

# WHERE THE NOR'-WESTER BLOWS

## *The Strange Contradictions Of Canterbury*

**T**HERE are perhaps five places in Canterbury which people deliberately visit as tourists. In the far south-western corner is Mt. Cook. In the west is Arthur's Pass. On the northern boundary lies Hanmer Springs. In the middle, as you will have heard, is the Avon, where the poplar trees used to stand among the weeping willows. In the south is Timaru, which is in Canterbury if you are counting up this sort of thing, as with Mt. Cook, and out of it when you want to play football or tennis, golf or cricket.

Between these five points there is nothing but Canterbury.

If you go to the Exhibition you will sooner or later encounter those enthusiastic Southlanders who took up so much space on December 15 in *The Listener*. And you will meet others, from Auckland, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Westland, Otago, or Marlborough, all in various degrees enthusiastic about their homeland.

But if you encounter a tall man, in plain cut clothes, with a face like the cigarette advertisements, and an intentional air of breeding and reserve about him, you will know that he comes from Canterbury, although he will not immediately tell you so or trouble to invite you down, even for the week-end.

### Love of Being English

Quite disregarding the fact that their province is full of Methodists and Presbyterians, who are supposed to be Scots in outlook if not by blood, the people of Canterbury have for so long been assured they are typically English, they must discover or invent the characteristics of Englishmen to adopt them for their own. It is largely because of the willows and the poplars, Hagley Park and the green fields of Winchester, and the Wakefields. They feel they have made a little England on the bottom of the world and must live down to it.

They will agree with the accents of reserved silence if you praise their lovely land, and achieve enthusiasm for politeness' sake if you are so impolite as to praise peoples and places elsewhere while they are listening. "Oh yes," they will say. "I've been there." This, you will understand, is the greatest enthusiasm of which they are capable, and you will be glad indeed at heart that your opinion has been greeted with such approval.

### Love of Being Earnest

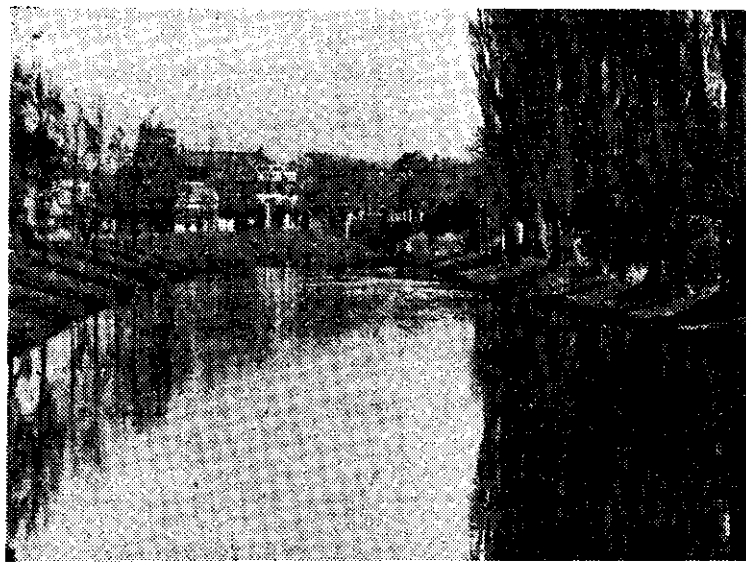
Canterbury manages its affairs and guards its interests with the sort of interminable intensity you will see in the stare of the tall man with the mouse-brown hair when you meet him at the Exhibition and invite him to throw quoits. They say that Canterbury people homing from the North island send back telegrams reporting their sensations at being once again in New Zealand. In truth, many of the New Zealander's riddles of behaviour and thought are most queer and insoluble among the people living in Canterbury.

