A View of Kumara

by LAWRENCE CONSTABLE

RAIN Number 823 leaves weeks, something. Greymouth at twenty-five to eight each morning, Hokitikabound with a crippling load of freight. In the passenger coach latched on the end you can put your feet up with impunity; "make yourself at our place" is the motto on the 823. Eleven miles and 45 minutes later you draw up at Kumara Railway, the nearest station to the small mining town that lies four miles off, where the foothills make their start for the Alps.

A stout green sedan waits on the train to collect the meat, the mail and the school kids. Whoever says the West Coast is dying should take a look at the youngsters of its rising generation, tempting fate as they do by getting off every kind of official transport before it stops. The driver took his place, rolled his own, and then set off for the address shown on his registration certificate: Seddon Street, Kumara. I don't think the road had a curve in it all the way. On either hand the fields went back into perpendiculars of silver pine, upright as the fencing posts they get made into.

We stopped only once, when an old man and a dog waylaid us, standing in the middle of the road.
"Oh, no, not again!" said the driver.

"Public Enemy Number ONE."

The old timer inserted a grizzled veteran of a face at the window, and reckoned it was high time his spark plugs were fixed.

"Lay off, grandpa," the driver objected, "I'm busy all this week, haven't got a minute. I've told you, the job'll be done Tuesday."
"I gotta have it," the old man yapped.

"How'm I a-gettin' my vedgies in to Hokey?

"Wears you down," the driver said, as we got under way again. "Every few jalopy, you can't get spares for it any more.'

The main road becomes Seddon Street from the time it hits Kumara until it drives out the other end, bound for Otira. Nowadays not a great deal happens in Kumara between arrival departure. We and stopped to replenish Murphy's Butchery with a carcase or two, and at the P.O. the postie was sunning himself while he waited for the mail. We also slowed up to shout morning to Cooky and Browny and Baldy and the rest as we breezed by. Kumara bus terminal is the Economy Bakery.

There I said cheer-oh to the driver. whose every minute was filled till Tuesday, and had a roll for breakfast. Pubs loomed in either direction, but some of them will fall down before they re-open.

Kumara has been associated with the liquor trade since its inception. Once upon a time (it's that sort of story) a party of distilling interests, not wanting trouble with the law, chose this neck of the woods for the manufacture of illicit whisky: Kumara hadn't been thought of then. Digging out the foundation for their tubs, they struck something a whole lot rarer than moonshine. From that moment they were in the gold-mining business. They were still hard at it, not having reported their find, when a fellow prospector came by. He took wind of their activities to a friend, "Digger Dick" Seddon in nearby Stafford Town, and the two men lost



"These are the diggings . . ."

no time in pegging a claim on the new diggings. The rush was on. Before long Seddon gave up his pick and shovel in favour of storekeeping. He was one of the foundation citizens who laid out the new town of Kumara, modelling it, so they said, on Melbourne, with wide streets on a pattern of squares. At the age of 33 Seddon became its Mayor. At 34 he was its Member of Parliament.

Kumara does not appear to have developed at the same rate as Melbourne. Its shops are sparse, shuttered and scattered. The chequer of streets is there; certainly those that remain were laid out with a generous hand. But what is this with chooks in it - Little Seddon Street? Both hens and mothers were having a field day along either side, making the most of the sun. If egglaying and nappy manufacture are not the local industries, the man who visits

on a fine day might be pardoned for thinking so.

Bled of its gold. Kumara's resistance was already running low when the Licensing Commission arrived in town, The old Courthouse Hotel, the Kumara, and MacDonald's Dundalk were struck out like the two top lines on polling day. Only the Empire and the Hotel Theatre Royal were permitted to remain. The theatrical entertainment that once went with the latter establishment has long since gone by the board. Shades of East Lynne! I even met a man who was carried on stage, so he said, as a babe-in-arms, a real live property piece to heighten the realism.

But, no, even the child is not enough to soften the heart of a touring company villain. He will not marry the mother he has wronged, the hapless Lady Isabel.

"Oh, sin!" he jeers at her, composing an attitude, "you ladies should think of that beforehand."

"Hey, look," cries a fascinated voice from the hall, "that's old Barnett's kid she's hanging on to!"

