

our whole social fabric on them—party politics, competitive business, competitive sport, even competitive worship and world government. But it is a little hard to understand why there should be two Ohakunes looking at each other across a flat and empty mile, and neither combining nor co-operating nor even taking the same half-holidays.

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I DON'T know who first thought of clearing stumps with bulldozers, but they told me in Ohakune that it was Bob Semple. The idea no doubt came to many people, but it seems to have been Mr. Semple who made the plan practicable, and already in seven or eight years it has almost changed the landscape. I drove through some miles of country in the triangle between Raetihi, Ohakune, and Horopito in which the desolation of stumps has given place to the productiveness of vegetable gardens with piled-up rows of stumps acting as shelter belts, or deep green lots studded with cattle and sheep. The Government, one of the present occupants told me, at first did all the clearing and took payment in the land itself—one acre perhaps in ten. It paid the Government, and it paid the farmer, and it especially paid Raetihi and Ohakune. Then another development agency appeared in the form of Chinese gardeners with money as well as patience and energy, and now many farmers surrender areas of stump land for a period of three or four years and then resume them and return them to grass. Again it seems to pay both sides. But it makes a white New Zealander think when he sees tons of vegetables arriving at railway sidings in lorries that probably cost £1,000 and are now owned by Chinese and driven by Maoris.

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I USED to believe, when I was a boy in Otago, that go-ai (as we called it) made everlasting fencing posts. But we thought nothing in those days of go-ai flowers. I don't remember ever getting a thrill out of them or hearing anyone talk about them. I don't know whether the reason was that they were not very exciting, or that Otago was not very excitable. I know that I was not moved by kowhai till I saw it on the river terraces of Canterbury, and that I never found it entirely satisfying till I saw it in the Wairarapa. But I felt when I went up the Rangitikei that I had so far seen nothing. There were kowhais all the way from Mangaweka to Hihitahi, where Ruapehu suddenly arrests you, that made all my earlier experiences of them tame—trees as big as weeping willows and all drooping gold, clumps of them lighting up whole hillsides, solitary trees half a mile away gleaming like sunlight in the bush, groves of them in hollows, avenues of them along the fences and roads. And when I left the Rangitikei and the Hautapu I

KOWHAIS

ran into kowhais again down the Manga-where, whose banks carried so many of them that at Raukawa, where the whole river makes a clear leap of 30 feet, the still edge of the pool below had a scum of gold an inch thick, composed wholly of fallen petals. I don't know whether the North Island has never shouted these things out or whether the South Island has not listened.

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FEILDING used to mean stock-sales to me, wide streets and a slaughter-house that was too big to be credible. It still has enormous saleyards, and enormous freezing works, and streets that seem to be waiting for people still unborn. But I was not thinking of any of those things when I turned into one of its hotels one afternoon to escape from a southerly. I was thinking of H.C.D. and Mrs. Somerset, and when I was shown where they lived—everybody knew—I found their house deserted and located them eventually in an old barn rehearsing a play by J. B. Priestley.

That is what Feilding means to-day to an increasing number of people throughout New Zealand: the place where the community players are, and the community art centre, and community culture in general. The story of that experiment is the story of Crawford Somerset himself, and he is the only man who can tell it. But it is beginning to be an important part of the story of Feilding too, and when I had sat for three hours in that freezing barn watching seven or eight young people from local offices and shops crossing the footlights to J. B. Priestley's city, I found myself wondering again what advanced education means.

It would be absurd to say that they gave a finished performance that anybody was brilliant, or any scene memorable. But they did get the play across, and the message and meaning across, and though it was ridiculous in the circumstances I was once or twice genuinely moved. Yet they were all just the lasses and lads of Feilding without stage voices, or stage manners, or special knowledge or culture of any kind. I saw seven or eight. But the Centre has 50 or 60 more whom I did not see, and the population of Feilding is less than 5,000. Part of the explanation no doubt is that acting is the most elementary of the arts and the most universal. These young people got themselves so easily into other people's skins because nobody had ever told them that they couldn't. The Somersets, I am sure, had told them that they could—that acting was just acting and nothing else—playing parts—being somebody else without ceasing to be themselves.

I asked the Somersets afterwards whether these young people gave their time willingly to practice; whether they were becoming self-conscious and arty; if they were still interested in the things that used to interest them and still interested others of their age; how they had been recruited; whether there was a story of competitions behind them, or

precocity, or admiring fathers and forcing mothers.

The answer was that they were normal youngsters in every way, held together on the stage by about two people with some education and training, but in all other respects the raw material of any small town.

(Further instalments of "Sundowner's" Country Journey will be appearing soon.)

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It's not that I'm unhappy in the good job I have at present, it's just that — but you'll understand me Matron I'm sure, even if I can't express it properly. It's just that my present job doesn't fully satisfy me. I believe nursing will. I'll feel I'm doing something worthwhile — something that's worth the very best I can give. Please Matron, when may I come and talk it over with you?

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