

Portrait Of A GENTLE LION

"If I were in Mr. Savage's shoes for just a short time, one of my first acts of office would be to appoint JOHN BRODIE as a one-man reception committee for overseas visitors. . . ."

says KEVIN STAUNTON

(In this tribute to John

Brodie, specially written

for the "Radio Record.")

THERE'S a particular fellow who knows more about you than does anyone else. And that's the fellow who rates just below you. . . . You can fool the rest of the world that you're a fine chap or a smart one. But you can't fool him. He knows you for just what you are—or maybe a little less!

When I was a "scurvy new kid" at the New Plymouth Boys' High School, one of the dignitaries of the short-pantsed brigade was a boy named John Brodie. And he was the most popular boy in the place.

It wasn't just that he was half-back in the school's undefeated fifteen—and blessed with ability to execute at psychological moments the most amazing corkscrew run performed on the college football field—that made him so. It wasn't the additional glories that he kept stumps for the school eleven nor that he was school boxing champion, acknowledged master of an imposing array of collegiate pugilists.

Even a prefectship, with its entail of summary justice meted out in time-honoured fashion to a host of youthful offenders, could not detract from John Brodie's popularity nor wrest from him the honour of being the one boy in the place unanimously voted a "white man"!

But what did make John Brodie the object of schoolboy hero-worship was a kindness manifest to every one with whom he had contact and a willingness to help every lame dog over every stile in its path.

And the ranks of youngsters at big secondary schools are full of lame dogs; and their paths are well planted with stiles.

His First Novel

A FEW years—and the name of John Brodie became as well known to New Zealand University and representative Rugby as it had been to the collegiate game. . . . More years slipped by, almost unnoticed by most, and a New Zealander's first novel, "The Little Country," was a feature of the 1936 literary year.

Its author was a "John Guthrie." And perhaps an even greater number of first editions would have been sold had a legion of admirers then known what is now common knowledge—that John Brodie and "John Guthrie" were one and the same person.

When tales of courage are told, that of John Brodie will have its place. It is to his further tribute that he would not appreciate its telling.

As one of those lame dogs helped over the inevitable stiles of first secondary school years, I had

But the inexplicable Fate was not to deal kindly with one who deserved only well. An old football injury showed signs of developing a condition of rheumatism. But it was more than that. Followed several years of intermittent illness and total incapacitation. One leg was amputated, use of the other seriously impaired.

Courage In Adversity

ONE dislikes quoting platitudes—but there's one that talks about "kindness in another's trouble, courage in your own." Well, if John Brodie had shown kindness in the troubles of others, certainly he showed equal courage in his own. And it wasn't just the courage of a struggle to get well against the ravages of an insidious illness. It was more than that. It was, too, the courage of patience, of forbearance and of kindness towards every one with whom he had dealings.

"EVERY TRIBUTE MUST HAVE ITS EXCUSE." OUR EXCUSE IS THAT JOHN BRODIE ("JOHN GUTHRIE"), ASSOCIATE-EDITOR OF THE "RECORD," ONE OF THE LITERARY LIONS OF THIS LITTLE COUNTRY, AND A MAN WITH A HOST OF FRIENDS, HAS JUST SAILED FOR ENGLAND ON A YEAR'S LEAVE OF ABSENCE. BUT, DURING THAT TIME, HE WILL CONTINUE TO CONTRIBUTE HIS EXTREMELY-POPULAR "RECORD" FEATURE, "THIS WORLD OF OURS."

ample cause to be grateful to John Brodie. Later, in my early years in journalism as a reporter on a major provincial daily, I had additional reason for gratitude. John Brodie, now a newspaperman of some years' experience, smoothed out a few troubles that lay in this path, too.

THE DOCTORS SAID NO MAN COULD STAND THE STRAIN. BUT THEY HADN'T RECKONED WITH A JOHN BRODIE.

