

be active and challenging, and an offence to human dignity. This also it is necessary to accept during the period of surrender. But I felt that surrendering to it was an abdication; a renouncing of everything that keeps us clean and restrained; a reversion to sub-normality. Until I escaped from that condition time was the longest interval I could insert between two vomit bowls. I was found to have that perverse body in ten or twenty that rejects modern drugs.

[STILL think, looking back, that the indignities of some branches of surgery are too gross to be accepted calmly. They would, in fact, be quite intolerable but for the impersonal attitude of the surgeons, and especially of the sisters and nurses, who mix efficiency with kindness and kindness with firmness until you have no resistance left. But it seemed to me that most of my fellow patients accepted what came to them without much effort. I would like to believe that a single patient passed through the ward without revealing his reason for entering it.

MAY 5
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"Yours is gallstones, isn't it?" A cheerful giant shouted across the corridor the day after I arrived; and it was not maintaining the tradition to answer curtly. No. He was, as it happened, a man without meanness or malice, and there was no one in the ward I missed more when he went home. He tried me out, and usually found me out, in so many subjects that I would have lost patience if he had once ceased to be interesting. But although he was often wrong his blunders were as stimulating as his safest declarations, which ranged from Bertrand Russell and Whitehead to cats, horology, and Continental cooking. I realised the moment he spoke that New Zealand had played no part in making him; but I would not have guessed, if he had not told me, that he was a French-Canadian reared in Los Angeles and topped off in Victoria, B.C.

His bed, oddly enough, was taken by another New Zealander whose making was completed before New Zealand ever saw him. But whereas the first occupant had been only four years in New Zealand, the second had been 40 years or more here learning nothing and forgetting nothing. He, too, was a stimulating talker on a narrower range of subjects, but while the first man bombarded you gently with flower balls the second gave you shrapnel. You could please yourself whether you stood in the line of fire or moved out of it. If you stood you would get hit, and find yourself waiting for a chance to hit back. If you ran you neither annoyed the speaker nor stopped him. It was, in fact, a sign that you had some intelligence or had been properly educated.

But after three days he too went off, taking his strong convictions with him,

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 21, 1954.



MATAI

"Tough wood for tough men"

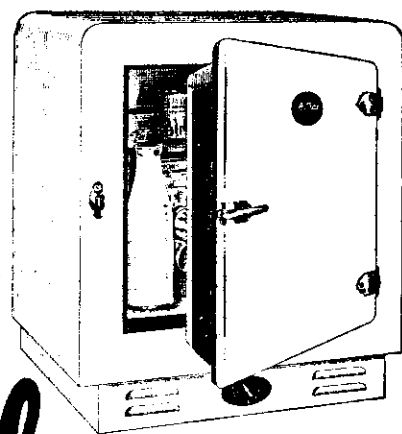
and my vis-a-vis was then a New Zealander from his heels up. If you met him in the dark or in a far country, in a bathing costume or wearing the uniform of the Grenadier Guards, you would feel at home with him the moment he opened his mouth, and then begin asking yourself whether you would stand or run. It gives no impression of him at all to call him simply an extrovert who had never opened a book. The world was his book, you, your interests, friends, and associates, doctors, hospitals, chiropractors, gallstones, gardening, whitebait, medical rackets, native birds, pasteurised milk, vocational guidance, correspondence schools, the big depression, social credit, visiting hours, floor polishers, ingrowing nails, light switches, impacted teeth, doctored bread. On any or all of these subjects, and as many more, he would involve you, not merely at a moment's notice, but with no notice at all, if you were weak enough or rash enough to glance in his direction. But I missed him, too, when he left us, since his tongue, tireless though it was, was lubricated by kindness. I don't know why God sends some chatters into the world, but I am sure He created this man to mock at his own misfortunes and help others to bear theirs.

(To be continued)

Questionable Activity

OF course, a digestion dealing with borsch is engaged in an un-American activity. But does my digestion care? He who likes a distinctly savoury vegetable soup could consider borsch. It's Russian, so you will probably have to strain it through the iron curtain.—J. D. McDonald, in *Table Talk*, an NZBS series.

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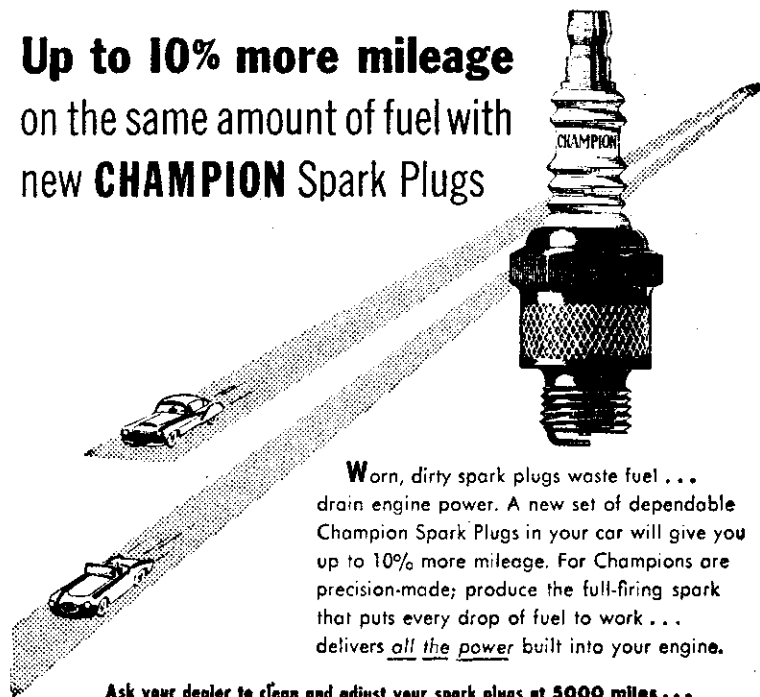
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