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BOOKS

MASTERS AND MEN

WORKS COUNCILS IN NEW ZEALAND.
By A. E. C. Hare. Victoria University
College.

(Reviewed for "The Listener" by
F. L. COMBS)

"And since goodwill is a delicate plant which must be nurtured carefully . . . the attempt to force its growth is more likely to result in killing it than in hastening its maturity."

* * *

"The main cause of industrial strife in New Zealand as in other countries is the struggle over the division of the proceeds of industry, but in New Zealand the struggle is greatly aggravated, and the settlement of disputes retarded by the want of personal contact and good personal relations between management and labour within the factory."

THESE two quotations from Dr. Hare's most important report, supply its keynote. As a research worker, Dr. Hare strikes me as having all the qualifications. His subject may be contentious, but he is not. His statements are measured, judicious, and wise. Yet his findings are straightforward and go to the root of the matter. He has not for the sake of soothing winds and sunny weather steered clear of awkward questions and unwelcome conclusions, and a student of the report will feel that he has had skilful and reliable guidance in forming his own views on the subject of industrial relations.

Preventing Friction

Works Councils, Dr. Hare both explains and shows by giving instances, fill a gap in the machinery of industrial organisation. They provide if you like a lubricant between two surfaces, the management and its manpower.

The major political and economic issues involved in the struggle over the division of the proceeds of industry are not the concern of Works Councils. Such a council formed in a factory, whether state or private, aims to bring about good will and co-operation. It does so by seeking to improve personal relations, by increasing the well-being and contentment of those who work together, and by eliminating causes of friction arising out of human relationships or material conditions.

Mutual understanding and confidence are requisite to the performance of a Works Council's task. These Dr. Hare has found to be of slow growth, but no slower than on the face of things was to be expected. It needs a rare discipline on the part of both employer and worker to say "There are big matters about which we do not agree—i.e., the sharing of the proceeds of industry—but there are matters of common interest about which we can and should agree—i.e., the making of the place where we both work as efficient, healthy, pleasant, and harmonious as existing circumstances permit. By such things we both live, and they aid us in no small degree to get the best if not the most out of our days."

The writer of *Works Councils* has impartially investigated the existing set-up in New Zealand factories. He does not praise this set-up, though his report is valuable in pointing to a fair amount of encouraging success. He does not condemn the set-up, though he bases analytic criticism on a number of

facts not agreeable to either workers or employers. He has, in short, done his job, which was to be a fact-facing commission of one.

The report would have been valuable had it merely cleared an area neglected or overlooked to far too great an extent in New Zealand. It has a far greater value, because in a sagacious, convincing way, it demonstrates the possibility of future beneficial developments. Have Works Councils come to stay? They did not stay after the last war, but few readers of this report will oppose the conclusion that they should stay after the present one ends. The slow and difficult business of really establishing them is another matter, but Dr. Hare's piece of research will not be the smallest factor in contributing to such establishment.

I end with a comment which is not a criticism of *Works Councils in New Zealand*. A report after all is a report. Could not the author of this one write a book which gave him scope to put some appetising meat on admittedly very essential bones? Not but what the bones are well worthy of diligent digestion by every member of the Employers' Federation and by every Trade Unionist.

NEW ZEALAND NOVEL

OUTLAW'S PROGRESS. By R. M. Burdon.
Progressive Publishing Society, Wellington.

THIS novel will not add to Mr. Burdon's literary reputation, but it may add something to the bank account of his publishers. It is (in general) good writing and easy reading, and a new novel for half a crown is an event in New Zealand to-day. But whatever else he is—historian, essayist, philosopher—Mr. Burdon is not a novelist. He handicapped himself to begin with by choosing a plot that everybody knows, a sensation still fresh in the public mind, a situation which he could not, for legal and security reasons, make as exciting fictionally as it had been in fact. The only way out of that difficulty was to get under the outlaw's skin and reveal the tragic inevitability of his crime; and he has done that to some extent. He has aroused our sympathy, but he has not stirred our blood and it is doubtful if anyone could have done it so soon after the event. In any case it was a task that called for fastings and prayer, and there are not many signs that Mr. Burdon struggled as hard as that. On the other hand it is pleasant to have the rural background so accurately and intelligently filled in. Mr. Burdon has driven a gig. He has sat weary miles behind an old and cunning horse. He has met stock and station agents; done business with country storekeepers; been through a slump; struggled with sour land; buried old ewes; seen a hard-up farmer's fowl-house; squeezed through a gate-way invaded by gorse; studied a country town; sat in a country police-station; met mortgagees; smiled at a bootlaced hat; bought or nearly bought a motor-car; shot a pig; heard the noiseless noise of the bush. He knows our language and he knows us. But he does not know how to make us more exciting than we are, and he should never have tried. Nor will he let well alone when his picture is complete. Instead

(continued on next page)



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