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SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

TWENTY years ago a Christchurch journalist, Ian Coster, set out to see England and Europe, expecting to be away not more than a year. But it was not until a few days ago that he returned, on a sentimental journey, to see his mother in Hamilton. By now he will be on his way back to England, to resume his weekly column in the *Daily Mail*. During 18 years in Fleet Street, Ian Coster has been on the staff of several big London newspapers, reporting events of international importance. He wrote a book, *Friends in Aspic*, in which he told intimate stories about people he had met. Now he plans to write another, also about people, which he will courageously call *Jellied Heels*.



Spencer Digby photograph

IAN COSTER

Plenty of people are 10 per cent. industrious

But when Coster called at *The Listener* office the other day, he confessed that he was more excited than he had ever been in his life. He had reported the launching of the liners Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, the wedding of the late Duke of Kent, fires, riots, and all the sensational incidents that are part of a London journalist's life, but to revisit his home country and see old friends again was the most exciting thing of all.

Coster's story, as he told it to us in an interview, is that of a man who has always refused to take life too seriously. We asked him if he could put his finger on any formula for success in Fleet Street.

Journalistic Formula

"Oh, I should say that if a man has 10 per cent. industry and 90 per cent. luck, he'll get there. But you must have the breaks. I was lucky. I made that remark once to a friend. The editor I was then working for heard of it and called me into his office. 'Was that wise?' he said. 'We can get plenty of people who are ten per cent. industrious.' Still, as I see it, perseverance and a scintilla of talent will do the trick."

For a few years Coster had been on the staff of a Christchurch paper. Then he left for Sydney, but was back again in New Zealand in no time as advance agent for Pavlova's tour in this country. On what he earned, persuading editors that Pavlova's was "the greatest show on earth," he went to England after a spell on a now defunct Auckland paper. A letter to a director of the *Evening Standard* got him a job on space rates, writing articles about London through New Zealand eyes.

"I got my first break one evening soon after I arrived," he said. "I happened to be the only reporter left in the office when somebody rang to say the Tower of London was on fire. I hurried off, got across the drawbridge, and was turned away by a Beefeater, reinforced by the

police. A paragraph got into print." Then he did some work on the feature page of the *Daily Herald*, working with Percy Cudlip and Stella Gibbons.

Bernard Shaw's Socks

Always looking out for something unusual, he picked up a legend that Bernard Shaw wore five-toed socks. To find out if it was true, he took a dip in a bathing pool frequented by Shaw and asked the great man about it. Shaw's reply was: "Utterly ridiculous." But it led to a conversation, which turned into an interview, and Coster sold it to *The Referee*.

After some free-lancing, he joined the staff of the *Sunday Dispatch* as a casual reporter. He had been recommended by another New Zealander, Angus Harrop, of *New Zealand News*. On his first day's hunt for material, he saw a riot among people being evicted from their homes. His article about it was featured on the front page. "And then," he said, "people seemed to get the queer idea that I was a good reporter." He became assistant-editor on the old *Nash's Magazine* for some months. "By this time, I had been fired from jobs twice, just to teach me what life is—all very amusing."

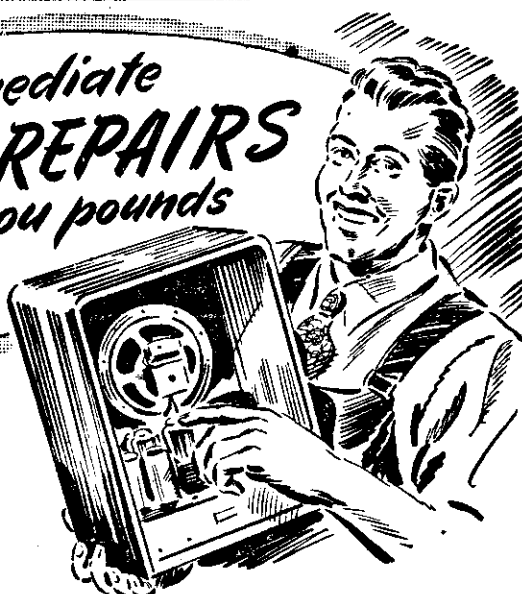
Delving Into Religion

He went back to the *Sunday Dispatch* as a special writer, doing a long series of articles about various religions, called *What Shall Man Believe?* "I had to study everything from the Bible to the Koran, Yoga to Shintoism, and it got me down. For 13 years after that I was with the *Evening Standard* and saw eight editors come and go. Things happen quickly in London."

For some years, Coster was the *Standard's* film and play reviewer, and between times he and Howard Spring, now a well-known novelist, covered big

(continued on next page)

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