DIGGER JORDAN—HIGH COMM

Taking an active part in the forthcoming Dominion Prime Ministers' Conference will be New Zealand's outspoken High Commissioner, Mr. W. J. Jordan. Alan Reeve tells something, in words and caricature, of his background and his activities

ONE afternoon, several thousand itinerant bees swarmed above the Strand, on the roof of New Zealand House. They were discovered by the caretaker. His discovery was prompt, his retreat quick, and soon New Zealand House was buzzing with conversation as well as bees.

Then Mr. William Joseph Jordan, J.P., High Commissioner for New Zealand, walked up to the roof. Disdaining proffered gloves and veil, he climbed over several parapets and stalked into the midst of the swarm. Carefully and expertly he selected the largest bee and put it into an adjacent apple box. Into the box the bees followed their queen.

A press photographer summoned from nearby Fleet Street arrived and asked the High Commissioner to assume a stance beside the improvised hive. Mr. Jordan refused. He pointed out that such a belated picture would seem posed and dull.

Thus Mr. Jordan revealed himself as a man of both uncommon talents and sound common sense.

He is indeed versatile. The trades of diplomacy and bee-keeping are only two of a miscellany of accomplishments acquired during a full and unusual life. Fifty-four years ago, when he was eleven, he left St. Luke's Parochial School in London to run errands for a Clerkenwell jeweller. Soon he was working in a type foundry, later he learned coach painting with a firm in Old Street. (He still talks with disgust about the shocking working conditions of coach painting in the eighteen-nineties, when grinding dry white lead into the paint destroyed the painters' gums, gave them dropped wrist and colic. The advanced socialistic ideas that, many years after, stamped him as one of New Zealand's most vigorous labour crusaders, were born in Old Street.)

In 1897 he took an engineering job with the Postal Service at Mount Pleasant. "It was a good job," he says, "but I grew restless and dissatisfied and became a policeman."

So for the next year P.C. Jordan patrolled the dingy streets of Limehouse. He found the experience educational. "It gave me an insight into life I couldn't get anywhere else, but I became restless again. Wanderlust, perhaps—or ambition—prompted me to book a passage to New Zealand."

"Yes," he adds, fervently, "there's a Big Hand in it all."

Not many English immigrants have had a lonelier launching in "the Colonies" than did young Jordan. But when he joined a gang of big-hearted bush-whackers (farm labourers) in the then undeveloped Pohangina valley he soon made friends. With his new cobbers he stumped trees, milked cows, built fences and constructed roads. So quickly did he identify himself with the interests of manual workers that, three years later, he helped to form the New Zealand Labour Party, was elected its first honorary secretary.

Today Jordan retains the naturalness of a bush-whacker, and looks like one. His rough-hewn head is set on a massive neck, his West End suits, smudged with pipe ash, rumple themselves uneasily around chunky contours. There is no fal-lal about his accent, which remains Old Street seasoned with robust colloquial New Zealand idiom. In contrast with the other and more sophisticated Dominion High Commissioners—Canada's suave Massey, Australia's urbane Bruce, South Africa's soldierly Reitz—he is as rugged as an unpolished N.Z. nugget. Affable, unaffected, accessible, he gives each caller a partial and homely welcome, drops a broad hand on his shoulder and calls him "brother." With Mrs. Jordan he lives in a modest suburban house in Wimbledon where, on summer evenings, he sometimes takes off his coat, rolls up his sleeves and digs vigorously in the vegetable garden.

Jordan is a Digger, too, in the military sense; he was wounded serving with the New Zealanders in France in the last war. New Zealand soldiers and airmen in England think he's a good bloke, affectionately call him "our Bill." He likes to feel he is the Father of the Forces here, and frequently welcomes and visits his servicemen "sons" at their stations and camps. Three years ago he inspected the men of the N.Z. Division in Egypt, just before they advanced into Libya. "I wanted to go forward with them," he says, "and I went as far as they'd let me go with a bowler hat on."

