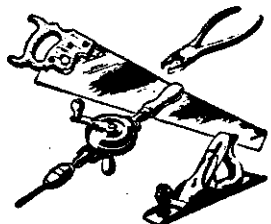


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## ANOTHER LOOK AT TARANAKI

I USED to think, before I had seen the tropics, that Taranaki must be the greenest country in the world. I still think that its green is the most satisfying in the world, the most lasting, and the most reassuring. But I am not sure that it is as vivid and deep as the green of vast areas in the Philippines, and I have still not seen Ireland. But green in Taranaki means wealth—not merely rain. I think it means health too, though I have spent much of my life trying to escape from dampness, am one of those who worry as soon as they get wet feet, whose instinct is for the desert and the rocks because they fear, I suspect with good hereditary reasons, water that lingers too long near the earth's surface.

But Taranaki is not as green in autumn as it is in spring. A month ago, more than one farmer told me, it was not green at all but yellow, and the green covering I now saw came with a deluge on Anzac Day. However it came it was very satisfying to the cows, which were as often chewing the cud as grazing, and nowhere showed the anxiety of cows on poor pasture to make every minute contribute something to the void.

WHEN the cows were like that I was sure that the humans were too, and the proof came when I talked to them. One man answered my questions before I put them to him. We were eating together in a hotel at Opunake, and I intended, as soon as we got past the weather and the roads, to ask if he

### CONTENTED HUMANS

liked the life he was leading. But he jumped right over the roads to farming itself, and told me without any encouragement at all that farming was always satisfying, and dairy-farming as satisfying as any other kind.

"You don't feel sorry for yourself then?"

"Not at all. Why should I?"

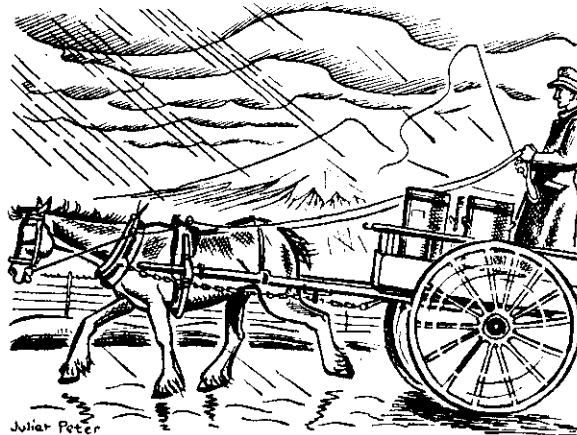
"I don't know any reason why you should, but many farmers do."

"They don't. That is just their talk—something they think they have to say. They have said it so often they can't stop saying it, but it means nothing."

"Why did they begin saying it?"

"Well, they may have had a reason once. Dairy-farming was tough 40 years ago. It was the refuge then of the man who had no money—who had never had any or who had over-reached himself. He milked by hand, waded through mud to the shed, and carted his milk through mud to the factory. But those days have gone."

"For every farmer?"



"Dairy-farming was tough 40 years ago"

"For 19 out of 20. It's a good life now for most of us."

"But you work seven days a week."

"Yes, we can't escape that. But what farmer can if he is interested in his job? We can take a half day off as often as we like."

"How many hours a day do you really work?"

"That depends on a lot of things—the weather, the season, the nature of the farm, and so on. But our compulsory hours of work are three every morning early and three every afternoon."

"The rest of the day's your own?"

"How we spend the rest of the day depends on so many things that no two farmers would give the same answer. But my point is that we are not compelled to work those other hours every day or even to spend them at home."

"You work when there are urgent things to be done and no urgent reasons for going to town?"

"Put it that way if you like. You have seen how many cars are in Opunake to-day. This of course is sale day, but you can see how things are."

"Not exactly a dog's life?"

"No."

"Or a slave's?"

"No."

"And when winter comes you have three months off the chain."

"No, don't make that mistake. That is going as far wrong the other way. Winter is as busy as any other part of the year, sometime busier, because we then have to hand-feed our cows."

"Even in Taranaki?"

"Everywhere in New Zealand if condition is to be maintained all the year round. If cows run down in winter they spend half the summer catching up again."

"But it is still a good life?"

"I think it is."

"What about your sons?"

"Young people are the same everywhere. They're not staying with us now, but they will come back."

"All of them?"

"No, not all of them. Some will establish themselves in other ways. Some will cling to the five-day week. But no farmer ever kept all his sons at home, or all his daughters. If they all stayed at home we would have problems of another kind."

"Subdivisions and family feuds?"

"Peasant farming like Europe and China."

"It is better to be tied to Taranaki?"

"Very few of us are tied. We are the freest small farmers in the world. We can stay or go, buy or sell as we want to. But not many of us want to sell because our main crop never fails."

[It was a little disappointing after that to walk out of the hotel into a Come-to-See-Us campaign (which of course means a Come-and-Spend-Your-Money-With-Us campaign). Tourists may be helpful to Thames or necessary to Arrowtown and

### CASTLES OF SAND

Naseby, but no part of New Zealand has less need of them than Taranaki. Yet here was a deputation from Hawera telling Opunake that it had "the finest beach and surroundings in Taranaki," with trout fishing and other attractions that "if properly publicised" would bring that little town "a great future." It is certainly better to build for the future than to rest on the past, but why build Opunake's future on sand and trout? Attractive though its beach is, it is small, and however numerous its trout may become, they will never be very big. Its farms on the other hand are just about as good as farms can be without starting a butter rush from the rest of the Dominion, and if cheese and butter will not keep the money flowing it is not much use building on tourists. But even farmers, I suppose, chase rainbows sometimes.

[It surprised me too to find the whole of Taranaki divided into two or three competitive areas, the South pulling against the North, and the East when it gets a chance pulling against both. Even the mountain is a battle-ground.

### SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

A man who cut my hair in Hawera told me that I was in the centre of the best piece of dairy country in the world; and I don't suppose that was a very great exaggeration. But he went on to say that there was only one place worth visiting on the mountain, the hostel at Dawson Falls, and that the road to it led straight from Hawera. They remained Dawson Falls advocates till I had passed through Opunake, though one man whispered to me in Manaia that the best approach if I was "not fussy which way I went," was through Egmont Village. From Okato to Inglewood they were all Egmont Villagers, but I then entered Stratford's sphere of influence, and learnt that the only sensible way

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