

EREWHON TOWNSHIP—SLOW!

A KORERO Report

ON THE opposite page is a sketch plan of a small New Zealand township.

Let us call it Erewhon. You have all seen it; some of you have lived in it.

Erewhon began about seventy years ago as a country store at a cross-roads. As the district developed and traffic increased (Erewhon is on the main road between two large towns), Erewhon acquired a public house, another store, a one-teacher school, and a handful of houses.

Erewhon's period of mushroom growth came with the motor-car, bitumen road surfacing, and petrol-pumps. The Erewhon you see in the sketch opposite has some six hundred inhabitants, a memorial hall, a newspaper (the bi-weekly *Erewhon Advertiser*), two public houses, two churches, a district high school, two garages with petrol-pumps, a dairy factory, a post-office, a branch bank, and a library. Erewhon has grown fast in the last twenty years, and will probably grow even faster in the next twenty because there is talk of a meat-canning works being started there.

But the Erewhonians, although proud of the way their township has grown (there is an Erewhon Progress League) are becoming aware that it leaves much to be desired as a place to live in.

Instead of growing round a centre, it has grown lengthwise like a tapeworm. The shops and public houses and garages were built on the main road to catch the through traffic. Houses were built along the main road because to build them off the road would have meant incurring the cost of subdivision.

This ribbon growth has many drawbacks. When the housewives of Erewhon go shopping, when their children go to school, and when they go visiting in the evening they use the main road. It is their shortest route, and it has a permanent surface. The few back roads are rough and usually muddy. But Erewhon's daily traffic mingles with the through traffic—fast-moving buses and motor-cars—between two large towns.

Sometimes motorists heed the notice "Erewhon township—Slow." Sometimes they don't; and Erewhon already has an unenviable record of road accidents.

Erewhon also suffers because its buildings are not arranged in any sort of plan. Somewhat decrepit houses occupy valuable sites in the middle of the shopping area. The garages are built up to the street fronts, so that the petrol-pumps have to be put on the pavement. Motor-cars getting their tanks filled obstruct the roadway. Two public houses and a store, each built out to a right-angled corner, make visibility bad at the cross-roads. The war memorial is certainly visible, but it interferes with traffic.

The churches are badly placed, because church-goers must park their cars on the main road. The dairy factory is in a residential area, and surrounding householders are inconvenienced by the smoke and smell.

Erewhon has reached the stage where it needs a sewage system and a better water-supply; but to do so it would have to pull up half a mile or so of the main road, which would be expensive and inconvenient. The Council has done nothing and isn't likely to.

The countryside in which Erewhon is set is a beautiful countryside—rolling pastures backed by hills. But, as the Erewhonians have to admit, their township is an eyesore—a long straggle of wood and corrugated-iron buildings tailing off into hoarding advertisements for petrol and beer.

Erewhon is a township built on the principle that every property-owner should do just what suits his purse and his convenience. For a few individuals the principle has worked well. Two storekeepers and a pubkeeper have made tidy little fortunes out of Erewhon. For the three hundred people who have their homes in Erewhon the principle has not worked well. They had the chance to build a township that was safe, healthy, convenient, and beautiful. Erewhon is none of those things.