

DISCOVERERS OF NEW ZEALAND

A CURIOUS business altogether, the discovery of New Zealand. For instance, I have just been looking at that little book of reference, "Datus." Its first chapter-heading is *The Coming of the Maori*. "The Coming," notice. No mention of discovery. The author probably regarded the Maoris as professionals, and didn't allow their effort to score any points. Nor does he look upon the arrival of Captain Abel Tasman in 1642 as an occasion for letting off crackers. The chapter is headed simply *Tasman's Visit*. It isn't until Captain James Cook, a genuine Englishman, turns up in 1769 that we find the word "discovery" coming in with a loud flourish: *The Discovery of New Zealand by Captain Cook*—just like that.

The word is not flatly misused there. We all "discover" things for ourselves; and, in a subjective sense, at any rate, that great man James Cook certainly did discover this territory. We may forgive Maoris and Netherlanders for thinking the use of the term "discovery" just a shade invidious, if not actually perfidious. But that is not a matter of any great consequence.

What is of much greater interest, although it is not often mentioned, is that the process has never stopped. It still goes on today. Not a year passes without the sensational discovery of New Zealand by some outstanding Englishman who has come here in order to make his quite exceptional talents available to the backward race inhabiting these remote islands.

In order to give you some bearings on the situation, let me proceed to concoct a couple of pieces of dialogue. The first demonstrates what I might call the W.M.B. approach:

"I've put my application in for that New Zealand job."

"But, darling—"

"What is it, my dear?"

"But—the cannibals!"

"We'll manage to cope. In any case, we have a duty. It's a new world in the making, and strong men are needed to take the helm. I don't think this matmalade is quite as good as that other brand we had . . ." etc.

And this, illustrating the Export Surplus angle:

"Toadharrow asked me for a testimonial today. He's applying for a job in New Zealand, of all places."

"What a lucky break for you, dear. What did you say?"

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soloists is fine (Allegro al 60). In the same batch of discs, Elisabeth Schumann sings songs by Robert Franz and Mendelssohn as you would expect Elisabeth Schumann to sing them (Allegro al 51).

Leaving the Oriole-Allegro catalogue, we cross over to Westminster for Edith Farnadi playing piano works by Liszt—Sonata in B Minor, "Mephisto Waltz" and Valse Impromptu (Westminster WL 5266). This is playing of character which presents Liszt in the best possible light.

Coda

For Danny Kaye fans—selections, which include Manic Depressive Presents, Triplets, Mad Dogs and Englishmen, and the Little Fiddle (Festival FRIO-1164). You may have to listen hard for some of the words, but the exuberance of the irrepressible Danny is in full cry.

"Gave a simply glowing account of him, of course. Best man in his field for years, and so forth. They won't be able to resist it."

"But, George, dear, what about the New Zealanders?"

"Yes, indeed." (Deep-throated chuckle, with sinister overtones.)

Ridiculous to suggest, of course, that these cover all the case-histories of Englishmen coming to New Zealand. Every one of us (or our forebears) came here some time or other; and motives, talents, ambitions and economic circumstances were in each case good, bad or indifferent. You'll have noticed that we have a tendency to discuss the ethics of migration from time to time. Did our forebears leave England (a) because they wished to escape from a feudal system that had been corrupted by commerce—to take the nobler elements of English tradition and re-plant them in soil where they might grow more freely, or (b) because they lacked the courage and fortitude to stay and help in the fight for social reform? There's a lot to be said each way. Often enough there's a good case for escaping from a wild bull, or a bad smell. But there may be an obligation to cage the bull, or deal with the cause of the smell. Take it whichever way suits you.

Whatever happens, we need not be detained by tricky questions of this sort. I am not really attempting to discuss such matters. I am speaking of a special class of Englishmen—the Discoverers.

Take a Discoverer and put him down in New Zealand, and he begins to expand like one of those Japanese paper flowers you drop in water. A mere pellet of a man may turn into something very showy indeed. The floral metaphor is quite apt in a number of cases, but for the rest we need a more dynamic image. Think of an inflated rubber bladder that is taken up into the stratosphere. With the drop in atmospheric pressure it becomes about seven times its original size—provided its skin is sufficiently tough and elastic. So may an ego, compressed in the tightly-packed mass of English society, expand suddenly when removed to a place that is not so overcrowded or so fiercely competitive.

A Discoverer may be identified as such soon after you meet him by his ineradicable belief, expressed in every utterance, every gesture and inflection, that in all matters the English scale and the New Zealand scale are continuous, the bottom of the former running into the top of the latter. Although this may be true enough, in a number of contexts, to provide a good working hypothesis, it is not an easy belief to live with when raised to the level of an axiom.

The Discoverer is often led into the illusion of quick success through having some of the local inhabitants rally to his side and hail him as a saviour. In time he discovers something else—that these people, like the collaborators in Occupied Europe, are usually impelled by quite special motives that make them extremely unreliable. They have rivals whom they wish to destroy by a sudden diplomatic coup. Or they are merely soured, feeling that they are not appreciated at their true worth by their own community, and see a way of getting a bit of their own back.

Where does the Discoverer finish up? This is a matter the social anthropologists might profitably look into. In a general way, it can be said that one of three things happens to him. Either (1) he moves on, carrying with him a repertoire of spine-chilling anecdotes about the barbarous customs of the New Zealanders; or (2) he settles back, defeated, into a permanent niche as club bore and sentimental laudator *temporic acti*, the hero of a hundred battles, the intimate of every distinguished Englishman of his generation; or (3) in a few cases, where the delusions of grandeur are temporary, and merely part of a process of readjustment or growing up, he becomes in due course a New Zealander, as insular as any born Pig Islander, and fiercely resentful of any Discoverer who looms up on his horizon.

—A. R. D. Fairburn



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