

Authority and the New Zealander

THE most depressing thing about New Zealand, so it seemed to me as a newcomer, was its resemblance to England. Certainly one agreeable novelty was the easy amiability of its people. Another unexpected feature was that if appearances were anything to go by—posters, shop windows, the urban panorama—they could outdo the British in Victorian insensitivity to ugliness . . . which, in my insular way before, I had never thought possible. Otherwise, at first, there were no differences at all.

Then, after a week or so of dazed disappointment with this, small unfamiliarities began to impress themselves upon me. At the start, they were disconnected. There was, for example, the strange spectacle in a crowded bus of a baby in arms being briskly slapped—to nobody's surprise, evidently, except its own and mine; there was the discovery that to overtake the New Zealander in his car often provoked an irritable spurt of neck and neck driving; there was the gloomy assurance from all sides that I would think the schools horrifyingly slack and there was the curious public obsession with juvenile and sexual lawlessness; then, as an incongruous contrast with this, there was the well-drilled deference of school children in uniform, and the shopkeepers' habit of serving adults first, however much earlier any child joined the queue. But soon enough, I came to detect a coherence about these isolated oddities and now I can make out distinct patterns into which they fall. Since two of these patterns, particularly, throw a good deal of light on my subject, the New Zealand family, I will ask you to ponder over them. They are the New Zealander's behaviour towards authority, and the attitudes he conventionally expresses towards the young.

IN his dealings with authority, I would say, the New Zealander knows only two manoeuvres—flat disregard when unseen, and passive compliance otherwise. Typically, he seldom questions authority, and he never opposes it head on, but if its back be turned, he follows his own inclinations. His passivity can readily be demonstrated—just suggest challenging a decision from Wellington! The dictates of officialdom, which, in England, would be met by a furious letter to one's M.P. and a phone call to a newspaper, don't even arouse indignation here. The innocent objector is told, "Oh! But that comes from Wellington," and ultimately he gathers that "Wellington" is no more to be shifted than the sun. As for evading authority when concealed, this is done as a simple matter of course. There is a 50 miles per hour speed limit, but the country roads can't be closely patrolled so many ignore it; after-hours trading is illegal, but inspectors can't be everywhere, so the grocer will oblige; it is an offence to feed dogs raw offal, but no one can ever be caught, and so hydatid disease is as prevalent as before the regulation. In short, the New Zealander is both a tame conformist and an habitual law-breaker, but the third course, changing the decree, seldom occurs to him—he is not a reformer and he is not a

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radical. If the early settlers brought any of the English radical tradition with them in their baggage, there is little sign of it that I can see now.

EVEN if these opinions of mine have not exhausted your goodwill yet, you must be wondering impatiently what bearing all this has on the topic of the family, and so I had better turn to indicate that. I shall come back afterwards to the other peculiarity in the New Zealand fabric that I singled out a moment ago, the attitudes voiced about the young.

It is a commonplace in psychology, nowadays, that adult personality and the beliefs, customs, and manners which characterise the social order are largely the outcome of childhood experience. If the New Zealander reacts to authority quite differently from the Frenchman, we may expect corresponding differences in the tone of the child's first encounters with adult authority in the family. Assuming my generalisation to be fairly true, that the New Zealander either evades authority surreptitiously when possible, or complies with singular lack of protest otherwise, then probably as a child he found that grown-ups were heavy, arbitrary, and immovable, to be obeyed or to be outwitted, but not to be influenced by opposition.

Is discipline within the New Zealand family heavy, arbitrary, and immovable? As an outsider, and with the unusual opportunities a psychiatrist has for observing these matters and comparing, I have no doubt that it is. In fact, when I talked just now about "discipline in the family," I was self-consciously choosing a phrase with a New Zealand flavour about it. Now, when I look into myself, I am straight-away puzzled why this should be so—after all, coming from England, there is nothing new for me in the autocratic parent and the child-beating teacher, even if they aren't so standard there. My bewilderment would be more understandable, I suppose, had I arrived from the United States. Nevertheless, I am sure I have heard the word "discipline" more often in my relatively brief span here, than in all the rest of my life. Whereas the London mother says guiltily, "I oughtn't to hit him, doctor, I know . . . but I lose my temper," the New Zealand mother says, "I ought to thump him much more . . . I know it's bad I'm so soft." Whereas the English social worker reports approvingly, "The family is well knit and secure," the equivalent approval in New Zealand is, "Discipline in the home is good."

IT was some time before I could explain to myself why discipline in the families I worked with loomed so much more conspicuously into awareness here, when in reality, I had come



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across the tyrannical father and the inflexible mother very many times before. Simply, it was this! In England, I would expect the father who is an absolute monarch, whose word is law, who never touches the washing-up bowl, and who is somewhat feared by his children, to be an unsophisticated working-man, acting his role in the family without thinking, and possessed of no theories of child-rearing with which to justify his behaviour. I would not—emphatically I would not—expect him to be a school-teacher or a lawyer, nor would I associate him with a large car, an all-electric home, a son at university, and a middle-class standard of living. Yet in New Zealand it's this sort of anomaly that one so often finds. To see it leads to uncovering a confusion in the New Zealand family's structure and standards of conduct—on the one hand, its economic aspirations and ideology are prosperously middle class, while on the other, the emotional relationships within it are the unreflective, unsubtle ones of an industrial working-class, inherited from the pioneers bred in the urban bleakness of 19th century England. Incidentally, many of the idiosyncrasies of the social scene here, such as the deplorable tendency for men and women at any gathering to go into separate clusters, are, I think, nothing more than features, now fast dying out, of working-class society in England.

THE conflict of middle-class and proletarian values in the family has several consequences. Here I will dwell on one. There is some practical need for a sharp distinction of individual roles in a working-class household—father has the muscles to work long hours for his wage, and he needs food and quiet at night; mother must organise the home so that he gets them, also

bring up the boys and girls to play equally distinct parts in life later on. But in the more leisured setting of middle-class existence, the basis for any so very clearly defined male and female roles disappears. The father will now spend much more time with his family, he will have much less need for rest when he does, and inevitably, his share in the upbringing of the children will increase. In this situation his functions must include what used in the past—the working-class past—to be only appropriate to the female. And yet the New Zealand husband and father, unlike his wife, has by no means caught up with the situation, and his idea of masculinity is anachronistic. It still threatens his masculinity, and makes him anxious, to bath the baby, to tolerate the children's answering back and their noise going on for long (and his weekends now are long), to join in feminine conversations, although he commonly does all these things nowadays. Actually, in other societies, this has been the normal masculine pattern for a long time, of course. Fortunately, while there is this troublesome leisure, he does have an escape in painting the roof of his house or in relaying the drains, for which in other countries, he would pay a tradesman. But should any stress arise in his marriage, these anxieties light up at once—he becomes frantically "masculine," retreats to premarital pursuits out with the boys, drinks brashly, drives his car competitively, and seeks to be masterful with his wife and children. Since 10 per cent of marriages end in divorce, we may calculate reasonably that an even larger proportion of New Zealand families suffer something of this sort in the atmosphere.

The rule of thumb methods devised in the hard-pressed working-class home

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