

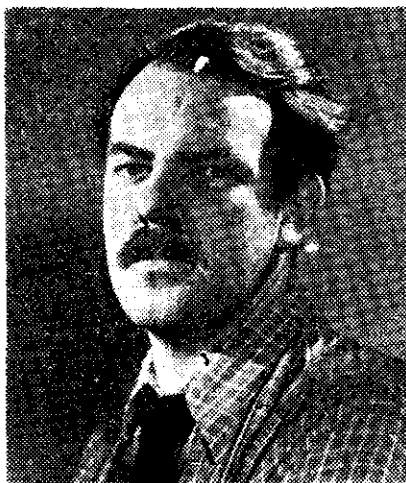
# THE LONELY TRAVELLER

IMMANUEL'S LAND, stories by Maurice Duggan; the Pilgrim Press, Auckland. Cloth 16/-, boards 12/6.

(Reviewed by James Bertram)

NEW ZEALAND, as once the remote Bermudas, now finds its own place in the Great Puritan Myth. It was Immanuel's Land that Frank Sargeson saw in his dream; though he, too, like Hubert Witheford after him, found that under the Delectable Mountains "the waters, indeed, are to the palate bitter." Christian on his first glimpse of Immanuel's Land (if we remember our Bunyan) was promised further guidance from "the shepherds that live there." It need not surprise us if these shepherds should turn out on closer acquaintance to be rather less than divinely inspired. Ordinary New Zealanders live quite a long way from the Celestial City.

Maurice Duggan is the latest of our literary pilgrims to have set out on that loneliest of journeys, the imaginative exploration of his birthright. What he owes to earlier travellers along this road—to Katherine Mansfield and Frank Sargeson in particular—is clear enough.



MAURICE DUGGAN

"Ordinary New Zealanders live a long way from the Celestial City"

What is his own is a sensibility that is vivid but uncloying, and a very subtle insight into human motives. If we add to this that his writing is clean, firm and sinewy in the notation of the most elusive nuances, and that the structure

of the best of these stories is quite masterly, we can see why this should be far and away the most striking volume of its kind since John Reece Cole's *It Was So Late*.

Not even excepting Dan Davin's *The Gorse Blooms Pale*. And here comparison is inevitable. Both Mr. Davin and Mr. Duggan draw heavily on the experiences of a New Zealand Catholic childhood, which both seem to have moved some distance away from. Lacking Mr. Davin's bravura and flair for melodrama, Mr. Duggan seems to me much more successful in recreating the peculiar atmosphere of Roman Catholic institutions in this country. Very well aware of the puritan side of transplanted Irish Catholicism, he writes out of love and understanding, not out of bitterness. His humbly tolerant Brother Ignatius is central and beautifully realised; his Brother Mark a horrid warning.

These stories are "epiphanies," in the same sense as Joyce's *Dubliners*, of which they sometimes remind us. They deal with moments of perception or revelation occurring in familiar everyday circumstances. There are no tricks or surprise endings; the quality of New Zealand life revealed is embarrassingly authentic. Yet it is a very rare perception indeed that can so delicately and unsentimentally isolate beauty and tenderness from a drunken dance-party amongst northern Maoris, from a gro-

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"I REMEMBER when I was a student myself, one particularly fearsome surgeon greeted me on my arrival in the wards with the remark, 'You, sir—your name would be Argyll Robertson, would it now?' Well, I didn't know what he was talking about, until some months later when I opened a text-book on diseases of the eye, and found that Argyll Robertson described 'A small irregular pupil which reacts sluggishly.'"—Richard Gordon, author of the books "Doctor in the House" and "Doctor at Sea," broadcasting in a BBC programme.

tesque evangelist's cellar in Auckland, from an adolescent shooting expedition that ends up in the magistrate's court. Much of Mr. Duggan's strength as a story-teller derives from his spare economy: he knows just what to leave out, so that the reader is compelled to let his own imagination work. (We do not see the goaded Hopkins strike Brother Mark; Mr. Davin could not have resisted this coup de theatre, and it would have thrown the whole story out of key.)

Several of these stories are about children that, since Katherine Mansfield, is where many New Zealand writers of fiction have begun. But Mr. Duggan's adults are just as convincing as his children. The Lenihans become, like the Cunninghams, a real family;



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N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 2, 1956.