

WELLINGTON ROUNDAABOUT

By "Thid"

DO hairs grow stiff beneath your nose, too? For me they daily make red lights in the path of the eternal search for compensation.

There is a compensation for indigestion. It is indigestion's excuse and cause: the flavour of the food. There is a compensation for toothache. It is the relief of leaving the dentist for the last time. Perhaps there is even a compensation for paying the dentist, although it must be more spiritual than practical. There is a compensation for lying sleepless: the fun of listening to silence, or thinking outside the prison walls of words, as thoughts escape when the fetters of reality fall with the midnight chimes.

There is a compensation, I have discovered, even for waking up in Wellington with a stiff stubble on the upper lip. It is not, as you might have expected me to say, the thought of going into the city on the daily voyage of discovery. It is not even the recurring notion that whatever noise trams make at sunrise they will stop again sometime. It is not, as occasional nostalgia might dictate, the wishful thinking that the winds which blow the sea's freshness into Wellington might leave some of it here as they pass.

Shaving and Shakespeare

It is all a matter of the stubble, the lather, and the blade; a nick, an imprecation, and discovering the eternal truth of a platitude.

On one stroke I am a *wretched soul, bruised with adversity, railing on Lady Fortune in good terms, in good set terms*. On the next the comedy of errors strikes home, a styptic laugh removes the evidence, and a good merchant philosophy takes its place: *sweet are the uses of adversity, which like the toad, wears yet a precious jewel in his head; and this our life finds good in everything*.

It is perhaps extravagant to go to Shakespeare over the small matter of a chip under the right nostril; but it seems to need some extravagance in ideas to buffet back the blows of fortune with *adversity's sweet milk, philosophy*.

Shakespeare, of course, never used a self-sharpening razor, so shaved in no false sense of confidence. If he shaved at all, he would use a good blade, and would know to blame the cuts about his face upon the night before, or the morning after, instead of vituperating upon the weapon in his hand. Yet he caps a modern mood with this apt verse, and I have made a long enough excuse without the need for excusing. With Oscar Wilde, I say to the Whistlers about me: "I wish I had said that." And they to me, as he said to Oscar "You will, Thid, you will." And I have. All for the sake of explaining the virtue of being cut while shaving.

No Point To It?

A few hundred words ago there was a point to this roundabout. It had meant to start with stubble and pass by easy stages to Fred and Maggie, Mrs. Entwhistle, Eb and Zeb, and Mr. Chalmers, with the Rich Uncles and the Crimson Trail as compensations thrown in. Instead, it is back in the sixteenth century, where I am stumped; for Shakes-

peare has nothing to cover the intricacies of Programme Planning, or the tortuous paths of Public Taste.

Perhaps, as Thid is stumped now, William was stumped four hundred years ago. And perhaps, as Thid looks back to Shakespeare, so Shakespeare, if he were searching now for compensations, would go back another four hundred and find some comfort in his Chaucer:

For of fortune's shape adversite,
The worst kind of infortune is this,
A man that hath been in prosperite,
And it remembers, when it passed is.

A good moral to finish the fable. But philosophy is only for philosophers. For the rest, Mamma Bloom's Brood is not. The Merchant of Venice, just as The Merchant of Venice was not Troilus and Criseyde. Prosperity is remembered, but does not seem to be sustained.

Other Bad Things

It was sufficiently difficult to discover adversity's sweet uses over the bathroom bench in the morning. In the evening, as you will see from pages 28 and 29 of *The Listener*, there are heavy clouds. The ceiling is low. A tankard of ale might improve the visibility, but Government departments co-operate too closely. When the doors swing to on the beer they open on the bitters.

Chaucer compensated for the Bishops in Athelstane, the start of The Irish Question, Thomas à Becket, and other Bad Things. Yet a compensation insists on popping up. Shakespeare balance the begging of cricket and the discovery of tobacco. Serials, they will be saying in the twenty-fourth century, were the cultural counterpoise to Spain and Abyssinia, China and Albania.

"Alas," they will say. "No more the *Japanese Houseboy*!"



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