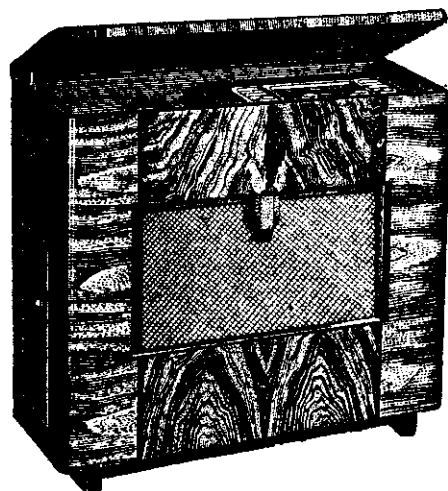




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## Land of the First Daylight

(continued from previous page)

the Senior Technician, and an auxiliary control room was also essential. The work of announcers, said the Senior Announcer, was broadening in scope all the time. The announcers needed a room of their own. Someone, surprisingly, put in a word for the receptionist-telephonist-typist, a radio station staff member who is forgotten more frequently than a second cousin in Tanganyika's birthday.

There was a brief pause to consider the receptionist-telephonist-typist. Everyone took a deep breath of tobacco tars, and then, with the exception of Mr. Fowler, lighted fresh cigarettes. The discussion continued.

Mr. Fowler, who is pleased to be patient, but whose years of experience tell him when to drop patience, finally lowered the boom. He happily cut the technicians' claims in half, and handed the spare half to the announcers. He assigned office workers, copy and sales to the new building, ending ebb and flow talk of who was to stay and who was to go. He reminded the technical staff of essential repairs, and of a return to be made to head office on disaster precautions. That was about that. The conference took up minor business, and in a few minutes morning tea was announced. This was a rather special spread to farewell a staff member off to England, and the conference moved purposefully to the tea room and massed round the cream cakes, which were attacked with the left hand, the right hand still holding a cigarette. A worthwhile point was thus scored by Mr. Fowler, who had two free hands.

Meantime 2XG went on transmitting its morning programme, up and down the rich river flats of Gisborne, up and down the sunny East Coast, the carrier wave bouncing dizzily on all those hill tops, like any traveller in those parts, fainting a bit as it got further from base. Who was listening? Perhaps as individual and diverse a rural population as you'd find in New Zealand. The visitor in Gisborne picks up hints of the people round him if he looks and listens quietly. "I'd say the big sheep farmers are no help to retailers here, or in Auckland, either, for that matter," remarked a man who should know. "If they want a pair of shoes they go to London and buy them there. Lots of money."

The people on the big sheep stations are not new arrivals. When they came communications were extremely difficult, to put it temperately, and if you moved off the place at all, you might as well make a ten thousand mile jump. It was only the first hundred miles that would be really bad. The habit, once formed, seems to have stayed with them.

There are also those with smaller holdings in the hills, different people, more of them, but less again than the people in the little towns, who are again different. The flat land round Gisborne (and where else on the East Coast is it flat except on the plage at Napier?) is wonderfully rich soil if you know how to drain it. It's so good that you can go on growing heavy crops of maize year after year, which, as the Department of Agriculture's officers in Gisborne will tell you, is wicked farming practice, but with soil like that it's hard not to live in a state of wicked ease.

On the plain, too, you see fat lambs, fat cattle, dairying, stud breeding, poultry, pigs and small seeds. A later development is fruit, which is on the way up and going far. The Department of Agriculture thinks Gisborne will become the leading sweet orange district in New Zealand. Production at the moment is something over 6000 bushels, together with 8000 bushels of lemons, 2500 of grapefruit, and 40,000 of pip fruits. Newer still, and also on the way up are magnificent fruit salads of feijoas, loquats, passion fruit, tree tomatoes, guavas, pawpaws, persimmons and cherimoyas. And here, too, is centred the only commercial production in New Zealand of the avocado pear, whose delightfully bland, savoury flesh spreads smoother on bread than the best butter.

Less exotic and on a far greater scale is the growing of vegetables for a canning factory. But developments like these will leap ahead when the work going on to control the Waipaoa River is completed. Flat dwellers have been harassed to the extent of 12 major floods in the last 73 years; visitations which discourage farmers, puzzle animals and cause unfavourable reactions in the minds of bank managers. Protective works which will shorten the river by four and a half miles and raise more than 18 miles of stop banks are not done for nothing. But the area protected will be about 24,000 acres worth, say, £300 an acre, apart from the matter of the lives of man and beast.

Through all these people at their different occupations, closely intermingled, strange and familiar at the same time, are the East Coast Maoris, the men who frightened off Captain Cook, who know well their present-day problems, and who ask first and foremost that they may be given the chance to meet and solve them in their own way, which is sometimes like the pakeha, and sometimes not.

There was a time when the pakeha talked mistily about the sad decline and probable extinction of the Maori race. It is true that some Maoris did lie down and die, and more felt that life in a land usurped by the pakeha would be dreary. A surge, an upthrust of vitality on the East Coast can be personified in the name of A. T. Ngata. Always the inquiring visitor hears the words: "There is no understanding the East Coast without understanding Ngata."

Of a lifetime of work for his people a picture remains particularly of his strong, solid figure, trudging persistently through the back country on the complex and apparently endless task of saving Maori land interests: talking, listening, weighing evidence, explaining the law the pakeha had imposed on them, and by his faith that there was a future, ensuring that future.

Now that he is gone, the talking and the listening are carried on by many competent disciples that he inspired. In the field of Maori-Pakeha relations radio can help the quick spread of ideas, and Mr. Fowler, with his own wide understanding and persistence, has made 2XG available in some fairly remote areas. Mr. Fowler's tastes and experience fit him for work of this nature. He is one of those rare New Zealanders who think of Polynesia before they think of England. This tends to make him at home in his country, and a more comfortable neighbour for Maoris, able to see them as individuals

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 27, 1956.