

'Charged With Being Starkie, Sir—And God Knows What Else'

An Amazing New Zealander—At Home And At War



JOHAN DOUGLAS STARK, born Invercargill, 1898—son of a Red Indian father and a Spanish mother: that's the man who is the hero of Robin Hyde's successful novel, "Passport to Hell," just published. Starkie was never made to fit in with our ideas of civilisation, and his boyhood in the southernmost parts of New Zealand was stormy and haphazard.

After a spasmodic school career, Starkie, by a series of misadventures, found himself in gaol. He was then 16. To this boy with the swarthy complexion and the big frame, came some pretty hard knocks. In the Invercargill gaol he was put in "figure eights" as an extra punishment. Robin Hyde describes this form of torture:

The "figure eight" is a mild version of the French Foreign Legion's beloved torture, "le crapaud." For a period of hours each day, ranging from two to four, the prisoner's arms are doubly handcuffed across the small of his back, wrists and elbows forced together. No leglocks are used. He can sit, stand, or lie, as he pleases. At the end of an hour the niggling little ache which starts between the shoulder-blades will have forced its way up into the cervical vertebrae. Wriggle or twist as he likes, he can find no position to ease that red thrust through the muscles of shoulder and neck. Then the ache creeps downwards, biting into the ribs and spine.

Then the Great War intervened and saved Starkie from further youthful misadventures in New Zealand.



Living to-day in Grey's Avenue, Auckland, John Douglas Stark (top left), half Indian, half Spanish, the hero of Robin Hyde's amazing book, "Passport to Hell." The other photograph is of the writer herself, Robin Hyde, an Aucklander, whose flame of literary genius burns brightly. (Photos by Tornquist and S. P. Andrew).

Although he was only 16 he managed to get by the authorities and joined the famous Fifth Regiment. Trentham came next, with plenty of hard training and nights of fun and foolishness in the "little Upper Hutt towns, where, in the big white riverside houses, liquor was to be had."

But Starkie got himself into another spot of bother before he finally left. In the mix-up between a sergeant, Starkie and a table, an officer was hit, and the brown-skinned 16-year-old got 21 days' barracks. The barracks were on Mount Cook, where Wellington's proud National Art

Gallery stands to-day. His companions were 21 Germans brought to the mainland from Somes Island—and they were treated none to gently. Robin Hyde sums up Wellington in this way:

In Wellington . . . there are the dark, slanting hills, and those enormous crystal-green waves which pour in, translucent hillocks, by the Red Rocks. If you can once be perfectly alone with the hills and sea of Wellington you have something they can't take away from you, no matter where and why they lock you up.

Then there was the tragic parting on the wharf as the Fifth Regiment sailed. Half of that regiment never came back at all. The wharf was packed with
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