

# e. e. cummings was a good neighbour

**R**EGINALD HUNTER, New Zealand-born journalist, poet, and playwright, who for the past 35 years has spent most of his time in the United States, told *The Listener* something about his experiences there when he was in Wellington last week, shortly after his return from abroad. Amongst his memories are a conversation with Theodore Roosevelt, his friendship with John Cowper Powys, journalistic associations with Carl Sandburg and Ben Hecht, and a neighbourly acquaintance with E. E. Cummings in New York's Greenwich Village, the American equivalent of Bloomsbury or the *quartier latin* in Paris.

Mr. Hunter was born in Southbrook, Canterbury, and spent his early years in Oxford. In 1915 he set off to see the world, stopping for a while at Suva, and again at Hawaii, where he worked for nearly a year on the *Honolulu Advertiser*. He went to San Francisco at the time of the Panama-Pacific Exposition, and after a while started to explore the middle west, working as a journalist in Salt Lake City, in Denver, on the *Rocky Mountain News*, and in Kansas City on *The Kansas City Star*. It was here that he met "Teddy" Roosevelt, who was a contributing editor to the *Star* and wrote "lambasting editorials criticising Woodrow Wilson's pussy-footing policy in his conducting of the war." He remembered how interested Roosevelt was in New Zealand's progressive legislation, and all things concerned with the Pacific.

On the staff of the *Chicago Daily News* he worked for a year with Carl Sandburg, who was its labour editor, and Ben Hecht, its feature writer. "At that time Hecht had no anti-British feeling," he said, "in fact he didn't seem racially conscious at all. On the contrary, he prided himself on his detachment from the common human squabble. Later Hecht became a Hollywood scenario writer at 500 dollars a week, and collaborated with Charles MacArthur in several plays, including *The Front Page*, which was in a way based on the catchline that all journalists were repeating in those days — "Praise Hearst from whom all blessings flow."

In New York Mr. Hunter worked as a freelance writer for a while, contributing to the *Boston Evening Transcript*, *Coronet*, and the *New York Sun*, for which he wrote editorials on New Zealand and Australian affairs at space rates, an unusual procedure in those days. After some years he went to London where he contributed to magazines such as

*John o' London's* and the *British-American*. He travelled on the Continent and eventually returned to the States.

During the '20's several one-act plays that he wrote were produced by Little Theatre groups, and a collection of them was published. His poems *And Tomorrow Comes* and *The Saga of Sinclair* were followed by *Porlock*, a full-length prose portrait of a character he had known in Greenwich Village, where he lived for several years. It was at this time that he met and became a close friend of John Cowper Powys, who wrote a foreword to the book. When Powys left, he moved into his flat. E. E. Cummings lived next door, and they used to "share the same lumber room." Cummings was a good neighbour, he said, although in their literary interests they didn't have much in common. He was known, because of the typographical experiments he made in his poems, as the man who "disguised his egotism with small i's," although he was really no more of an egotist than most artists. Mr. Hunter considered. They lived in a quiet little tree-lined street called Patchin Place, and in his last letter to him, E. E. Cummings said he hoped to visit New Zealand himself one day.

Carl Sandburg Mr. Hunter described as "an honest-to-God rugged American with a great feeling for the essential America as opposed to the tinsel America of the movies and popular fiction," and Padraic Colum as "a striking figure with a remarkable delicately-shaped head."

Mr. Hunter has come back home to retire, he says, and does not expect to return to America. He does however intend to do a little more writing if the famous "New Zealand inertia" which he has heard so much about does not number him among its victims.



Spencer Digby photograph  
**REGINALD HUNTER**



## 'Rehab fixed me up

— but we're not all so lucky'

'For two years we were living in one room, with a slit of a kitchen, and bathroom shared by three other families.

'Now we have a home of our own and we feel we can breathe. Now I own a tiny bit of New Zealand — and after all, I did fight for it.

'Is the wife happy! Just look at her face; she's a different woman since Rehab. helped us to buy this place. We had a job finding it, but I knew, sooner or later, we'd strike someone who wanted to sell to a serviceman.

'Some of my cobbers are still hunting. It's heartbreaking work—I hope they soon get fixed up!'

Rehabilitation have settled well over 40,000 ex-servicemen and women in homes and farms — but the job is not finished. There are still needy cases. Will you help? If you have a house or farm to sell or a house to let, remember —

**Give a Serviceman first chance**

ACCURACY and  
Elegance...

**MOVADO**

WINNERS OF 168 OBSERVATORY AWARDS

SOLD AND SERVICED BY JEWELLERS THROUGHOUT NEW ZEALAND