

WELLINGTON ROUNDAABOUT

By "Thid"

Bachelor's Lament

IF you are a bachelor and have not yet come to live in Wellington, there is one piece of advice to cover all your problems: *stay away*.

Anywhere except in Wellington it is easy to be a bachelor. Either you board, or you flat, or you simply pig it where you can. In Wellington, the situation is more complicated.

There is no suggestion here that it is the Wellington girls who make it difficult to be a bachelor. They are no worse and no better than in any other city. If anything they are worse, for I'm told the climate takes the oil out of their complexions. Their hair styles, too, are horrible; and their hats.

Hymn of Hate

No, bachelors in Wellington are as safe, in the romantic sense, as bachelors anywhere. But in the purely business sense the good ladies of Wellington have them by the side whiskers.

It is not spinsters of whom they must be afraid, but the married women. I am talking of immorality, but not in any sense which might be found objectionable in a family magazine.

It is the immorality of graft, and greed, and Doing Others Down.

Wellington is sick. Its malady: the Housing Problem. Its doctors diagnose the trouble variously; but there is no violent political animus in the Wellington bachelor's outlook on the Wellington bachelor's life. He may be a Tory, a Liberal, or a Fascist. He may support Labour, or Socialism, or Communism. He may wear shirts of radical hues beneath his sober jacket. He may even be a Nazi. Whatever he is, none of the ordinary hates of life in 1939 will outdo his general hate of The Landlady.

The Landlady's Husband

She may not be married, and spinsters as a class may not deserve to escape this diatribe against her; but usually she

has a husband lurking somewhere. She hides him with her family around the murky corners of her house as an old hen hides her chicks beneath her moulting wings.

She is the very essence of cupidity. Sometimes the bachelor-boarder says he does not blame her for it: she lives in her time and is pleased to find its vices fashionable. Most times he calls her simply mean, and old, and something else; he rails against her, and against the Housing Problem, the Government, the Builders, the Agents, the O.B.C.s, and the Exhibition; all quite impartially, all very sincerely, all with a venom which would sear them to the quick were they not insulated from its bite by layer upon layer of his own hard-earned bank notes.

Daily Programme

She makes his life miserable all the week, and would have him weep also through the week-end did she not first succeed in driving him to drink. His daily programme runs something like this: At 6 a.m.: awake. Until 8 a.m.: wonders why he sticks it out. Until 8.15 a.m., has no time to wonder about anything until 8.30 a.m., when he wonders why he's always late and must go to work with his fast unbroken. He lunches at noon, on yesterday's potatoes and tomorrow's poultry. At 5 p.m.: buys fish

**Other Bloated Capitalists.*

and chips and enough alcohol to make him blind and deaf when, at 6 p.m., the landlady says rents are going up, and that, at 7 p.m., she'd like the chair out of his room for the new man and would he mind, at 8 p.m., if they turned the wireless up so that everyone, at 8.15 p.m., can hear Easy Aces; and, at 8.14 p.m., he goes out, and stays out, until 1 a.m., when he returns to occupy his room.

Weekly Budget

He spends at the most, eight hours daily in his eight-foot room, yet his budget works out something like this:

To board, £2. To doing without breakfast and buying chocolate instead, 4/-. To lunches, 10/-. To snacks for tea, 7/-. To indigestion powders, 5/-. To clothes, 5/-. To laundry, 6/6. To going out, £1. To taking out, £1/10/-. To stamps, 1/-. To sporting requirements, 7/6. To office subscriptions, 2/6½. To morning and afternoon tea funds, 1/6. To working expenses over and above expenses allowed, 4/10½. To drowning sorrows, £1/2/6. To pick-me-ups, 5/-. To various, 2/6.

Total, £8/11/9.

Weekly wage, £5/10/-.

He is a little more fortunate than fifty per cent. of his fellows; usually Public Service cadets, who have the same expenses and half the income.

Worse in Store

But these small financial deficiencies are nothing to the trouble in store for him. Soon the restaurants, the cafeterias, and the fish shops will have his teeth rotting out. As his resistance is lowered influenza will follow pyorrhœa. He will catch measles. His limbs will be brittle, and he will soon be in hospital with a fracture. Or it will be appendicitis, with cancer and tuberculosis following; until at last, still on the debit side, the world will enter against him: Funeral expenses, £20.

Her Pound of Flesh

But The Landlady will have her rent. She has listened to the multitude crying: "Rooms, give us Rooms!" and she has hand-picked him and half-a-dozen others likely to be Good Payers. When they have winced she has cut out their morning tray. For each anguished cry out of them she has raised the rent—tightened the screws down another turn.

If she does not find she likes him she soon tells him to go, for there are thousands of others. He goes, for life is already too miserable for him to bear the torture of being squeezed out slowly, and painfully, as The Landlady can squeeze.

You will recognise him in the street: drawn, hungry, disillusioned, hopeless. You will know, if he is looking at a recruiting poster, that he is only wondering which unit will have the highest death rate. That will be the one he joins, and he will go down gallantly, each thrust of his bayonet, each bullet from his rifle, directed, by proxy, at The Landlady.

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