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THE GAMES RETURN

New Year's Day at Waipu

(Written for "The Listener" by M.A.R.)

WHEN the Three Sisters are weaving the web of a life, against the grey background they plait in the bright strands. I hardly know what colour to call such a web if one is woven of our national life, but the bright threads are those strains of rich individuality that are not submerged by the general pattern. They persist in the country rather than in the towns where we are so afraid to be different from one another. Such a strain is maintaining itself very sturdily in our Scottish settlement of the North.

The Celt stirs easily in the New Zealand Scot, even of the second and third generation. We have what Compton MacKenzie calls the "lone shieling complex."

*"From the lone shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us and the waste of seas,
But still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides!"*

I wonder of course how much the Highlands of our dreams are a romantic mist-spun illusion, like my own fond belief in my Celtic origin, until I found that the badge of my clan was driftwood, and my progenitors probably of Scandinavian origin, from a wandering or storm-driven Viking ship. How I envied the Duart Macleans their heart-stirring clancry of "Another for Hector!" Seven big Macleans, sons of one household, fell one after another around their chief, and this, the last word of each as he fell, became the motto of the clan. Such was the Highland spirit!

If ever the lost spirit of the glens calls to the hearts of the children of their once-exiled sons, hidden though they be

under the mask of a matter-of-fact twentieth century New Zealander, it is on New Year's Day when the Waipu Caledonian Society hold their games. There had been no games since 1942. Too many of the young men were away and alas! there are too many gaps to-day among those who used to be competitors, for Waipu has given largely of her best and bravest to both the wars, as did the ancient glens. Somehow the pride and the grief of the people seem to hover in the air of the empty church where we go the next afternoon. The Scottish flag hangs in the front of the church. At the back is the memorial tablet with its long list of names. An old man can point out to me the corners of the church where he and his contemporaries were taught their Sunday School lessons. I try to picture the old minister, the Moses of his people, in the pulpit; actually, he was never there, for he died in 1866. Nevertheless the church is seventy-five years old, a respectable age by our standards.

LET us return to the games. Dancing is in progress and I can't resist it, or the sound of the pipes. How robust and meaningful are the lively and graceful national dances when we think of the insipid posturing one often sees. The piper taps his foot as he pipes. There are many contestants and he is relieved by a second musician. They dance in threes with fervour with the judge's eye concentrated upon them. We choose our fancy, but wonder what niceties of technique the eye of the expert may be examining. How pleased with ourselves we are when our choice is approved!

There is too much to see. We dart from the dancing to the course where the stalwarts are putting the shot, throwing the hammer and toying with a substantial tree trunk. But we do not miss the special ceremony of this day, the presentation of the Nova Scotian flag to the people of Waipu. For our Scotsmen here are by inheritance Canadian Scotsmen also, and that bond between them and the Nova Scotian land where their forebears sojourned for thirty years before their migration to New Zealand is being strengthened to-day by this symbolic gift. The flag is handed to the Chief of the Society, it is dedicated by the minister before a reverently silent throng, the cord is loosed, and the lion of Scotland flutters out above our heads.

TO the outsider, to the Sassenach, unless he be a Scot by adoption, this is just a holiday outing. He seeks ice cream and afternoon tea. To the people of the district and its scattered sons and daughters it is a great day of meeting and forgoing. I suppose these plaided and kilted young men will wear an ordinary guise to-morrow, but to-day they are chieftains all. We see tartan in dazzling variety, and wish for someone knowledgeable to identify them all; such information as we garner is interesting but vague. I can see the distant Highland glen and the faraway days



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before the proscription, when this was the ordinary dress of the people. It must have given force and life and colour to the grey glens. Among the older men one sees here and there the statuesque bearing and the keen profile of their race. I watch one couple a long time, a man of middle age and an ancient, in one of the best-known tartans, and with buckled shoes. He leans his ear towards his interlocutor. I cannot take my eyes from this old Highlander.

THE evening brings the concert and the dance. Here comes the meeting of the old and the new. The performance commences in most leisurely style. There is a large mixed audience. The pipe band is a great thrill. I could wish they would play on and on, but it is good to hear old Scottish songs sung by people who know how to sing them. Even here a few alien items creep in. So with the dance. The Highland schottische is in character, especially where here and there kilted lad and tartan lass are dancing together, but the young ones want their New Year fun and presently the programme drifts away into foxtrots and the hokey-tokey.

A few days spent in Waipu are an unforgettable experience. If other national customs are beginning to break down, the old Scottish traditional hospitality is in full force. The people have not the brief memories for "old acquaintance" on which the town dweller almost prides himself, remembering you

(continued on next page)

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