The season of East Lynne was a roaring success: everyone went to see Barnett's kid in the show. It didn't have to be made of gold for Kumara to appreciate a local talent.

Barnett, once the Kumara chemist, had a shop next door to the Theatre Royal. His son, now a hardy 76, remembers the way the miners used to drop in to pay their bills out of chamoisleather bags of gold, cashable at the bank across the road. He remembers Digger Dick, the Member for Westland, running to girth, it seemed, while the youngsters of Kumara were notching their years up the kitchen walls. Seddon's supply of half-crowns was inexhaustible; he never called on a family without clasping a coin into every child's palm. Oh, the glory of a halfcrown before the nineteen hundreds clocked out! Some who were children then think of themselves as Liberals even today.

What used to be Seddon's Store has given way to mill houses, and beyond them the road to the forest climbs gently until it overlooks the river Taramakeu a mile away, as innocent in braids as the siren-to-be of standard six. One looks back over Kumara, a bobble of roofs marooned on the bush like flotsam. A little further on, mounds of rubble appear, rising in heaps out of the green, more and more of them, seventy and a hundred feet high, until the whole valley seems a turbulence of cones and grovnes and craters. These are the diggings, countless man-hours of mullock smothering the countryside, in turn being grown over by manuka. Who knows what tales of fortune and misfortune will then be hidden, probably for all time?

In the midst of the shingleyard another capsule of settlement presents itself. Dillmanstown is falling down; or at least, that part of it is that isn't a comparatively recent visitation. Sometimes only chimneys show where habitation has been. Fluming rusts where once it sped water high across trestle-works to flush out the gold. Now the valley lies desecrated and still, watching clouds graze in flocks along the top of Big Hohonu, listening to the timber lorries come and go.

Not much more than a lifetime old and already very old, Kumara today has the resilience of the veteran. Seen from afar, its roofs shine in the sun, when the sun shines, with something of the brilliance that once made it rich. It brings to mind a certain jalopy sixteen miles from Hokitika: you can't get spare parts for it any more.

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 1, 1955.

(Solution to No. 739)

SIMPLEFAITH E E R R M P A N T S T A L E S O B N I E L C YALE ASHGROVE E G H R ADIES PARTED N P L O EGATION BRAN R J L TRAGEDY SPAHI 1 E I M D NORMANBLOOD

Clues Across

- 1. You may put up with this trimming, but reproach will be the result.
- 4. Unexplained constituent of Job's cure for his boils.
- 8. Eric and I and the Member of Parliament, relying on experiment.
- 9. Looking back on certain portions may cause pain to naughty little boys.
- Sit alone in confusion. Cutting them, perhaps?
- 11. This customer may not always be right. but you'd better not argue with him,
- Regard.
- "A stony adversary, an inhuman ---, Uncapable of pity"

("Merchant of Venice").

"THE

- 18. It is quite a problem to find a place 17. Mental expression of grief? to do this.
- 19. Song from a mad girl.
- 22. Head in disorder about one hundred; no wonder the head did this!
- 23. Found in a forsaken graveyard. Something to do with the tombstones no doubt.
- 24. Touching a sunburnt man?
- 25. Slackened.

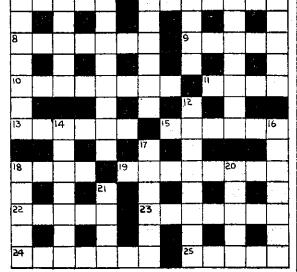
Clues Down

- 1. The bear will do this when upset.
- Abundant.
- 3. Were there cuts then, too? (4.4).
- 4. The small company is upset over the religious worship, with mystical result.
- 5. Trimming for the window?
- 6. Hurt pig nevertheless holds himself erect.
- 7. Nothing in it my pet!
- 12. Dismiss without dissolution, apparently in the rascal's favour.
- Hot corn gives a kind of lace.
- Combined spear and battle-axe.

CROSSWORD

- 18. Secret hoard, in the garden, obviously. 20. Looking in this, even the wise man
- sees a fool. 21. "As ---- as a painted ship
- Upon a painted ocean" (Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"),

No. 740 (Constructed by R.W.H.)



LISTENER"