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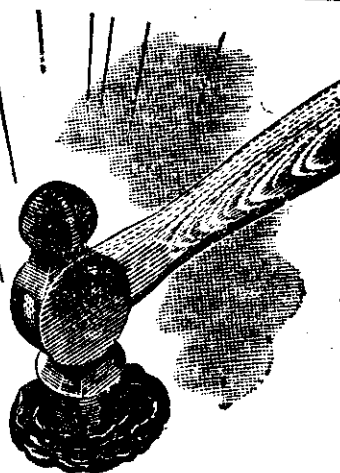
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The Titirangi Snowflake

NEW ZEALAND is having a hard winter this year. Snow came earlier than usual in the South Island, and low temperatures have been recorded throughout the country. Yet the full severity of the season was not understood until July 12, a date made memorable by the appearance of snow in Auckland. "At Titirangi," said the *New Zealand Herald* the next morning, "a single flake was seen to drift down, settle on the ground, and quickly melt." The exactness of the description might seem superfluous to people in districts where snow is seen more often; but rare and notable occurrences must everywhere be reported faithfully and studied with a sense of wonder. Even so, there may be sceptics who will insist that the thing could not have happened, but is merely a rumour, the report of an illusion. Fortunately, the principal witness was a member of the staff of the Auckland Weather Office. The sharp moment came to him during a hail shower about one o'clock. "His trained eye quickly identified the flake among the pelting hailstones and he watched it closely until it disappeared."

The event was given a fitting prominence. Although the newspaper of July 13 had to announce the impending dissolution of Parliament, the release of a draft peace treaty for Japan, and the Persian Government's decision to receive Mr. Harriman as a mediator in the oil dispute, space was also found for the Titirangi snowflake: indeed, its arrival was reported in black type and printed in a panel which could scarcely fail to be noticed, even by those people who merely glance at the headlines before they settle down to serious reading in the racing page. This was a rare distinction for what, after all, was a blob of frozen vapour, different from the hailstones around it only because it came as a flake instead of a

pellet. Still, the importance of an event must be judged by its rarity. Who is to say that a single flake is less interesting in Auckland than a six-inch snowfall may be in the streets of Christchurch or Dunedin? It is not the thing in itself, but the weight of suggestion behind it, which arouses interest or despondency—in this instance the low barometer, the leaden sky, the cold creeping up from the south. In cruder times, no doubt, the story would have been inflated, so that local inhabitants could have learnt to look back to the year of "the big snow." Scientific observation has averted this danger, and the climate of Auckland remains safe from detraction.

Nevertheless, an event of such significance cannot be isolated. A meteorologist saw the snowflake with his trained eye; and the information was passed on to a reporter, also trained, who wrote a story about it. If that were the end of the matter, it would still be interesting to speculate on the psychological history of a speck of frozen vapour. But next day the snowflake was brought into the lives of thousands of people who read of it at breakfast tables and on trains and buses converging on the cold city. To read is to discuss; to discuss is sometimes to argue; and argument may lead to emotional moods and sudden decisions. Once again we are reminded of the way we walk in this world, our existence confined within a narrow band of temperature, our destinies poised sometimes on brinks beyond which we can be carried by the touch of a snowflake. We need not suppose that Auckland has received the first warning of a new ice age: the visitor came alone, and the touch of earth was the kiss of death. But it has been a strange year, one way and another; and men may some day look back to it and re-discover the portents. "Yes," they will say, "there was even snow at Titirangi."

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 27, 1951,