

DECEMBER 14, 1951

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A Place on the Map

SINCE the end of the second world war it has become evident in a number of ways that English geographers are taking an increasing interest in New Zealand. Some reflection of this interest could have been expected in a new atlas, just published by the Oxford University press.* Reproduction throughout is excellent, though the editors do not seem to have solved the problem of size which haunts all makers of atlases. The page is about as large as it could be without making the volume too clumsy for handling and storing; but most of the maps are spread over two pages, and the inevitable break in the middle is an aesthetic weakness, and sometimes a frustration in research.

First impressions of quality and completeness are quickly lost when we see what has been done to New Zealand. A map on pages 66-67 covers "Australasia" (a word still used relentlessly at Oxford, though some rumour of its unpopularity in these islands should long since have reached the Bodleian); and in a necessary obedience to scale, New Zealand occupies a few square inches in a page filled with open sea and an inadequate sprinkling of island groups. On pages 70-71 the Dominion is shown in a separate map; but it is given no more than an "inset" on pages used chiefly for Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. The general heading is "South East Australia and New Zealand." Cartographers acquire traditions which apparently are very hard to break. One of them is the curious belief that New Zealand should always be grouped with edges or shoulders of Australia. It is true that the country is not large; but it is a little larger than the United Kingdom, it has a population of nearly two millions, and its mountain systems and climatic variations are interesting. New Zealanders abroad are often

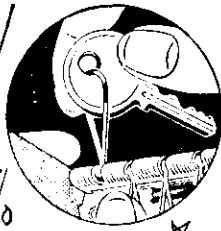
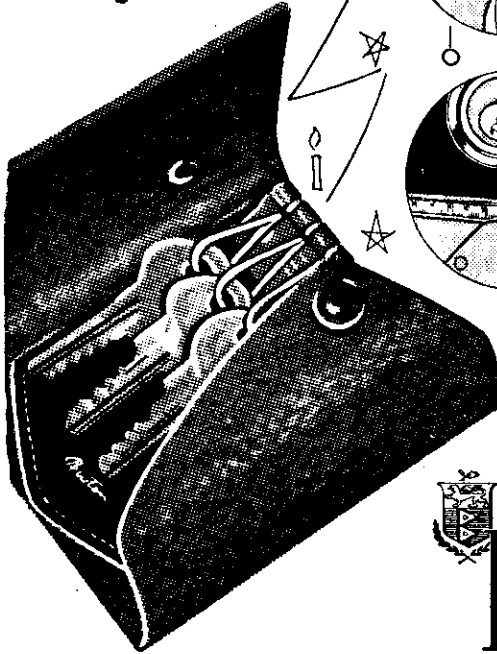
amused to discover how many people continue to believe that this country is either somewhere in Australia or anchored a few miles away in the Tasman. The joke becomes stale by repetition; perhaps it would die more easily if map-makers could bring themselves to give New Zealand a modest place to itself. The map on page 70 is so small that students are not likely to find it useful. In addition to being small, it is badly placed; it gets more than its fair share of the break between pages, so that the lower part of the country—including Dunedin—seems to have been given arbitrarily to Southland. This is an illusion caused by the spread of the pages. But there is nothing illusory about the errors, omissions and oddities of selection.

Havelock is at least 50 miles from its true position, and is quite cut off from Pelorus Sound. Lake Ohau and Pongaroa are mis-spelt. Comparisons with the comprehensive map issued in 1943 by the Lands and Survey Department (used as a source map in Oxford) make it hard to understand what criteria have been used for the inclusion of place names. Half-moon Bay is not shown on Stewart Island; only Oban is mentioned. There is no Shannon in the North Island, though Alfredton—a much smaller place—is included; and room is even found for Galatea, which is still little more than a timber camp. Small and unimportant places are shown on the East Coast of the North Island, but Ruatoria is not on the map. Wanaka and Tekapo are mentioned twice: once as lakes, and once—presumably—as towns, though they are scarcely settlements. Similar discrepancies may be noticed in both islands. Further, the West Coast sounds in the south—which have geographical, historical and a potential economic interest—have been left unnamed. The final impression is that New Zealand, and indeed the whole of the Pacific region, has not yet emerged into postwar perspectives at Oxford.

*The Oxford Atlas, edited by Brigadier Sir Clifton Lewis and Colonel J. D. Campbell; Oxford University Press. English price 30/-.

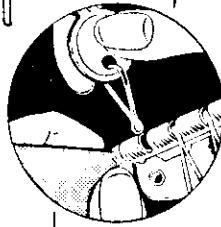
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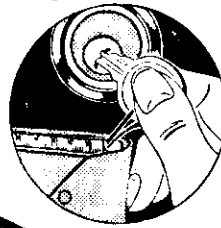
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