

THE DEPOPULATED SOUTH

I NEVER cross Cook Strait in bad weather without wondering how the Maoris ever crossed at all. When I crossed yesterday, it was a miserable experience from harbour to harbour, with great seas breaking over us all the way, and most of the passengers, including myself, sick and a little afraid. Half-

GETTING THERE

way across the open sea I found the locked doors intolerable, so let myself out on the lee side and spent the rest of the journey holding on to a rail in a sheltered corner watching the waves roaring and tumbling past in confusion. It was fascinating but horrible, and when I remembered the difference between the Tamahine and the Endeavour I was not surprised that Cook's victory over the Strait was not complete. He proved that it was a strait; found his way through; and located and entered the safe havens on the South side. But he never entered Wellington harbour, though he knew that it existed, and Tasman in the Heemskerk never got through at all. Cook came in January, Tasman

in December, and primitive though their vessels were by comparison with a modern twin-screw steamer, they were leviathans to the Maoris. If there was ever such a navigator as Kupe, he came in a canoe; but there can be no doubt about the later migrations, when New Zealand was occupied from canoes; and even if we could refuse that story we are close enough in time to Te Rauparaha to know that he dominated Cook Strait from Kapiti, raiding passing vessels at will, and thinking no more of the waves than we do of a high wind on the crest of the Rinitakas.

Maoris did of course get drowned in the Strait. Whole canoe loads got drowned. But it was never an impassable barrier to them whether they were North Islanders raiding the South or South Islanders retaliating on the North, and it meant no more to them in general than it means to us to-day. To the average individual it meant far less.

CROSSING the Strait cost a Maori three or four hours of muscular effort and whatever that represented in the depreciation of a canoe that was

good for a hundred years. The shipping company that carried me over charged me £1 for my own bulk (203lb.) and £19/8/6 for my truck (2 tons 3cwt. 1 qr.). I make no complaint of those charges, since I have no means of judging whether they were justifiable or not. I did ask the manager of the Company to explain them, and since I have no answer to his answer—that they were fixed after protracted discussions with the Automobile Association and the Price Control Tribunal—I must accept his explanation. But I imagine that if Cook had been plying for hire he would have accepted £20/8/6 for a special charter for 3½ hours and that I paid enough for one little corner of the Tamahine's deck to give me the whole Endeavour to myself for an afternoon,

THE COST

with all the ship's company working for me. It may be true, as the manager told me, that Cook Strait is cheaper to cross, actually and relatively, than the English Channel. But if it is I suspect that the reason is the same in both cases, and the moral too. In any case I am sure that burdens tend to lose their weight when we all know about them.

Meanwhile it is a sobering thought for us all, buyers and sellers alike, that we have made such a crazy pattern of our economy in a single century—partly



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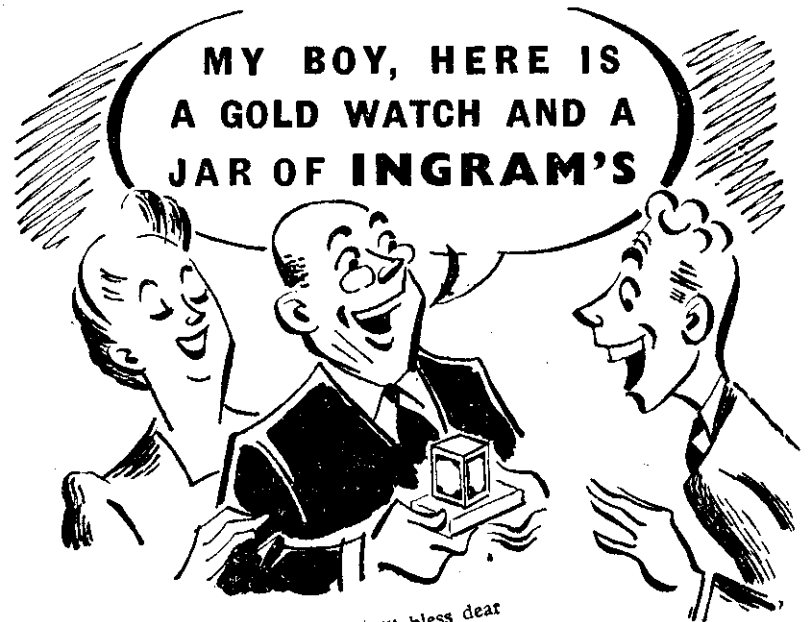
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