

There's a

MODUS OPERANDI FOR RAT-CATCHING

Wellington's Rodent Control Officer Has Slain His Thousands



"SOME people look on mine as an insignificant, degraded sort of job. They expect to see a lout or a drunkard doing this work. But my profession requires a knowledge of psychology, toxicology, powers of observation, and, above all, intelligence. And . . . yes . . . it needs courage."

The man who said this was P. Procter, the Wellington City Corporation's Rat Detective.

"Why did I take it up?" he echoed my question. "Well, my father and his father before him were farmers in England. I was the youngest of the family and regarded, as youngest sons were in England, as a bit of a nuisance. My father gave me the job of destroying all the vermin about the farm; perhaps

he wanted to destroy me too. But I had to catch all the rats and I suppose it became second nature.

"How do you go about it?"

"The modus operandi of rat-catching would fill a book. And let me tell you, it's no joke entering someone's premises at midnight, groping for the light switches and finding 50 or 60 rats staring at you. How would you like that?"

"Not up my street," I said.

"Mind you, it's interesting. I started with the council in 1923 and have been rodent officer or, to give it its proper title, Inspector of Rodent Control, for the last eight years."

Mr. Procter then settled down to deal with the science of rodent detection. "There's more in the rat-catcher's job—that's the tin-tacks name for it—than killing them with a stick. Take the psychological aspect. I deal with all sorts of people. I might have to go into a pub or a lady's boudoir. And for that sort of job, you know, you have to have a certain mentality. You must be able to sum up the person's reactions in five seconds and decide what line of diplomacy to adopt.

The Right Approach

"When I call at a rat-populated house I watch my step. I casually inquire about general conditions. I might even be told a story about the old cat next door, but I generally find that there is a neighbourly feeling and that most people are jolly decent folk. There are narks, of course.

"But the job needs specialisation. Let me put it this way. Say your wife was ill. You would telephone the doctor and try to explain her symptoms. The doctor would simply say: 'I can't do anything unless I see her.' In the same way I am consulted about rats. I make my investigations and determine the methods of approach and attack, and what is best to use—poison, my dogs, or the trusty cane."

"So you keep trained dogs?"

"Three beauties; fox terriers who have been rat-catching all their lives. They got 95 one night. Some rats are fierce: they swing on a dog's lip; they bite the hand, the teeth closing over like a nose-ring. It takes years to learn the job. To-day I can stand on a doorstep and tell immediately if there are any rats about."

"Do you smell them out?"

"Not exactly. You see, I have developed a sort of sixth sense. In my profession you get highly developed. I can find rats where other people can't. I'll tell you of a curious case.

"I was called to a business man's office. He had a fine polished desk and his room was heavily carpeted. I said:

(continued on next page)



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WELLINGTON'S Inspector of Rodent Control. At top, ready to start the day's work; below, with his cyanide pump and one of his fox-terriers