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BOOKS

The Search for Balance

ECONOMIC STABILITY IN NEW ZEALAND, edited by Professor R. S. Parker:
New Zealand Institute of Public Administration, 12 6.

(Reviewed by W.B.S.)

THE public are interested in economic affairs to the extent that their wages and salaries change, the prices, quality and quantity of goods in the shops change, housing becomes more difficult or easier, and roads, schools and other public buildings deteriorate or do not deteriorate. Cabinet Ministers and Public Service and University economists have also been interested in precisely these things, for recommendations and decisions which affect all of them must be made if any kind of balance is to emerge in New Zealand's national economy. In order to exchange ideas and perhaps provide the public with more details on these problems, the New Zealand Institute of Public Administration arranged for a series of papers to be read at its annual convention in May, 1953. These papers, together with the gist of the discussions, have now been published. Their publication is amply justified—there are thoughtful and often penetrating discussions of some economic problems of New Zealand by economists and public servants with a keen interest and a highly developed conscience. These men came together primarily to discuss economic stability—they ended up inevitably by discussing economic development.

In fact, the main criticism that can be made of the convention is that the wrong topic was chosen. The title of "Economic Stability" dealt with history. If the title had been "Economic Development," the papers would have thrown a stronger and better light on present problems and those of the years to come. In the next 20 years another million will be added to the population. New Zealand's capital facilities—transport, buildings, factories, equipment—are, in many cases, already inadequate. Providing adequate capital building for the future involves discussions of taxation, borrowing, credit policy, the allocation of physical resources and the standard of living itself. A start has been made on this by the timely conference on capital development held in Christchurch in August last.

But before papers are prepared for further discussion it would be as well for everybody concerned to absorb these papers on economic stability. Readers will be charmed by Professor Belshaw's tight and nimble discussion of stability and growth, and agree with his plea for more economic research. They will be impressed by the Government Statistician's paper on social accounting and also by his humanity. They may read with nostalgic regret Professor Simkin on monetary policy and raise their New Zealand eyebrows when he talks of dual exchange rates. When they have read the papers they should turn to Professor Parker's balanced introduction to crystallise their thoughts. He has, like an impartial

judge, summed up the trends of the papers and the public discussion.

And we conclude—that all New Zealand's pressure groups should digest the ideas in this book before they say another word, that there does not seem to be a consumers' pressure group, that New Zealand's sterling funds govern New Zealand's economic development, that there is something seriously wrong with the dairy industry guaranteed price formula, that the praiseworthy preoccupation with income security does not necessarily provide for development, that there is a lot of thinking in the Treasury Department, and that the demand for lower taxation is not necessarily the result of thinking.

"ESSENTIAL IRONY"

JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS: A Study in Structure, by Andrew H. Wright; Chatto and Windus, English price 16/-

THIS book is by a young American scholar who mainly occupies himself with the ironic themes of Jane Austen's novels. He endeavours to show that ironic language is likely to be evidence of irony in a much deeper sense, and quotes Kierkegaard, who said that "whoever has essential irony has it all day long, not bound to any specific form, because it is infinite with him." This is interesting matter for speculation no doubt, but it seems to me unfortunate that Mr. Wright, tied to his thesis, should proceed to take an unsatisfactory view of *Mansfield Park*.

In that novel he finds Jane Austen too much "engaged," and it is in her disengagement as an ironist that he finds "an objectivity which is not scientific, because not disinterested." It may be so, but I should have thought it quite impossible for anyone to write about *Mansfield Park*, without mentioning that the novel contains two of the most wonderfully comic passages that Jane Austen ever wrote: I mean the excursion to Sotherton, and the rehearsals (with "indefatigable rehearsers") for the amateur performance of *Lover's Vows*.

Further, it seems to me very doubtful whether Fanny Price is quite the "simple didactic figure" which Mr. Wright makes her out to be—particularly if we think of her in relation to the much more sophisticated Kate Croy. of Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*. Kate's motives in seeking money as a stable centre for her life are largely determined by her sense of the painful marriage situation of her sister: similarly, it might be argued, that Fanny's faithful attachment to the dull Edmund is determined by her sense of her mother's situation: at least she finds in Edmund the stability of character which her father lacks, and I suggest that it is this sense which is mainly responsible for her distrust of Henry Crawford, who she sees may eventually turn out to be a man resembling her father despite all his charm. In other words, her impulse towards playing safe somewhat mars the nobility of her severely-tried attachment.

It is difficult to agree with the publisher that this book is for the ordinary

(continued on next page)



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