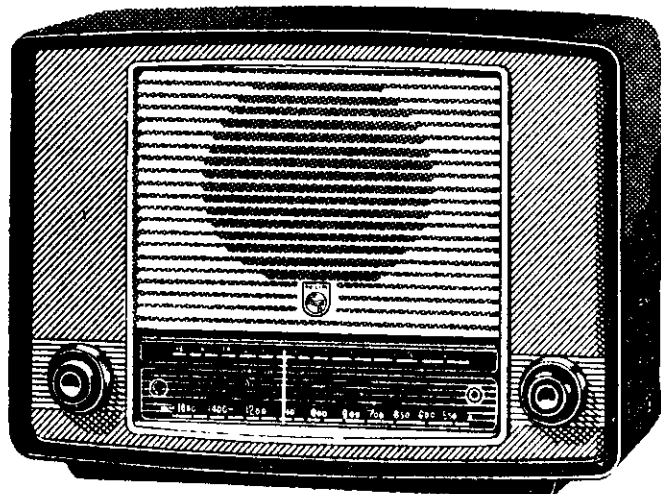


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PHILIPS FOR MUSICAL EQUIPMENT

THE CENTRE OF POWER

THERE is a time, soon after lunch, when the secretary slumps in her chair, feeling suddenly a little large for her girdle, when the office boy dreams over the stamp book balance, when the boss puts his elbows on the desk and concentrates with closed eyes, and when Winston Churchill and millions of sensible *latinos* rejuvenate themselves with a proper siesta. It was about this time I stepped into a quiet bar to buy a bottle of burgundy for a birthday. The barman was dreaming by the beer pump and his one client, a well tweeded type, was contemplating a brandy. I gave my order and the barman lifted a trap door and disappeared into the cellar. "Dis descendeth," remarked my neighbour, in a well tweeded accent, probably using Pluto's alias, "A fellow of fearful mien, well aspected to hell."

"I don't expect much from him," I said, "not as much as Persephone; just a bottle of mediocre burgundy. I hope it may fizz a little."

"A powerful weapon when charged," he said, "a waiter's last line of defence. Carry it carefully through the streets of this great city."

"Are you a visitor to our town?" I asked.

He nodded, shifting his grip slightly on the brandy. "I'm a student of military power," he said. "Auckland is the centre of our military power, and I repair to the centre at regular intervals to study. The last semester, an American term, you understand, lasted a week, and coincided with the Auckland Cup. . . Head work, you understand, all head work, and a readiness to pay the price: the key to success on the race track and the field of battle."

"Did you lose much?" I asked.

"I am in a position to lose all," he said. "We are all in a position to lose all." The rest of the brandy disappeared in one magnificent swallow. "What do I see round about?" he went on. "A small, obsolete naval force soon to be replaced by a small, obsolete naval force. A small, obsolete air force whose best unit can still engage barefoot Malayan guerillas on equal terms. . . Next year, who knows? And ground forces carefully maintaining their three armoured vehicles with fresh paint lest the local garbage collection remove them to the dump early one Monday morning."

The barman returned with the burgundy. My well tweeded friend extended his empty glass and the barman reached down a bottle of very highly regarded liqueur cognac and poured him a double. He splashed in soda. "Rocks me every time you do that," the barman said. "Fair go. Soda with that!"

"Please join me. We shall lose no battles if we spend yet half an hour."

It was extremely good brandy.

"Do not mistake me," he went on, with a tug at the points of his mustard tweed waistcoat. "I mean no cheap jibes. Rather I mourn our plight, and bitterly recognise the inevitable.

We, who are used to command, no longer have the power to command. Power has left us in the inevitable progression of history. We spend money as a sop to the past, without relation to the realities of the present. We can no longer pay the price."

There was a pause. I paid the price of my burgundy and prepared to leave.

"Brave days!" he said suddenly, his face lighting up. "Who's to deny us the past? Yesterday I led a raiding party up from the East Coast. We needed muskets, which were stored in a warehouse on the waterfront, having lately been unloaded from the barque Scintilla. Now I had learned that the guard regiment was about to be relieved and it seemed that an attack at dusk would give us a fair chance of escaping with our booty in the growing darkness. Pursuit by the new guard regiment could be no more than slow. The plan was this . . ."

I left unnoticed as he revealed his tactical scheme: a fluent and unlikely character, even in a centre of power as puissant as Auckland.

Cooking for a Few Friends

HENDERSON, a few miles north-west of Auckland, has an easy going, neighbourly sort of energy that speaks at least three languages; New Zealand English, Maori, and whatever it is that is spoken on the Dalmatian coast of Yugoslavia. This last is a fluent tongue for making wine, and the best Dally wine is good, though that matters little to us New Zealanders. We tend to buy a gallon for Saturday night and then spike it with a bottle of Australian whisky. The people of the Henderson district aim to raise £10,000 and build a hall. So far they've invited the rest of Auckland to come and spend their money at a couple of real expensive Sunday afternoon blow outs. One was called a sports meeting. It had a light-hearted, late season game of football, Maori versus Pakeha, a wrestling demonstration, very heavy-weight, whippet races and a hangi. I happened to be passing, downwind, and smelt roast pork afar off, but by that time the ovens were empty and the people full, except the kids, who were crowded tensely

(continued on next page)



"A fluent and unlikely character"