

IMPERFECT PARADISE

A Stranger's View of New Zealand

I AM an Englishman who has worked 16 years in India. There we find that visiting strangers may see our problems in refreshingly novel light. So readers of *The Listener* may be interested in my admittedly superficial views. I have been here, on holiday, a month. In politics I am Liberal. This is my first experience of Australasia.

Many things in this country I like. Others I like less or am puzzled by. My main dislike, or criticism, is that you are taking life easily, more so than the world's tragic state warrants. It is a small world, much shrunk by modern communications; and as an eminent American has emphasised, it is "One World." Humanity, the globe over, has been put by science into the beginnings of compulsory partnership.

Too Few People

Only about 1½ million people occupy your fertile, beautiful, temperate land. I came, by air, from a tropical country of 400 millions, a country of much suffering—and of great latent abilities. It is a sub-continent, now only about 2½ flying days distant from you. Early last year, I spent some weeks where I was bred, in an island of New Zealand's size and clime, but of 46 crowded million inhabitants. About the sufferings there, and the abilities, you are more conscious than of India's; yet not, my observation suggests, sufficiently.

New Zealand, for decades, and particularly during the last one, has been much admired by progressive-minded folk, as an exemplar in enlightened policies and bold experiment. Some termed it a sociological laboratory. "The workers' paradise" it was called; "a paradise for the common man" is a modern variant. As pioneers in humanitarian and social reform you have a great reputation to uphold. It may sag or collapse if New Zealand, self-absorbed and complacent, now enjoys her own temporary good fortune without proper regard for mankind's acute ills elsewhere. Isolation, as any nation's policy, was never ethical; on a globe so contracted as ours nowadays has been by science, it is not practical either.

Lots of Food

Among the things I like here, immensely, is your food. I have not fed so well since holidaying in the pre-war England of '37. I had forgotten how delicious milk and mutton could be. The mere existence of many of the other good things you take for granted in your lavish daily fare had slipped from my mind. You have some rationing; but in my few

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"Spitfire pilots and paratroopers were my speciality. One of them was on the quay to meet me when I landed at Auckland; I was with another one in Palmerston North and on a sheep farm by the coast; and I hope I'll be seeing others in the South Island, and then in the Wanganui area on my way back to Australia and India."

Written for "The Listener" by
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"The Statesman" of India.

weeks' stay I have hardly noticed it, have used only three coupons, and gained half a stone in weight. The quality of many foodstuffs in India is always poor. In Bengal, where I work, a war-created famine three years ago killed as many people, 1½ millions, as your entire population. They were the helpless, ignorant poor, and they died in the Calcutta streets all around us. Ten months ago, in a bitter English March, I experienced anew, as earlier amidst exploding flying bombs in the summer of '44, the miserable meagreness and monotony of British rationed diet. As a tall man who likes open-air exercise I often went to bed hungry.

These contrasts I may feel more acutely because I so like New Zealand people, and feel so naturally at home here. This has proved a very congenial country to me, which makes the difference from living conditions in the two other lands where I work and originate the sharper. You are astonishingly English—with some improvements. You have less stolid reserve. The spontaneous kindness and good company here, the hospitality, the readiness to talk and befriend the stranger are essentially English; but in the Home Country they show themselves mainly in crisis, as during the historic summer of '44. They were hard to find at times amidst England's mood of evasive inertia in '37, or of fatigue and disillusion in '46. American kindness can also be wonderful, but some of it has an overwhelming, over-organised quality. New Zealand's, in my experience, is charmingly genuine and unaffected.

Good Looks

I like New Zealanders' looks as much as their manners. Perhaps you have fewer folk of superlative beauty in face or physique than a land so very lucky in diet and climate might be expected to raise. But the proportion of sturdy, well-built bodies, of cheerful, healthy, pleasant faces, of what might be termed good looks high in the medium grade, seems greater than in any country of five continents that I have visited. One query must be added, however: why are there so many false teeth?

"Puzzling Distinctiveness"

I greatly like your landscape. It contains unique qualities. At times I have been reminded, in your plains, of Southern England's gentleness; your steep, sunlit mountain-sides suggest Italy, even occasionally the Himalayan foothills. There have been snowy Alpine moments, and moments on windswept, rain-washed tussocky grasslands recalling Western Iceland. But there remains something in this country's topography, in the way your ground arranges itself, in the shapes and groupings of your characteristic trees and herbage, in your characteristically clear air, which has peculiarity, a

puzzling distinctiveness which etches itself on the mind. New Zealand's scenery in its way is unexampled, an experience which no traveller should miss.

I like your cities' siting. Auckland and Wellington are as superbly placed as any leading towns in the world. That so much of them should have been built during history's ugliest architectural century is bad luck. I like, too, your gaily painted modern bungalows, in countryside or suburb. Their paint would be coveted by many in shabby Britain today. But it seems odd that so many of these new structures are still built of wood and corrugated iron, perishable materials which often need repair and are noisy to live in.

Standardised Overseas News

I like your Press. Its dignity, seriousness, and avoidance of sensationalism maintain the profession's best traditions. Journalism's basic job, as I see it, is to keep the people soberly informed by untwisted news and thoughtful comment, on big current events abroad and at home that may affect their welfare. That job New Zealand newspapers do well. The pooling and standardisation of your cabled news and transmissions seems however a drawback. If all papers take the same unified foreign service, a country's Press lacks variety. Subject to that one qualification, however, I would regard New Zealand's newspapers as the natural counterparts and full equals, not of the so-called popular London Press, much of which disgraces a great nation, but of the renowned British provincial newspapers or the better newspapers of India—a country which, though so different from New Zealand, is also very politically-minded.

'The Big Problem: Immigration

Because your Press is so good the dearth of items in it about what for me, a visitor, seems much your biggest problem is perplexing. Here I come back to criticism again, to the things I dislike or am puzzled by. That problem is immigration. Since I came I have read or heard occasional cautious references to the need for augmenting your population. But dimly little seems yet to have been done; and the existence can be guessed of political forces set against any major renewed immigration at all. This year, 5,000 assisted British immigrants, I learn, are at last arranged for; in '48—three years after hostilities ended—you may accept up to 20,000. Those appear small, belated figures.

Before arrival, I assumed that the recently-ended Pacific struggle had convinced New Zealand, like Australia, of her ethnic peril and the urgent need for bold remedies. Around us, in uniform, on Indian soil during the latter part of the war, and scattered elsewhere about the globe, were scores of thousands of British lads of the finest type ready, because travel and fighting had unsettled their minds, to accept the adventure of life in any promising new country. That mood must now be fading. They are home again now, settling in, and New

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