

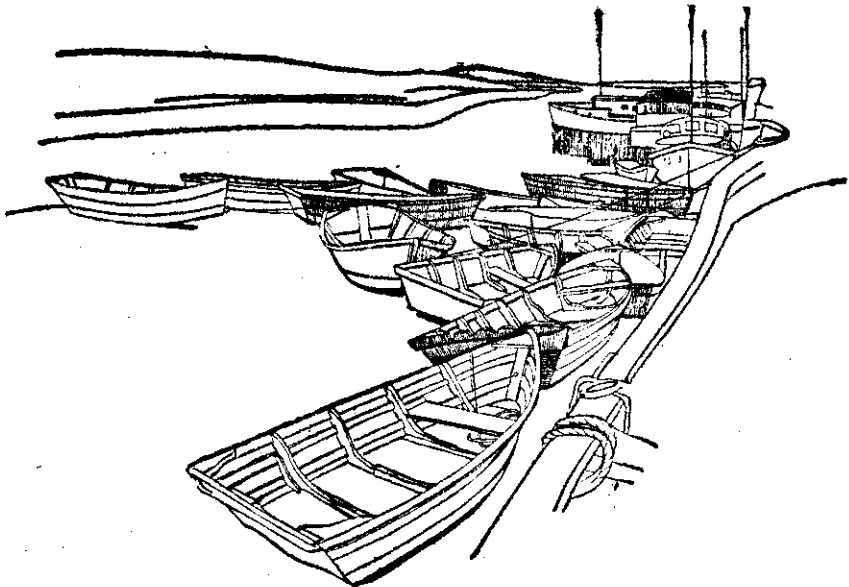
Will Boldness Pay?

OUR OWN COUNTRY. Paul's Book Arcade, Hamilton. 25/-.

THIS is one of the boldest ventures in publishing I can remember in 40 years. I can think of subsidised jobs (like the books of Johannes Andersen) filial devotion books (like Heinrich Von Haast's), and books of provincial pride (like McIntock's *History of Otago*) that all cost a great deal more than this one; but I can't remember another case where quality on the production side seemed to be the only consideration with a publisher so well aware of the limited appeal of the text. It is of course a cheering situation when it happens, but I can't think why it happens.

Anyhow it has happened. The book costs 25/- and the number of people likely to buy it can be large only after a long period. Admirable though some of its sections are, they are the kind of thing you appreciate when you have long acquaintance with them, or very close acquaintance with the subject matter of them; and in this latter case if

you know one of the worlds well you are not likely to know the others. Because, I have life-long knowledge of one of the geographical areas, and the knowledge of one non-geographical subject that comes quickly because we go hungry if it tarries, I have found myself turning back to some pages over and over again. Many others will do the same. As our pleasure is renewed we shall tell others, a new group each time perhaps, and so gradually do the advertising. But there is nothing that shouts from the pages themselves: no sensations, no scandals, no political provocation, no flashing wit or hearty laughter. You travel all the way from Arrowtown to Kerikeri without feeling once that this is the first or last fresh word that scene or situation will provoke. There is some forced writing, some thin writing, a little (but not much) foolish, smart-alec writing. Everywhere, too, there is superficial writing, since there had to be superficial seeing. The editor could, I think, have blued out a further 10 per cent. when he was making his selections from *Korero*, the Army Education magazine from which the present book has been gleaned.

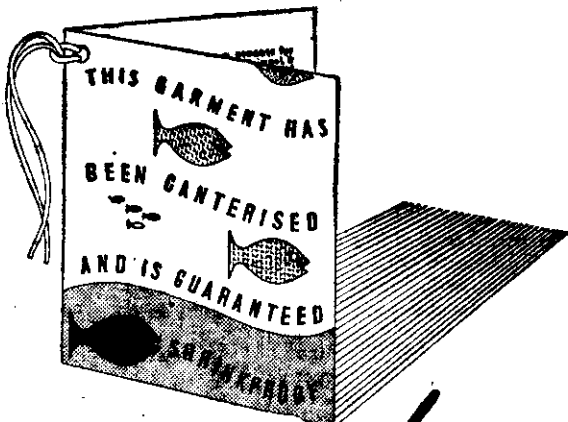


THAMES RIVER, by L. Lipanovic, an illustration from "Our Own Country"

But say what you like about the writing, it has revealed and not concealed New Zealand. It is our own country we see as we read, and a good deal more of it than most of us have seen before. The writers are more than reporters if not quite artists and interpreters—though they come near to interpretation in an occasional bright flash. I read my

own copy in a caravan between Naseby and Lumsden, with Cobbett's *Rural Rides* for a change of fare. I am not going to say that I found one as good as the other, but it was possible to read the two simultaneously. As for the externals—the printing, binding, and illustrations—I have, I think, indicated already that they are

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