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GROWING UP
IN THE FORTY MILE BUSH

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in the FORTY MILE BUSH

BY

HARRY COMBS

PAUL'S BOOK ARCADE
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FOREWORD

TEN YEARS BACK, New Zealand celebrated her centennial, and amongst other acknowledgments of the work of her pioneers were several excellent books about the lives they lived and the conditions they mastered. These were more or less confined to the first fifty years. What about the second fifty? There should be some record made of them before it is too late. Though they lack the stirring interest of first arrivals and Maori wars, they were by no means commonplace. What follows has to do with a corner of Hawke's Bay, but it does set down the life lived in backblocks settlements so far as it affected one small boy.

So set your calendar back to '80 something, and come with me.

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GROWING UP
IN THE FORTY MILE BUSH

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MAKOTUKU

The White Crane

As THE devil drove, the devil being the food and clothing needs of three infant sons, my parents moved from place to place in search of employment and opportunity. Bush settlement, out-back isolation, small town and tiny village, followed each other in quick succession; but memory rests on Makotuku, for it was there that I made my debut (unnoticed on the roll) as a schoolboy.

The tiny school was in the heart of "The Forty Mile Bush," and I was only four years old when I crossed its only doorstep for the first time. A year too young to be enrolled, but I didn't care. I was in love. The lady was beautiful: blue eyes, long plaits of golden hair, an engaging smile, plenty of spirit and a rippling laugh. Too much for the resistance of baby boys. She had a dowry, too, in her own right. As a P.T. (short for pupil teacher) she was able to deck herself in the extreme of bush fashion out of her salary

of £20 per annum. Such charms and affluence were too much for the unattached males of the village. They were shy, but not so this four-year-old. His proposal was by the short route of telling her she was to marry him. She was willing and so was father, provided some schooling came first.

So, see the new scholar on his way, resplendent in his first pair of real-to-goodness pants (they britched small boys as opportunity offered in bush circles), lunch in a home-made schoolbag slung over his shoulder, and cow-bell in hand, picking his way in and out of the logs and stumps which beset the path between his home and the road which led to school. Our cabin was set well back from the road line. To cover this distance unescorted was essential to schoolboy status. The cow-bell was a compromise. A very delightful one to his mind. With the bell clanging merrily—he saw to that—mother checked his progress without coming further than the big stump halfway along the track.

At the sliprails, his lady love took charge, giving the bell a vigorous jingle-jangle before placing it on a convenient log. Thus was mother notified that, so far, all was well with her schoolboy son, and turned back to the pressing tasks of skimming the milk, or setting the dough, or baking a home-made loaf in the camp oven.

The house had four tiny rooms—the largest 8′ x 10′—and was roofed with shingles, the inner

sides of which constituted the ceiling, while a yawning space in the kitchen showed where the fireplace would eventually be.

Pending the arrival of the bricks for the fireplace, cooking was done in the open—rain, hail or shine. Of firewood there was a surfeit; it surrounded the house whichever way you looked. Cut to fencing-post length and thickness, it was laid, three or four pieces deep, in a trench dug for the purpose. Lighted at one end, it was never allowed to go out, fresh lengths being thrust in as the burning ones neared their useful end.

It was the cook's job to shuffle the cooking gear from outer coldness to inner heat, as emergency required. The kettle, or the kerosene tin, or the camp oven, had the point of vantage in turn. A sort of postman's knock, varied by inevitable upsets and flavoured with whiffs of smoke, very trying to the eyes and the temper. As the tea hour approached, the tempo was accelerated, with the kerosene tin dominating the central position over the flames. For bush work was dirty work and a good sluice in the half-barrel which served as a bath hardly less welcome than a good meal.

What a life for a gentle woman! Yet what appetising meals mother whisked off those hot coals! And the great day for her when the bricks came, and the amateur brickies closed that yawning gap and set up our chimney! Even though

open-hearth cooking left much for the cook to desire, there was at least shelter from wind and weather.

But where was I? On my way to school with the P.T. She shared her scholastic activities with the mistress ("E" Certificate), and between them they taught reading, writing and arithmetic to some thirty scholars. What an assortment we were! Ages ranged from (my) four years to seventeen. Four nationalities were represented—Norwegian, Swedish, English and Maori. The seventeen-year-old was in Standard I—a giant come out of some mountain recess in search of his "bit of schoolin'."

For convenience of leg room, this scholar sat on his desk when he did not figure at the teacher's table out in front. Rude and elementary as our surroundings were, they were a new world to him. The general store, the church, the school itself, were of unceasing interest, while the fascination of clambering over the trestle bridge in course of erection against the arrival of our first train led to many reprimands for lateness before he settled down.

Out of the Ruahines, Alec made his bow to progress when he presented himself at Makotuku School. He paid for his keep by doing odd jobs for this settler or that and by contributions of young kakas and pigeons to the general stock pot.

He had uncanny skill in producing these welcome variations to the somewhat monotonous menus.

As the two newest scholars, we sat as nearly together as such ill-assorted sizes could manage. By right of years, Alec supervised my efforts with pothooks and hangers, with such a masterly neglect of his own that he was warmly upbraided by my wife-to-be. This scolding seemed to please Alec. The two were of an age when familiarity between youth and maiden quickly develops. My Alec was a handsome youth with the first suspicions of the whiskers of manhood. Frowns and scoldings were the P.T.'s uncertain shield.

Vere Foster set the hand-writing standards of the day, but I don't remember how far I progressed in his elementary requirements. I can say, however, that I was the day's sensation at the school and in great demand with the older girls, for I shifted seats as fancy moved me, having the freedom of the room, but with a bias towards Alec.

He had an accomplishment which outshone all others—he could waggle his ears. This was new in my experience and, as soon as he discovered the importance I attached to it, he exercised this charm whenever I strayed too far, or stayed away too long. Catching my eye, Alec would waggle, and my return to his side was as certain as the swing of the needle to the pole.

