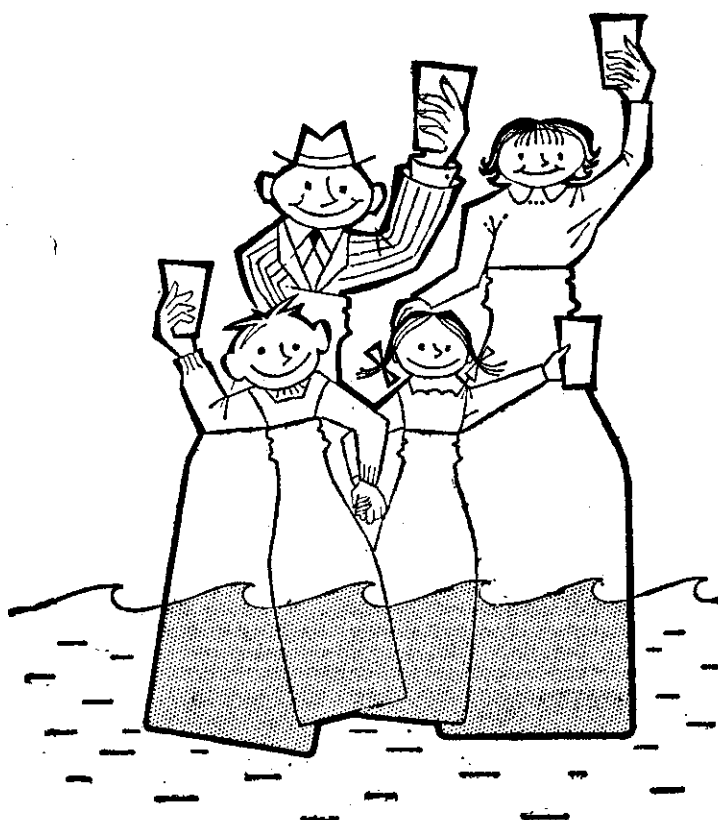


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Milk is a must for growing children

Auckland Notebook

ALIENS

THE people I know from the New England States aren't very much like Canterbury people. Perhaps I don't know the right ones. Yet I have a lingering feeling that if history was doing its job there would be likenesses. Both sets of Pilgrims left Britain (in their own times) not so much to start a new life as to carry on their present life in better environments. But their fond wishes conflicted with many stern realities of the new environments. They had to create and improvise and compromise. By the time the second generation was taking life for granted as they knew it, the old people were not in much of a position to measure cultural or social abstractions. The leaders of the Canterbury Pilgrims, who were strong for organised religion and a properly ordered social pattern in which those who owned property voted, and those who did not, touched the forelock to the squire, wanted to give their sons the same sort of education they'd had. They couldn't rise to the necessary endowments which would have kept the University solvent without State assistance, but Christ's College, the transplanted public school, has survived, and is now prosperous. It is not like an English public school, of course, any more than it's like Upper Canada College or Groton, but it's certainly like nothing else in New Zealand. Even in Christchurch it is slightly alien, and the stone buildings enclose an air of extra-territoriality. Further north, where truck drivers and an occasional telegraph delivery girl wear shorts all the year round, alien is the only word for heavy dark cloth uniforms with stiff collar. But Aucklanders also send their sons to take part in this persistent experiment and an Auckland branch of Old Boys meets regularly to recall times past and regard each other's receding hair lines and changing fortunes. The members of these groups have a twice distilled alien quality: they are not like a Canterbury gathering of Old Boys, and the adolescent pressures they underwent have changed their flavour as Aucklanders. A Canterbury group, and particularly the younger country members, might all be blood relations. It is not only a likeness of clothes, shoes and the way the hair is brushed, but also of carriage, of voice, facial colouring and bone structure. An Auckland group is likely to be soberly but not uniformly dressed. The suits do not appear to have come from two closely situated tailors. The ties have neither the flamboyance of Auckland nor the striped convention of Christchurch. Indeed, it would not be surprising if only a minority of the group wore an Old Boys' tie. The faces bear the wary expressions of commerce, but without the usual Aucklanders' cheerful acceptance of a life of hire purchase and quick turnover, or the Canterbury property owner's carefree reliance on land capital and a yearly debt settlement when the wool cheque or the dividends come in. They are a moderate group of double aliens gathering to look south once or

twice a year at the stone enclosures of their youth: a couple of drinks, a cold buffet meal, and another drink nursed through the toasts of the evening. Not exactly uproarious, as similar English gatherings have been reported. Well, what are their assets? They survive, for one, and that's no mean asset. For the rest we must wait until a novelist casts a warm, understanding eye over them.

Aliens II

CHINESE politeness at a reception sets a formidable standard. New Zealanders, notably informal greeters, are gravelled for choice phrases when met by a receiving line of nine people, of whom only one speaks English. The Kiwi handshakes along, his smile wearing thin, possibly uttering muffled, apologetic vowel sounds. At the end of the line he is given a cigarette, a light, a paper napkin and a plate with food on it, plus four more smiles. Who knows what the young Orientals are saying, but they are obviously friendly as well as polite, and the buffet is inexhaustibly stocked. Have you ever seen so many roast sucking pigs in one room?

This, of course, was the Chinese Classical Theatre touring company, and the reception was held after their last performance in Auckland. They were nice young people (mostly very young people) still full of bounce and giggle after an astonishingly diverse and athletic performance, but conversation and social exchanges with their Western guests was admittedly limited. I couldn't help but be impressed by the persistence and politeness of both sides in the encounters I witnessed. In the crowd I was jammed against a lady who held me off with shoulder and elbow on the left or plate-holding side while her right hand brandished a pound or so of cold roast sucking pig. In front of her a small neatly blue suited, smiling Chinese offered a plate of raspberry jelly with ice cream. "Will you be sorry to leave New Zealand?" the lady asked, making no move to take the jelly. She had no move to make. He bowed and smiled. "I suppose you'll be glad to get home again," she said, after a large bite. He bowed and smiled. "Do you like living in China?" she persisted. "Not much like New Zealand, eh?" Somebody else

(continued on next page)



ROY DAVIS

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