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## BOOKS

# Streets of Wellington

THE STREETS OF MY CITY: WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND. By F. L. Irvine-Smith, A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington, 20.

SOME authors, like some generals, die in the hour of victory. Such a one was Miss F. L. Irvine-Smith, who lived just long enough to see her life's work, *The Streets of My City*, in such demand during the Christmas season of 1948 that the first edition was quickly sold out. Such a sale of a book about historical origins may have surprised many, but this was a book with a special local appeal, pleasantly written and well printed, with a dust-cover showing Wellington from the air that was an inspiration. If ever a jacket helped to sell a book, it was this one. The book caught Wellington's eye and touched its pride just at the right moment.

Miss Irvine-Smith was a teacher of history, and to the study of Wellington's place-names she brought a scholar's disposition and training as well as a lover's devotion. The caution to beware of obvious derivations applies to this kind of research as well as its etymology. The book has faults. At times the style is loose and over-sentimental, and the story over-discursive. These faults, however, cannot be entirely separated from its virtues, for this is a lively, gossipy historical record, not a dry-as-dust list of origins. Miss Irvine-Smith always had an eye to the human side of her story. She was interested in the man or the thing that provided the name, and in the folk living in the street that bore it. And she was able to convey her pleasant personality to the reader.

In a measure, therefore, this is a political, social, and economic history of Wellington built up round its place-names. If you are imaginative enough to look for it, most place-names have an interest. They are sign-posts in history. Dips into the obvious like View Roads and Prospect Avenues may be ignored, but a Brown or a Smith Street may have a history of human endeavour that is worth preserving. South Africa has two Smith names that recall one of the great personal romances of war. In this country Wellington provides the best material. It was the first city to be founded, and its sponsors were organised and distinguished. The central name opens out a pageant of history from Assaye to Tennyson's Ode, and there

are a string of other names associated with the Duke. In Lambton Quay one is in touch with a key event in the development of the British Commonwealth. Wakefield and Pencarrow, Baring and Somes, Hutt and Willis, recall the vision and rashness of the Company, which had such momentous consequences for New Zealand. But Miss Irvine-Smith does not stop at the great



MISS F. L. IRVINE-SMITH  
A scholar's disposition and a lover's devotion

or the prominent. She connects hundreds of names with ships, governors, mayors, politicians, lawyers, merchants, teachers, tradesmen, all sorts of people, many of them long forgotten. Here is a memorial to them.

The photographic illustrations are first-rate. The only possible criticism of them is that they show the city only in her best dress, and even her lovers must admit that she is at times and in places, dowdy and drab. A. H. Messenger's sketches provide a touch of homeliness here and there.

*The Streets of My City* comes upon a wave of interest in New Zealand history. Other cities, and towns, however small, should take note of this fine production. There is widespread need of similar research. And let everyone heed the author's advice to choose place-names wisely, so that they will recall what is worthy.

—A.M.

### PRIZE NOVEL

ALL THE KING'S MEN. By Robert Penn Warren. Eyre and Spottiswoode. English price, 12/6.

AWARDED a Pulitzer prize in 1947, Robert Penn Warren's novel *All the King's Men* has now been re-published in England. The story, that of a Southern politician, Willie Stark, a man of the people corrupted by success, is told mainly by Jack Burden, press agent and henchman to Stark. The author handles with considerable skill this narrative device of an intelligent sympathetic observer situated at the centre of events, which, as Henry James demonstrates in his prefaces, allows for some of the best effects in fiction—economy, suspense and intensity.

The career of Willie Stark from farm boy to law, then politics and the Governorship of the State, in some respects parallels but never closely follows that of Huey Long. Stark exemplifies the hard-driving man of affairs obsessed with an illusion of a humanitarian mission, but who is in fact a hollow individual able to achieve fulfilment only in power and in the oppression of those who retain their humanity. But the novel is more than a political document; it is a

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, APRIL 29