

# THE MAORIS AS I FOUND THEM

**D**R. SMITH was no doubt right in calling my attitude to the Maoris romantic and my remarks about them "bloody nonsense." He has known them intimately for 30 years and I have not known one of them for 30 days in my whole life. It may easily be true, too, that the Maoris "saw me coming." But I also saw something when

## MEETING THE MAORIS

I arrived, and it was not a case of seeing what I set out to see. I did not know till I got there that the people of Hokianga were 60 per cent. Maori, and in any case I am myself wholly pakeha. My thoughts, interests, reactions and attitudes, if they do not completely isolate me from Maoris, keep me so blandly and selfishly white that partisanship of any other kind has no chance. A visitor who neither speaks Maori, reads Maori, nor thinks Maori, and has never tried to overcome these limitations, may be a very foolish observer of a Maori community but he can hardly be charged with excessive Maori sympathy.

Anyhow he is worse than ignorant if, seeing much to admire himself, he accepts all the complaints and criticisms of other people. I saw a good deal in Hokianga that no friend of the Maoris

would condone—land occupied and not used, gardens neglected while food was taken from tins, garbage infecting the water supply, and insanitary homes. It was impossible not to see those things, and I am not going to gloss them over. But I'm not going to be silent about other things either, whether I am a romantic or a simpleton for thinking that they mean what they looked like to me at the time.

For example: everybody has been told that the money Maori women draw as children's allowance Maori men drink. Some Maoris do drink, but I did not see one drunken Maori north of Auckland. I heard two in Taihape making a loud noise in a hotel bar at half-past ten in the morning. They were not yet drunk but well on the way. If I had lingered in Auckland I should no doubt have heard a few more. But I passed through Auckland at five in the morning, and although I then spent three or four weeks north of the city and covered about a thousand miles I did not again see a Maori under the influence of liquor. On the other hand I spent a day in a district in which all the Maoris for religious reasons abstained from tobacco as well as from alcohol.

But even when Maoris don't drink, those who know assure us, they won't work. Well, I did not expect to see Maoris working for the love of work or refusing money because they had not

honestly earned it. I expected them to behave very much as pakehas would, and do, in comparable circumstances (including of course the absence of moral or social pressures in favour of diligence and thrift); and that is what I found. But I did see many Maoris working. I saw more working than I saw idling. Many of the roadmen I saw were Maoris, and they were working hard; many of the railway surfacemen; about half, I thought, of the truck-drivers. I saw Maoris milking cows, and one Sunday morning, when I was driving through a stretch of about 15 miles in which there was only one pakeha farmer, I noticed particularly that the cows were all milked or being milked by seven o'clock and that most of them were in average condition.

When I mentioned these things later to Dr. Smith he told me that I was as silly as an inspector of the Department of Native Affairs.

"They call a man employed if they see him milking a couple of cows. A boy is employed who carts a can of milk to the factory. It is very likely that nothing else is done all day."

"I'm not suggesting," I replied, "that the Maori is a lowland Scot yet. What I am saying is that I've not seen him lying on his back and doing nothing at all."

"You have seen him milking half a dozen cows on a farm that would run 20 or 30; and if you were here for an-

other month or two you would see him drying them off when the grass gets short instead of providing supplementary feed."

It was no doubt true, but it did not worry me. I did not ask myself whether the Maori is too lazy to grow winter feed, or too philosophical, or too thriftless. I was so happy to see him farming at all that his methods neither disturbed nor surprised me. I did, however, look carefully at his stock, and was surprised to find the facts very much better than I had anticipated. I saw herds of milking cows that had clearly been starved all winter and were still tucked-up and unthriftly. They were noticeable because they were exceptional. I saw illbred and underfed dry stock, but that again was not the general picture. And I saw none of the Maori horses of legend. I saw good hacks and bad, lively mounts and slugs, but they had all had sufficient feed, and if they had been "knocked about" as Maori horses are supposed to be, it had not noticeably disagreed with them. I watched several times when a Maori went to mount a horse that had been tied at a gate or a fence, and I did not once see the animal jerk up its head, pull away, or show any of the common signs of ill-treatment. I saw horses ridden hard on hard roads, overloaded horses, and mares being ridden that pakehas would have left out at grass with their foals. But in a country that is probably the kindest in the world to horses (after Britain), I saw nothing at all that even annoyed me; nothing certainly that I had not seen paralleled over and over again by pakehas.

**B**UT my most lasting memory of the Maoris of Northland is the superiority of their manners. There must be Maori vulgarisms and Maori louts, but I did not meet them. Every Maori I spoke to was courteous. Every one was obliging, and I thought naturally kind. Once I had to turn to them for assistance when my engine developed a short

## MAORI MANNERS

circuit, and I was about equally astonished by the trouble they took for nothing (since they refused payment) and the mechanical knowledge they displayed. I talked to Maoris over the fence and on the roads, in hotels and stores, and occasionally in their homes, and the impression was always the same: that their manners are better than ours, their breeding more ingrained, their dignity more secure. I was not foolish enough to think that they always liked me; but there was grace even in their toleration of me, and on one occasion when they were probably all actively hostile they received me politely and endured me for two hours with a dignified courtesy of which I myself in similar circumstances would have been quite incapable.

I don't want to qualify for another phrase of Dr. Smith's—the helplessness of the fool who has never taken the trouble to learn his ABC—but I would sooner risk that than shirk saying that

(continued on next page)

## The Animals Come in One by One

"**D**OES it, would it, will it bite?" That, and nothing more, seemed to be what the crowd of children wanted to know first when Tiger Tim, the Wellington Zoo's five-months-old cub, visited Station 2ZB's studio the other Friday afternoon. Tim was there to illustrate the first talk in the new session, *News from the Zoo*, by the curator, C. J. Cutler.

After he had been patted and stroked, Tim was exhibited on a table behind the plate-glass window of the studio for close-up views, and there he lay, looking as bored as only a young cub can. Mr. Cutler was half-way through his talk when Tim himself answered the children's initial question emphatically by taking a tidy titbit out of a keeper's hand. "Oooo," said the children. "That's nothing," said one of the three keepers—not the bitten one.

The first session apparently caused much interest. Mr. Cutler wrote to 2ZB that on the following Saturday the Zoo takings rose 50 per cent. and on the Sunday by 70 per cent. The session, which is on the air every Friday and Saturday at 5.15 p.m., is designed to tell listeners of events at the Zoo from time to time, and something about the birds and animals—more than 1500 of them—that live there. Information is given about new arrivals from overseas, about births at the Zoo, how the animals are fed, how the keepers try to keep them healthy, and how they are treated when



TIGER TIM with C. J. Cutler (right) at the 2ZB microphone

sick. And different inhabitants of suitable size appear as "guest artists" at the sessions.

Wellington Zoo has been in the news lately. A few weeks ago lions arrived from Melbourne, and with them were two huanacos—small South American

animals like camels without humps. Other new boarders include a fine Shetland stallion, and eight queer-looking Chinese fowls. A pair of Demoiselle cranes were recently hatched out, and as far as is known, Wellington Zoo is the only Zoo in the world to rear these delicate birds.