

# Land of Old Wives' Tales

THREE members of the New Zealand CORSO relief team in Greece returned to Auckland just after Christmas; they arrived by air from Sydney after spending slightly more than two months on the journey from Athens via Egypt and Singapore. J. A. Horne, deputy-leader and chief administrative officer of the team, was on his way home to Hastings; Louise Logan, a transport officer also trained in Karitane work, was hurrying on to Dunedin; and Irene McLean, a trained nurse, spent the week-end in Auckland and called at *The Listener* office to give some news of the work she had been doing. Mr. Horne, in a brief interview, outlined the general work of the teams and gave a short account of his views of some of the difficulties that are faced in Greece by relief teams working there.

No CORSO workers were stationed in the main towns, Mr. Horne said; they worked in groups in the larger villages and about the islands, setting up clinics and moving from village to village in rotation over periods of a week to a fortnight. The idea was that peasant women and others would thus come to know the particular day the team would be in attendance to give out medical supplies or to give medical or dental attention and advice. All the relief teams were operating in districts where no local medical aid was available. Miss Logan worked with Dr. Athol Patterson, of Wanganui, with a health team in the Cyclades islands. The team consisted of five members who moved from island to island in a caique converted to provide living quarters; this team, like all the others at work, found its most pressing problem malnutrition.

## No Starvation

"But I must stress the fact that none of our doctors found any case of actual starvation in Greece," Mr. Horne said. "UNRRA has done a good job for war relief and the work to be done now is really education and not relief. There is very general malnutrition and widespread disease, and much good work has been done by UNRRA and by our teams investigating and checking and setting up clinics for preventive treatment and advice."

"So what would you consider the greatest trouble now?"

"Politics. And then lack of shelter in the villages," he answered promptly. "There are no building materials and communications are shocking—roads and railways are still in a bad state and even the villages that have not suffered actual war damage are in a bad way. It will go hard with the peasants in many villages when supplies left by UNRRA and CORSO are exhausted. These supplies, by the way, will be distributed by responsible relief organisations."

"Are their own crops back to normal production yet?"

"Well, of course, their fruit and vegetable crops are splendid and this season they had an excellent wheat crop. But all their farming is on the most primitive scale and they have to work extremely hard to win their livelihood. And they like meat, they like meat very much indeed and they just can't get enough of it. What they do get is mainly mutton. But without it cheese is their

staple diet—goat's milk and sheep's milk cheese. And they eat quantities of bread."

TO Miss McLean Greece is a land of old wives' tales—and the old wives who tell them are the grandmothers. The grandmothers who look after the children while the younger women put in eight or nine hours' solid toil in the fields; the grandmothers who go to the hospitals to sleep at night with their daughters and their newly-born grandchildren; the grandmothers who are the midwives working rigidly by the rules of their older wives' tales; the grand-



J. A. HORNE

mothers who oppose every idea that seems new-fangled to them (such as the idea that newborn babies should sleep in separate cots and not in their mothers' beds); and the grandmothers who with giggles line up for inspection by the visiting foreign doctor in the hope of getting some free pills, some pink water, or best of all, a few assorted injections.

## Pills Were Popular

"They all love injections," Miss McLean said. "They love them—they're used to them because the Germans have been selling them their own outmoded drugs for years. Give them pills or give them injections and they're happy. But try to give them advice, try to give them a few napkins for the baby, try to persuade them to give a 15 months old child any solid food other than hard-boiled egg and they'll simply shrug."

Miss McLean worked for most of the time in the northern districts about Florina near the Yugoslav border with Dr. Alison Hunter of Wanganui. There was also a dental nurse in the team and she found the adults competing eagerly with the children for her attentions. The team travelled by truck and sometimes slept in it.

"Malnutrition," she said, "began with the babies—they are breast-fed up to 15 months and often up to two years; and if they are ever given any solid food it's very solid indeed—hard-boiled egg! Then the children go out minding the flocks—it's pleasant to watch, the goats with bells and the children with their long sticks keeping the flocks on the pastures and off the roads—but it means that those children aren't at school, and if they aren't at school they are missing the cooked meal that UNRRA supplies for them. They

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