

OUR ROUGH ISLAND STORY

MANY observers have remarked on the numbers of people who are to-day leaving the cities for the smaller towns. Dissatisfied with the emptiness and frustrations of suburbia they seek to identify themselves with a community, to feel a community sense.

We felt that, too, and had long threatened to do something about it. But one gets into a routine, however futile, in town, and so we had postponed decision until "some time." We had a section on Waiheke Island, down harbour from Auckland, and the original intention was to build a week-end bach on it. But one day we were feeling more than usually fed up with town life so we decided to combine the two ideas and make our permanent home on "the Island."

Another generation would have said "Sydney or the bush, eh?" and let it go at that. But nowadays even one's best friends make some pretensions to literacy, so we endured vaguely relevant wisecracks about the disciples of Thoreau and D. H. Lawrence and the search for the simple life. Except those who told us they thought we were lucky—while privately they thought we were crazy.

Written for "The Listener"
by GORDON INGHAM

According to the Scriptures, Job was the most unfortunate man who ever lived. But compared with the vexations and the troubles that beset the would-be builder of a home in these days of shortages and restrictions, Job was a happy-go-lucky chap sitting on top of the world. Of course, our permit warned us that there would be difficulty in getting supplies; but the word "difficulty" was coined in optimism. So we rented a bach until we could finish our own place and on the wettest week-end in the year we moved down with every stick and stitch that we owned.

The Last Outpost

Looking back on the months we have been on the Island and comparing our life here with last winter, spent in rooms in the centre of Auckland, I feel that any description of the changed circumstances should be labelled "advertisement."

How would you like to live on an Island, near enough to the city to see the lights at night but not near enough to hear the noise? To be within an hour

and a quarter's run of Queen Street and yet to be in a settlement so completely primitive that there is no form of authority or local government at all? This perhaps is the last "no-man's land," the last New Zealand frontier outpost.

Here time has no meaning. When first we came down here I would go to work at my accustomed hour of eight; but I had to discontinue that because no one was out of bed and no business could be transacted. So now we rise at about eight and I leave for work some time after nine and stroll quietly along the beach.

To most people the thought of life on an island conjures up visions of a life of indolence and perpetual sunshine and content. For once they are not far wrong.

Time by the Boat

Time, I said, has no meaning. Sometimes our clock is right; sometimes it isn't even going. We see the boat come in around about 11 a.m. and leave about 4.15 p.m. and that gives us a rough idea of the time and all we need. One of our neighbours tells a story that illustrates our *manana* philosophy. She had a local paperhanger come to re-cover the walls in her living room. Eventually he arrived, set up his trestles, mixed his paste and cut his paper with all that deliberation peculiar to paperhangers. Then he

remembered that he had to go to the butcher's to collect the meat; so he went and came back three weeks later.

Not that it really mattered. Admittedly they could not use the living room in the meantime, but as obviously they were still living the room they were using most became the living-room.

Sunday is Friday

Sunday comes early on our Island because we hold it on a Friday. In other communities, Friday is the shopping day, but here all the shops, and even the Post Office, close on Friday, while the shopkeepers go to town to do their shopping. That leaves most of the population, who spend a lot of time in either stores or Post Office, with nothing to do; so they go to town for the day, too.

As our only means of communication between here and what outsiders call the mainland is by boat, these Friday trips have a picnic air. Tea or coffee is served on board and during the trip all the local gossip is retailed and all our grievances regarding this or that get a thorough airing. Deprived people who have seen only the glow-worms at Waitomo should be down here to see the little torch lights as the homing Islanders come from the boat at night.

There is no organised religion on our Island, but a Labour Party meeting in our settlement attracted 91 believers—

(continued on next page)



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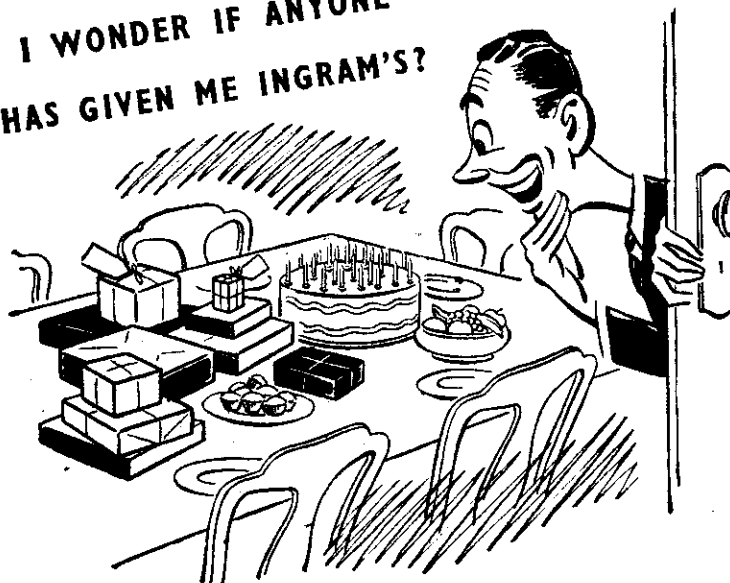
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