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To Waiho AND THE GLACIER

MANY people go to church in Waiho who don't go anywhere else. Some go to see the church itself and some to fill in time, but a few, I could not help suspecting, because they feel a little awed at the glacier and temporarily at least a little devout.

BUSH CHURCH

When I went myself to an evening service, and arrived late, the congregation consisted largely of men and women whose piety had been so successfully concealed in the hotel that Conan Doyle himself would not have suspected it. They were not there for the view of the glacier through the altar window, since you need daylight for that and clear weather. Nor were they present to air their other-than-knockabout clothes, since most of them wore flannels or tweeds. I think they were there partly because it was a wild night, with thunder adding to the roar of the river, and flashes of lightning intensifying the gloom of the gorge; partly because the preacher had mingled freely with them in the hotel lounge and asked them to come; partly because alcohol can release knots as well as tie them; partly because the proportion of active unbelievers is nowhere very high; and partly because the preacher was an earnest, intelligent, and very attractive young woman.

I could not help noticing another woman there no longer young, and never, I should think, since childhood very attractive, whom I had seen sitting all alone in the lounge silently drinking whisky. She was still alone, but when a hymn was announced she would pull herself together, rise briskly to her feet, and with an expression that was both defiant and appealing, enter for five minutes into communion with the saints. It was far more convincing than the remark of a third woman when I returned to see the church by day that it was "significant" that you had to kneel to get a view of the glacier through the window. Significant of what, I felt like asking her, but being a moral coward I in fact replied (I am sure with a disgusting sanctimonious smirk) that it was something I had not noticed. But women as well as conscience make cowards of most of us.

* * *

WHATEVER the question is there is always someone who will answer it. I was told at the hostel that the glacier was advancing a yard a day. At the glacier itself I was told 15 feet a day. In the lounge at night the advance was declared to be retrogression—and that authority at any rate had

EBB AND FLOW

photographs to support what he was saying. He added that all glaciers were in retreat in the Southern Hemisphere. But when I returned to Wellington on the heels of a Government geologist the retreat had become an advance again, and was (as such passes move) fairly rapid. All these answers could of course be right at different times; but they could not all be right at the

same time; and if it had been important for me to get accurate information the day I asked for it, my situation might have been difficult.

In fact I seldom retain such information much longer than it takes me to acquire it, and I seldom believe that others retain it accurately either. It is comforting to know that the ice is not melting fast enough to disappear before our grandchildren can see it, and not accumulating fast enough to push the present inhabitants of Waiho into the

in their case was that everybody on the road knew when the buses were coming and took care to meet them in possible places.

I can't be sure how it was all arranged, but I know that the roads carried heavy traffic in heavy rain without breaking up, and that the less chance they had of drying out the better they seemed to wear. It was suggested to me that the overhanging bush broke the force of the rain in the first place, and then, by providing protection against the wind and the sun, kept dust away and counteracted the gouging out of pot-holes. It is a technical problem which I leave to the engineers. But it is not necessary to have technical knowledge to know when a road is corrugated, and the only stretches on which my teeth chattered and my backbone threatened my hat were the open stretches where the sun and wind had full play.

* *

IT struck me as strange on the way to the glacier that I had heard so much about the ice and so little about the approach to it. I am not going to call this the finest walk in the world, or in the Southern Hemisphere, or even in the South Island.

We have so many walks in New Zealand which the old

WAIHO GORGE

world, if we were closer, would pave with gold that it is safer, talking to New Zealanders themselves, not to be ecstatic about any of them. I will say only that the three or four miles of gorge between the bridge and the ice astonished and delighted me all the way. I don't quite know why any physically fit sight-seer drives to the ice instead of walking; but if you do choose to drive you will find the road safer than Queen Street or Lambton Quay. Even in a car, however, it would be difficult not to feel the gorge, and on foot it is difficult to keep moving on, at the lower end to leave the milky, roaring, river; higher up to pass the birds and trees; at the top end to withdraw the eyes and switch the mind from the side glories to the greater wonder in front.

* * *

SOMEWHERE south of Wataroa, but I can't remember how far south, there is a farm whose owner has never occupied or claimed it. I thought of this as I was passing the landing-ground near Wataroa, and I wondered if events would have taken a different course if flying had reached Westland a few years earlier. For the story, as I recall it, is a little ridiculous. It begins about 60 years back—perhaps more

NO MAN'S LAND

(continued on next page)



"The three or four miles of gorge between the bridge and the ice astonished and delighted me all the way"

sea. But my curiosity does not go much further than that. The glacier as I saw it was very much like the glacier seen and described by Haast, and by Dobson before Haast. The magnificent aerial photographs we get of it to-day fill out and round off the photographs taken from the surrounding heights by tough photographers on foot during the last 50 years; but the picture remains the same for all but the geologists, and what they lose one decade they seem to recover the next. I accept their statement that it is almost unknown to find so much ice at such a low altitude and such a high latitude within seven or eight miles of the sea. But I don't share the fears of those who say that such a freak will not endure.

* * *

IN spite of the rainfall South Westland gave me the best driving I have had anywhere on unsealed roads. This would not have surprised me if I had met no heavy traffic; but some of the loads were so heavy that I kept wondering what happened

RAIN AND ROADS

when two trucks met, since it must usually have been physically impossible for them to give way to one another as courteously as they always did to me. But I never once saw a truck in trouble. Somehow or other the drivers must have made a 10-foot road divide into two six-foot roads, and with those stolen margins have crept safely past. Then there were the service buses, which were wider still; but I imagine that what happened