



"IT WOULD MAKE YOU MAD"

Wellington to Waipukurau in Winter

By a Staff Reporter

WELLINGTON to Waipukurau in winter is not a heartening journey. Near Wellington there is too much clay, and a great deal too much gorse. In the Manawatu there is too much water. Far too many homes are placed on islands in a sea of swamp or near-swamp; and when you do at last run on to firm ground it is wind-swept and cold.

Yet the journey by train has its moments. Waikanae lifts one's spirits after the winter damp of the preceding 20 miles. The Otaki river-bed could be from Hawke's Bay, Canterbury, or Central Otago. Whether your eyes follow the terraces up stream or the willows down stream they travel gladly; and although it is early for lambs, I saw them there last week. I saw one at Manakau, newly arrived twins a little beyond Ohau, but from that point on, I saw no more until I had left the train and gone back through Hatuma. Then I saw a whole paddock of them, and the next morning heard a sleepy young shepherd saying that he had been up all night with a stud ewe and even then had lost one of her two lambs. Nine lambs had been born to six ewes and only five remained alive. "I wouldn't have studs on my mind," he went on. "There may be money in them, but they are too much worry."

BUT it was not to see stud lambs or flock lambs that I went to Waipukurau. I went to see a farmer who maintains that Waipukurau built Wellington.

"You can't take that joke in Wellington," he said, "because it gets you on the raw; and we farmers don't enjoy it much in Waipukurau either. But where did Wellington come from?"

"From the same place as your beautiful home—the labour and thought of tens of thousands of people."

"No, it came out of the soil. Every town comes out of the soil, and we farmers dig it out."

"Without help?"

"If we get help we provide it in the first place. You don't build cities out of air. You build them out of grain and wool and dairy produce, and we make these available."

"Timber and iron too?"

"No, the miners and timber-workers provide those. They are producers too. But town workers are not. They just pass things on and take a little as they go."

"You have a car?"

"Yes."

"A radio?"

"Yes."

"Telephone?"

"Yes."

"Refrigerator?"

"Yes."

"Tractor?"

"Two tractors."

"Harvester?"

"Yes."

"Ploughs, harrows, discs, rollers, seed-drills, lime-spreader and truck?"

"Yes, all those things and a few more."

"Wool-press and shearing machines, for example?"

"Yes."

"And a beautiful ten-roomed house?"

"Yes, I think the house is not so bad."

"And you say that all these things came out of your soil?"

"My soil or some other farmer's."

"How many farmers in New Zealand?"

"I don't know—perhaps a hundred thousand."

"If that was the total population of New Zealand, what would your standard of living be?"

"I don't know, and neither do you. But what would yours be?"

"I would not be here."

"There you are then. You are here because the farmers make it possible for you to live here."

"But I make it possible for you to have all those things we were just talking about. If there were not one and a-half millions consuming your produce and processing it, and moving it on to people willing to pay for it, you would be about as comfortable as the Maoris were in Waipukurau 120 years ago."

"And how comfortable would agents and dealers have been 120 years ago, or bankers, shopwalkers and commission agents?"

THAT is not an accurate report of our conversation, but it is a fair indication of the trend of numerous conversations, that began, and were broken off, and resumed again over a period of three days. It is pathetic, and also disturbing, that wherever there is a farmer in New Zealand there is a man with a grievance or shot through with suspicion. Some of it is politics and party; some of it habit; some of it the dregs of propaganda. The farmer is being pushed in one direction as systematically as the miner in another. But my host is a generous man, modest, smiling, the doer of good deeds by stealth. He has occupied the same farm for 40 years, and seen Hawke's Bay move from fern and scrub to grass. He has had lean years, but has ridden out every storm, and success has brought neither vanity nor jealousy. He loves trees, birds, and books, but nothing so much as good tillage.

"I am an agriculturist at heart," he told me, as we looked at a crop of healthy young wheat. "I put that crop in partly because New Zealand called for it, but partly because growing things answers a call inside me. Look at the colour in those young blades."

"Do you agree with the author of *Plowman's Folly* that it is sufficient to scratch the surface of the soil?"

"No. On our land it would be lunacy. I have tried it out—run the discs over a piece of land six times without making enough free soil to cover the seed from the birds. The plough is the farmer's best friend if he uses it properly."

"But isn't it an exacting friend? Doesn't it demand a 12-hour day?"

"It does with horses, but there are not many horses left."

"Men will no longer work 12 hours?"

"Most of them will not, and so we are drifting into hostilities on both sides. The ploughman wants more money than most farmers can pay, and fewer and fewer ploughmen are sticking it out and getting farms of their own."

"Have we too many farmers or not enough?"

"Not nearly enough. The land is not getting sufficient attention anywhere. But some of the most successful men in Hawke's Bay are on very small holdings—150 to 250 acres."

"That is to escape employing labour?"

"Yes. The labour situation is getting worse every year."

"Have you a solution?"

"No."

"Would national ownership of land help?"



"That's an efficient industry"

"It would help the spongers and agitators for a while, but not long. When they found that the land could not pay overtime, and that the rest of the community could not pay subsidies, they would have to be marched to work under armed guards."

"Aren't we getting a little far from reality?"

"I'm not sure that we are. The Labour unions have no conception of our difficulties, and no inclination to find out. Their aim is control—control of everything. It would make you mad!"

I WAS to hear that phrase over and over again. Once I was admiring his trees—the trees of a man who plants both for shelter and for delight. It was clear, I told him, that he had thought a lot about those trees before he put them in.

"Yes, I thought about them, and I spent money on them. The fencing alone was a heavy item. But if I had thought enough about them I might not have planted them at all. When I die the Commissioner of Taxes will send a man along to value them, and my children will pay for the sin of inheriting them. It would make you mad."

We were scraping the mud off our boots after feeding out some hay, and I remarked that he would have no time to clean his boots when his ewes started lambing.

"No," he said, "if I am not but from daylight till dark, the boys will be."

"Wet or fine too, I suppose."

"Yes, the wetter it is the longer they stay, and they come back dirty and cold. But you see that timber. That is for an outside bathroom which I am not allowed to build for them. I went to town about it, but was told that an inspector would come out to see what the situation was. In the meantime a permit could not be issued. That was months ago, and now lambing is on us again and nothing has been done. It would make you mad."

He had his truck out to cart in some carrots and I remarked what a godsend trucks are on a flat farm.

"Not such a godsend as you may think," he told me. "I bought it to cart things by road, to take my wool and lambs away and to bring home fertiliser, timber, and lime. But I can't go out of my own district without a permit. If I sold a load of firewood in Napier or bought a ton of potatoes in Dannevirke I would not be able to deliver one or collect the other. I would have to wait for a permit. It would make you mad."

Nor would he agree that these were war measures only. They were part of a master-plan drawn up in Wellington to rob farmers of their independence. If the politicians were not behind it, all the bureaucrats were—now that they had experienced power and were determined not to let it go.

"But," I said, "the men you call bureaucrats are just yourself and myself, just your children and my children; boys and girls from your own school here in Waipukurau; the grocer's son, the policeman's son, your next-door neighbour's son, working in Wellington and finding a difficulty in paying the rent."

"Some of them are and some are not. Some are friends of the bosses brought in from outside."

"But you and I are the bosses, and everyone else who has a vote. The men now in Parliament represent us, and if we don't like them we can change them."

IT is not easy in Wellington to remain conscious of the suspicion in the country and smaller towns—to remember that they see it as a place where plots are continually hatched and that we are the people who are hatching them. But