

# STRANGE PARADISE

SIX months ago the problems of new settlers were discussed in an article by Professor David C. Marsh. The emphasis was placed on the difficulties of adjustment felt by immigrants from Britain. In the article printed below the subject is treated from the viewpoint of settlers who have come from foreign countries. HARRY J. BENDA writes of what has to be overcome by people who must learn, not merely new ways of living, but also a new language.

TWO or three years ago, it would have been simpler to write about alien immigrants in New Zealand. But since then so many newcomers have been added to our originally restricted number that I can only try to accompany them, as it were, on their new venture—try, that is, to sift from what was personal in my own case what might be more general. By now, too, it has become more difficult to generalise about “foreigners” than ever before, because to the refugees from Nazi Germany have now been added Dutch and other immigrants as well as thousands of former displaced persons, fleeing from the Soviets in many parts of Europe. Peasants, ex-officers, white collar workers, intellectuals—they all have been thrown together in New Zealand now. From former university professors to illiterates, from Dutchmen to Greeks, we find a bewildering agglomeration.

Still, there are some difficulties common to most alien newcomers. There is, to begin with, the great difficulty of settling down among people who speak a different, a foreign, language. Most of us don't know any English on arrival, and the few who do, don't necessarily understand New Zealand English at first hearing. But English remains essentially foreign to them even then. Now this presents a real difficulty of great magnitude, because it robs the immigrant of that essential security which only your own mother tongue can give you. You become aware of the fact that the people around you notice you. No matter whether you manage to speak some sort of English or whether you prefer to speak in your language (either because you are ashamed of your broken English, or because you simply wish to communicate easily with your compatriots), you are noticed. You become aware of sheer curiosity, or it may even be that you sense disapproval: the fact remains, you are branded an outsider. This is, I should say, the first real difficulty, and it is pretty common to all of us; and it is also partly the reason why many “foreigners” prefer to “stick together” so much. The problem of adjustment, as the psychologists would call it, becomes a *priori* infinitely more complex than is the case with the British immigrant. True, the “Pommy's” accent may be noticeable—but has he not the compensation of regarding New Zealand English as something less desirable than his own?

NOR is this the whole story. Take food, for example. New Zealand food, whatever its advantages or disadvantages, is completely strange to the European; and, especially for the unmarried immigrant, the “food problem” makes settling down difficult. I don't know the answer to this one—unless some enterprising restaurateur makes up his mind to cater for this new potential clientèle. Nothing short of a revolution could, however, really solve this problem! Until then, Continental

new settlers will continue to sigh—and drink what New Zealanders insist on calling coffee (not to mention the rest of the menu). . . . The list could easily be added to. Thus, even the way New Zealanders dress makes each of us feel different—as long, especially, as we wear our European clothes.

All this goes to show that, even under the most favourable circumstances, it takes us a very long time to feel at home in New Zealand. But the topics I just mentioned are mainly external difficulties. The real problem begins with the realisation that we have no possibility of returning “home”; some of us may have believed—or still do believe—that New Zealand is but a temporary haven of refuge, until matters are righted again in Europe. But the fact is, that most of us will never be able to return. Now this is the real meaning behind those cold words “Displaced Person”: we all remain displaced for a good many years after our arrival in this country.

AND that makes it doubly difficult for us to appreciate and like the country quickly. Any other immigrant is free to decide for himself whether he (or she) likes or dislikes the country; whether the effort of settling down here is worth while, or whether, on the other hand, a return to the home country might be preferable. But we can't. We have to like it, otherwise, we would commit mental and emotional suicide. I know, of course, that after what most of us have left behind, New Zealand should be paradise; but it is a *strange* paradise and not ours—as yet, anyway. The war, persecution (racial or political), and post-war camps had reduced most of the European migrants who now seek admission to new countries to a vegetating existence. To have a home, to be re-united with one's family, to have enough to eat, to have a steady job, to be left alone by political commissars of all shades of the political rainbow—all these seemed to spell the Promised Land. Once, however, the new country has given us these very things, we find (as we should have known) that even we cannot live by bread, nor yet by bread and friendliness, alone. We are uprooted. Our memories start to reach back to a Europe which we should know to be dead, yet a Europe which we cannot help loving. Our own people, our own language, our own little ways of behaviour, the landscape, familiar places—“Home” in short. They all are far away, yet they seem to hold us; our imagination magnifies all the things New Zealand cannot offer us.

