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LAVELLE SCHOOLS OF DANCING

WE INTERVIEW A CHARACTER From The South Seas

THERE are times when characters out of fiction walk into one's presence and carry on conversation as if they really existed. Usually, when this happens, a tense or utterly absurd situation develops, and then you wake up. But I knew I was awake the day I was having morning tea and E. J. P. N. Micard came in the door looking for someone—my companion as it turned out. He was, I was quite sure, some minor character from a South Seas novel by Somerset Maugham, or out of some story in *Wide*

World. He wore a bow-tie, and a hat made of what we would call "island grass" of a dashing shape, and having a thick band of curiously woven grass around the crown. Under a fawn-coloured silken jacket he wore a waistcoat of pale beige satin, with a floral design embroidered lightly on it. His trousers were of heavy cream linen, and the knees had been patched. He walked in brown and white leather shoes.

When he appeared and looked from table to table, my companion held up a hand. The character from the South Seas spied it and grinned broadly. With a drawn-out "Aaaaah" he swept the air with his hat, bowed, and stepped gracefully across the room with everyone looking at him.

Introductions were brief, because he sat down and immediately took up the threads of a previous conversation with my companion. And while M. Micard leaned across his leather portfolio and talked animatedly of matters I did not understand, I watched his rapid gesturing and his volatile face; his hand, which tapped his hearer's forearm at every emphasis; and his blue eyes, which concentrated on his hearer's eyes, and allowed no half-hearted listening. When he fished in his portfolio for a letter, my friend began to explain: "M. Micard is from Tahiti. . . ." He was interrupted. But a moment later he was able to go further: "M. Micard was doubles champion of France in 1914. His brother is quite a famous explorer—I don't know if you've ever heard—Gaston Micard—went five times to the north of Greenland. He's something of a bridge player too. He was the champion of Paris one year. And he won the veteran doubles tennis championship here in Auckland the other day—paired with F. M. B. Fisher, who used to be a Minister of the Crown. Once he won a set from Anthony Wilding."

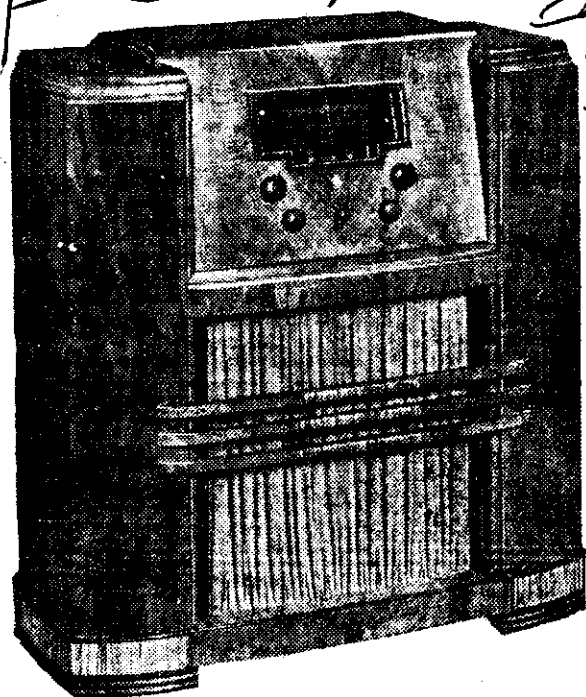
I also learned in due course that although he had come to New Zealand from Tahiti, he did not really belong there, though as I say he looked as if he might. He had gone there for a trip in 1940, and was caught by the collapse of France. And now after an unwilling stay of four years he was trying to get back to Europe. In the last war he was in the British Army.

Three Other "Wars"

M. Micard made to dismiss my friend's flattering introductions. And when they were over, the three of us began to talk of this and that—of what will happen after the war, of Russia, of France, of Tahiti ("an ante-chamber of death," Micard calls it) and of the destiny of the church in this century. He was one of those people who are completely at their ease the moment they meet you. He talked volubly of whatever came into his head—in this case, of topics he had previously discussed with my companion.

He began to repeat, on request, what he had been saying the other day about the "wars behind the war." We had a theory—a "seory" as he would call it—"You can see ze military aspect of ze war. But zere are other wars: ze war of womanhood—women are wanting power. You will see; zen we will have a world zat is quite 'woman-powered.'" He leaned low over the table, smiling at the word he had coined, and pointed at me with one hand. With the other, he emphasised his theory by tapping my forearm. "Also zere is ze war of ze yout' against ze old age, and ze war of ze coloured man against ze white man. But only in Russia is any sympathy for

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