Most of the boys tried desperately to emulate

him, and red ears were the order of the day. As I couldn't, I urged my lady love to try. She took refuge behind her authority. Sadly disappointed, I appealed to everybody to do their level best, with the same negative result. But I didn't ask the mistress. Natural awe of a grown-up of twenty-three, plus respect for her supple-jack, restrained me.

Alec was kept in. Afterwards he would consent to waggle those entertaining ears only in rare moments, such as when both teachers were out of the room.

My return to the home circle was simple. The plan of the morning was put into reverse. The cow-bell was rung vigorously and handed over, but, more satisfactory still, after signalling to mother that her son had entered the home stretch, my escort decided to hand him over in person. As good an excuse as any for a gossip.

I was given "a piece" (bread and dripping) and sent out to play. Keeping within earshot, I gathered that the day's events were under discussion. I knew she was "telling on me," for I heard mother chuckle. Reference was made to Alec's ears, and the chuckle developed into peal on peal of unrestrained merriment. But horrors! It was not what Alec could do with them that occasioned this laughter; it was the description of the state of them! My passion faded from that moment, and, although I paid further unregis-

tered visits to the house of learning, it was more the charm of the cow-bell overture than the prospect of a happy marital state which beguiled me.

Our scholastic progress was small. This was partly because of measles, colds, chickenpox and the like. But there were also absences occasioned by diversions along the way. These were many, and all cried aloud for small-boy attention. They brought frowns and the supplejack ever nearer and nearer. The shallow creek which flowed over the road, near our front sliprail, was always a temptation. We set chips and bits of bark afloat and followed them until they disappeared under the log which served as a footbridge. Then, again, this creek had never been traced to its source and this was a job for Primer III, school or no school.

Travel books make a feature of the difficulties and dangers of first explorations. It is now possible to assert, in the light of this early experience, that such accounts are exaggerated. Nothing could be more satisfying than an obstacle overcome, unless it is the process of overcoming it. Difficulties really began at the conclusion of such adventures. Adults have a very cock-eyed idea of what is suitable for children and what is good for themselves.

Standing near the bank of the rivulet (a convenient water supply) was a one-room whare—bedroom, kitchen, dining-room and pantry, all in

one. In this lived our nearest neighbours—father, mother, and seven children. The dividing lines between these features of domestic economy were more or less sketchy. The bedroom was farthest from the fireplace. It boasted a double bed with one leg. Don't shout! I repeat—a double bed with but one leg. And how? Simplicity itself. The frame at the head was fixed to the rear wall, one side to the side wall, and its one leg, out in the middle of the dirt floor, supported the free corner.

Above this was what can only be described as an extra wide shelf. It was constructed with long lengths of manuka spanning the gap between the eaves, with shorter lengths lashed crossways and to the back wall. On this rough stretcher was spread a layer of dried fern, which in turn supported sacks half filled with chaff. This constituted the boys' bedroom. It was entered by stepping from the stool on to the table. And then, with a half-spring, half-scramble, up you went.

No more desirable sleeping berth could be imagined. It was the aim of my young life to spend a night in that whare and sleep with the boys.

All good things come to him who waits and knows how to ask. I did stay the night, and I did sleep with the boys in this bed of my desire. What tales I had to tell next day! The toasting of bread and slices of bacon before the log fire which blazed busily in the outsize fireplace; the raising of the sacking screen behind which the

girls retired for the night; the snug comfort of the boys' bed; porridge served out of a pot dumped in the middle of the table (the best porridge ever tasted); the dab in the creek with the end of the community towel—a "lick and a promise" and no mistake.

Never was small boy more excited or jubilant. Never had small boy such wonders to relate. He made one slip. As a cold yet interesting fact, he mentioned that "Jacky had spiders in his hair!" Slip? "Avalanche" would be nearer the mark. In just one minute a small boy was bitterly repenting his careless tongue as his mother, with soap and carbolic and the wholesale use of water and a fine-toothed comb, gave his neck and ears and hair as thorough a "once-over" as small boy ever had.

In this fly-speck of a village, life was not the monotonous business most people might imagine; or, putting it another way, there was sufficient importance attached to small events to give them a lot of interest. For instance, the installation of a four-gallon linseed-oil drum in our open fireplace, to serve as an oven, was the object of school conversation for quite a spell. Many a small wayfarer wandered in to have a peep, to the disadvantage of his attendance record as the bell rang out its summons to morning school. The drum was packed in with clay, a channel being left underneath to take hot embers and to create a draught. The top was left exposed and on this

further embers were shovelled for baking purposes. It was long uncertain as to temperature, but, what with plastering with more clay and much trial and many errors, this irregularity was more or less mastered.

Trips into the bush always savoured of adventure. Can you picture two small urchins, father's dinner in a flax kit, cow-bells in hand, dawdling along the sledge track and gazing in awe at the age-old giants bordering the right-of-way? These trees, or most of them, were truly magnificent. Clean stemmed for thirty, forty feet before the first branch broke clear—a branch in itself was a fair-sized tree—they crowded close together like the pillars of the temple in the family Bible at home.

The track was clearly defined by the deep scoring of sledge runners, so we could not miss our way, but we always avoided its uneven surface. Who wouldn't prefer the carpet of mosses and small ferns at the side? With a flurry of wings, a dozen or so pigeons changed feeding-grounds from miro to tawa, or titoki, or konini as the season provided. In and out flitted scores of fantails, fluttering so close we must try to catch them. Tui replied to tui, in musical duets no composer has yet reduced to paper. There were parakeets too, carrying on cheeky bird conversations and flirting their red breasts. Sometimes we could pick out a kaka after it had called a dozen times; or

again (this very rarely) a huia would sail by, its white-tipped tail outspreading and contracting like a beautiful fan.

With such diversions to keep us interested the dinner in the Maori kit was mostly slow in arrival. Ahead we could hear the klip-klop of an axe, or the rhythmical swish and hum of a heavy cross-cut ripping through the life-thread of totara, or matai, or rimu, or white pine.

