

# WELLINGTON ROUNDAABOUT

By "Thid"

## Thoughts on Labour Day

SIX small boys played together twenty years ago. Near their homes, in a small country town in the brown Otago hills, there was a slaughter house, and near the slaughter house a graveyard for its bones.

Those were definitely not the days of sponsored programmes. The boys had read about their Robin Hood in books. Wireless was as remote as the printed word to a cannibal. But they could string a bow well enough to frighten even a hawk in flight or scare the liver out of people passing by, though they might ride in the latest, smartest, and swiftest rubber-tyred gig.

The manuka provided staves for Friar Tucks and whippy wood for Robin's bow. The arrows came

from Toi Toi canes, pointed with "brads," obtained as necessity demanded and ingenuity contrived from the nearest builder's job.

Strictly speaking, Robin Hood had never lived to meet Sir Walter Raleigh, but acorn pipes with straws for stems and seeds of weeds, or mother's tea for fuel, seemed somehow to fit the manly part. In the luxurious autumn days, when the purple berries dropped, the pith of elderberry shoots was better still: chopped up, or smoked in cheroots, with a hat pin down the core.

### Arms and the Men

Thus armed and so equipped, provisioned from turnip fields encountered on the march, with sweet thistle nuts for variety, and crisp limestone water for their wine, the merry men would go forth to the burial ground.

Through their tight belts hats were stuck, cunningly placed above the rump to save the danger from a fall and yet not protruding too far to hinder a quick flight through fences should any field be found with an owner lurking along the rows.

They seemed to be poor in material riches. A few sported sugar bags, won by who knows what artifice from some scanty pile. With one corner at the bottom pushed in, these made a head-gear Robin himself would never have refused.

### Excavations

If nothing intervened to check the advance — no frogs in green pools, no baby rabbits in fresh burrows, no trees that must be climbed, no special sunny corner among the tussocks in which to hold a council, no stooks to live in for a blissful hour or two while crickets jumped about the sun-soaked stubble — excavations would begin as soon as sight combined with smell to announce the band's arrival on the Spot marked X.

Now Robin added to his stature by two whole cubits of importance; Friar Tuck, selected for his fatness, prised

and levered with his stave, sweating mightily; and the merry men dug and delved in a frenzy of fear and curiosity.

Some good man and true quaked upon a higher mound as look-out for the return of the dinosaurs to the burial ground of their immortal brothers.

### In Doubt

I am not yet fully satisfied that they did not actually unearth true relics of some ancient life. After all, the skeleton of a moa had been found but a short league away. The earth never seemed to be fresh turned. They had to dig hard and long, often in the great heat of the summer sun, and usually on short commons, for to ask for lunch was to find the reality of parental disapproval spoiling the fantasy.

It is too late now to chance a precious memory for the sake of making sure. The slaughter-house will be an abattoir, with the State taking an interest in its methods. The blood of that most gory place will go with the bones to be buried as manure, and small boys now will be playing Gort and Gamelin.

It is not now the small matter of lunch that interrupts the idyll. It is breakfast, too, dinner, and tea, and a roof for shelter, beds to lie on, chairs to sit in, radios to listen to, newspapers to read, trams to ride in, teeth to be filled, lungs to be patched, hearts to be mended, money to be earned and spent or hoarded.

Make-Believe has no chance at all. Labour Day is just one day when we turn from earning our wage to spending it, and the effort either way reaps no such reward as in the golden days.

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