

We New Zealanders

+ are we like this?

A KORERO Report

A RECENT NUMBER of the English periodical *Horizon* included an article called "New Zealand: Answer to an Inquiry." The writer, Anna Kavan, tells us at the beginning that she is trying to convey something of her private picture of New Zealand, "very impressionistic, certainly, and incomplete. But," she says, "I believe that if you were to collect a sufficient number of such personal sketches from people who have been there you would have the most lively and valuable picture possible. I mean by this that there is much more of the living spirit in Tom, Dick, or Harry's confused idea of a country than there is in the factual exactitudes of reference books."

Well, we reproduce some of Miss Kavan's impressions here together with some comments from other sources about New Zealand and its people. We would like you to tell us what you think about all this. Are we New-Zealanders really like this? Your opinions might make another interesting article for *Korero*.

To begin with, Miss Kavan says that in her picture the country itself is immensely more important than its inhabitants. She adds that she thinks this may be because the social instinct is not very highly developed in her; or it may be that the population of the country is so small in relation to its size; or it may just be because of the sheer, overwhelming splendour of the natural scene "in those weird islands, to hell and gone down there, near the south pole."

We haven't space to reprint Miss Kavan's description of the country and its towns and villages; we must start with the paragraph in which she talks about the

vague sense she has "of something having gone wrong somewhere":

A new country (she says), a country so full of splendour and strangeness as this one, ought, one would think, to produce some new and splendid characteristics in its inhabitants. But does it? Well, of course, here and there, splendid individuals do emerge, as for instance, Frank Smith, the ranger at Waikaremoana, a man of real, simple magnificence and in close contact with the natural world. And Mrs. Gron, brilliantly blue-eyed, with a magic touch for all growing things, toiling away in the backblocks year after year, in a man's hat and gumboots too often stogged in mud, and utterly undismayed.

But my impression of the mass of the people, the townspeople at any rate, and particularly those in the Auckland district, is that there's something lacking in them. Perhaps it's the humid climate that does it; but anyway they seem to me to lack vitality, warmth, enthusiasm, whatever you like to call it. The women look fine sturdy specimens, like professional tennis players, but walking around their houses and down to the shops is about as much as their energy runs to. The men look hearty and tough, but when you get to know them they seem depleted somehow, frustrated perhaps, and dissatisfied.

It's a queer thing, really. For most of the year, anyhow, in this region, the sun shines and the weather is good. The country's good to look at with plenty of hills in the background and small mountains, some of them even extinct volcanoes. The sea's still better to look at, full of fishes and small islands. The smallest fishes jump up in shoals out of the water