Rounding a bend we come in sight of the bush-men, to be halted by a warning shout as, swaying towards us, gently at first and then with a rush, the tree in hand comes crashing to earth, smothering us with leaves and twigs and dust and bringing down branches torn from obstructing trees in its path. The blast of displaced air almost knocks us over. A near shave indeed, and one which father did not care to talk about for many a long day, his fright was so great.

Along this track, or just such another, we might make way for a team of bullocks, perhaps ten, sometimes sixteen, yoked in twos, tugging and lurching in their persistent way with a huge log trailing behind rolling and twisting on its way to the sawmill. The bullock-driver with voice and whip encouraged the workers and punished the slothful.

This man was a notability amongst us. Did he not use the longest whip (no mean accomplishment in the heart of the bush—ask any fly fisher-

man), had he not the bushiest beard, did he not own the strongest bullock team in the whole forty miles? Yes, a hundred times yes. And when he volunteered to help the school committee out of its annual picnic problem of "where" and "how" by offering to transport the children and teachers and female adults into the very heart of the bush, the chorus of approval sent up by the male youth was so flattering in its sincerity that the offer had to be accepted.

So, planks having been laid on the rough deck of his wagon, picnic kits and other gear placed aboard, the ladies helped up, the girls lifted in as the boys climbed the muddy wheels (they must get in the way the men do), away we went. The team was not specially groomed—no one was fussy in such matters—but an extra bell or so had been strapped on to combine their tunefulness with the rattling of the ever-useful kerosene tins swinging under the axle. Add to this obligato a chorus of happy children's voices singing:

"Pull for the shore, sailor;
Pull for the shore.
Heed not the rolling wave,
But bend to the oar."

From time to time the leading bullocks, finding themselves beyond the reach of the all-persuasive whip (an extra span or two had been yoked in to

add magnificence to the procession), would forget their duty and come to a halt or turn aside for a moment's browsing. Then their driver, in turn, forgot his passengers and returned to his craft with some unfiltered language, amid squeals of disapproval from the women. This merely added variety to the proceedings. With menacing yelp, the dog, awaiting just such an occasion, scurries through the undergrowth to nip the heels of the defaulters. Our wagon is in motion once more.

Arrived at the clearing, the elders boil the billy and set out the eatables, while they discuss the general waywardness of children and the utter impossibility of getting boots which will last a couple of weeks. "The boys kick the toes out of them in no time." These same small boys are having an hilarious time swinging themselves over the creek on rata vines and threading supplejack mazes. The girls are equally noisy, as they play "kiss-in-the-ring" or some round game requiring a lot of chasing.

The rattling of the kerosene tin brings all wanderers to the business of eating and drinking, the company having first sung a verse of the Doxology. Appetites satisfied, exploring parties set out, to return in the late afternoon laden with ferns and shrubs which invariably refuse to grow after transplanting in the open.

Good times indeed, but there were others not so good. One such comes to mind. A neighbour

had a family of strapping sons, all of them employed on bush work of some sort. The youngest left school in our time to help his father with a felling contract. The pair were away all the week, returning on Sunday for a clean-up, a change of washable clothes, and a much needed rest. They had scarcely settled down to their job when the boy was struck on the thigh with a heavy branch which dropped, for no known reason, from the tree they were cutting. The broken leg was lashed to a stake and the sufferer hauled by his father to their whare. There he lay on the rough table while his father set out for help. Hours later his mother turned up, father having gone on to telegraph the doctor in distant Waipukurau.

On the morning of the second day, this hard-worked friend of the community arrived, too late to save the leg and almost too late to save the boy. Off the limb had to come, with the mother as nurse-assistant. A crude stretcher was improvised, and father and brothers hoisted the patient on their shoulders and set off on the long tramp to the station, mother walking at the side to watch the bandages. Sympathy and help with the carrying there were without stint. Every cottage along the route had the fire going and the billy boiling, fresh scones and cups of tea ready, sufficient for a party twice the size, if they would but set the sufferer down and stop for a rest.

Meanwhile, the doctor, having done all he could for this urgent case, was pressed into service for jobs that had been put off against such a call. Boils were lanced (bush boils were the very devil), teeth pulled, ringworm treated, stomach troubles guessed at and prescribed for, and so on until, thoroughly tired out, the good man accepted a shakedown in a friendly home, to sleep the sleep of the just.

The school was no more. For the youth of the village a by no means ill-timed disaster; the girls demurely silent, the boys smugly off-hand. There had been a real old-man bush-fire. Ten days of it. Settlers with their wives, battling it out night and day, rescuing stock and poultry, feeding their families, defending home and outbuildings and fences. A losing fight in some of these particulars for all of them; a disastrous clean sweep for some. This fire was one of many, but it stands out in memory because of the length and extent of it.

At that period there was little or no control of land-clearing by fire. It was regarded as the right thing for settlers whose "burn" was ready, to warn fellow settlers. But the accidentally-done-on-purpose fire was frequent enough.

This one, which closed for a time my search for knowledge as prescribed by the educational authorities of the day, started some miles from where we lived. A perfect late summer day. Brilliant sunshine and a cloudless sky. The bush

lightly tossing to the gentle breeze; the tuis in full song, as they probed bush flowers for honey stores; hundreds of fantails pursuing the thousands of midges on which they lived; the irregular notes of the bells as the cattle grazed and wandered through the undergrowth; the fowls scratching in rotting logs for those tidbits discriminating birds find so tasty.

Midway through the morning attention wanders from the entrancing story of the cat-which-sat-on-the-mat, to the upper unfrosted half of the schoolroom window. A cloud is framed by the sash. No mistaking that cloud. Perfect in shape, like an enormous cauliflower, a clear ivory in the sunlight, shading by graduations to a sombre brown as it revolves and rolls, rising against the blue of the sky.

"Bush-fire!" runs a half-delighted, half-agitated murmur round the room.