Liked by all classes, "our Bill" is quite at ease with the Old School Tie civil servants in Whitehall, and they with him. He is an ardent Empire apologist, and at Empire conferences, such as the periodical meetings of High Commissioners with Lord Cranborne, his opinions carry the weight of their directness and sincerity.

His appointment, a political one, came in 1935, just after the New Zealand Labour Party had swept the polls. Jordan, who had been Labour M.P. for Manukau from 1922, declined a seat in the Cabinet to go to London as the Party's first High Commissioner. He has not forgotten antipodean politics, and during the recent N.Z. elections joked, "If my party doesn't go back, I do." Like other hardy politicians, he loves to tell stories against himself, such as the one about a parson who introduced him at a meeting, saying, "We understand that Mr. Jordan has had his term of office extended for the duration of the war. We hope the war will soon be over."

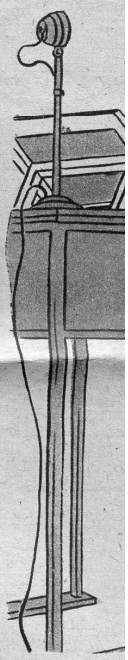
Nor has he mislaid his political ideals and convictions. Enlightened social legislation, more radical in some ways than the Beveridge proposals, has been put into force by his party. He proudly explains, "New Zealand has carried out some useful experiments in social security . . . The programme provides medical and hospital services, payments for the sick and aged, widows and fatherless, the blind and other unfortunates. It operates largely without a means test and, when the means test is applied, it is generous."

He talks about the comprehensive plans made for the settlement and welfare of New Zealand servicemen and women on their return to civil life, also for those discharged disabled.

"And we need more people," he continues. "We hope that, after our servicemen have returned, an immigration scheme will be established. The country offers comfort and security for all with energy and honesty of purpose."

The youngster who once wore clothes obtained from an Old Street school is now a Freeman of the City of London. His powerful voice has resounded in international councils—he will be remembered for his courageous speeches at Geneva on behalf of China, Abyssinia and Spain. Today, as his chauffeur drives him to Downing Street, this downright, upright, self-made New Zealander is not likely to forget the P.C. Jordan who, many years ago, patrolled another and dimmer beat further down the River Thames.

Back Garden by God with and increase, is equally at summer eve agricultural



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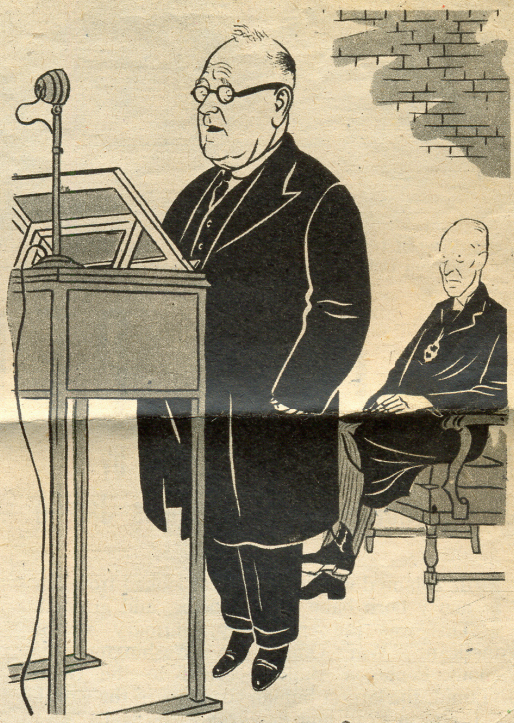
Back Garden: Once a farm labourer in " a land favoured by God with a fertile soil, satisfactory sunshine, rainfall and increase," New Zealand's rugged High Commissioner is equally at home with saw, spade, hoe and fork. On summer evenings he sometimes finds time to invest his agricultural experience in his large Wimbledon garden



Guildhall: " The people of New Zealand are intensely British and give place to no part of our Empire, not even to Britain herself, in devotion to our King and the democratic form of government . . ." Mr. Jordan rarely reads a speech, is a fluent impromptu speaker. A Methodist lay preacher, he is also a London Churchwarden