

(continued from previous page)

on the summits. You get tired of the same clay banks, thistles, clumps of fennel, tussock, and cocksfoot. When rain is pouring down the windscreen, and yellow mud is flying up past the side windows, there is something absurd about the big sign by the hotel "HOT SPRING—Golf, Tennis, Croquet, Riding," and you desh past without a pause. Further on you see little knots of people waiting in the rain at gates, and you know there is a service car expected along this way soon. Big Maoris with suitcases, tiny little Maoris with baskets, waiting by the milk-can shelter, usually with a dog, watch you closely when you pass. And if you wind your window down, put your arm out and wave, perhaps you will get a great big smile.

\* \* \*

ONE thing you will notice everywhere up the East Coast is the New Zealand Army hat—lemon-squeezer variety, troops for the use of. The hat issue must have been a windfall to the rural Maori population. The biggest Maori and the tiniest little Maori will wear it, puggeree and all; you will see it in the milking-shed, on the roadside, anywhere. What the East Coast Maoris will do for new hats if there isn't another war in 25 years doesn't bear thinking about.

\* \* \*

EVEN when your itinerary allows for over 300 miles in one day, you take in some impression of oddities by the roadside that were passed in a flash. The Japanese prisoners, the Polish children playing in the cold wind; the crazy V sign someone made by winding pink rag round two sticks and fixing them on a roadman's hut, miles from anywhere, the kind of spot where you wouldn't expect to meet anyone if you passed it every day for six months; the roadside guest-house run by a woman who knows a good name when she gets it, and puts it on a board outside: "Mrs. Paramore, Prop.," the surprising sign "Subway," miles out in the wilderness, that makes you look for something unusual, and then when you round the corner you find the road merely ducks under red girders



"Nothing to do but wait"

carrying the railway line; the arrogant white rooster that apparently waits all day until a car approaches at high speed, and then leisurely crossed the road (we narrowly missed him one day, and the next day, when we had to retrace our steps, the same bird went through the same act at the same spot); the gigantic viaduct that towers above road and river, and seems so vast in comparison

with the two men on a jigger chugging across the narrow railway on top.

\* \* \*

THESE are the things of a moment. They come into sight suddenly and soon are lost to view, if you are hurrying. But whether you are in a hurry, or idling along at a mere 35, there is one unwelcome sight you don't quickly forget: the rear view of two or three hundred head of cattle. Out on the Takapau Plains, a pale mass on the road comes into view a mile away, and you recognise a mob of sheep. You breathe relief when you get close enough to see that they are coming towards you. You slow down to walking pace, and the dogs get them past you in a few moments. But up in the winding roads between Gisborne and Morere, you come on a herd of beef cattle without warping. You swing round a bend and there they are, spread out along 200 yards of narrow road, the hill on one side, a steep gully on the other. A Maori rides behind them in his Army hat, swishing a stick. You resign yourself. The drover is shrewd and drops back, to let your car do his work for a while. You contemplate the hind quarters of the sluggish beasts for what seems an hour. Each bend raises your hopes of finding a place to by-pass, and perhaps you get past a dozen or so. It is no use talking or muttering or even tooting, for there is really nothing to do but wait for the open gate where they will turn off to new pasture.

\* \* \*

IN younger years I studied Boyle's law, and heard vaguely of Grimm's Law. In recent times I have read with more enjoyment of Mencken's Law: "Whenever A annoys or injures B on the pretence of saving or improving X, A is a scoundrel." And now, after what is admittedly a limited experience of New Zealand hotels, I feel ready to propound my law, which establishes a relationship between (A) the distance in any given hotel of the light switches from the beds and (B) the distance of the given hotel from Civilisation—as understood by (1) automatic telephones, (2) automatic lifts, (3) decent coffee, (4) rude, impossible waitresses. I claim to have established that as (B) varies in units of 20 miles, (A) varies in units of approximately one inch. In other words that the light switch moves away from the bed about an inch for every 20 miles distance added between Hotel and Civilisation (as defined).

A good city hotel either has a light switch thoughtfully built in by the bed, or if the building is old, an extra reading lamp with its own switch clipped on to the head of the bed. A day's run by car, and you climb into a strange bed, read for a while, and then in reaching for the switch, only just manage it without toppling out. Another journey, and you climb into bed and get warm and settled, after reading until your head feels ready for the pillow, only to discover that you have to traverse a wide area of cold linoleum in order to reach a cord switch that could just as easily have been put in the corner where the bed is. Decent hotels have carpets, anyway.

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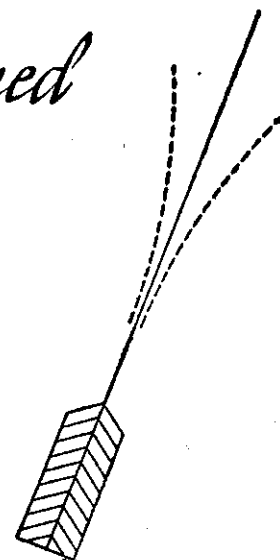
THERE may be a law governing bedside light-switches in hotels, but it would be hard to extract a principle from the vagaries of casual meals. In a town in a sheep-farming area you eat among men who wear sports coats and grey flannels, tan shoes, with brilliant check

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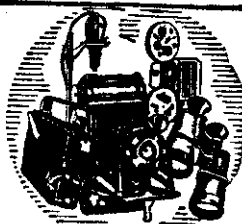
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