"Which way will she break?" wonder the experienced children. A lot depends on the answer to this unspoken question. Wind currents, drawn by the heat of the burning forest below, take their time before setting out on their path of destruction.

Lunch recess finds us still awaiting the answer. Along the road we have unusual company. Men from the sawmill and even out of the bush are on their way home too. They want to be on hand. If the tip of that smoke-cloud breaks our way there will be work enough for them. If it breaks

the other way, then horses must be saddled, wet sacks of all sorts strapped in front and behind, and off they will go to help distant settlers in the path of the flames.

The sky by this time has changed to a bad-tempered blacky blue. There is hardly a breath of air stirring; the mid-morning breeze is stilled. There is something ominous, too. The oppressive atmosphere has silenced the bush birds, or they have departed to who knows where? Farm animals stamp along the fence lines, especially the horses, tossing their heads as though worried. The fowls are restlessly calling in the peculiar way they have. But that magnificent cloud, though bigger and hundreds of feet higher, retains its perfect shape.

We hurry through our dinners and are off to school once more, father deciding that, for the afternoon, there is no need for concern. Other fathers are of the same mind, for we are all back, my coterie again engrossed in the adventures of the fat-cat-sitting-on-the-mat.

Suddenly the schoolroom darkens. Everybody looks up. That smoke column broken, and blowing every which way, but definitely our way, obscures the sun. We are for it! The final hour of our scholastic troubles has one hundred minutes. The big boys are told to see the little fellows home. Only just in time for me, for, with a rush and a roar, the gale swoops down on us, bringing

a full load of twigs and leaves and small stones to sting little boys' hands. A tornado of a blast, then a dead calm. Next a swirling, vicious whirlwind, that brings us up all standing, then hurries us this way and that until, grabbed by some adult, we are hurried indoors.

A dense cloud of smoke sweeps across the paddocks, blotting out everything, animate or inanimate, twenty yards away; then lifts like the curtain on a stage to a glow of fierce flames and the roar of coming destruction. Then a glare lights up the bush a mile away and the tops of the trees near the house break into flame from the heat borne by the gale. The debris of the first squall is reinforced by sizeable branches, wrenched from trees hundreds of yards back. These thud to earth, adding terror to the anxieties of mothers of straying small boys.

Within half an hour the fire, which was a mile away, is all round us, and efforts to save the stock are abandoned. The job now is to save the home.

Across the way a neighbour's barn catches fire. It is filled to overflowing with green hay, hurriedly harvested in the vain hope of saving it. The dark blue and brown of the forest smoke is supplemented by this hay smoke, black as black can be. Sweeping across the short space to our home, it terrifies the small boy perched on the roof of the low lean-to at the back of the house, where he has been stationed with a bucket of water and

a pannikin to deal with flying sparks dropping on the shingles.

For a time he can see neither roof nor sky above, nor earth beneath. It is the end of his world. He screams in terror as a second eddy, more dense than the first, swoops over the gable. The bucket tumbles over, the pannikin flies anywhere, as, careless of foothold, he falls backward into his rescuing father's arms.

There follow days of incessant and fruitless toil for those capable of it. Difficulty is superimposed on anxiety for the womenfolk. They have worn-out men to cheer, and kiddies crying for food at their feet. Meals are conjured out of nothing in a nightmare of noise and an atmosphere clogged with ashes and befouled by smoke.

And ten days before the rain came! Ten days of almost ceaseless anxiety. Everywhere one looks the country is alight. Tall trees, like tremendous torches, are ablaze from the ground up. The whole world is on fire.

And then the rain! The blessed, glorious rain, the prayed-for rain, falls down on us, washing the atmosphere clear again, tempering danger with hope, and bringing relief and rest to those almost too tired to stand.

The long fight is over. Where magnificent trees once stood there are now scarred and twisted and gaunt trunks, and pile upon pile of charred remains, like rocks on the coast when the tide

is out, as far as the eye can see. Freakishly, there stands a lone forest monster, to all appearances unscathed. A symbol of a world that is gone. Fifty yards away, maybe, is a charred trunk, stripped of everything but its naked strength. The world that survives. Both will fall presently, when saw and axe start in to clear away the mess.

For a day or so complete exhaustion rules the village. Then men begin to emerge from shed and tent (make-do homes) and other resting-places and set to counting their losses; licking pioneering wounds, as it were. The surviving houses are occupied by two or more families. The surviving stock are pooled to provide milk and butter. The general store is raided for flour and sugar and tinned goods to feed the younger generation. The sawmill is gone. The school is gone. So are the stacks of sleepers awaiting the railway inspector's broad arrow. A winter's work and hopes brought to nothing.

Start again! Well! Will we? Or won't we? By some telepathic decision the menfolk gather at the site of the vanished sawmill. Nothing is left but the engine lying on its side. The school being gone, boy-folk make this their rendezvous too. Listening in? Just so. What tales of woe, of depression, of discouragement run round the circle! More than one has a bandage showing; a bad burn, a sprain or even a fracture needing medical attention, not keeping them home.

A "what's-the-use" sort of atmosphere. Up-stakes-and-start-somewhere-else, is discounting Oh-give-it-another-go, with partisans on both sides. Pessimism beats down suggestion until the bench-man (key man of the sawmill, and therefore a workman to be listened to), who has heard all and said nothing, breaks in with:

"There is one thing we can do, anyway!"

"What's that?" in a chorus.

"We can stand the old engine on her pins!"

He strolls over to his friend. A man here and there follows him. Then all gather round the fallen engine. Someone grabs a pole and pokes it under the boiler, as a lever. Willing hands seize hold of anything they can grip. With a heave and another, and a pull together, "up she goes," to be held in position while props and struts are fixed to hold her. The job is done.

What a useless job it is! But is it? The saw doctor forgets his sprain and gets down into the pit, to see how his saws have fared. The bush foreman moves off, tap tap tapping the charred logs lying around, gauging their worth as millable timber. Someone reminds someone else that some bullocks had been reported a couple of miles away. The mill-owner, with only his engine and his mortgage left, opines that, if the storekeeper will lend him half-a-crown, he will send a telegram to Napier and see if the merchant will accept rough baulk timber.

