

A LAND OF THOUGHT

A LITTLE over a year ago John Green, the BBC's Director of Agricultural Broadcasts, paid a lengthy visit to New Zealand. In March last he gave his impressions in a broadcast in England which appears in the British "Listener" under the heading "A Country of Thought." We print below an abridgement of this broadcast.

IF Australia is a country of impulse, New Zealand by contrast is a country of thought. I felt all the time I was in New Zealand that it was a classical land: an outpost of civilisation infinitely remote, but intensely conscious of the world. Australia values her isolation and seems pleased to let her destiny follow the course her impetus dictates; New Zealand seemed puzzled and worried by leaving anything to chance. She seemed concentrated on an intellectual pattern. I spoke recently about the Australian sense of personality.

I know I am running a risk of losing friends on both sides of the Tasman if I make comparisons between Australia and New Zealand. If you want to know how they feel about each other, imagine ourselves compared with France by an American critic. Brought up with an

insular view of our own history, we are apt to bridle when our monuments or habits are grouped as European. It all seems an insufferable piece of "Yankee" history. Well, the Australian and New Zealander feel the same about Australasia; they regard it as a mere convenience of geography. Although an aeroplane flies between the two countries every day, they travel in each other's countries very seldom. They are definite and distinct nations, tied only by the sense of political responsibility in the Pacific. I thought I detected in New Zealand a certain nervousness about Australia, lest it might involve the family in a "grand mistake"; while in Australia there was just that friendly disinterestedness of the brother who has tasted some of life's illusions, for a younger brother still rather indulged at home.

I wonder how many traducers of British Imperialism have ever read

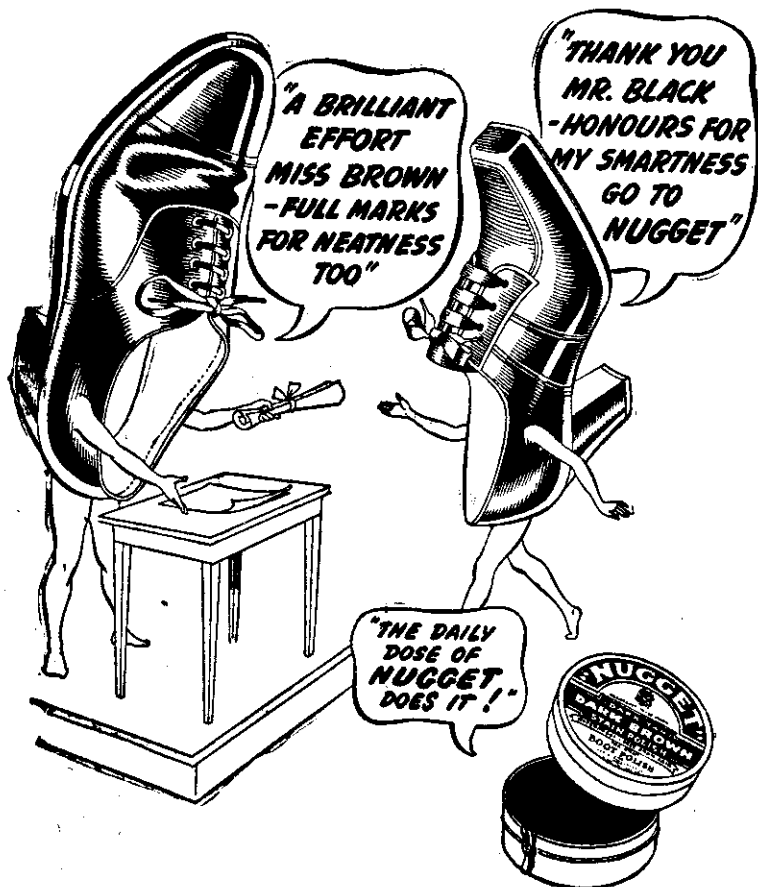
about the founding of New Zealand. It seems almost remarkable in these days, for remember there were no minerals or groundnuts at stake. From the very start the missionaries sought to prevent the extermination and corruption of the native race which had occurred on every other continent. What is more remarkable, they were able to exert their influence at home. Why else should the British Government in 1817 have expressly excluded New Zealand from His Majesty's Dominions, and made this position plain to prospective settlers for more than 20 years? As a matter of fact the permanent head of the Colonial Office and his ministerial chief were both officials of the Church Missionary Society, to which at least the Church of England missionaries belonged. Both men had worked for the emancipation of slavery, and dreaded the thought of another boisterous colony. They opposed it resolutely until 1839, when the Government was openly defied by the newly-formed New Zealand Company. I believe the defiance is the only "bar sinister" on New Zealand's shield, and even this was a capricious intellectual action, unlike the

simpler human motives that made Australia. There was no mild scientific curiosity in shrubs and ocean currents, nor an elementary greed for gold or acres, but the theory of one rather remarkable but uncomfortable man, Edward Gibbon Wakefield. (Uncomfortable men have been having theories in New Zealand ever since—muscular Christians, imaginative Jews, Scottish radicals, and opinionated soldiers.) But this is the real point. They have all largely been actuated (whether confessed or not) by a puritanical fear of God, which gives New Zealand much in common with Washington's America. I thought it made New Zealanders rather awkward when they had to justify their classical reserve to the more robust opportunism of rebellious America.

"A Political Sere"

To a student of politics, the history of New Zealand is a most interesting study. Theories and ideas can be linked to the material changes associated with the development of virgin country. In Europe it is hard to trace the thousand springs of cultural influence that have welled up through the centuries, to join a rolling tide of progress and reform. But New Zealand, to borrow a phrase from the ecologists, was

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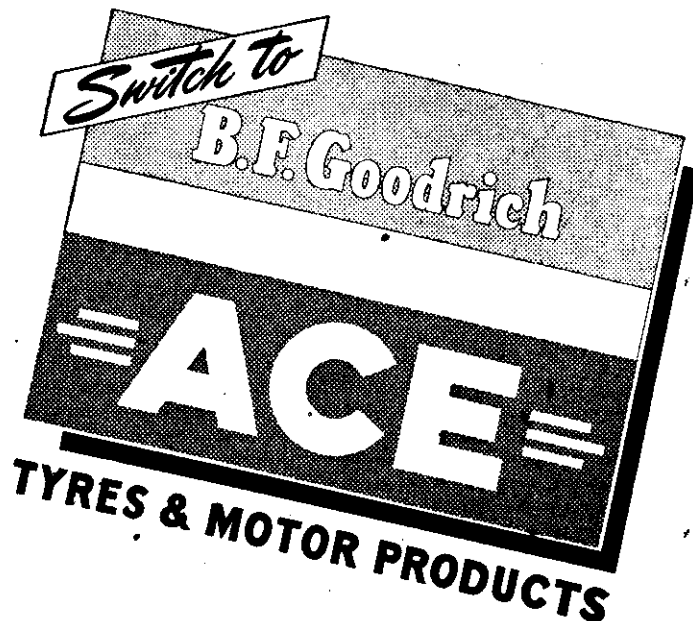


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