

King of Babylon

IN chapter one, verse one, of the Book of Daniel, we are told that "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it." In the BBC play, *Nebuchadnezzar*, by Lord Duncannon and Muriel Jenkins (*ZB Sunday Showcase*, September 16), the authors have moved on from this terse introduction through a concentrated scrap of emotional history (only four brief chapters in all). From it they have fashioned a



witty restatement of an old, familiar story in serious dramatic terms. The curious trio, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ("upon whose bodies the fire had no power"), emerge as three personable characters: the first pompous and academic, the second human and sensible, and the third shifty and nervous.

Nebuchadnezzar himself (played by Donald Wolfit, below, left), comes to life as a gigantic schizophrenic, intolerable and cruel on the one hand, and comic and genial on the other. The two aspects of his character are brought together by a fundamental religious zeal, first expressed in the worship of the Golden Image, and then canalised into a knowledge of the Living God. Only Bel-Shalti-Nannar, High Priestess of the Temple of the Moon God, and the supposed daughter of Nebuchadnezzar (like all young people with fairly extensive responsibilities, she is a somewhat precocious character), may bewilder those familiar with the Book of Daniel; but her presence is accounted for by a discovery of Sir Leonard Woolley. In his book *Excavations at Ur* he describes the school over which she presided.

The music for the production was composed by Elizabeth Poston. A special feature of it is the use made of the psaltery, played by Joan Rimmer. After considerable research Miss Rimmer had this archaic instrument reconstructed for her and then had to master the art of playing it. The roles of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are played by Eric Anderson, John Gabriel and Brian Haines, while the exotic Bel-Shalti-Nannar is played by Sulwen Morgan. The narrator is Lord Duncannon, the co-author.

THE INVADED

*SINCE then and for a long time
We were always in retreat.
It was after the big battle,
Mud, metal and the stench
Of corpses in the slit trenches.
And in our minds was defeat, defeat.*

*Suddenly that captain appeared
With a few troops, hard, lean,
Clothed like him in rags and a beard.
Our shame, their weapons were clean.*

*They went through, leaving us
Pathetic as plucked fowls, their eyes
Mean and purposeful, not watching
Us the machine-gun was stitching.*

*Then there was silence
As after the hooting of an owl.*

*Shortly after, I remember,
We sometimes turned and deployed
To enfilade the confident enemy
From roadside timber, enjoying
Pinking their darkened buttons, thinking
Less of them tonight will be eating and drinking.*

*—Then melting, rejoicing in retreat
On battle-blistered feet.*

*We never saw that captain again.
He was a living legend. They said
He was dead among the guerrillas.*

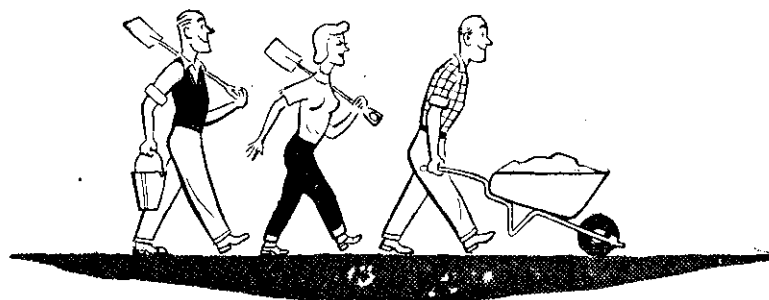
*But later we mounted our attack Not then
And hurled the unthinking enemy back.*

*That soil we bled upon
So desperately was our own.*

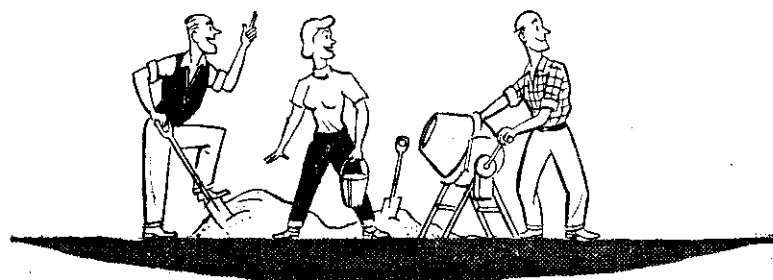
*Now deep ploughing turns
Weapons up from the war, and stones.
Farmyard dogs, nose to the ground,
Uncover graveless bones.*

—Denis Glover

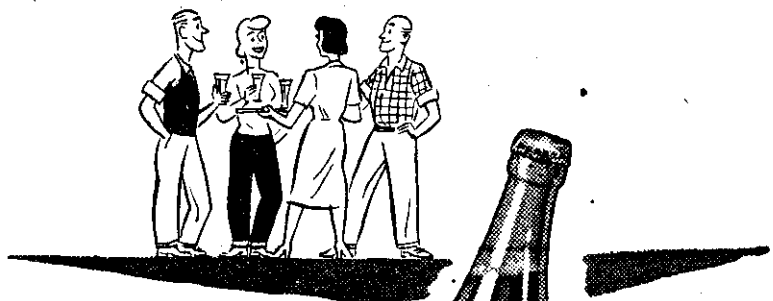
Pause



for a



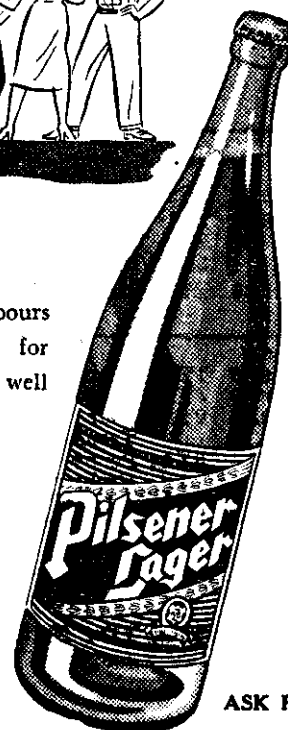
Pilsener



When friends and neighbours
lend a hand, a pause for
Pilsener is always well
received

Pilsener Lager

Brewed by the
New Zealand
Breweries Ltd.



THOSE WHO KNOW

ASK FOR IT BY NAME!

PL4-2