Our village lifts its head and male villagers return to women-folk with the light of purpose in their eyes, the squared shoulders of men who have still a purpose in life.

In a few days, more urgent matters having been disposed of, the call goes out for all hands to put up a temporary school. Pungas and slabs and other useable timbers are gathered and stacked. A trench is dug, the ends dropped in, and the tops lashed and nailed to battens. Raupo thatching serves for a roof and, presto! there is a school once more. The chinks and crevices are chocked with clay. This is the boys' department. They attend to it with a will.

An old tub (half a barrel) is partly filled with pug and sluiced with water and two of the smaller boys hoisted in to tread the mixture into useable consistency. For a start, the side of the tub is grasped firmly, but gradually discretion is thrown aside until first one and then the other nipper subsides into the slippery mess to the complete disadvantage of pants and shirt.

But what matter? Mud pies are good, official mud pies glorious. Oh, the oozy, squazzling squirm of soft clay between the toes—the slimy, slushy pleasure of it! Shouts of derision and hilarity as first one hero and then the other, grown bold in well-doing, falls sprawling in the slippery mess. Yells of boy delight as more clay is added, more water splashed over the conglomeration,

boys and all. Boy and mud merged into a perfect whole. And asked to do it! Memory retains no joy to equal this day of delight in this wealth of minor happenings.

After a "real" fire had passed, grass-seeding became of first importance. As soon as the necessary seed was available (there were many delays), the settler cut a sack in half, tied a piece of rope to each corner, filled the half-sack with seed and, slipping the loop over his shoulder, tramped his paddocks from end to end, until his supply of seed gave out or his fields were gridironed.

If he was blessed with sons, they could be very useful, no matter how small. Sugar-bags, cut in imitation of the sack, with string or strap to serve as loop, had their quota of seed measured into them. Keeping a near-enough straight line, through and over a mullock of logs and stumps, was next to impossible. Boys slipping in and out of gaps between logs made omissions good, or overlaid areas too thinly spread. Performance left much to be excused, but wagging tongues at times of refreshment (under mother's special care) left no doubt as to who was doing all the work.

As soon as grass-seeding was over, logs and stumps were burnt, this time according to plan. Moveable logs and debris were piled, end on end, around stumps, or at the foot of a standing trunk. Once more small boys filled a useful place. It was their delight (for there were stirring times

ahead) to place armfuls of the general litter around these piles. When this job was done, a calm day was awaited. Permission given, an eager urchin seized a lighted brand from the kitchen fire and dashed forth to do his best—or worst. He had lived for this moment. No professional firebug could do a better job. Flying from heap to heap, he soon had the satisfaction of watching the work of his hands, in a most agreeable form, lighting up the nearby landscape. Livening up smouldering bonfires or heaping fuel on sluggish logs kept him out of other mischief for days. Should a stalwart monster be involved, speculation would be rife as to the hour of its downfall. If it chose a bedtime hour, great was the disappointment. But, mostly, such trees were kind to small boys, and high was the glee as they came tumbling earthwards, an arc of flame and a fountain of sparks as each struck the ground with a lordly thump. Guy Fawkes days of after-years were the merest sideshow!

But what of home fires? How did we live outside bread-and-butter needs? Every cottage, every whare, every bush camp, had its open fireplace. The day's toil over, family and friends would gather in a circle to enjoy the warmth and companionship. Men talked politics and bush "shop"; the women turned over domestic setbacks, discussed births and deaths, or, at great length, some far-away society wedding as depicted in the Lon-

don *Graphic*. Small boys punched and teased each other, until suppressed by an adult "who could not hear himself speak," because he was getting the worst of an argument.

This interruption would serve to start a directed form of entertainment. Yarns held the floor. Experiences on shipboard, coming out to the Colony, were followed by reminiscences of Maori war times and tales of the road; most of the men had "humped their bluey" at some stage, prior to their arrival in Makotuku.

A more lively source of amusement would be voted for. Spelling-bees were much in favour. It is hard to realise today the degree of interest these contests occasioned. The words were graduated to suit ages and schooling (or lack of it), three-letter words giving way to four-letter words, one syllable to two syllables, and so on. Excitement ran high as contestant after contestant misspelled himself out of the competition. Woe betide the senior who allowed a youngster to outspell him. He was twitted about it for days. By way of variation we had contests in mental arithmetic, each child on edge to be the first with the answer.

Interest slackening, a sing-song was proposed. Led by fiddle and concertina, childish treble added to soft soprano and, backed by tenor and baritone, combined in happy harmony one would give a small fortune to hear again. The flames leaped high in unison as we sang of the troubles of

"Old Black Joe" or the liveliness of "Camptown Races." These gave way to Moody and Sankey's hymns. The tunes were simple and the words easily learned. Faster and faster went the fiddler's bow.

"Hold the fort, for I am coming,
Jesus signals still.
Wave the answer back to Heaven,
'By Thy grace we will.'"

Eyes shining in the firelight; faces lit by the growing embers; all signs of weariness and stiffness disappeared. Grotesque and more grotesque grew the musician's shadow as it climbed the wall and wove across the ceiling. No community sing of later years has ever equalled in fellowship those of wayback settlement days.

All too soon the command, "Now, boys! Time for bed!" would put an end to our share in the evening. Dilatory "good-nights" having been said, we climbed into our bunks, mother tucking us in. In the short interval between drowsy wakefulness and deep sleep, the noises of the night set us wondering. Crickets singing. Moreporks signalling to each other across the gully. Our rooster taking his turn in the crowing circle. Brindle tinkling her bell in the undergrowth. Frogs croaking in the swamp. The loud "chuck" of the big eel in the creek. The bush sighing as the light breeze

stirred the treetops. The barking of our dog as a horseman trotted past. "Who was that?" we wondered. A tongue of flame shot out of a hollow stump, lighting up the room. Voices from the other room would cease to make sense, drift further and further away, become fainter and fainter until—the sun shone in the window.

