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WELLINGTON ROUNABOUT

By "Thid"

Courtenay Place

I AM beset and bedevilled — by war, and by rumours of war. It is impossible to get away from them. They are all over Wellington, as plentiful as the slips in the suburbs and the rats in the city.

Two wild and ancient Irishmen nearly attained the heights of an appearance in Roundabout. Both were interesting, but too censorable, if I may coin a word. One told me he'd been corporal in the guard of honour to the Kaiser when William visited Malta, and the Kaiser, as you would be thinkin', admired his horse. But Patrick had strong views on the present situation and has to be omitted.

George had no contact with the Kaiser as a claim to fame. He'd spent five years at the last war and a considerable period after that in gaol. Sure he'd been in gaol. Three times did he drink too much and three times did they find him navigating that very Manners Street. Three times did the big men hail him up and three times did the judge pronounce upon him. With the third time the devils put him away to sober him up, him that had lost his father, two brothers, and given a son to his country. "Will you just feel my face now and touch where the shrapnel went in."

Perhaps it is safe to say of George that he put himself on record as one whose opinion of the last war was that it was all dinner-time and no dinner.

Otherwise, George too has to be censored, but I can mention an old digger who stopped me in Willis Street around 12 o'clock of the night following.

The Author

"Hayah, bud." "And to you." "You know, I was there for five years last time, and I've got a boy just like you. Now, whadydo?" "I earn my living dishonestly." "Youra writer? Y'know, I'm gonarite a book." "When?" "Right now. Got any paper?" "Got any ideas?" "Yes, sir! I'm not gonarite about people. I'm gonarite about the whole world." I helped him up again. "That sounds like a really promising plot." "Plot! Promising! Would you tell me? Now old man, would you do me a favour. Just a small favour. And I'm awful crook. Could you make it ninepence?"

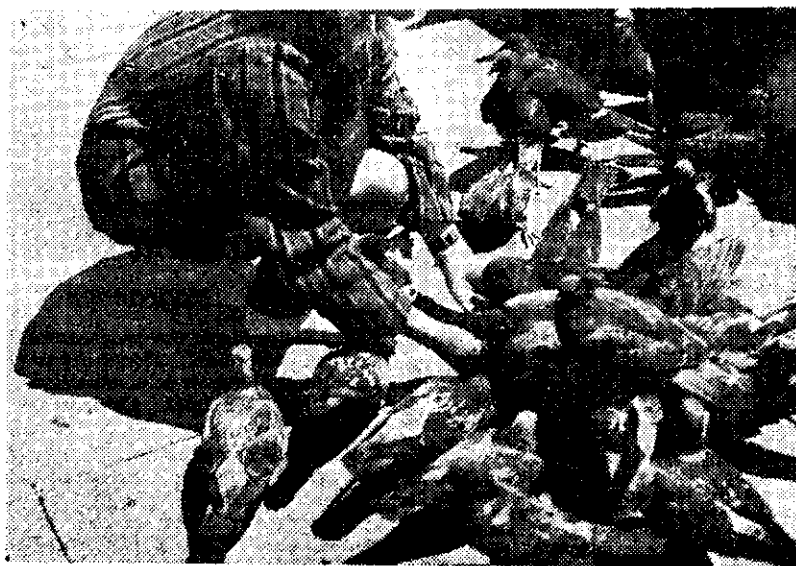
I did.

But let's go to Courtenay Place and have a rest. The sun, naturally, is there too, shining on a lot of old men who

you can see more than a little sky at a time. It is one of my biggest complaints against the place that it builds all its best buildings only in places where it is impossible to stand back and admire them. Horrible as the thought may seem to the squeamish, I have sometimes permitted myself to envy Napier the earthquake. It gave the town room in which to plan for better things. A good deal of Wellington could profitably be shaken down.

A Change Impending

However, they tell me it's all being shifted to the Hutt Valley in any case, and that we'll soon have nothing left here but the wharves, the Government Centre, the Chinese fruit shops, and the smelly restaurants in which the Public Servants fight dyspepsia. No matter, we are in Courtenay Place, where newer streets cut diagonally into the line of some old bullock track, as silly and twisty and delightful as Timaru's Stafford Street. The acute angles of the intersections leave room for gardens, brick borders, clean concrete paths. Here we can stop a while, for in places like this Wellington allows some licence. I hope to take my lunch there someday and sunbathe in a pair of trunks. I'm



monopolise the seats, for all eternity. A small boy squats on the path, his hands full of crumbs and wheat.

The Pigeons

Round him the pigeons strut and gobble. On the grass stands a mother with a very little girl. The little girl puts out her hand to the pigeons and totters over to the birds. They carefully avoid her uncertain feet and hop aside when she tries to catch them. The boy looks up, not very concerned, and continues to feed them from his hand. Some wheel around the little girl's head, and this seems to please her greatly. She chases them round the lawn. They fly away but flutter back for the last of the bread. One hops across the road, waits for a car to pass, and waddles unhurriedly over to the footpath. Not even shy of the camera, it goes past to join the group feeding. Here indeed is peace.

Excepting the northern end of Lambton Quay and the great unknown of the waterfront, Courtenay Place is the only place in Wellington's business area where

sure no one would notice, for the lawns in Courtenay Place are walled in with the seclusion of a foreign place. Over the wall the world rushes by, too hasty to see what goes on inside. It is a place for children and old men, for prams and wheel-chairs, and for me when the office castles seem too high elsewhere.

James Again

As yet I have no pram, and am some years off the wheel-chair, but there are moments when either would be useful, for James, that very inconvenient fellow, continually disturbs my peace.

By the sundial he found me that day, and whispered another of those fantastic rumours of war into my ear. Where on earth, I asked him, had he heard that one?

Nonchalant, James admitted he hadn't yet heard it, although he expected to, shortly. At the moment he was just starting it.

Soon, then, you will hear about it. But take no notice. Come to Courtenay Place. It's much more pleasant.

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