NOW, homesickness is quite respectable and harmless, as long as it does not become divorced from reality too much—and that is, I think, where at times we all are guilty to some extent. We forget, only too readily, that the additional comforts of Europe are bought at the expense of a living standard of the majority of people which we



Spencer Digby photograph  
HARRY J. BENDA  
“We cannot live by bread, and friendliness, alone”

ourselves, as new New Zealanders, would scornfully reject. Sooner or later—usually later—we find that New Zealand has a good many things to offer which at home we never knew; not only the Plunket system, social security and free medicine, for example, though they are wonderful. But the very freedom from suspicion and fear, the knowledge that people around you smile, the fact that in this country policemen and bureaucrats are *almost* ordinary human beings—all these are great things to find out.

Yet it should not be forgotten that to appreciate these things, the foreign immigrant has first of all to find a place in the new and strange environment, and that is often far from easy. Many, if not most, of us have had to start from scratch, and that is even true of the enviable few who were lucky enough to bring enough money or other goods with them to New Zealand. Many have had to find different employment from the one they were used to: quite a few Continental lawyers and other professional people have turned to manual labour; others had to make simi-

lar adjustments. This is often a difficult, but always a protracted, process of assimilation, and until it has been completed, we can hardly expect the newcomer to be really happy.

IT also takes a while to get used to the placid and tranquil life in New Zealand. The transition from a politics-ridden, nervous Continent is very sudden, and it takes time to get the exciting past out of your system.

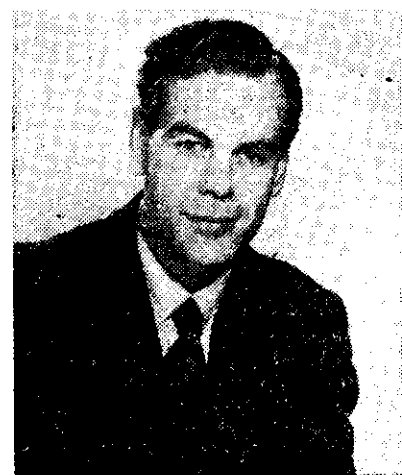
It is true, of course, that most Europeans miss many things in New Zealand, and it would be foolish to deny the fact. Some of us find it hard to get used to liquor laws that force you to regard drinking alcohol at a dance as a crime—or a forbidden fruit, at best. Central Europeans keep looking for their beloved *Kaffeehaus*, just as peasants, for example, find out the difference between themselves and the New Zealand farmer. The sophisticated immigrant will long for the tradition embodied in theatre and concert hall, in . . . well, you know it all.

AND yet! Look closely at the European settler who has been in the country for some years, who has settled down, in spite of all the external, as well as the self-imposed and internal, difficulties. He is no longer the complete stranger, not even the complete foreigner of several years ago. He has mellowed, he knows that this is his home—and how angrily he defends it against the newcomer of today, who is critical, ironical, superior (if only because he, like most of us at some stage, has felt insecure)! Part of the answer is, of course, that time has worked, smoothed off the edges; another, very important, part is that the children of the immigrant have become New Zealanders. Can you forever wish to be *funny* in the eyes of your children? And to them you are, as long as you keep to your own ways, at any rate. . . . And, lastly, you start to work in your garden, you chat to your neighbours, you even learn to enjoy cricket and races. Slowly, you become as much of a New Zealander as is humanly possible for you. And in nine cases out of ten, you start to like it.

## Baritone Comes Home

DONALD MUNRO, 38-year-old Dunedin baritone, came back home a few weeks ago after 12 years abroad, and will shortly be heard in broadcasts from all the main centres—the first of them from 4YC next week. When *The Listener* saw him in Wellington on his way south, he had something to say about his experiences in broadcasting and on the concert stage since his Wigmore Hall recital in 1948.

Among the highlights that Mr. Munro recalls from his last few years in England are parts in broadcast performances of *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, by Delius (this was later recorded), and, under Sir Thomas Beecham, Cherubini's *Les Deux Journées*. Cherubini's opera was sung in French, and Mr. Munro was the only non-French member of the cast in a major part—two years in France having made him familiar with the language. Other important broadcasts in which he took part were two performances in the Third Programme



DONALD MUNRO

of *La Vida Breve*, by Falla, presentations of Schubert's great song cycles, *Dichterliebe* and *Liederkreis*, and recitals of English and French songs.

Not long before he left Britain Mr. Munro sang in the first complete broad-

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