

Are New Zealanders Too Serious?

DO New Zealanders take life too seriously? Should we spend less time keeping our gardens tidy and more time sitting in them, idly, in the sun? Do our womenfolk waste valuable time in forms of thrift that belong to the pioneering days? These are some of the questions raised by Eileen Saunders, of Christchurch, in a controversial series of radio talks in which she compares life in New Zealand with life in Britain. Under the title *There and Back Again*, they will be heard from YA and YZ stations at 9.15 p.m. on Thursdays, starting on October 3. They are also to be broadcast from YC Stations, starting from 3YC soon. An Englishwoman who came to New Zealand in 1949 and six years later returned to England for just over a year—she is now back in this country—Eileen Saunders trained as a sociologist. As listeners who have heard her before will know, however, she is no mere academic, but can look at life through the eyes of a housewife and an ordinary intelligent citizen.

Right at the start of her new series of talks she raises the question whether the migrant is to be pitied as one who lives for ever between two worlds, "balancing precariously what he has lost against what he has gained . . . loath to leave the present life that he has built and yet feeling increasingly the pull of the past." New Zealanders, she decides, make extraordinarily good immigrants. They settle down, in Britain in particular, with a joyous forgetfulness, and apart from an odd, sentimental thought for the Southern Alps or some other favourite spot, are happy to be expatriates forever. For Englishmen, on the other hand, home is still there to return to. "Perhaps it's because an Englishman's roots go deeper. One of the things that has struck me most forcibly in New Zealand is how slight is the bond between New Zealanders and their land."

This is one of the controversial assertions Mrs Saunders makes. Another is that New Zealanders deceive themselves when they say that New Zealand is a country without class distinctions. In fact, she says, there's a deference for English ranks and titles that's almost religious. "Within New Zealand the divisions are there, despite what any-

one will admit. The trouble is that nobody knows quite what to admit. . . There is a mystic entity of the Best People, but who they are, heaven or they themselves alone know." As for class divisions in Britain, Mrs Saunders found indications that they won't work out quite as the theorists think they ought to. But she did find, for example,



EILEEN SAUNDERS:
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that pleasures which were once the exclusive privilege of certain classes are open far wider. The roads are literally jammed with cars, with the dock labourer probably driving a better one than the university professor—"if indeed the latter can afford one at all"; and the train to the south of France and the steamer to Capri are crowded with typists and clerks. The average Englishwoman is very well, if not very admirably dressed, and appearances are now, as they never were before, deceptive.

But many New Zealanders will be most interested—and even perhaps a little upset—by what Mrs Saunders has to say on the question whether "the good life" is most fully lived in Britain or New Zealand. Pointing out that New Zealand was colonised at a time when evangelical respectability was at its height in England, she says that a stern attitude to life was needed for breaking in a new country; but because this attitude was successful it has remained as an uneasy conscience in many New Zealanders, particularly women. So a man who neglects his garden is almost in the same class as one who beats his wife, and we play ball games not "for fun" but to train character, encourage team spirit and subdue self. The Englishman, on the other hand, accepts the view that the cultivation of harmless enjoyments is not in itself the road to ruin, and that life lived grimly is not necessarily more virtuous.

In her last talk Mrs Saunders tells what the rebellious generation of the '30s—the young men who grew hot about the Spanish civil war and fought the Second World War—are doing; discusses the "angry young men" and finds them no more angry than any others have been; touches on the revival of interest in religion as "the modern protest"; and ends with a note on the cloud of international tension that hangs over England—so heavily that during the Hungarian and Suez crises she found people more depressed than in the worst days of the war.

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things are so easy. Everybody will be making things up themselves. People simply haven't the money to keep on having things made up for them. By that time, of course, she can be thinking of having something tailored again."

"But won't people go on making straight things for themselves," I said. "You'd think when they found out how much money they saved—"

"No. People simply haven't the time to keep on making things for themselves," was her answer.

"But couldn't she wear them after that?" I asked.

"Not after everybody's left off wearing them. Of course not. Don't be ridiculous."

"But then nobody would be wearing them, and you said that when nobody—"

Just at that moment Mr O'Flanagan burst into the room.

"I was just thinking, Miss Blossom," he said. "I was just thinking . . ."

"Do you expect us to down tools and stop everything just because you have been thinking," she said. "I was just telling Wally—" I was called Wally to distinguish me from Walter—"I was just saying that Frenchmen like their women to dress well, they like other men to look at them and admire them. Wasn't I, Wally?"

"Oh, I thought you were talking about straight things coming into fashion," I said. "I didn't—"

"I mean that you were like that in being sensible and deciding to put your wife into straight things so that everyone will admire her. Isn't that so, O'Flanagan?"

"That's a fact, Miss Blossom. That's a fact," he replied with the same intensity of conviction he put into his agreement with everything she said. "You know I was reading something in the paper last night by a fellow who said he considered himself a journalist and that he knew a thing or two, and that he had always thought men liked women because they were made that way. But now it seemed that this was all wrong, and he didn't know as much as he thought. I wonder what he meant."

"I haven't the faintest idea," she answered.

A week later I was in Gieves' again. Gieves, of Plymouth you know—oh, yes, I mentioned that before. It was the first day that I had worn the trousers that had been made just right in width for me, and I was naturally interested in how people would react. There was a young couple there, and they glanced at me, and I knew from their conversation that they were discussing my trousers.

"A bit odd, don't you think?" said she.

"Yes, rather," he replied.

"But . . . yes?"

"Oh, yes. Certainly. Yes."

"Not?"

"Oh, not at all. Definitely not."

So I knew that my tailor had done the right thing for me, and I was regarded as being correctly eccentric. Supposing what they had said had been the other way round! I was glad to hear it in Gieves'. Of Plymouth, you know—oh, of course, I told you that.

I hurried out just as the assistant, that is the vendeuse, was telling the girl "any more than I have myself. And nobody will be wearing them—." How right Miss Blossom had been. As usual, I mean, this was Gieves'. Of—yes, I hurried out.

I ran straight into Old Flanagan Street—I mean into old Flanagan coming down Mr O'Bond Street. No, no, no! I ran into Mr O'Flanagan coming down Old Bond Street. I must have everything exact, like Baedeker.

"Ah—hard at it, Wally," he greeted me. "We have to work hard here, you know. Fierce competition in business in London."



"I really don't like any of them"

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