More than anywhere else in New Zealand, the people of Canterbury are individuals forcing themselves unwillingly to live with other people and permit life to be organised for them. Understand-

A Canterbury correspondent who prefers, as he says all Canterbury people prefer, to remain anonymous, read in "The Listener" about the energy applied by Southlanders in defence of their Southland. This is his reply, on behalf of Canterbury.

ing, in theory, the need for local bodies and some sort of politics to put in the newspaper, they apply themselves to the task of keeping public life vigorous with an industry that often reaches the point of virulence.

It is not that they are quarrelsome: they prefer to be quiet, to be left alone, to go their own ways.



*TOO RESERVED to indulge in the brawling turbulence of more uncouth waters, the Christchurch Avon has played its part in influencing Canterbury character*

It can only be a sense of duty that makes them so belligerent, politically, that a man's reputation, his past, present, and his future, can depend on his vote for or against the grant by the County Council for a yard of wire-netting needed round a new-planted tree. Devil take the tree; devil take the pence, the rates, the chairman, and the county engineer; but devil take him if he falls down on one of those principles that have made public life in Canterbury hardly worth living for the last 100 years.

### Love of Being Contrary

All New Zealanders are sufficiently individualistic to fight bitterly among themselves for their political convictions. But they are also too individualistic to enforce their opinions as the opinions of a mass of people. Only in Canterbury could this paradox apply so closely. A governing body down there, local or national, can go right through its term of office without a single measure of praise, without a single note of agreement, and yet it can still rely on mass inertia to keep it in place at the end. Fiercely progressive in their best thought

as individuals, they are sententiously backward in their deeds as a group.

They have, as we have seen, about five possible tourist resorts. The best of these they acknowledge with pride, but seldom visit. The further a Canterbury man (or a New Zealander of any other prejudice) lives from Mt. Cook or Hanmer Springs, the more likely is he to visit them. The closer, the less likely he is to remember they are there.

Yet it does not matter. None of the places named on the map or in the tourist's guide is the real Canterbury. The people living there are incidental. Caroline Bay, Kairaki Beach, Sumner, New Brighton, the shady corners of bush and sunny bends of rivers, the peaks and glaciers, are not the whole story. It would be as presumptuous to describe Canterbury as Mt. Cook and The Avon as it has been presumptuous to sum up the people of Canterbury as this article has tried to sum them up.

### Love of Many Things And Nothing

For the qualities that make Canterbury like nowhere else in the world are not the cities and resorts, the people or their way of amusing themselves; not the swans on the Avon nor the flowers in the thousand and one beautiful gardens in blooming Christchurch; not the bricks of Timaru nor the broom and gorse round the downs below Mt. Grey; not even the Canterbury harvest, nor the wind in plantations on the plains; but only those unmentionable not-to-be-analysed qualities of fleeting beauty that make a Canterbury man or woman feel strange, and lonely, all-at-sea, for long years after Canterbury has been left behind.

Perhaps they hit on something of the secret when they made that bare model of Canterbury for the Exhibition and illumined it with changing coloured lights. It is not wholly accurate, but it gives some idea. The colour down there is not plain blues or greens or yellows. It is light itself, with the spectrum gentled into pastels, and pastels smoothed away into a perfection of subtle variants. Artists would give their eyes to catch just once the colours that are flung full-arched across the eastern and the western skies, morning and evening, or swung from sea to hills when the day's been dull—seawards at dawn and at twilight, west across the hills before the night brings soft security.

It is a dangerous land, fit to make dullards and iotus eaters as easily as revolutionaries; to breed poets and Tories side by side; to nourish great conceptions and cut them off still-born; to make a people as incalculably vigorous as the rivers rebellious between the shifting shingle banks, or as lethargic and contented as the reedy-edged lagoons and the cows grazing round them.

Maybe it is much like the rest of New Zealand, but if a New Zealander must fight or argue over anything, he first defends himself, then his province, and then attacks all the others. Forward, Canterbury! Down, Southland!

Have I been too contradictory, too vague, too various? It is nothing. I come from Canterbury.