

HERE TO LOOK US OVER

Three Businessmen Who Are Interested in Books

NEW ZEALAND was recently visited by two Americans and one Englishman connected with the book trade. The Americans were here on behalf of American publishers in general, the Englishman was here on behalf of a big Liverpool film of colour printers. The Americans came under the aegis of the U.S. Office of War Information; the Englishman had come under his own steam; that is, without assistance from the authorities. In fact, it was the first time since 1940 that our staff reporter remembered meeting such a business man at large in the world in this way, though it was, of course, a common enough thing until then.

OUR meeting with the two Americans took place in the office of Sydney Greenbie, special assistant to the American Minister in New Zealand. They were Whitney Darrow, vice-president of the New York firm of Charles Scribner and Sons, and Edward P. Hamilton, president of John Wiley and Sons, publishers of a wide range of technical books. They apologised for their appearance—they had spent the night on the train from Auckland. There was a pause. Mr. Darrow said "Well!" Mr. Hamilton said "Go on, you tell them, Whitney." And Mr. Darrow began.

They had come as representatives of American publishers as a whole, not on business for their firms. They had been chosen by the United States Book Publishers' Bureau, and their visit had been facilitated by OWI. They were not interested in selling more American books. They were not here to secure trade. They were here to investigate publishing methods and conditions, and were interested in "American thought, American literature." "But for God's sake whatever you say don't say we're looking for manuscripts," said Mr. Darrow. "When we got to Australia evidently a lot of people thought we wanted them to send us their works. Piles of manuscript began to arrive. Everyone whose grandfather had written a diary thought he had something to sell us. We had no



EDWARD P. HAMILTON
Admired N.Z. children's books



WHITNEY DARROW
"Please don't send us manuscripts"

way of stopping it. The pile got as high as this—and we had to send all these papers back, and Oh! . . ."

All the reporters thought this was a great joke, and someone said "We'll protect you."

Co-operative Publishing

Mr. Darrow went on with his tale.

They wanted to get first-hand information here about our publishing, printing, and book-selling, and take it back to the Publishers' Bureau so that the American firms would understand how our conditions differed from those in the States. They had gone round all the member-publishers and pooled their various questions to bring with them.

When Mr. Darrow had finished his summary, he invited questions.

No one seemed to have one ready, so another thought occurred to Mr. Darrow. He said that to most people "books" meant novels. For the purpose of this visit, "books" meant "literature" as distinct from mere "reading matter." Nor were he and Mr. Hamilton upsetting any arrangements between the United States and Great Britain by coming here. All their relations with Britain were very cordial.

"Is our trade anything to you?" someone asked. "Well, yes," said Mr. Darrow. "we've been amazed at your stores here (he meant bookshops): you have wonderful stores, wonderful staffs. . ."

Another reporter asked whether they didn't think some prohibition ought to be placed on cheap inferior literature—"pulp magazines" and so on—that was corrupting taste. Mr. Darrow said he personally didn't believe in censorship of any kind.

"Not an educational censorship?"

"It's still censorship."

A woman reporter asked Mr. Darrow whether women were common in executive positions in American publishing. There were some, he supposed, but he was vague, as if the question had never

occurred to him. Someone asked whether America had any experience of co-operative publishing ventures. Mr. Darrow had never heard of any, and Mr. Hamilton said he thought they would be mainly confined to religious societies and such-like. But the co-operative movement in American industry was strong, and no doubt it could spread into the publishing field.

And soon after this it was time for Mr. Darrow and Mr. Hamilton to go and fix up their passports, so we all shook hands with them and left.

Under His Own Steam

THE Englishman whom *The Listener* interviewed was Leslie R. E. B. Brown, a director of the firm of Brown and Bibby Ltd., Liverpool. Many readers will remember where they have heard the name when we mention *Bibby's Annual*, a large illustrated book about the shape of New Zealand's coloured Christmas Annuals. It contained reproductions of works of art from galleries all over Europe and articles, many of them devoted to subjects connected with Theosophy and the Law of Karma and Reincarnation. When we met Mr. Brown, we mentioned the Annual first, to bring the conversation on to common ground. It had ceased publication at the beginning of the war, he told us, and he seemed to be doubtful of its future. He wondered whether the demand for large Annuals of its kind had not given way before the fashion for small pocket magazines.

Trouble Getting Here

Then we asked him bluntly what he was doing here, and he said he had been asked to look around and examine the prospects for post-war business. That fact was interesting enough in itself, since it seemed so long since we had met a traveller who hadn't some official backing of some kind. No, his passage hadn't been fixed for him. He had merely been given permission to go, and a passage as far as South Africa. The English authorities had not thought he would get much further. But by pleading and good luck he had got across to Australia—but with his life in the hands of the gods, for the cargo below decks was a dangerous one. And from Australia he had come to New Zealand.

He produced photographs of his firm's modern factory—obviously a remarkable achievement of architecture. The main body of it consisted of the simplest possible idea—a sort of elongated hangar with a curved roof supported on the cantilever principle so that, although the width was great and the available space enormous, no pillars interrupted it. An interior photograph had been taken at a time when all the firm's plant had been removed to allow wartime machinery to be put in, and you could see the great scope such design gave for plant layout—a clear well-lighted space 120,000 square feet, with cloisters along the sides, and compartments for all the more self-contained

accessory printing processes. During the war that building had seen the manufacture of great quantities of Angel's Hair, the fine metallic filaments dropped from bombers on approaching the target to mislead enemy radar.

Intolerance in Politics

"But you don't want me to talk about my business. I tell you what I would like to say though, if you think it's all right."

He had been holding his place in a book with one finger all this time. He put the book aside.

"I've been most distressed while I've been travelling round," he said, "by what seems to me to be a new tendency in politics. I don't mean only in New Zealand, but also in South Africa and in other places too. I mean all this intolerance and, well, bias. I listened in to the House the other night on the radio, and it seemed to me that on both sides there were totally irrelevant interruptions going on all the time while men—of both parties—were trying to put forward their ideas. It even seemed like deliberately attempting to hinder a man from making a clear exposition of his thoughts. I noticed exactly this thing when I went into the House of Assembly in Capetown, and I've friends in Canada who've told me much the same thing of their politics. You'd hardly believe that we've just finished a tremendous struggle



LESLIE R. E. B. BROWN
He was once very angry

against intolerance. And I feel that the whole of the body politic, as it were, is being corrupted by it. This tension might pull the whole democratic principle apart."

He took up the book he had had on his knee. It was *Full Employment*, by Sir William Beveridge.

"Take for instance a book like this. It becomes impossible to discuss a sane and sober book like this without a lot of acrimony and bickering, and yet it's a book that's as important in its own way as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. It seems impossible for politicians to discuss such matters objectively. Yet it

(continued on next page)