Early days of land settlement in Hawke's Bay saw the immense areas of open country, the natural clearings, monopolised by big run-holders—squatters of the Australian era. Smaller men (by "small" I mean those with little or no cash or influence) were compelled to go right back. Where they did settle was determined by one or both of two factors: (1) cheap land; and/or (2) the opportunity to make some sort of living, in addition to what they could win from their small holdings. A bush section gave the answer to (1), and the building of railways the answer to (2), provided the line came within easy reach of the holding. But this job had its limitations. The pay was small—four bob a day—and an absence of ten hours (getting to the job and home again cost a lot of time) left the settler hardly any chance to break his property in. The clearing of a bush farmstead was a full-time job in itself. But most settlers in the Forty Mile Bush acquired some ready cash by doing part-time work on railway construction, and used their "free" time on their holdings, cutting and shaping sleepers and

posts and rails, which had a ready sale with the contractors when they moved into a nearby stretch.

These useful oddments were stacked alongside convenient bullock-tracks pending the arrival of the Government inspector. His visits were uncertain; so the non-working speculator with cash to play with made a lot of money, particularly if, as mysteriously happened, he got wind of the approach of this important official. Once the inspector's broad-arrow sign was punched into the items submitted, they became Government property. The maker need worry no more (unless a stipulation had been made as to delivery), for a cheque would arrive in due course. But the settler, with a store account building up, and with a stock of posts and rails and sleepers awaiting official branding, found it hard to resist the blandishments of the speculator, particularly if the bush-fire season was in the offing.

Should such a fire precede the inspector, a whole winter's effort would more than likely go up in smoke. A gamble in the real things of life, with a vengeance. Many a man took this chance to his bitter disappointment. King Fire not only shuffled the cards; he dealt himself the Joker, the Right and Left Bowers, not to mention the Ace and King.

But hard and all as such total loss was, it was easier to bear than a world-without-end debt

liability. This was the lot of many who elected to accept an advance against their stacks of timber awaiting acceptance. Most of those who took this easy-money route repented their weakness.

The bush-fires brought a train of small disasters, but in the main recovery was quick. The natural fertility of bushland, supplemented by the ash of the fires, was extraordinary; it had to be seen to be believed. After each succeeding fire the holding was a little clearer, and carried another cow or so. Home-made butter and cheese were as good as ready cash with the storekeeper. He had his market at the contractor's camp along the line. With groceries and other small needs bartered for in this way, the family's other needs were more or less supplied from the farm itself. With our own milk and butter, cheese from a Scandinavian neighbour (they were past masters at making it), two or three pigs, ducks and hens, the table never went very short.

But the real wealth of the district, if these pioneers had not lived so close to their tasks, lay in the forest itself. Only a few of the splendid trees which stood in this richly endowed area were ever converted into millable timber. The rest were felled, to shrivel and dry, ready for burning when they were not burned "standing."

Thought for today was all that was possible. Care for the future was rarely expressed, at least not in schoolboy hearing. The settler, with his

rent or interest to meet, struggled manfully to raise money. If there was a "poultice" (expressive bush word for "arrears") on his place, he was just moved on as soon as his creditor found a purchaser at the new improved value.

In what particular jam father got caught we never rightly knew. But caught he was, and the farm no longer ours. His years of strenuous toil and husbandry reverted to the vendor, who, in addition to his claim for outstanding monies, had by way of bonus fences and outbuildings, to say nothing of a property cleared and drained and therefore more readily sold or leased.

Small boys know little of such things and think less. So we young fry were not at all disturbed when father and mother set themselves up as a committee of ways and means, covering a hopeful migration to Porangahau.

2

PORANGAHAU

In Maori: Porangi—mad; Hau—wind

FOR THOSE days the way was long—perhaps fifty miles—and the means woefully short, not much more than twenty shillings. These pieces of silver were set up in two piles, one to be retained by mother for the needs of the three boys, the other to cover father's journey to this distant job he thought he might get.

We follow him. The ticket to Waipukurau cut his precious share in half. Stepping off the train, he strode along the only street, with a thirty-mile tramp ahead and his anxieties for company. But his luck was in. Passing the hotel he was greeted by the proprietor:

"Hello, Billy! What brings you here?"

"I'm off to Porangahau, Peter, after that job at the store."

"How're you going to get there? There's no coach until Monday."

"I'm not using any coach. I'm going on shanks' mare. I'm broke, Peter."

"The hell you are!"

"Bet your sweet life, and I must be jogging along if I'm to get there before dark."

"There's an easier way than that, Billy. Take my horse. If you get the job, send him back by a drover. If you don't, ride him back. It will be easier than walking."

"But, Peter, I can't pay you; I'm broke."

"Pay be damned, Billy. Who said anything about pay? I'm lending him. Some exercise will do the brute good. What's more, dinner's ready. Nothing like a good feed before you start.

"Mother!" (this to someone in the kitchen). "We've company for dinner and I'm hungry."

An hour later, farewells having been said and thanks brushed aside, behold father on Peter's roan pursuing the road to job or no job. With so much at stake his thoughts early took charge, and the roan, from nipping thistleheads, took to snatching satisfactory mouthfuls and finally, with a mind to serious grazing, saw a turning that suited and just naturally took it. Dusk was setting in when his rider awoke to the fact that Porangahau was not in sight and the road had dwindled to a bridle-track. A night in the open in May was a far from pleasant prospect; but, just as he had made up his mind to it, the sound of a horse coming towards him at a smart trot obviously

told of a rider sure of direction. A brief explanation and the two men were on their way to Oakburn, the stranger's destination. The offer of a "shake-down" was gladly accepted and, with the prospect of a meal ahead, the horses kept up a brisk pace.

