

TALES OF THE RADIO EXPLORER

Motueka history and to learn the work of the Cawthron Institute. The plan for iron and steel works at Onekaka had given the district special interest.

When he went there he heard of this "somewhat mystical" asbestos field. He got a horse and decided to go exploring. He found it was one of the finest in the world.

There were 150 acres of it, some in clay, some in solid rock. He found that a large company was damming the nearby Cobb River and tunnelling the hill and then piping the water down 1800 feet into the Takaka. At the bottom of this pipeline they were putting in a power-house which, he understands, is to supply Onekaka and Nelson and the asbestos field and any other subsidiary industries with their electric power.

Edge of Beyond

AND on the border of all this immense potential industry—where dynamos will hum and factories will clang their loud metallic noise of Progress, he found the solitary elderly couple of the bush.

The radio explorer, Mr. Douglas Cresswell, is well known for his explorations—both ancient and modern—in Canterbury. One week he is telling about his explorations down a coal mine of the West Coast and another week he is telling about his explorations into the history of old New Zealand families.

Now he has had some of his talks recorded by the NBS in Wellington, and they will be heard in time from all the national stations in New Zealand.

I ASKED him what first gave him the idea of giving these talks. He used to be a farmer in South Canterbury. He told me.

"Living the life in the country," he said, "I soon began to see that half the people in New Zealand didn't know the problems of the other half. That was really what first started to turn my thoughts toward radio."

He would read in overseas journals and trade papers of the impressive work done in this country by the farmers. Then he would come into town and hear people in New Zealand talking in just the opposite way.

"They seemed to have the idea that the farmer was a man who was always going to the Government for help and couldn't stand on his own feet."

THERE was perhaps some truth in that, but people didn't realise, he argued, that the life of the farmer was the life of Nature. It was governed by matters over which he had no direct control, such as disturbances in overseas price levels and catastrophes of Nature. The townsmen didn't appreciate this.

"Why," asked the townsman, "is the farmer always running to the Government for aid and at the same time he is buying expensive cars?"

"But," argued Mr. Cresswell, "even with his cars the farmer can't persuade his children to stay on the land."

He Disagreed

PEOPLE said the rural districts of New Zealand could not absorb its own population. He disagreed violently with that. One had only to point to European countries where the land settlement was age-old and much denser than in New Zealand.

The country, he argued, should absorb its rural population; it should stop the drift to the towns; it should learn to be sympathetic to the man on the land.

"Whatever way you look at it," argued Mr. Cresswell, "the farmer is the goose that lays the golden egg. And if we had such a bird in our family, think

how we would look after it and care for it."

SO he began to explore the problems of the men on the land and tell about them over the air. This led him on to other explorations.

He began to dig into the stories of the old farming families of Canterbury, piecing together the tales of their struggles and adventures.

Sceptical at first about the prospects of interesting the radio public in these talks, he was surprised to find how many people were fascinated by these tales of the pioneers. They wrote to him and told him scraps of their own family histories.

"My great-grandfather was the first to drive a bullock-wagon over the plains," one would write. "I can remember my grandmother telling me . . ." and so on.

Forgotten Tales

HE learned the old forgotten tales like that of the old farmer of Timaru, who was driving his bullock-wagon into town and came to a river which he had to ford.

"The old chap took off all his clothes and rolled them into a bundle and put them in the wagon. He forded the river, but on the far side the bullocks bolted.

"They took the wagon and his clothes with them and he was left utterly naked in the tussock country where there were no trees and no leaves to cover him, not even a figleaf."

THE radio explorer wandered on journeys to odd places like Port Underwood, near Queen Charlotte Sound.

There he found a family which had lived in the same spot for 110 years. It was the family whose far-off ancestor, Captain Guard, had been the father of the first white child born in New Zealand.

That white child had a strange adventure. It was seized by hostile Maoris and held hostage. Captain Guard went to Australia for aid, and a warship was sent across the Tasman to Port Underwood to force the Maoris to surrender the nine-months old child.

To-day the radio explorer found only five families living in Port Underwood. That in itself was not very exciting. But it soon became exciting when he found that once upon a time, shortly after the Battle of Waterloo, in 1815, it was nothing unusual for 130 boats to put out during the morning after whales from Port Underwood.

Port Underwood of New Zealand, now deserted, had once been the greatest whaling port the world had ever seen.

NOW the radio explorer is going to extend his field again. In a short time he is to visit the Wairarapa and the Hawke's Bay districts. There he will gather material for talks on the stories of the old families in those districts, just as he has dealt with the stories of the families of Canterbury.



DOUGLAS CRESSWELL.

"... One half of the country didn't know how the other half lived."



TWENTY MILES
FROM ANY-
WHERE
... Lives the Custodian of the Asbestos Field.