

# Home Thoughts from Abroad

I WAS wondering today, while listening to the overseas news, if events in other parts of the world mean anything real to us. Do we conjure up by our knowledge of them, any accurate mental picture of scenes and sights and incidents; are we capable of getting inside the stories, in imagination to participate in the events of which we read?

... Can you for example picture yourself in Hungary, on the crooked bridge by Margaret Island, in the dull grey Danube between Buda on the right hand and Pesth on the left? You are a middle-aged man walking home from your work at the glove factory. Your whole life has been trouble. Your family lost its money in the twenties, your wife and daughter were killed in 1944 when your country was fighting with the Germans against Russia. At the end of last year Nagy raised your hopes for a month, but since he left the Embassy for virtual deportation to Rumania, you have gone back towards hopelessness. Your son disappeared nine months ago. Neighbours saw him with the Csepe steel workers on January 10, when the militia opened fire on the demonstrators. Since the 11th when the Soviet tanks arrived and sealed off the factory, there has been no news of Janos—just none at all. . .

OR again, if you prefer the Mediterranean air to that of Continental Europe, find yourself in Cyprus. You are a Greek housewife in Kyremia, north of Nicosia. . . Since 1954 you've not had a moment's relaxation from fear, for your three sons, like their father, are members of Enosis and have in the past, collaborated with the Eoka men. To you this movement for union with Greece seems right enough—Corinth was your home, but the British are nice, and you do not think the principle involved worth the possible death of all your men. There has been comparative peace since the Archbishop was exiled and indeed since his return to Athens. You've breathed a little more easily since last month, when Sir John Harding revoked half the emergency regulations. Now you fear it may all start again, for apparently Cyprus is on the Agenda for this 12th session of United Nations Assembly. You know the temper of your people. . .

OR you are a Junior Science Master at Central High, Little Rock. Your mother was one of the white women's organisation which, last month, petitioned a State Court to enjoin your School Board not to let 17 carefully chosen Negro pupils into the white school. For the past three weeks you've been hearing nothing at home except how right Governor Faubus was to call out the State Guard to save mob violence. You shout that according to you, there was no shred of evidence that violence was planned, and if it had been then the Guards should have been there to escort the Negro students into the school, not to debar them from it. You shout more loudly that Faubus acted from personal political motives to further his own ambition for a third term, against Jim Johnson and Bruce Bennett, the segregationist opponents. . .

You can understand a feeling of racial reserve on both sides. You yourself ex-

Extracts from a recent commentary on the international news broadcast from the Main National Stations of the NZBS

perience an attitude of restrained friendliness, and you'd rather be with your own people socially. You even understand the human frailty of a Faubus with his political axe to grind and his present face-saving show of indignation, but what you simply cannot understand are the so-called adults who congregate in front of a school gate to cry "To hell with the niggers." The white motorist in Ozark who deliberately tried to run down two Negro children terrifies you as all sheer madness must do. And now you have another anger—against the facile, smug criticism of world-wide opinion, the readiness of foreigners to think the worst of all Americans, to make blanket condemnations. You are maddened by the ease with which newspaper headlines obscure the full truth for sensation's sake. You want it known in Algeria, in Hungary, in the Middle East, and in the Commonwealth, that the vast majority of Americans are still sane, even in the deep south; that the disturbances making those headlines involve fewer than 2500 people in the 40 million whites and 10 million Negroes who live in the south; that two million white children and 350,000 Negroes are already going to school together in southern integrated districts; that your own university of Arkansas and six tax-supported Colleges in your State are open to Negroes. Has no one followed faithfully the quiet, discreet progress made towards integration during the past three years, since the Supreme Court struck down the old doctrine of equal but separate schools?

You can't get on with your work. If you are not arguing with others, or lamenting with friends, you are turning it all over and over in your own mind. You'd better go round to the drug store for a tranquillizer.

AND so on, right round the world. Would you exchange Christchurch for Constantine, Balclutha for Bonn, Dunedin for Damascus? No. If we went abroad in imagination a bit more we would perhaps come home content to be without conventional adventure. . .

But let me in conclusion say this, that while we in New Zealand should be very glad to be here this does not in any way give us the right to grow fat in mind or the necessity to worship mediocrity. We are missing a wonderful opportunity given us by our exceptional domestic peace, economic prosperity and comparative security, missing the opportunity to make New Zealand, not a Utopia (for that in its own way, if possible, would be boring), but a vigorous and exciting working model of what a cultured democratic society could be in spite of the people in it. We should have better health in mind and body than we do. We should want and demand better libraries and more theatres. We should work harder in working hours or relax more sanely in our leisure. We should tolerate the unusual and encourage the brilliant. We have the smallness of population, if we had the will, to make much more satisfactory the

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