

To the Kermadecs and Niue With a Tape-recorder

UP to a few weeks ago the unsophisticated natives of Niue Island knew little about radio and nothing at all of the motion-picture industry. But now they have seen and heard both a tape-recorder—"funny little box that takes our voices away and gives them back again"—and Clark Gable and Greer Garson in romantic excursions on the talkie screen. The effects of these two products of civilisation on a people whose small home so little deserves its alternative name of Savage Island, were observed recently by Bryan O'Brien, who had been assigned by the Commercial Division of the NZBS to visit the Kermadecs and Niue, and compile information for a new series of Sunday night programmes.

Only a short stay was made at the Kermadecs, but three nights and four days were put in on Niue Island, about 1350 miles north east of New Zealand. Niue has a population of 4,300 natives, of Polynesian and Melanesian stock, and 30 Europeans, who look after public

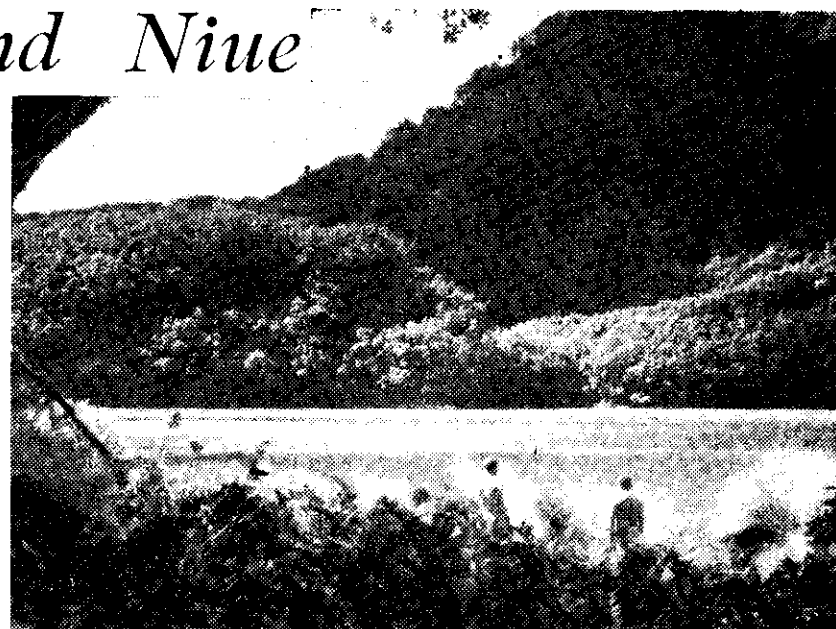
works and administration for the New Zealand Government. Here Bryan O'Brien recorded descriptions of the native way of life, its customs and its music. He also induced several of the natives to let their voices be recorded, and once they lost their initial shyness, they talked as freely as housewives over a cup of tea.

Films in the Jungle

All interest at the time was centred in the picture theatre—simply a clearing in the jungle with walls of sacking strung from poles, a 16 mm. projector, and a screen measuring 10ft. by 10ft.

"All through the screenings an interpreter went flat out, raising his voice in competition with the screen characters, and explaining the plot," Mr. O'Brien told *The Listener*. "Though the natives had no idea what an American melodrama was all about they were still enchanted with what was to them the magic of it all."

The visitors were entertained in island style, and treated to such dishes as fish baked in coconut cream. To drink



BLUE LAKE, on Raoul Island, largest of the Kermadecs

they had non-alcoholic *otai*, made from ti-root and coconut milk.

Islanders with stronger tastes brew bush beer in secret, but on detection receive a term of imprisonment served

in a gaol which is just a very pleasant sort of farm building. Imprisonment seems to consist of little more than lazing in the sun and singing home-made hymns. (continued on next page)

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