Did I say it was father's lucky day? The object of the journey to Porangahau turning up in the course of general talk, he was able to settle the matter of "job or no job" there and then, for before they dismounted the job was his. His host for the night combined sheepfarming with general storekeeping and was the owner who was looking for a new man. Father settled in right away, and a few days later a letter enclosing two one-pound notes arrived at Makotuku. We were in funds once more.

It took weeks to scrape together enough money to cover the shift to the new home, but the funds were available at length and three excited boys were all on edge for the glory and excitement of a trip on the train.

Our neighbours had been more than kind—they had been generous to the point of self-denial and their hopes of our "coming back some day" were as genuine as our promises to do so. Good people all.

The stationmaster clanged his bell, the guard blew his whistle and raised his arm, and we were off to a great waving of handkerchiefs and honest

"goodbyes." Down the grade we gathered speed on to the railway bridge and into the cutting on the other side. Makotuku was gone and interest in bush playmates gave way to interest in the train itself. The driver (the envy of each boy's heart), the fireman and the guard were old friends. Each was called by his first name, except by mother, who used the prefix "Mister." Having agreed that we were on the best train, handled by the best crew in Hawke's Bay, we canvassed the pleasures of the journey ahead, wondering if "she could do better than twenty miles an hour on the flat."

But pleasures that day there were none. They were destroyed by bush and second-growth fires along the track.

For miles the train just moved, and no more. It stopped at every culvert while the guard went forward to inspect. It stood for untold minutes at every bridge (all bone-dry totara) while the driver held conference with a red-eyed, smoke-grimed platelayer. Mostly the two disappeared into the murk that hid the lower parts of the structure before they decided to proceed. The heat was terrific whether carriage doors and windows were open or shut. Nothing could keep out the smoke, the floating black cinders and feathery white ash which settled on clothes, in ears, and worried eyes until they smarted unbearably—rubbing only made them worse. The acrid taste and smell of

the smoke destroyed all appetite for anything except fresh water, which was unknown in the railway carriages of that day. At least one small passenger crept under the seat in search of relief from these discomforts.

It seemed more like days than hours before we emerged from the smoke and heard the last of fiercely crackling grass and fern as the flames raged up and down the sides of the cuttings.

We were hours late in reaching Waipukurau, and the coach, being under contract in the matter of mails, had gone off without us. In the help-one-another habit of the times, this was a minor trouble. We boys took it as a matter of course to be billeted in the homes of good-natured residents. I had as host the blacksmith, and a proper nuisance I must have been, for I was "under his feet," as he expressed it, "the whole blessed day." His smithy was a novelty and I tore myself away only for meals. The rise and fall of the huge bellows; the clouds of steam as he damped down the rising flames; the pungent, pleasant smell as hot shoes were fitted to massive hooves; the ring of hammer on anvil, between blows on the new shoe. The flying sparks, as first blows were struck; the beat of heavy sledge and guiding hammer when the smith and his offsider joined forces to forge a new axle. Dong! (on the spot to be hit). Ding-a-ling-a-ling-ling! (on the anvil). Whang! (the heavy sledge). Dong! Ding-a-ling-a-ling-

ling-ling! Whang! Musically, evenly, perhaps thirty strokes; perspiration streaming down and reflecting the glow of the roaring fire, while hot iron turned from orange to red, to bronze-blue, before they cried "enough." The beat of sparks on leather aprons. The ultimate glory of riding the newly-shod to the hitching-rail is one of lifetime's memories.

But the coach came back, as coaches will, and the coach pulled out, as coaches must when drawn by five willing horses. We were on the road to our new school. A tedious road it was. A provoking road. An exasperating road. Twenty-eight miles of (slow) uphill and (swift) down dale. Uphill (it seemed) all the way. In our day the coach did well if it compassed this journey in five hours. This was the summer timetable. It did not run at all in winter, being replaced by packhorse for mails and bullock dray for store supplies. Those residents who could not ride remained in isolation for the duration.

Besides climbing the higher hills, the road specialised in going the longest way round, private bags having to be dropped at run-holders' gates. Half-way, we pulled up at Wallingford for a change of horses, the passengers pressing the driver, as per time-honoured custom, to accept refreshment while this was going forward. The landlady (kindly soul) put a leading question about lemonade. Receiving three positive affirma-

tives, she, rightly, brushed aside mother's polite negative and we were happily initiated into the charms of that beverage.

Wallingford lying at the bottom of a hollow, we started to climb, climb, climb again and, between the monotonous pace, the tedious outlook and the lurching of the coach, were all but worn out and half asleep when the driver roused us with, "Porangahau, boys!" as we crested the final rise.

It was dusk. In the short time he gave us to look, we spied out a few scattered houses, the small church, a two-storeyed hotel and the store. The river father had written about was hard to pick up, as its banks were high, but beyond where we guessed it to be were the whares and other buildings of a considerable Maori pa.

"Giddap!" shouted the driver, and, to the cracking of whip, rattling of harness, jingling of chains and loose buckles, we took the downward track to the flat below at a pace a trifle short of a smart gallop. But the brakes were good and the driver's hands were firm. Almost before we had time to be frightened we were speeding over the final stretch—a level road at last. It was an entry in the grand manner, and roused a chorus from the dog population befitting the arrival of so important a vehicle. We tore down the last hundred yards with a dozen small boys in hot pursuit.

The tedium of the journey was forgotten in the glory of this entrance.

Next day, to school. It was tiny. Not much bigger than a decent haystack and not much unlike one in shape. Three windows faced the road, set too high for small children to peep through; but, to make sure distractions of traffic did not divert attention from lessons, the lower halves were frosted. In one corner stood the shelves of the public library. Its hundred odd books ("odd" is the right word) were leather bound and smelled deliciously. The blackboard and the pointer were the teacher's tools of trade, and a large map of the world (Mercator projection) covered most of the spare wall. There was an open fireplace for heating, comfort in that particular depending largely on wood retrieved from the river which flowed along the back boundary of the small playground.

