

ARNOLD BENNETT *and* HARRODS

“I will not flout public opinion”

Recently Harrods ventured to invite three of our greatest Masters of the Written Word to lend the influence of their pens to the cause of Business. By permission, and without comment, Harrods publish their replies. The first—that of Mr. Arnold Bennett—appears below:

I HAVE now fully considered your proposal that I should write, for the purposes of publicity, a signed article or series of articles dealing with such aspects of your business as might, on examination, especially appeal to me. I note that you would wish to give me a free hand as to both selection and treatment of topics, and that in particular you are quite ready to accept and to print adverse criticism as well as favourable criticism.

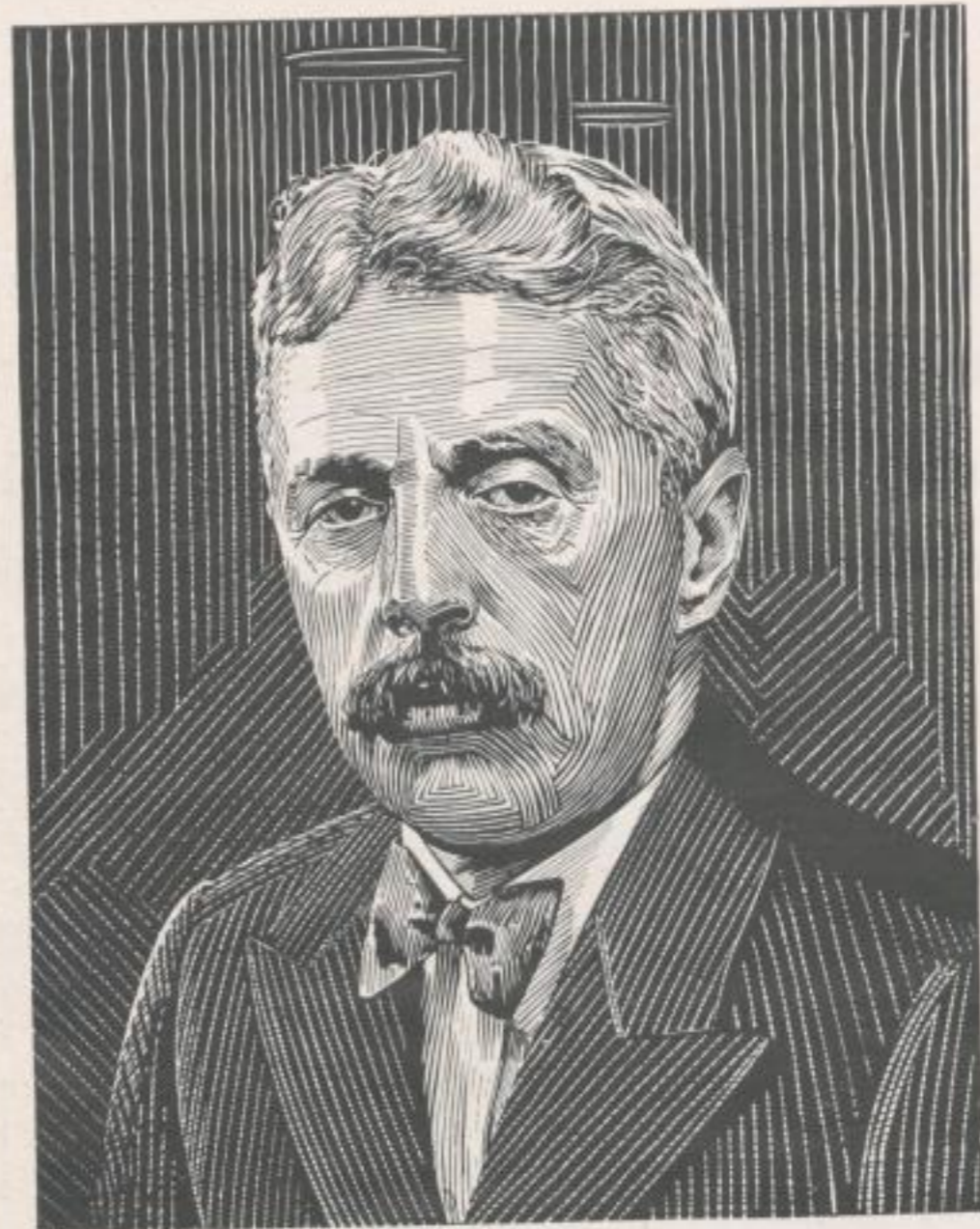
You remind me that, as is well known, your business is among the largest, most comprehensive, and most famous of its kind in the world. You say that it counts notably in the industrial and mercantile life of the community, that your regular staff comprises an immense and constantly increasing number of citizens of both sexes, and that you use every honest endeavour to be of commercial service to the community.

You say further that you buy the best available materials and commodities that research can procure, and that you employ the best organisers, technicians, artists, designers, architects, and craftsmen of every sort that you can discover.

Lastly, you suggest that you ought to be able to enlist the help of descriptive writers in the same category of excellence and prestige as your finest workers in the applied arts.

On my side I will now tell you that as a writer I have always been keenly interested in the very impressive phenomenon of the big departmental store, regarded either as a picturesque spectacle, or as a living organism, or as a sociological portent. I am all in favour of the departmental store. I cannot keep my eyes off its window-displays, its crowds of customers, its army of employees. In Britain, America, France, and Germany I have studied its functioning as far as is possible to an outsider. As a theme for description it strongly appeals to me. I have written articles about it, and I have written a novel entirely about it. That novel, published many years ago, was inspired by the mere sight of your own premises when they were first erected.

I agree with you that you ought to be able to enlist the help of whatever writers seem to you to be adequately equipped for the task you would set. I should like, of course under proper conditions,



to accept your proposal; and I see no possible reason against my acceptance, except one.

The reason is that public opinion in Britain is not yet ripe to approve the employment of responsible imaginative writers to whom it has granted a reputation, in any scheme of publicity for a commercial concern. Personally I differ from public opinion in this matter; but the opinion exists and I will not flout it. In flouting it I should certainly lose caste, and I do not intend to lose caste by attempting to create a precedent which could result, for me, in nothing save a disadvantageous notoriety. The time must inevitably come, sooner or later, when the precedent will be created, and after it is established people will wonder why it should ever have met with opposition. But the creator of the precedent will not be myself.

I must therefore, with lively regret, decline your proposal

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