

"You Know Us By Our Hair"

HER face was the colour of bush-honey and her black hair was braided across the dome of her head, behind a high and sloping forehead. She told an enormous tawny dog: "Go home at once," but he just grinned at her and did nothing about it.

We seemed to have half a day to wait for a bus so I said to her, "You were not born in this country?"

"No. In Rarotonga." She smiled and her smile was as charming as Shirley Temple's, and her teeth were white and regular. "I am working here but I have only been here three weeks."

"Well, have you always spoken English?"

"Yes, I spoke it in the islands, but I don't speak it very good." I told her the only thing I knew about the islands was that a friend of mine had been a doctor there about ten years ago; she beamed with joy: oh, yes, she knew him and he was a very good doctor. So we stood there in the sun in Auckland, waiting for a bus and laughing at the surprise that we should both know the same person.

"To-day it is my day off and I go to town to meet all the other girls because

we all have Wednesday day off and we have a club. In Wellington I think they all have Thursday day off and they have a club and go to the beaches."

What They Wear

No, she said, she wasn't going to the pictures. Last week they had all gone to a concert in the town hall, such a crowd!—but this week she was going to the Museum. I asked her about the bark-cloth I had seen in a museum, with the mallets used for beating it thin and even. She said her mother made it but she herself did not; the brown patterning is made with mud dye and the red pattern from plant juices.

"In the islands the girls wear those clothes but here we all wear white clothes. And you know us by our hair. We all have the hair braided on top—except some of the girls who have been here for long time and have cut hair. Sometimes I cut some off mine and then I put oil on it and it grows again."

By "white" clothes she apparently meant navy-blue, sometimes with spots, sometimes with a flower pattern, but always navy-blue and nearly always with a brown coat or a navy-blue blazer.

And she liked being here?

"Oh, yes, I like it fine. No buses and nice things like that in the islands—just walk to places! And only 5s. a week for work there and much more money here."

"Do you save up for your fare? And how do you get a job from Rarotonga to New Zealand?"

"Fruit is Terribly Expensive"

"Well, all the girls who want to go to New Zealand for a job apply at the Government and the Government has the names from New Zealand and the people here pay the fares and then we pay it back in 5s. a week from our wages. Oh, the fruit is terribly expensive here and just rotting on the ground in the islands. And it is very expensive in the bus and pictures and so on, but I like new places. Oh, I like it here. And I have a better job. Before I was cook, and every day I had to think and think (here she turned her finger round her forehead) what I would make for a sweet, always working it out again each day. But now there is a cook in this job and I don't have to think any more. Oh, yes, I like it better here. But the first day I went in Auckland I was lost. Did not know where I was, oh, I was lost."

"What did you do?"

"Oh, I went in a telephone box and rang them up and told them I was lost and they came in for me in the car."

—J.

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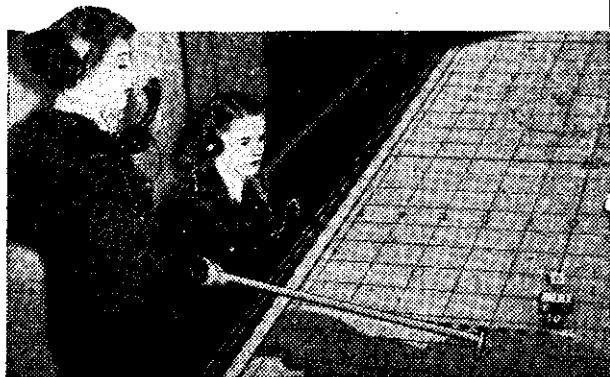
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