

THEY WERE THE FIRST

The Men Who Explored New Zealand

THE EXPLORATION OF NEW ZEALAND:
By W. G. McClymont. Centennial Survey, No. III. Printed by Whitcombe & Tombs, published by the Department of Internal Affairs. E. H. McCormick, Editor

THIS book will excite you if you are rough and tough, or would like to be. Even if you are timid and tame, you have probably found yourself at some time in your life wondering whether you were not the first to burst into some boundless sea of bush. Or you have reached the top of a lonely peak and almost persuaded yourself that no white man ever stood there before.

Mr. McClymont is a dispeller of such illusions, but only in the interests of truth. He would leave you in possession if he could, and as often as he can he gives you the benefit of the doubt. But the early explorers were as unkind to him as they were to you. There are odd corners yet in the south-west of the South Island where a few more names could be written on the map; a smaller area in the north-west; and perhaps a pocket or two in the north-east of the main land mass of the North Island. But dead men hold all the rest.

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Yes, the Brunners and the Hectors were tough; the Barringtons and the Camerons; the Heaphys, the Dobsons, the McKays. Von Haast was tough. Douglas was almost too tough to be true. But Mr. McClymont is tough, too, or this book could not have been written. The task before him when he began to write was not less bewildering than the task before the missionaries, explorers, settlers, and gold-seekers when they found themselves facing a trackless wilderness without any possibility of getting a bird's-eye view. Somehow or other he had to see the woods past the trees. Somehow or other, he had to show them to short-sighted readers, without wearying them, and without passing any big tree by. And he has done it—first, there can be no doubt, by assembling enough material for a book of a thousand pages; then by selecting and sifting and trimming and pruning till there remained only a hundred pages; and then by restoring a journey here and an adventure there till he arrived at a coherent picture.

Nor must it be forgotten that his material was not lying about like the cards at the end



W. G. McClymont
... Dispels some illusions

of a game of patience. Some of it was in books; some in forgotten newspaper files; some in Parliamentary reports; some in London. To find it required knowledge as well as diligence, to verify it tact as well as endless patience.

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Well here it is. If the full story would fill a library, there is enough in his 200 pages to show what the story really is. Some will be satisfied, some will want more, but nobody will find any difficulty in seeing how and why it all happened. For Mr. McClymont gives reasons as well as facts. We know there is a road over the Alps and why musterers first drove sheep up the Waiau and Awatere to Canterbury. We know why such desperate journeys were made from Lake Wakatipu and why Brunner ruined his health linking Nelson and Westland by land. It is not just a narrative but an exposition, and although there are mysteries still to be explained in New Zealand exploration, and some controversies still to be settled, this book answers more questions about the early explorers than any single volume now available.

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Some day, it is to be hoped, Mr. McClymont will write that fuller story for which

this one creates such an appetite. With the space limitation imposed on him—necessarily imposed on him if the book was to appeal to the general reader and come easily out of the general reader's purse—he has often had to be tantalisingly brief. We want to know more about Brunner, more about Caples and Barrington, more, far more, about Douglas, and some of us will not be satisfied until we do know more. But we have neither the time nor the facilities for digging it all out of libraries and newspaper files. Even with the very full notes on his sources supplied at the end of his book we are babes wandering in an endless wood. He will have to come to our rescue. But we shall not be ready, and shall not deserve, to be rescued until we have mastered what he has told us already.

It would of course have helped if he had supplied a few more maps. There are places, and even journeys, in his narrative which it is not possible to trace at all, and although maps cost money, it would not have added appreciably to the cost of production if the blank spaces on the folding maps had carried locality plans of, say, north-west Otago and either the Marlborough-Canterbury journeys or the Wellington-Wairarapa routes.

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It may be ungracious after all this to suggest that Mr. McClymont occasionally nods. On p. 101, for example, he says that "the best and most reliable" account of the exploits of Mackenzie the sheep-stealer was given by J. H. C. Sidebottom. On p. 195 he says that "the most reliable and most comprehensive" statement about Mackenzie is given by Mrs. Woodhouse. Those who have read Mrs. Woodhouse will know that she repeats Sidebottom's account, but others will be slightly mystified. Again on p. 156 eight sailors from the wrecked *Pacific* get safely to shore. A few lines farther on they are seven, which may easily have been the case. But what happened to number eight?

There is some obscurity, too, on p. 113, where Kettle and Valpy go from Lake Wai-hola to Waitahuna and on past the source of the Tuapeka river till in the distance they see the valley of the Molyneux. Mr. McClymont can hardly be wrong in saying that they then returned "almost due south" to the Tokomai-riro plain; they may have done so; but it is difficult to think what route they took.