in a puff from start to finish of his receptions, trying to make sure all the ingredients are from the right source and that all the preparations are served properly (and that everyone present is made aware they are and have been), or Penny Cloud, requiring each guest to display a sufficient artistic temperament, the Snapper party is a manifestation of inadequate substitutes for rarefied habits. Among other Snappers, the party is supposed to be ‘spontaneous,’ meaning only that a location, ten minutes warning and some victuals are supplied by the host; the object of the endeavor is for the host not to botch his supplies or fail to stupefy all the guests before they tire of enjoying themselves; should they become disgruntled and restless, they will, for their part, attempt to destroy the host’s household and keep him wake all night. Amusements are a must which are hardly ever provided by those of the professional class (apparently conversation will suffice). Nevertheless, so as not to malign the Snappers, they are taking advantage of the only alternative left to their disposal in an adolescent culture but scarcely beyond puberty.

All of which conjures up another digression. Molehill is in essence a cultureless community; not for any inherent inability to appreciate the traditions of artistic and intellectual excellence, but because of a lack of the traditions themselves and the literature and models to transmit those which might be imported. Culture to us is an artificially packaged, extraneous item which can only be poorly merchandised, not lived with daily. Should some fragment of culture accidentally come to one of us, it is held to be an infertile possession which one retains in private places like some over-precious curiosity.

But a note must be laid down about the Lots-to-Lose Club’s parties. Very often,

our largest paper, The Business Flyer, devotes whole sections of its valuable pages to the bric-a-brackery of the exceptional people. These articles and pictures of the powered elite among the moneyed elite reveal them in the light of a closet intrusion — a pack of mutual admirers armed to their stiff white collars with a repellent fatuity. Only their catering and laundering bills are more impressive than their smug facades.

Gossip is an essential element in any of these gatherings — and the greatest delight of those whose conversational stores are ill stocked. One word only on this account and I'll withdraw: when one is privy to tantalizing news had from a mere acquaintance out of oath, one's friends should not have to prime, pump, and promise reimbursement with interest to have at it — don't you agree? No pledge should be asked except the perfunctory 'you mustn't tell anyone' — which is not held to be binding in any legitimate society. Yet despite this forceful reasoning I have bound myself irretrievably to silence on many matters that would be of interest to a history of Molehill. That being the case, I can divulge nothing more intriguing to you at this time.

—Gibbin Nash

(Molehill Ain't Over Yet!)

OBSCURE THINGS FROM OBSCURE PLACES

To be in this position, it is humiliating.

Today we met

your wife

my lover

our friends

just a Saturday in the country.

And yet I saw you

or rather you saw me

Looking directly into me

You took a measure and did not turn away.

At the village market

amongst the cheeses herring and

cheap manufactured nothings

that old god desire reared his head

and scratched my cheek with his dirty fingernail.

Hot and awkward I stood

embarrassed by the knowledge

I would have done anything

to feel the grasp of your hand on my wrist

as you drew me near.

*In this far place amongst friends
we quietly discuss those absent
and probe into their least action
seeking an explication of each default
We nod and happily admit
that it's all too bad that it's all so sad*

*To savour the genteel melancholy
we tease the past for flattering reflections
glossing and gliding over our errors
to magnify the sins of others*

*How impossible to admit when loving has gone awry
that self-doubt this disbelief
in our own good intentions
So we murder in the heart
whilst smiling over our glasses*

*We drank and talked of words
pleasure dissolved
Despair left me weak in remembering
how easy our laughter had been
how these years have gained nothing
for the little faults fester into open sores
the pale blemishes of character
deepen into scars
Now nothing remains
I touch you only with words*

by Pat Waters