



EXCEPT POSSIBLY for its drabness, a mark of its age and nature,

Lyttelton, main port of the South Island and third port of New Zealand, presents nothing extraordinary. The port itself is a natural inlet on the north-western side of Banks Peninsula, that hill-fringed knob of land thrusting into the South Pacific from the edge of the 3,000,000 acres of the Canterbury Plains. It has an inner harbour at Erskine Bay, about half-way along the northern side of the inlet; and behind the harbour, where the slopes of the hills are less steep than in the neighbouring bays, is the town, wider east and west across the foot of the hills than deeper from south to north towards the summit.

The port is not a difficult one for mariners. Just inside the mile-wide entrance the depth at low water is seven fathoms, or 42 ft. It gradually lessens to 5 fathoms opposite Gollan's Bay, nearer the heads than Lyttelton, and from there a dredged channel leads to the inner harbour. This channel, 400 ft. wide, is 34 ft. deep at low water and 40 ft. at any high water. Perhaps an idea of what these figures mean in terms of shipping that can use the port may be gained from the dimensions of two British warships which visited Lyttelton before the war. One, drawing 31 ft. was 794 ft. long with a displacement of 32,700 tons, and the other, drawing 29 ft., was 590 ft. long with a displacement of 20,000 tons. The draught of cargo and passenger vessels using the port ranged up to 32 ft. 4 in. Since the war vessels among the twenty largest in the world have visited Lyttelton.

The inner harbour, where the ships tie up, is an area of 106 acres of water enclosed, except for an entrance 500 ft.

wide, by two breakwaters. Here, jetties, and breastwork wharves with more than 12,000 ft. of berthage provide space for thirteen overseas vessels with inter-colonial and coastal shipping as well.

Unlike the two larger North Island ports, Auckland and Wellington, Lyttelton has no cargo-sorting sheds on its wharves, and as the port is at present there is no room for them. It has wool and grain stores and a cool store where outward consignments of farm products can await shipment, but there are no sheds where the inward cargo can be sorted and lifted by the consignees. All the main jetties carry railway-lines, and cargo is transferred direct from truck to ship and ship to truck. The discharged cargo is sorted in sheds in Christchurch, seven miles beyond the hills. And that is why it is sometimes said that these yards mark the western extremity of the port. That is partly why, too, the future of the port has for many years been a subject of controversy, why those interested have divided themselves into groups supporting schemes for a new port more accessible from Christchurch and for a road under the hills to Lyttelton. And perhaps this may be partly why the township bears the marks of age so plainly.

The railway-line which connects Lyttelton through the tunnel under the Port Hills with Christchurch—the first line in New Zealand incidentally—is an electric one. But steam-engines shunt the trucks in the Lyttelton yards and push and pull them to and from the wharves. And as the noises in the port, apart from the rumour of working cranes and grabs and the clipped, half-throttled bleat of the gulls, are chiefly the sounds of engines puffing and whistling, the whine of wheels on rails, and the crash of shunted trucks,