

WELLINGTON ROUNABOUT

By "Thid"

The Virtues of Taxing Petrol

WELLINGTON is a very intimate city. All the people, and the buildings, and the streets, the stairs, the narrow alleys, the back yards and front porches, come crowding close.

There is no right-of-way on the pavements. Instead of *Keep to the Left* signs, such as they have and most honourably maintain in Dunedin, you are commanded in Wellington *Not to Spit*. Wellington pedestrians know their right hands from their left no more than a woman driver in a traffic jam.

It is possible—indeed it is common—to go from place to place without having bacteria sprinkled upon your person, although the City Corporation seems to think the risk is great. But it is not possible to walk unmolested. Welling-

ton is squeezed so tight between the hills and the sea it can never rise to the sedate behaviourism of Dunedin or the gentle politesse of rambling Christchurch.

It is not as bad as Sydney, where manners, they say, are dangerous property. And not as good as London, where Londoners behave beautifully; perhaps because their invective against the sins of public misconduct is sharpened by so many centuries of practice. They cry down the hustler and the hustler. In Sydney it is devil take the hindmost. In Wellington they gave it up long ago, and now bump about their town in sullen resignation.

On Friday Nights

There are people who walk about Wellington for pleasure; thousands of them, on Friday nights, half going one way, half

the other; none steering the steady course necessary for navigation in such cramped spaces.

In these conditions, intimacy is not a privilege. "This woman," it is possible to say as she passes, "has knobbly elbows. And this one has not been to Marsden or St. Margaret's for she swings her arms across instead of to and fro. That man is too fat, and that one, being thin, falsely believes he takes up more room than the child upon whose toes he treads."

Men and Women in Trams

In trams it is the same. "Here is a woman," the monologue continues, "with peculiar knees, and beside me a man whose ample beam is out of all proportion to his feet."

Break that into eccentric lines, and Auden himself would not outdo it.

And again: "Your shoulder blade—Dear sir—I must aver—is very prominent—To-day. Do you agree? — Or do I make too free—With the close intimacy—Of your anatomy?—I have a plan—You know—For making trams go slow—And if I can—I'll quench their fires—With rubber tyres—And then—Dear Man—Your stern—So rude—Will not obtrude—Or if it does—It can."

Silly? Of course. But the trams themselves are silly.

They start at one end of the town, go to the other, and return. Never do they reach any destination. They are labelled *Kelburn* or *Wadestown*. They rush to one or the other. They pretend they have arrived. But then it is *Island Bay*, or *Miramar*, and they must be off again. They cannot settle. Noise is their only purpose, and only in making noise are they successful. They are ugly brutes, and I do not envy them their claim to greater intimacy than is mine. As I said, it is no privilege.

The trams must know who sits hard upon them, and who sits soft. They will know whose shoes are worn, and whose pinch; who wears long underpants, and whose socks have no suspenders. They will hear from Mrs. Smith when Mrs. Jones expects her next, from Mr. Brown whose beer is best, from Mr. Green which wind blows most out of his garden.

Talkative Citizens

For Wellington citizens are not reticent. If they do not shout their private affairs about the trams, they display their private vices in the streets. I know, for instance, that Mr. James, who bumped me off the pavement this morning, subjects his wife to mental cruelty; that Mr. Robert, who tried to eye me down this afternoon, would like to be overbearing but has not the nerve; that the eight o'clockers are more gentle than the half-past eighthers, and the nine o'clockers gentler still; and that none of them really gives a tinker's tuppence for me, or manners, or the Golden Rule.

I much prefer a horse, who stands through the lunch hour on Customhouse Quay. He is the only one of all the beasts who does not seem to be active in objecting to the presence of others on the streets. He only bumps me when the sugar runs out — a gentle, reflective bump — and then returns to his chaff.

As they say in Dunedin: "And a penny, Mr. Sullivan." Let us have more horses.

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