He was too ill to move from his bed; but he wasn't too ill to write. And he wrote "The Little Country." No tale this of illness, in whose clutch he had lain so long, but of life today without hint of tomorrow's death.

By its own merits it was acclaimed among the most promising novels of the year. No sob Press told the story of the author to boost sales beyond true literary valuation. The book sold strictly on merit—and sell it did!

A Battle Won

AND, at the same time, John Brodie won the battle against the disease that had kept him out of the race for so long. They said he'd walk only with crutches. But John Brodie manages his artificial limb with as much dexterity as film actor Herbert Marshall.

Just a few short weeks ago, when a New Zealand summer was doing its best to maintain competition with an English winter, I arrived back from the Old Country. And John Brodie took me swimming—in the chill waters of Wellington's Oriental Bay!

I was out of that water almost before the first dread shock could expel the air from my lungs. But John splashed about with vigorous



—Earle Andrew Photo.

JOHN BRODIE, better known, perhaps, as "John Guthrie." Some day, says the writer of this article, that last name may appear on the title page of the first great New Zealand novel.

strokes for fully twenty minutes. He told me that this was his daily dose, time—not weather—permitting!

Another novel, "So They Began," fulfilling all the promise of its predecessor, short stories, articles! And to talk with their author one might believe he had few interests beyond lying in the sunshine, splashing the surf and looking on Nature's beauties in this "little country."

Literary ladies might discuss their rejections with him for hours, sure of sympathy for their ambitions but unaware that their audience had written more than his name and a weekly letter home; athletically repressed gentlemen might tell him of their prowess, real or imagined, in a dozen fields—and never know that only an accident prevented John Brodie from being an All Black, and that he did indeed win almost every other honour that New Zealand Rugby has to bestow.

There may be people in New Zealand with more acquaintances than has John Brodie—but there are few with more friends. You may not like the fellow next door—and undoubtedly he doesn't like you. But, if you both know John Brodie, you both like him. Oh, you do much, much better than that!

The same whimsical humour, the sly philosophy and the gentleness that are evident in the writings of John Guthrie are part of the real John Brodie. If I were in Mr. M. J. Savage's shoes for just a short time, one of my first acts of office would be to appoint John Brodie as a one-man reception committee for overseas visitors on whom we are anxious to impress the attractions of this country.

NO loud-voiced booster this, no God's-own-country-whether-you-like-it-or-not bouncing propagandist—as are all too many of us. John Brodie has learned the art of quietness, and any charm that New Zealand has would be made amply evident through his own charm. Trouble is, John could never be persuaded to accept the post.

He loves peace and finds it in his writings or in discussions on pleasant nothings in the company of a few favoured friends. To act as greeter to "big names" from far places would hold scant appeal for him.

The great New Zealand novel is still to be written. Though he would smile at the suggestion, the name of "John Guthrie" is perhaps more likely to appear on its title page than is any other.

Still in his middle thirties, John has filled all the unforgiving minutes with an ample worth of distance run. New Zealand is not greatly appreciative of her own in the world of art, but she will yet be forced to take a wider cognisance of "John Guthrie," *nomme-de-guerre* of the "white man" we knew at school as John Brodie. . . .

In England Now

EVERY tribute must have its excuse. John Brodie, associate-editor of this paper, whose writings have given infinite delight to the "Record's" 250,000 readers for some eighteen months past, sailed last week for England on a year's leave of absence. The timid editorial mouse had no courage to permit perpetration of this article until the gentle lion was at a safe distance.

But New Zealand has only one John Brodie and, while he would oppose it strongly, some tribute to himself and his work and advice of his plans to his public is only fitting. This is John's second visit to England in two years. I can think of few more pleasant ways of spending time than browsing with him through London's bookshops or strolling with him in the English countryside knocking the heads off English daisies.

But New Zealand is his home—with all the attachments that implies. And, if a little of his inspiration comes from England, it will be New Zealand of which he will write. . . . Perhaps the great New Zealand novel isn't so far away after all.

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