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To the Editor

# O, TO BE IN ENGLAND!

Sir,—I read with interest Ronald L. Meek's "Confession of a Brain About to Export Itself" (*Listener* March 4). I am glad this young man is at last going to take up his scholarship at Cambridge—he would feel forever frustrated if he did not do so. He is bound to benefit by the experience; but since he has that wholesome quality so badly needed by our intellectuals—willingness to do a good job without worrying about money or fame—I sincerely hope he will return, for New Zealand has need of competent, disinterested economists.

On his journey over there Mr. Meek will have time for meditation. One has it on very good authority that three simple truths are food for the hungry. May I, in wishing Mr. Meek "Bon voyage" draw his attention to them—

- (1) "The soul of man is immortal; and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no limit."
- (2) "The principle which gives life dwells in us, . . . perceived by the man who desires perception."
- (3) "Each man is his own absolute law-giver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment." —"LIBERTA" (Hastings)

Sir,—I have just read Mr. Meek's fine and, if I dare say it, rather poignant, article though I confess that in the main the pity is mostly for myself who will "never go, where the branches blend and blur in Grantchester, in Grantchester" (having no brains to export me thither). Clearly Mr. Meek's conscience has demanded a justification for his action in leaving Home and Duty to get along without him. In his article he has really turned the justification into well-directed accusation.

I am sorry that this young man of evident ability and talent should have felt lonely in his own country. Yet I am more sorry for New Zealand.

Surely it is time we New Zealanders examined our collective conscience. We like to pride ourselves that we rate the highest average consumption of printed words in the world. Surely this printed matter must sadly lack in quality what it boasts in quantity else we would not have the recurrent phenomena of our best brains exporting themselves to more profitable pastures in search of the rich comradeship of understanding (and of other more substantial things).

Loneliness is a beastly thing to bear. Most especially is it when it is the loneliness of the spirit that pervades what has remained of intellectual life in New Zealand. Pity the poor creative artist shivering upon his pillar, lonely as Stylites, offering the unheeding crowd his forbidden fruit—knowledge. They are few who, in the hustle and bustle of getting and spending away their lives, stop to look up and offer if not homage, at least "good-day." Fewer they who in glad meeting exclaim "Friend, well met." We have no millionaires to throw them crumbs from the rich man's table. No government subsidies. Nobody seems to care. So off they go to England, and mostly never return. No one has expressed the tragedy of this state of

affairs more poignantly than Robin Hyde, both in her writings and in her tragic unhappy life.

For the God of this country is named Mediocrity and his twin is Orthodoxy. Conform and the world will trudge with you. Don't and you may soar but always alone. Likely as not, in the end you will come trailing a broken wing (or dust will lie thick upon the dreams). Be different and accept the label "queer." Eat for your daily bread that final bitterness of the spirit. Either that, or be acceptable to the crowd; and eat cake.

If the bread is too sour and the cakes turn bitter-sweet in your mouth, fly away little bird, fly away. (Don't come home limping the glory and the dream).

And thou Jerusalem, look to thy walls!

Having had my say, may I conclude by wishing Mr. Meek success in his chosen career. I am sure that he has sufficient of the poet in him to make a very good economist. (Had Karl Marx offily been a poet as well!).

"HARASS" (Ellerslie).

Sir,—As a New Zealander of about the same age as Mr. Meek, I confess I too have considered leaving "God's Own Country," even if only for Australia.

We are an isolated dot in the world, and in the struggle to build material benefits our pioneer fathers necessarily neglected a culture of philosophy, and the finer arts even the art of enjoying life for life's sake.

There is not the scope in New Zealand for Rutherford, Lows and Cowards. Perhaps that is all for the best. We cannot be a really independent country. Even our foreign policy, in the age of power politics, must be tied to some stronger nation. We import the greatest entertainment and art product of any age—motion pictures, we import books, philosophies, and works of art.

Yes! I feel it is right that we export a brain now and again. After all, since the rest of the world feeds our culture (in exchange for meat and butterfat) we can lease an economist to England, providing he gives us the benefit of his study; and possibly New Zealand may offer him £600 per annum to return. It would cost much less per year than our war expense to give every 20-year-old New Zealander a six-month tour of the world. Such education would broaden the narrow, six-o'clock-closing-time, self-righteous attitude which is unfortunately prevalent in the present generation.

—J. VAUTIER (Palmerston North).

Sir,—When I first came here with my husband, a New Zealander, people, on hearing I had come from China, seemed very interested and I was repeatedly asked whether we had electricity and movies there. At that time this amused me. Yes, we had electricity and we had movies; we also had weekly symphonic concerts (being spared, incidentally, interpolation of "pretty" songs in symphonic music), we had ballet seasons and grand and light opera as well as an amateur dramatic company. But the significant point which escaped me then

was that no one asked whether we had those things. Now after six years I understand the reason and that is that to the majority of people in this country, electricity and movies symbolise civilisation, whereas music and art mean very little indeed. What a pity that is so, in a new and modern minded country but the fault is not with the individual but with the educational system.

It has become apparent to me in these years that the majority of those educated here have no love or knowledge of literature or art; there is no room for it in their lives and though they will comment on scenic beauty, have no appreciation of beauty created by man in words, music, or pictures. And the reason is lack of education in appreciation.

Art, music, and literature should be given the place they deserve in schools here. A country with a system of education which can produce otherwise intelligent adults who will pause in front of my reproduction of a world-famous Van Gogh and say "Did you paint this also?" (this was not an isolated instance and my style does not resemble that of Van Gogh); which makes it possible for 75 per cent of its women to take in a flow of "serials"; and which limits the conversational abilities of 95 per cent of its men to gardening, sports and politics, should see that something is done quickly for the children now in its schools. Those who have talent and the ability to create are fortunate indeed, but an education to make appreciation possible is the birth-right of every child.

My own ability to settle down contentedly here could possibly be traced to family background, later influences, and unsettled life. But this is more than a personal situation, because in England, the U.S., Australia, and China I found ample facilities for cultural and intellectual development. Having seen many originals of masterpieces of art, from ancient Chinese to very modern, can I be blamed for experiencing the sense of desolation which comes over me in the Auckland Art Gallery? When the beauty of Epstein's sculpture has been experienced all other is dwarfed in comparison and when one has seen plays and ballet presented with pomp and decorum can one be blamed for wilting within the precincts of local theatres? Even my hitherto seemingly inexhaustible love of my fellow-creatures is being gradually destroyed by the inexplicably bad manners of so many here.

So I am another one of those eager to escape, to have the chance to learn while still young and possessing the will to do so, to mix again with people who do not distrust the unconventional but who accept the classical and who would discuss T. S. Eliot or Gerard Manley Hopkins now and then as well as gardening—for if we must talk of cabbages let us also talk of kings. Therefore in spite of the kindness shown to me, in spite of the hospitality extended in this country of peace, temperate climate, and a plenitude of all things requisite for healthy living, I remain  
ONE WHO WANTS TO RUN AWAY (Auckland).

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MARCH 22