

Baring Head Light



A K O R E R O R E P O R T

"DEFENCE AREA. No admittance without authority." We opened the gate and climbed a steep hill to a plateau, bare and sea-encircled, over which the gravelled road dips and swings till it stops dead at a plantation. Inside the plantation there were two houses and a garage and several outhouses, set in gardens and rockeries. Outside, on the edge of a precipitous cliff, was the lighthouse. The whole picture was quite different from what we had expected.

Mind you, all lighthouses aren't like this one. If you want to know what lighthouses can be like, ask Mr. Rob. Wilson, former head keeper of Baring Head, who has been on most of the main stations of New Zealand. Mr. Wilson, who has spent thirty-eight years in the lighthouse service, is now retired, and is waiting at the lighthouse, as he says, "for his ship to float ashore." He explained his long service by his love of the sea, the same love which made him stow away aboard a barge as a boy of fourteen. Since then he has never left it.

Baring Head, said Mr. Wilson, as we sat in his brown panelled sitting-room, is the lighthouse-keeper's paradise. It is the show station of New Zealand. Not that other stations are as bad as many people imagine. The Marine Department, which is responsible for the coastal lights,

has done its utmost to mitigate the hardships of the keeper's life. All lighthouses now have a fortnightly mail, and are connected to the outside world by line or radio telephone. All are furnished with comfortable dwellings which possess the main amenities, while fuel and lighting is provided. Most stations have local areas of land on which the keeper can keep enough stock to give him fresh meat and milk. Children are taught by the Correspondence School, when there is no other school available, and for recreation there is a circulating library and wireless provided.

Nevertheless, Baring Head has none of the inconveniences associated with other lights. The keeper and his wife don't have to be taken up in a basket by a derrick, as they do at the Stephen Island block in Cook Strait, in rough seas. Three men don't live alone for six months on end as at the Brothers. Baring Head, comparatively, is in the centre of a metropolis. It has a road out to civilization, regular stores and mails, snug houses, garage, cow-bail and workshop, good gardens, friends can come (with an authority), telephone, wireless—it seemed a fine life.

We heard the wind buffeting round the house like a young bull and singing in the struts of the radio pylons. It had torn