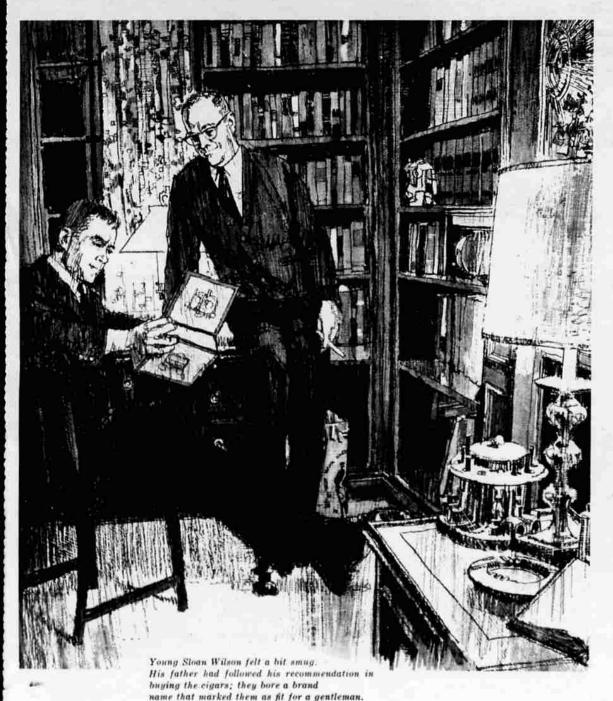
The Snob Cure A noted novelist recalls with gratitude how he



O NE BRIGHT summer morning 24 years ago, a mailman handed me an envelope with the austere letterhead of Harvard University.

With trembling fingers I opened it and read the words: "The Admissions Committee is pleased. . . ." Rushing through the rest of it, I ran eagerly to my father. "I got into Harvard!" I said breathlessly.

"That's good," he said mildly. "I hope they don't make a snob out of you."

This surprised me, because I had not noticed in myself any tendency to become a snob. It would indeed have been difficult for any child of my parents to remain a snob for long. My father, the son of a New England schoolmaster, had painfully worked his way through the University of Virginia by driving a physician's wagon on night calls. He had nothing but scornful memories of many young Southern dandies he had met there. A magazine editor and a professor of journalism, he believed only in the aristocracy of personal accomplishment.

"Let me tell you the derivation of the word 'snob,'" he said on that memorable day when I was admitted to Harvard. "In the old days in England, a man's rank was always put after his name. If he had no rank, the Latin words sine nobilitate were written. These were shortened to snob, and it means quite clearly, 'without nobility.'"

"Yes, Dad," I said. At that age I sometimes felt my father was almost unbearably academic.

The following September I went to Harvard, and although the phrase "Harvard undergraduate" has a certain style and gayety to it, the fact is I was scared to death. I knew no one in the whole Boston area, and the great brick dormitories seemed more like tombs than a friendly place to live.

I don't know what I expected at