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New Zealand Journey

IN the next few days the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will come to the end of their New Zealand journey. There will be no sudden or final break of interest: the last stages of the tour will be written and talked about when the Gothic is at sea, and afterwards we shall have news from Australia. In New Zealand, however, the bunting and the decorations will be taken down; and then, in the cooler mood of everyday life, it should be easier to look at the past five weeks and to see what they have meant in national experience.

The tour will be seen from different levels. For officials who had to make the arrangements within a close timetable it was an exacting and difficult enterprise, though perhaps becoming easier as the people showed that they needed no tuition in orderly behaviour. The formal occasions were managed smoothly and with dignity; and some of them—especially the ceremonial opening of Parliament—were deeply impressive. Most of us saw these events from a distance, or took part in them vicariously, with the aid of the daily broadcasts. The tour did not come close to the people until they were able to go out into the streets and see the Queen and the Duke for themselves. Some were lucky. There are men and women throughout the country for whom the tour was concentrated in a single vivid impression—a word and a smile from the Queen, a friendly gesture from the Duke, a moment enriched by the informal and the unexpected. Many others, the great majority, simply stood in the crowds and waited.

They did not behave quite in the way that was suggested by more colourful reports. There was no lack of enthusiasm; the people put aside their usual restraint, and were not afraid to cheer; but they

did not cease to be New Zealanders. Afterwards, on their homeward journeys, they spoke of what they had seen with cheerful friendliness, and sometimes with the solicitude they would show for members of their own families. The Queen was all they had expected her to be. Yet now she was no longer the centre of a pageant shown on a screen or in photographs, but was a young woman who could be seen at her endless round of engagements, obliged always to be under the public gaze, and knowing that every move and gesture was being recorded by cameras. People began to see what heavy demands are made on Royalty, even when the greatest care is taken to ease the strain. And the discovery left them thoughtful.

New Zealanders, expressing their loyalty in their own way, have learnt to identify themselves more closely with the Monarchy. Yet this has been possible only because the Queen and the Duke have moved everywhere with the right blend of ease and dignity. They have carried out their full programme with supreme tact and patience. There are some aspects of New Zealand life they have not seen, some groups they have not touched—and some, perhaps, they have had to meet too often; but these were matters outside their control. Their stay in New Zealand has quickened loyalty into affection, and enriched it with respect and understanding. The young Queen, unfailingly gracious and regal, and her husband, a man of strong intelligence and character, have done much more than their duty. They came to a country which was already the Queen's realm. We are all hoping that they leave it with the feeling that it is now a home to which some day, not too far ahead, they will want to return.

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 29, 1954.