The Rough Places Plain

IN 1892 there died at Waiokura Post Office clock said Pa in South Taranaki a tattooed old Maori chief, Hukanui Manaia, in whose veins flowed the blood of the great chieftains hotels, I took a walk of the north. Manaia had lived in stirring times. He remembered the advent of the pakeha, and the Bibles, bullets and influenza that accompanied him. He had seen the Maori wars and the savage Hauhau campaign of Titokowaru. And he remembered Taranaki as a forest. He had seen the white people chopping their bridle-paths across it, and the smoke over the face of the look at, Rich soil and a mountain whenever new settlers fired the bush. Manaia died; but his name had in common with remained On the pakeba plain that was once a Maori forest is the township of Manaia, a sleepy, scattered farming community, scarcely more significant today than it was seventy years ago.

March was turning to April when I visited Manaia. It was a windswept Sunday, and Egmont was fugitive in cloud. Straight as a die, three macadam roads converge on the town between breakwind hedges of boxthorn: from Hawera, from Opinake, from Kaponga. They arrive in Manaia broadside on to the band rotunda, whose red patch of roof can be seen from a long way off. The ro-tunda stands in the Octagon with the press of commerce around it. Manaia is the Octagon; and at four o'clock of a windswept Sunday it was a place without charm. Cows were browsing on the broad green borders of Main Street. John Mills was showing "Saturday Sat-

two minutes to eleven.

Once installed in one of the town's three gaunt with my old Taranaki guidebook. It was published in 1935, reprinted 1941, but I do not find that Taranaki dates

In all conscience there seemed little enough to view of Egmont Manaia most other towns of the province, and the day was hardly at its best for either of them. Like many

another small town, Manaia seems to have been activated from time to time by a consciousness of its history. The local swimming baths were erected as a monument to the pioneer century in the persons of two early settlers on "the rough places plain." A red granite obelisk in the Octagon commemorates those who died in the war-the Taranaki War of 1866-67.

From the town I moved out a block or two into the suburbs, and found the local Domain. As I entered the gate a decrepit Maori in a football jersey came lurching out. "Gidday," he said. I gave it back to him, and he added: "Don't look too good for the trots tourday" in Scott of the Antarctic. The morrow, eh?" Clearly this particular de-



by LAWRENCE CONSTABLE

scendant of Hukanui Manaia had travelled a long way from his forbears.

MY pocket guide told of a novel war memorial, a ferro-concrete tower, "from the top of which," the book promised, "can plainly be seen the watertower at Hawera." In search of this rewarding spectacle, I clanked through the rusty turnstile on to the ground as many a stout Manaia fifteen would doubtless do in the season to come, and set about exploring the local twentyfour acres.

The memorial proved difficult to find. The park gave place to a reserve where Nature was flourishing out of hand. A weedy brown stream floated amongst the overgrowth. The wind rocked in the

11. Will this word escape you? Not if I

14. Dress it in these slightly colloquial

educated you properly.

Feat, indeed!

garments.

16. Unintelligent.

18. Fatuous.

pinetops, shook every neglected shrub, fetched the breath of the Tasman to mingle with the fragrance of the pineneedles that lay deep underfoot. Almost by accident I came upon the tower, grey and penal-looking, in a wild little clearing that the townsfolk would seem to have forgotten.

On this spot a garrison once mounted guard against attack by hostile Maoris, men three generations removed from the local football team. Protective earthworks still surround the place, and on either side stand the blockhouses of the original Manaia redoubt. The memorial itself is a concrete replica of the wooden lookout tower of the leighties. For the rest, there is only the ebb of the wind, and a clearing as empty as hooligan laughter. Rustic seats have been dismembered and the pieces strewn about. An ancient field gun rests on its side in the long grass. The gardens are desperate and unkept. As for the blockhouses, my guide-book says firmly, these have been put in order by a special grant from the government. Certainly they are well-enough preserved. One is used as a toolshed, though some time seems to have passed since the things it contains came face to face with the gardens. Open blockhouse appears to have been kept in the other. Jock Tulloch, of Hawera, was there in 1935. The west wall records the visit of Margaret Murphy during her Taranaki tour of 1946. And in 1943 Dapline Grey came all the way from Lepperton to make her mark four times, once on each wall. With penknife and pencil they have come, four walls full of them, avid to set their names in the wood of the Maori War.

I climbed the tower. I had not expected to see in Hawera's water-tower, ten miles away, anything resembling the spires of Canterbury Cathedral, but when at length I reached the Manaia towertop there was nothing to see but the pines which have grown higher around it. The whole expanse of the Waimate Plains is excluded; and if a ghostly horde of Hauhaus came storming down from Te-Ngutu-o-te-Manu, Manaia redoubt would be all unawares.

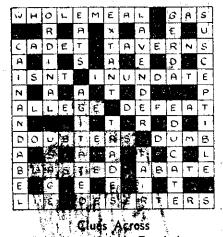
MY hotel was full of horsey people who had come for the Hawera trots. After dinner that night they sat round a blazing fire in the Commercial Room and counted the odds of their art. Outside in the Octagon cold gusts of wind came and rattled the windows. I left the company early and from the front doorway watched the moonlight driving across the empty pavements, glittering in the corrugations of the rotunda roof. Here and there lights were burning dimly in little box churches, while the wind carried with it the sound of supplicant choirs competing one against the other. By moonlight the town had lost something of its desolation for an air of timelessness. The rows of shuttered shops wanted only the enlivening clatter of a coach and pair to fetch back the past.

As I went up to my room a horsefaced woman emerged from the bar. and with a shandy in one hand, waved me a gay goodnight with the other. "Off early, aren't you, dear?" she said as she went back to worship in the Commercial Room.

I slept well in a bedroom with flowered paper peeling from the walls, and woke to broad sunlight. Manaia had (continued on next page)

LISTENER" **CROSSWORD** THE

(Solution to No. 555)



- 1. Part of the Suicide Regulations.
- 4. Thère is plenty in the middle of these specimens.
- 8. Ban, inter alia.
- 9. It is seen back to front in the Niagara Falls.
- 10. It's nice, Pat (anag.).
- 13. This man doesn't sound at all 7. "I can suck melanfrivolous.
- 15. Part of the design, or even all of ...
- 17. The crime of Cain.

- "And mighty I am—that I am able to have a spare bed for my friends" (Pepys).
- 22. Richard Farrell, for instance.
- all his trim" (Shakespeare Sonnet 20. It is said to laugh at locksmiths,
- 23. "When 21 across pied April, in 19. Mimicked.

No. 556 (Constructed by R.W.C.)

