

help feeling grateful to the rich man who had made this land available at a price based honestly on its productiveness and not cynically on the hopefulness of land-hungry soldiers. It was a tonic to see well-painted houses, flower gardens, orchards, and neat out-buildings, and to be told that not one farm in the settlement was for sale.

IF comparisons were not so offensive I would be tempted to say that I found the people of the East Coast the most interesting I have met anywhere in the North Island. I resist that temptation, but take the risk of saying that I have nowhere found people more interesting.

Nor am I trying to be pleasant when I say that. I found them interesting partly at least for their limitations, and am therefore saying something that many of them will think exceedingly unpleasant, ungracious and ungrateful after all the hospitality I had among them, the ready welcomes and warm and continuing friendliness. But it would be a poor return for all that to offer them a little cheap flattery. They deserve the truth as far as I can see it and as honestly as I can report it. They interested me not because they are kinder than New Zealanders elsewhere, or richer, or wiser, or pleasanter, or more sincere. They are on the average richer, the Pakehas among them richer than the majority of Pakehas elsewhere, the Maoris richer than most Maoris elsewhere. I found them also exceedingly pleasant, Pakeha and Maori without any distinction at all. But what makes them unusual is the fact that they have lived by themselves for three generations, not in complete isolation of course, but always isolated to some extent, sometimes very rich but not often very poor, more poised and polished than the average run of farmers because so many of them have been to boarding schools, free of snobbery partly because the richest people among them have never been merely rich, partly because not many of them are poor enough to be bitter, partly because there were never enough of them altogether, rich, comfortable, or poor, to hive off into classes, partly because isolation has made and kept them one family. I have not had so strong a feeling anywhere else that all the residents for a hundred miles and more are acquaintances, and most of them friends. No one forgets to offer hospitality to a traveller from another valley or bay, and no one hesitates to accept it. They call in for meals as naturally as I would call in on my brother or my son if I were 50 miles from home and passing his house at a meal hour. They carry one another in their cars, give one another gifts from orchards and vegetable plots, and were surprised that I seemed surprised at such continual giving and taking. It was remarkable, too, to note the interest they seemed to take, the interest of friends and not of rivals, in one another's gardens; men and women alike. "How are your onions?" was the first remark of one of my hosts after he had introduced me to a neighbour 18 miles away; and the neighbour at once led the way to the onion bed and pointed out his successes and failures. Women exchange plants and bulbs, and when they visit one another ask how a particular dahlia is thriving or some exotic thing obtained by post and locally famous. The flower gardens and lawns serve both as art galleries and as morale-builders, keeping alive a love of the beautiful and giving their owners the kind of feeling a woman in the city

develops if she has rare pictures or choice furniture. One husband expressed it like this to me when I asked who cut the lovely but enormous lawn.

"I do, and my God I curse it sometimes. But it keeps my wife contented. When her neighbours call she has something to show them that she is not ashamed of."

"You're a wise man."

"No, I'm a grateful man. My wife came here out of the city. She is better educated than I am, but cooks, dusts, mends, and polishes, and interests herself in my work too. I'm not much interested in flowers myself, but I'm interested in keeping her happy."

SO it goes on between Pakeha man and Pakeha wife, Pakeha farmer and Pakeha neighbour. There is a good deal of dancing in the winter, a steady run of parties and picnics in the summer, which nearly everybody attends. The occasional church services seem to be well attended, too, partly because faith is still a reality in most households, and partly because the others hesitate to abandon a practice that brings neighbours together once a month in friendliness. I met a travelling Sunday School in one centre whose two young teachers, husband and wife, seemed very happy about the welcomes they were receiving. But I saw the signs, too, of a move in the other direction, the wife driving to church alone while the husband and sons drafted sheep or rode away up a valley to shift cattle and shake their heads sadly over the latest advance of erosion.

And I could shut neither my eyes nor my ears to the evidences of isolation in their reading and thinking. It is strange, with radio voices carrying right round the world, books and newspapers flowing freely, and planes annihilating physical distance, that a gap of a hundred miles on a New Zealand coast can still make a difference of something like a generation in ideas. But it is so. The people of the East Coast are what we all were before social conflicts separated us 30 to 50 years ago, and what we must all become again to be saved. But they are certainly not in the van of thought politically or socially. They talk earnestly about things that no longer exist, feel sad about tendencies that the rest of the Dominion has ceased to notice. The good old days are not just a phrase to them, or a joke, but a reality that they now think they will see again if we come well out of the peace conferences.

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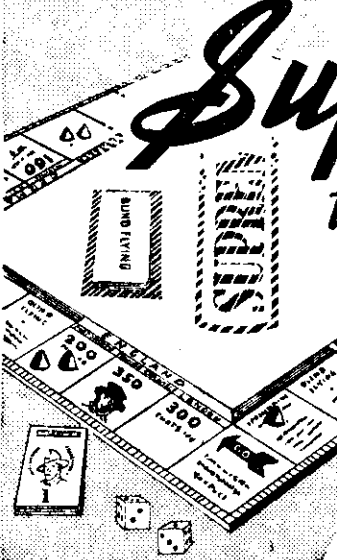
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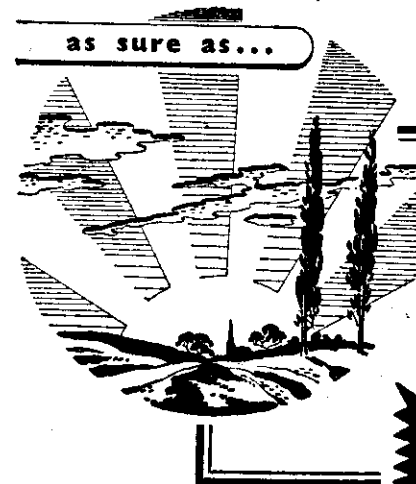


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