

TEN DAYS IN JAPAN -

THIS is the first of a series of articles written by the Editor of "The Listener" about his recent visit to Japan

I WENT to Japan at 48 hours' notice at the request of the New Zealand Government. My task was to see what life there would mean to the New Zealand soldiers who would form our section of the army of occupation. Ten days after I arrived I came away again, and now, 33 days after I set out, I am back in Wellington writing this report.

Necessarily it is a superficial report. In 10 days one sees little but external things, and sees even those through a haze. If I had stayed 10 weeks I should have seen a little more; but to get the picture right I should have had to stay 10 months, and that is nearly twice as long as our advance troops will remain in Japan. I have no choice but to say what I saw and felt in the days available to me, knowing that time will change some of my impressions and obliterate others.

But first impressions are not entirely valueless. A longer stay would have enabled me to speak with more authority, but it would have disqualified me from presenting Japan as it will appear to our arriving troops when they arrive, which is my sole aim and duty. I found Japan exciting, confusing, depressing, alarming, but every day more interesting. As clearly and simply as I can I shall say why.

I WRITE, of course, for soldiers first, and then for their mothers and fathers. I want to interest them in Japan, but to do so truthfully; and I know of no better way than by telling them frankly what interested me. Far more than most countries Japan has to be seen to be understood, and there is at present no country in the world which it is so dangerous for New Zealanders to get wrong or refuse to see at all. It is as like New Zealand physically as a dog is like a wolf or a bullock like a buffalo; the same general shape, the same geological skin, the same uncertainties under the skin. Though I felt no earthquakes while I was there I saw the same faults in the rocks as we have in ours, the same fear of brick hpuses, the same indifference to smoking mountains. I saw no rivers comparable with the Waikato or the Clutha, and nothing as big as the Waitaki or the southern Waiau, but I saw more than one that you would hardly have distinguished from the Manawatu, and half a dozen that could have been the Hutt, the Ashley, of the Aparima. The mountains in general are black with bush, the bare faces above the bush white with snow. Our lakes are bigger, deeper, remoter, and wilder, but Japan's in general are the same kind of lake, and have taken the same hold on the national mind. There are so many physical reminders of New Zealand whichever

THE LAND IS LIKE OUR OWN

way you look or turn that, when the light goes and the foreground is blotted out, it is easy to forget that you are 8,000 miles from home and not in Nelson or the Wairarapa.

No New Zealander will feel physically lost in Japan whether his home is Bluff or Bay of Islands; but when he turns his back on the earth and looks at the millions inhabiting it—stands on a railway station while the crowds surge in and out; wanders through the narrow lanes of streets where people are shopping; listens in the middle of the night to the almost unbroken clatter of clogs—he may well feel lost then, and not merely lost but bewildered, and not merely bewildered but half afraid. He will not fear the Japanese people, who are subdued, polite, as friendly as they are allowed to be, and certainly quite harmless. But he may fear the whole surging East, the cluttered earth and the human swarm, and wonder how much longer he can live in his own clean comfort and abundance.

GETTING THERE IS EXCITING

BUT first he must get to Japan—fly there or go by sea. If he flies, as I was lucky enough to do—and many more will have the same kind of luck before the occupation ends—he will find the journey excitingly varied and interesting, not at all exhausting, and even in a military plane only now and again uncomfortable. If it is his first flight the incredible ease and speed of it all will drive discomfort from his mind; but even if he is a seasoned traveller, no longer moved by the miracle of flight and unable to forget the difference between a chair and a steel rail under his buttocks, he will find himself coming to life again on this journey. I found it so exciting over the sea and so absorbing over the



REMNANTS OF THE JAPANESE FLEET AT KURE: "Japan was beaten long before Hiroshima, and in Kure at least, which lies like Lyttelton under a hill, the people must have known it"

land that I was afraid to go to sleep in case I missed some new thing—buffaloes in a swamp, islands above and islands below the sea, mountains pushing their heads out of clouds, cities like toy towns, and breaking waves made motionless by the speed of our flight. All these things kept me watching and waiting when my more sensible companions were resting, but I don't think anyone was indifferent to them or slept all the time.

And it is still a wonderful journey if you travel on the surface of the earth instead of 10,000 feet above. You will be three or four weeks on the way instead of three or four days, but you will see people and places at close range as Cook and Tasman saw them, since it is not possible to go to Japan by sea without threading your way through reefs and islands, and not possible to journey from 40deg. S to 40deg. N without crossing from Capricorn to Cancer, seeing things it is impossible to see in our cool temperate world, and discovering that the sun is not merely a pleasant titillation of the skin on a cold day, but the maker and breaker of societies a thousand feet down in the sea.

MANILA MAKES YOU THINK

SINCE they can't refuel at sea, land-planes follow the land-masses, and our route therefore was Wellington - Auckland - Brisbane - Cloncurry - Darwin - Morotai - Manila - Laoag - Okinawa - Kanoya - Hiroshima.

Cloncurry gave us our first sight of what Foster Fraser would have called the real Australia, but which is in fact no more real than Canberra or Sydney. It is the Australia of Mrs. Gunn and the old Sydney Bulletin—blinding heat, flies, tin shacks, blokes, beer, and a deliberate and almost truculent despon-

dency. Yet for hundreds of miles round about there had been heavy rain and the grass was deep green. So it was all the way to Darwin, which seemed planless and untidy and to having a struggle to survive. It had of course been savagely bombed and had found neither the time since nor the spare men to tidy up and rebuild. Its day is coming, but you feel at present that it is just holding its own against the forces of disintegration. Morotai is only two degrees over the equator and does not let you forget it day or night.

But Manila was the highlight of our journey—a shock and a bewilderment to the duller of us. Before the Japanese came it was as big as Auckland and Wellington together, and in many respects far ahead of either. To-day it is a dusty or muddy mess, with slums so foul that you speed up your jeep as you rush through them and ruins so extensive that you wonder whose energy, confidence, and wealth built them in the first place. It was the first war damage we had seen on a big scale, and I don't think any of us knew before how much the city had suffered. Buildings that have been completely destroyed are shocking but mentally assimilable. They are even in a sense stimulating, since you think at once of the cleaning up and rebuilding. But when a building bigger than anything in New Zealand has just fallen in on itself, roof, walls, partitions, floors, tilted and sagging but hanging hideously together, the effect is unspeakably depressing. Instead of the bulldozers, drag-lines, and scoops that will come one day to clear it all away, you see it sinking further and further into decay, weeds swallowing the paths and mould covering the masonry, and the things it expressed dead forever. That is the whole of the old city of Manila today and much of the new, and when you