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Wellington Notebook

I'm a Stranger Here Myself

EOPLE live in Wellington ear for no reason at all." And so on, because it happens to be the centre of Government. It's a place to work. Home is somewhere else. Naturally this is reflected in the Wellingtonian's attitude to life in general and to a stranger in town in particular.

"So you come from the South," says the Wellingtonian, looking wary and slightly preoccupied. If he thought of Wellington as home he'd immediately ask how you liked the town. Any Dunedin citizen would ask you that. But he doesn't. He looks you up and down, decides you're probably harmless, but not harmless enough to take a chance on, and goes back to his inter-departmental manoeuvring. Somewhere down at the grass roots of Wellington's square inch lawns there must be a few natives, but whether they are to be found in Karori or Haining Street I don't know-yet.

Inconsistent Wariness

THE citizens of Wellington have, I suppose, good reason to look warily at a stranger. He is bound to hit them up for something; a flat, a house, a pair of nylons, a clean place to eat.

went through it themselves when they first arrived, they've felt the innumerable pressures set up by too many people trying to live in too small a space. So they look at the stranger warily, willing to tell him what



they can, but not wanting to be landed with any responsibility over anybody else's pursuit of living space or scarce material comforts. "It's pretty tough," they seem to be saying, before they even open their mouths. "I've been through it, and you'll have to go through it too. I can't do it for you, so please don't ask me." It's an understandable attitude, and one you get used to quickly, but it's lit by one glaring inconsistency; the streetcorner paper sellers. There are the papers in a box (so they won't blow away), the change in an open tin. Very seldom anybody there. Help yourself! So you do, and nobody complains of being chiselled. Once I did see a man in attendance. All I had was a ha'penny and a pound note. He couldn't change the pound. "You can pay me when you come back this evening," he said, with a wide open smile, never having seen me Twopence isn't much, but this man made his living out of twopences . .

Gracious Living

T'S an old story in Wellington. Most of the citizens carry the scars of the chase. The stranger in town may or may not be influenced by the stories he hears, but while he does his own house-hunting there is always in his ears a susurrous of grisly tales. "... Rain pouring through a hole in the ceiling, wife couldn't dry the baby's washing. No hot water; landlady wouldn't do a thing about it.' Twelve months in one room with a wife and two kids, then thrown out on my

while one tries methods, answers advertisements, tests theories already a thousand times tested, and covers a startling amount of countryside, vertical and horizontal. One theory is that the more friends one has and the more one badgers them, the more chance one has of landing a flat. To the stranger this seems fair enough until he discovers a Great Wellington Truth; a truth based on the fallacy of everybody taking in his neighbour's washing, but nevertheless an operationally effective truth. "Hullo," one says, "how nice to see you. Do you know of a flat?"

"No, but if you hear of one, please let me know right away. My lease is up next month.

Evidently the search never stops. You hope for a neighbour to pass his slightly better flat on to you so that you can leave your somewhat inferior one to somebody else. The fallacy is evident to the homeless masses at the bottom of the ladder, scrabbling about in rooms and bed sits., but it is one thing to prove a fallacy and quite another to find enough space for a comfortable life.

Sophistication in the Capital

WELLINGTON has a number of elegant diplomats and a high proportion of unmarried women. These may or may not be reasons why the women of Wellington dress a little more smartly than is the case in the South Island. The effect seems to come from the outfit as a whole. Each one is a complete unit of taste. Any handbag won't do, it must be the right handbag; the shoes must be right in colour, elevation of heel, and degree of ventilation. The ensemble must look new; a sign of wear, even if it is only a blurred crease or a fit that has become more comfortable through use, is a mark lost in chic. Style before comfort, please. How the young working women do it, I don't know. They are apt to live in single rooms where there just isn't space to hang an 'extensive wardrobe. Do they buy a frock, wear it three times, look at it regretfully, and then throw it away?

"Life moves a little faster in Wellington," an expert told me, dreamily comparing the degree of polish on two lacquered finger nails.

"Maybe," I said, "but not quite so fast as that."

"The women are more sophisticated," she pursued, neglecting my question on wardrobe space. "You can see that by the way they dress."

A full circle, but no answer to my question. Ah well, why bother? It is most pleasant on a summer morning to see the office workers tittupping on their

high heels down the steep streets and staircases, laughing. in the brisk breeze and grabbing at their skirts. Sophisticated? That's a flattened word, with little meaning left, but there must be something in the



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