

# With Some Notes By the Way

remember that the Americans have committed themselves to walking out this year you are not sorry to be away before it happens.

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WHAT else you see on the way depends on the route you take, but you will sooner or later come to Japan itself, and in Japan sooner or later come to Kure—until a few months ago one of the best-equipped naval bases in the world. I know nothing of such things myself, but the

## THE BASE THAT WAS KURE

commander of a British destroyer told me that Kure had been an eye-opener to them all. "We expected something pretty good," he said, "but it astonished us, British and Americans alike, to discover that we had nothing anywhere that was missing here." To-day Kure is a mass of twisted steel and piled-up rubbish. Everything that had military value, except the water itself, was bombed beyond the possibility of use before Japan surrendered; and even the water is cluttered up with ruins. I've seen nothing more horrible in war damage than Kure's bombed dockyards, which still hold water, but have become a stupendous sump with midget submarines (some possibly holding corpses) breaking the surface of the scum and hundreds of tons of steel and mud obliterating one end. Japan was beaten long before Hiroshima, and in Kure at least, which lies like Lyttelton under a hill, the people must have known it. You can't hide stranded cruisers, levelled acres of masonry, or a shell of rusting steel 400 yards long and at least 100 feet high, when the people who made all these things and operated them live above them and look down on them.

But New Zealanders only pass through Kure and do not come to rest there. Their resting place is Eta-Jima, an island about half-an-hour away by launch, which will take their breath away. I don't know why they have been lucky enough to be given this paradise for a base, but they have been. The Americans, who have luxurious standards in such matters, told me that the barracks the New Zealanders will occupy are better than any they have seen anywhere—that they were built for the officers and cadets of the Japanese navy and "have everything." I don't know what such places usually have, but I do know that this place has everything (baths, theatre, sports grounds, etc.), that the Japanese themselves thought necessary for the morale of conquerors, and that the setting is what Day's Bay might have been if it had been occupied for a thousand years by a race devoted to beauty.

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FROM Eta-Jima to Kure is half-an-hour by water, from Kure to Hiroshima another half-hour by road, and that will be the first journey of many soldiers. It will be a journey made by everyone who visits Japan for a hundred years, perhaps for a thousand; but although I saw Hiroshima from the air as well I shall not attempt to describe it.

The damage can of course be described: it is the centre of Coventry, the flattened blocks of Rotterdam, the rubble heaps of Berlin extended to an area of about nine square miles. The rubble is a little smaller, the dust a little finer, the silence a little greater, the still standing things a little less numerous, and that is about the full story considered as devastation. We get the whole picture out of focus if we suppose that there is nothing in history to compare with Hiroshima in the way of destruction. Scipio did worse things at Carthage, Titus as bad at Jerusalem. The story of Hiroshima is not what was done, but how it was done—the tiny bomb, the blinding flash, and then no city or safe civilisation any more.

For that is what Hiroshima means. You are not looking at the dust of a city. You are standing in the ashes of the system that has ruled you, the civilisation that has shaped and curbed you. A new day has dawned, and neither you nor I nor anyone else can know how it will end. Neither did the silent little group I saw at work making a garden in the rubble. They knew only that they were hungry, that the earth would still grow vegetables, that the concrete blocks would break the wind, and that there in the meantime was a piece of free land.

They were the first Japanese civilians I had seen at close range in a Japanese setting. They took no notice of us whatever, of our notebooks, cameras, or car, but I was not sure when we drove on that they were not as ominous as the bomb. For there are millions and millions of them working like that, without haste and without rest, defeated, hungry, houseless, cold, but neither shattered nor changed.

(To be continued)



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