

AROUND WELLINGTON

In Which "THID" Encounters A Lady With Illusions

IT was two days after the NBS used records sent from Egypt by the Broadcasting Unit. Everyone had been saying what a wonderful thing the radio was. "Just fancy; all those thousands of miles" they said. And then the old lady came along with her illusions and spoilt it all. It was about the time, too, that the news service for our troops was getting well under way. All the way from here to there, twelve thousand miles if it's an inch, the news was going out over the radio-telephones and shortwaves, up to the ionosphere, through the upper air where the weather is always so good it doesn't matter; all that way the news was going out that weaners were selling at 12/6 and the lemon trees were blooming. And then the old lady came along with her

illusions and it did not seem quite so wonderful.

Queer Noises and Steam

Her case history went back to a time, as far as I could make out, when she had lived in a flat which was beside another flat where two men had a wireless set. They must have had a transmitter with wires all over the place, the electrician called often, and queer things happening to the geyser in the bathroom. In their flat they made queer noises and in the bathroom they made steam.

Well, this lady came into the office and she asked if we had anything for it, us being *The Listener*. She explained that she was a reporter, and we understood that this meant she could come in and tell us all about it.

Well, it was like this:

She would be at home writing her reports (ladies' reporting, you understand?) and then these noises would come and one of the men was large and unpleasant and drank a lot. (You could count the bottles before the rag man came.) And after a while they began to get at her with their apparatus. When

she would be in bed at night the rhymes (her own description) would come down over her. She made a movement to indicate a weight on her shoulders.

And her bed would make movements. She wondered if we could give her anything to stop it. She wondered if we could tell her if there was any way these men *could* do these things to her? Evidently she was not very certain about it and required, before she was given the cure, to be assured that the malady really existed.

Very Strange Things

These rhymes, as she called them, were evidently very strange things. I can quite appreciate how she felt about them. It was the way very small children feel when they are asleep and the blankets and quilting climb up over their heads. That was the way the old lady felt about the rhymes. Although it might be daylight, or the electric light might be on, it would still seem to be dark and the weight pressed all the harder on her because she could not see it. All the time the rhymes would be going into her ears and racing round inside her head where she could not catch them even for the small moment necessary to appreciate exactly what they were. So she saw "Journal of the National Broadcasting Service," written up at our front door and she came in to see if we had anything that would stop the rhymes.

Occasionally, as she told me about it, she would laugh, almost as if she realised that the situation was ludicrous. For all that, I would not care to be dogmatic and say she had a sense of humour.

"Change of Address"

It was then just about the time of the first afternoon news broadcast. All the way from Daventry it was coming and into the shortwave receiver, through the landlines, out through the big transmitter with the aerial that swings from seven hundred feet. It was all very wonderful, when you came to think about it, or if you did, but it seemed to disconcert her somewhat and I had to turn it off.

She said she found when she shifted into another room that the rhyming ceased to worry her. She decided therefore to move her residence. She told me her new address, and she asked, if we did hear of anything that would stop the rhyming in her head, would we send the information on there. I promised that this matter would be kept closely under review, but am now rather at a loss, because during our small talk she mentioned the same matter four times and gave five different addresses, all several hundred miles away from Wellington.

When she shifted her residence all was well for a little while, but then the men must have found out where she was because they send the noises after her. Again the oppression descended on her when she lay in bed and again the mattress moved under her.

(When you feel the bed moving in little quivers at night just before you go to sleep, you have either been reading about earthquakes or you are having trouble with civilisation, like this old lady.)

"At the Movies, Too"

She said she could still get away from these men and their apparatus if she moved into another room. She thought for a while that they would not be able to follow her into such a crowded place as a picture theatre. So she tried going

to the movies. Unfortunately, however, she is somewhat deaf, and when she goes to the movies she has to get a seat where they have a plug for earphones. As soon as she would put the earphones on the men would know where she was, and again they would get at her. It was like a surging and flowing, the movement of the rhymes in her head. It was funny, though, she said: as soon as she took off the earphones and got back into herself the rhyming stopped.

It was very worrying, you know. She was a reporter, she said. "That's why I came in here, you understand." And with this rhyming the men prevented her from doing her work. And they spent such a lot of time in the bathroom. It was so inconvenient. Really, she had not liked to complain, but she was worried about it. She could hear the gas-heater going and she was sure they were in there making steam.

Devilish Air-Raid Sirens

To judge by their complaints, the people of England hate the air-raid alarms more than they hate air raids, says "Time." Recently the Ministry for Home Security bowed to the popular will, and reduced as much as it could the time of sounding each alarm—from two minutes to one.

No haphazard noisemakers are Britain's wailing sirens. Sounded by air pressure operating on electric oscillators, they produce a discord which in the Middle Ages was regarded as the work of the devil. This discord is the augmented fourth (example: C and F sharp on the piano), was called the tritone because it spans three whole tones.

The tritone was banned in sacred music, thus giving rise to a maxim: "Mi contra fa est diabolus in musica" (The tritone is the devil in music). When the sirens, beginning on a sweet major third or fifth, slip up and down into the blood-curdling tritone, it sounds that way to Londoners.

Now, did we know of anything that would make it impossible for them to get after her?

In a Tobacco Tin

She said she had read in the papers about a small transmitter the size of a matchbox that could be carried in the pocket. Perhaps, she suggested, it was one of these things they were using to follow her with and get at her. Did we know about these?

"Oh yes," I said, "they are made. They are about this big." I produced a tobacco tin. "They are really only small radio sets, just as a wristlet watch is only a small clock."

She looked at the tobacco tin. "I think," I said, "that the trouble is that you have been worried by the noise of a wireless and you are extremely sensitive to the sounds you remember about it."

"Batteries!" she said. "And there are batteries in there, too, are there?"—pointing to the tobacco tin.

It was hopeless. I said there were. "But," I said, "these are quite harm-

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..you can't bequeath your Business Judgment..

You can make a will disposing of your material possessions, but you cannot pass on your ability to a successor to manage the estate you leave. Administering your affairs after you have gone will not be any simpler than managing them whilst you are here. Probably it will not be so easy . . . Not many individuals care to have this duty imposed upon them.

The Public Trustee, with a staff of competent specialists, is trained in this important work. The Public Trustee will prepare your will free of charge, and hold it in safe custody, if appointed Executor.

Consult the Public Trustee or any of his branch officers.

The
PUBLIC TRUSTEE

