

# HAPPINESS IS WHERE YOU FIND IT



Jack Acland, M.P.,  
Recommends  
The Country

I WANT to discuss with you my idea of a "good citizen." I cannot do better than quote the words of the Bible: "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you." A good citizen is a man who thinks not of himself but of the people around him, and in this way there is no difference between a good citizen in the country and a good citizen in the town. The more thought I give to the matter, the more certain I am that education plays a most essential part in forming the character of the citizen, and that it is with the help of education that we can learn the true value of life. It seems to me that up to date our sense of values has been out of proportion. What people must realise is that it is happiness that counts, not money — a way of life rather than a standard of living. And in the adjustment of these values I am certain the school teacher will play an increasingly important part. Our problem is: to attain a new perspective of life which we will achieve only by a change of opinion and a readjustment of values.

I think we generally agree that democracy is the form of government best suited to people of our temperament, and if democracy is to function, the people must be trained to take their responsibilities. As Dorothy Thompson said recently, "Democracy depends on universal, vigorous, moral training in the home, in the church, and in the school." We must have social discipline, and if people don't know how to make themselves do the right thing, someone will rise up and tell them. Then democracy disappears.

The State, the framework in which the citizen lives, should provide for three things:

1. Economic development.
2. Political stability.
3. A desirable social life; and to attain this we must have a well balanced community with a vigorous rural population.

## Life from the Soil

I was struck by a recent remark of Mr. W. Brockington, whom some of you met, and most of you have heard over the air: "I think democracy flourishes at its best in the little towns and the country places—the democracy that treats the rich and the poor as though they were men; that sets men talking about the laws they live by and help make; and what heart-warming things men and women do when, as the old woman gathering sticks in the Worcester woodlands said to Lord Baldwin, 'God, goodwill and good neighbourhood are their company.'"

I do not think it is necessary to advance any arguments to qualify these statements. We realise that all life comes from the soil, and that it is the basis of our art, literature, and culture.

*IN a recent talk in Christchurch to the New Education Fellowship, Jack Acland, M.P., of Mid-Canterbury (above), made a strong appeal for a better appreciation of country life, and had some interesting suggestions to make for stopping the drift to the towns. Here are some extracts from his address.*

It is there we must look for our economic development, our political stability, and a desirable social life.

As you know, the settlement of Canterbury was brought about chiefly by the efforts of two men, Godley and Wakefield, who hoped to transport a slice of English society from top to bottom to the other side of the hemisphere. The dream was only partially realised. Sir George Grey, who spent his early years in Ireland and had first-hand knowledge of the miseries arising from tenant farming, had no wish to see the same in New Zealand, and upset their plans by throwing open the land and the remainder of the Canterbury Province at a low rental. The very state of affairs which Godley and Wakefield had striven to avoid therefore came about: great areas of land were taken up by individuals and the "shepherd kings" of Canterbury played a prominent part in the political, social and economic life of the community. As a descendant of one of these early settlers, I am not prepared to say tonight whether this was a good or a bad thing, but I do wish to point out the effect on the history of this country.

## Break-up of Community Life

The life of Canterbury to begin with, centred round the big sheep stations and round the station owner, who lived on his estate, even though a manager might be employed, and was the uncrowned king of the district. He was patron of the local clubs and societies, in many cases a man of culture and education, who gave leadership to the life of his particular district. Under this leadership, the people in the district lived a full life — they were, in most cases, a virile, hard-working, and self-reliant people. The breaking-up of the large sheep stations was a contributing factor in the decline of the community life in the small centres, but this was considerably hastened by the coming of the motor-car, the radio, and the motion picture. These took the place of the village pub and blacksmith shop, originally the meeting place (the community centre) for the people in the agricultural districts—with advantage, perhaps, to their health but not to their community spirit.

I have not the time to trace the history of local government, but must point out that the powers of the county councils and boroughs are gradually being whittled away under the pressure of centralisation in Wellington, and this means that district people do not have a true civic or social feeling. In the past they had a sense of service to the rest of the community. They also had opportunities of political self-expression and of making a definite and worthwhile contribution to the well-being of society.

Among other causes of the decline in community life is the drift to the towns. In 1901, 17 per cent of New Zealand's population lived in towns with a population of more than 10,000. In 1936 (and the position has since become worse) 41.55 per cent lived in towns of that size. In 1936, 61 per cent of the North Island's population lived in towns with a population of more than 10,000 people and 56 per cent of the South Island's people.

The causes of this drift were partly economic—the attraction of higher wages, the 40-hour week, no work on Saturdays, and so on—and partly the lack of the right sort of education. In other words, our people have acquired a completely false set of values — they prefer the high-speed entertainment of the town to the more simple and natural pursuits of country life.

Then there is the housing problem. In many cases when a single man marries in the country, his employer has to dispense with his services through lack of suitable accommodation for him. It is also noticeable that if any young man shows particular promise at school it is immediately said that he must be sent to the town to work, that there is no scope for him in the country, and that his qualifications would be wasted.

I do not want to leave you with the impression that I think town life has more advantages than has country life. On the contrary, I believe that country life with all its disadvantages can give greater happiness, more freedom, and contentment than town life. But I think that we politicians, and others as well, do the country a dis-service by continually pointing out the joys of town life compared with the hardships of country life, without pointing out at the same time the advantages of country life compared with the disadvantages of town life. The nearer the people are to the soil, the happier they are, and the more simple and honest their happiness.

## Less Divorce in the Country

For some time, too, I have been meaning to examine the divorce figures as between town and country. From my own observations I would say that there is a larger percentage of divorces in the town than in the country. I don't suggest that the country man is any

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