



that he first came to this part of that country. The railway-line wasn't through then; the land could be bought for £1 an acre or less; now it is worth anything up to £50 an acre. For forty years he's been with the Railways Department—his first responsibility was as a cleaner with a piece of cotton waste; now he's an express driver, this engine in his care and (apparently) his control. He knows every piece of its mechanism. He knows also every inch of the line, each curve where speed has to be slackened, each stretch of straight where it's safe to open up. To him it doesn't matter that the night is black, that visibility is almost nil with rain or fog. It's a nuisance, but he could take that train through with his eyes shut.

He knows the history of that country-side, too. People rushing through the night associate the stopping stations with coffee and a pie, a place to buy a magazine, a bottle of orange. The smaller stations, where the train does not stop, pass unnoticed. But the driver knows that this small town was the first in New Zealand to have electric light, that the next has signs of oil, that here the Maoris killed all the whites one dark night of war, that there a world-famous scientist was born. You wish that it was quieter, so that you didn't

have to miss so many of the things he has to say.

A light through the trees, half a mile away. A blast on the whistle. The light blinks off, then on again. The driver grins. It's his daughter's place and he's saying good evening to her.

So on you go through the night, the powerful light of the engine slicing dramatically through the blackness. Dark outlines of hills rise shadowingly by your side; you see snow. Then they are gone. You pass through the towns, the centres that you know—

Feilding, Ohakune, Frankton Junction, Palmerston North. But there are names you haven't seen before—Wiri, Porootaroa, Oio, Dinwoodie, Mangaonoho. For all you know they could have been the names of the main towns of Central Australia or Mexico or Tibet. You find you don't know so much about this country called New Zealand.

It's dawn, the morning light is chill. The fireman swings giant shovels of coal into the giant furnace, tidily sweeps up the floor with his little red brush. At the next station the driver and he will leave this engine, to switch over to the cab of a south-bound express. You will go back to your seat. After twenty years you decide that after all you don't want to be an engine-driver—and not only because your face gets so black from the soot and the smoke in the tunnels.

You say good-night, you liked these two, the driver and his mate. In the carriage washroom you clean your face, your hands, as best you can. Thankfully you lie back in your seat. It seems so comfortable. You go to sleep wondering why engine-drivers wear white ties. It seems right enough for Fred Astaire to wear a white tie. But why engine-drivers? You asked, but there was too much noise to hear the answer. You wonder . . . but you're asleep.