This playground was an improvement on Makotuku, as it was free of obstacles other than long grass. The school roll jumped from twenty to thirty during our stay of four years. The master was a German, who neither spared the rod nor spoiled a child. The small fry feared him—said they hated him—and hoped that something dire might happen as he passed the river bend on his way to school. His methods were based (so he told us) on those of his own schooling. If this was true, then German boys of his era had a

mighty thin time of it. It was quite usual for him to smash a ruler (made by the local carpenter) on some small child's hand, then seize another and continue to punish the unhappy mite until this broke also. The results were as poor as his methods. In one notable year only one pupil out of twenty-seven passed.

There were several Maori names on the roll, all boys. My class had three, making a class of four when all attended. The three Maoris had but one book among them. The chap who got this precious volume came to school; the other two just didn't—it wasn't done! The pakeha scholar pondered this mystery for some time. When the why and wherefore of it dawned upon him he sprang to action. The class colour scheme changed from brown and white to all brown. The pakeha book had been handed over to a potential absentee and the third Maori had gone fishing with a white partner in sin.

The Porangahau is tidal to a little above the main road crossing. There was no bridge in our day; a dugout canoe served pedestrians who liked to get over dry-shod. The rising tide brought an advance guard of herrings. Next on the programme was eeling. The Maori boy knew all that was to be known about digging them out of the mud. There was the kingfisher's hole to explore. Was he at home? He was; and in a nasty temper, too. We were in and out of the river every five minutes.

The hours flashed by in a boy's heaven of happiness too good to last, for small boys must eat and small boys must sleep.

The division of spoils agreed upon, the Maori boy returned to his tribe with two eels, to be welcomed as one who had done well by his upbringing. The pakeha, with half-a-dozen herrings to justify his departure from routine, was received in silence. An ominous silence. Perhaps the limited catch decided the punishment—not enough to go around; so, off to bed without any tea.

Porangahau had sat itself down at the foot of the hills as though it needed company. The flat was narrow where the houses stood and widened out into a considerable plain as you followed the river. The hills nestled close and were steep for small climbers, but up we went to discover a delicious swamp-hole in the hollow crown of one of them. Fringed with raupo, and growing water weeds to perfection, it was semi-warm in the summer. Could a small boy wade across? He could, but only just.

Lying at its edge, we searched the sky to locate larks singing to their families. Mighty hard to spot. How could such small throats deliver that volume of music? Not a sign of them. Music out of nothing! Could there be "nothing"? What would the world be like if there were "nothing"? Everything black. But wouldn't "black" be something? Oh! There was a lark! Singing as though his heart

would burst, and fluttering, fluttering down; then silence as he dropped like a stone for the last twenty feet. Can we find his nest? No chance; that chap is too cunning. He lands feet away from the nest merged into a camouflage of grass, and finds his mate. We give it up and return to the pond for our twentieth dip.

In the 'eighties, if Porangahau had any special feature it was its isolation. Not that this worried youngsters overmuch. They had their mates and, apart from school, had the general run of farm and station activities to join in. In the summer the arrival of the mail coach was the highlight. When the winter set in the coach was wheeled to the corner of the stable yard and packhorses brought out mails and urgent supplies, such as medicine.

The general store stocked something of everything, and this included chemists' sundries. The parson, who had studied medicine but had not taken a degree, prescribed. The storekeeper did the rest. Nobody was any the worse for their ministrations. As the Maoris liked blue bottles, their medicine had a castor-oil base.

Patent medicines were popular. Painkiller took the edge off, or added to the thrill of a drinking bout, or somebody's "Safe Cure" in brown bottles was taken by the dozen by certain "drifters" who discovered merits in the contents quite apart from their curative properties.

Speaking of "drifters" reminds me of the swaggers who tramped up and down the coast as spring work began on the sheep stations. There were notable characters among them. They slept out quite a lot, and their "dosses" in the fern dotted the roadsides. Their reputations as workers were well established. All could make themselves useful if they wanted to. Some never wanted. But mustering, lambing, docking, shearing and droving provided them with spells of work and funds to "wipe the slate" at the pub.

Useful men were fed by the squatters until the season started. "Drifters" were given a feed, a night's doss, a hand-out next morning, and sent on their way. Their pace on the road was regulated by the distance to the next cookhouse. Nearly all had a dog trailing behind. Some carried bedding rolls, weighing many pounds; others preferred to freeze at night rather than burden themselves on the daily tramp. They were tough. Vagaries of weather had to be put up with, and were put up with as if of little moment. They could tell to an ounce what the hand-out would be at the station ahead. Silence was their rule, and they ruminated over questions, sometimes so long they forgot to answer.

Yet they were part of our life. Not a picturesque part; they were too down-at-heel for that. But they had their influence, if not as an example, at least as a warning.

When winter finally shut down on us, the working community relied on the store for general supplies. These sometimes gave out. Heavy items, such as flour and sugar, could be obtained from Waipukurau at £5 per ton per bullock wagon. This surcharge was too much; so we made use of the tiny steamers which plied the coast. Our open roadstead port was Blackhead, and it often happened that the surf there was more than the sailors would face—and goodness knows they were daring enough; so the small steamer would pass us by to try again on the return trip. If it missed several times—well, we were all on "short commons." This, for the small fry, was not worth discussing, unless sugar was short at the store. Run-holders who laid in stores in bulk sometimes came to the rescue, but transport from them was difficult and potato and pumpkin pie figured on the menu morning, noon and night.

Plenty of meat? Yes, but mutton, mutton, mutton. The community was so small, the killing of an ox was never thought of—half of it would have gone bad. Sometimes the bullock-driver discharged one of his team. It would be "spelled" a few months and then slaughtered "on spec." Everybody took more than they could manage and next day wished they hadn't. Ten years' tugging on the chain sucks the succulence out of muscles, toughens sinews and hardens bone.

Father had a brine-tub; so corned beef—corned

leather was nearer the mark—figured on our table until we were sick of the sight of it, and were glad to return to mutton roast, mutton boiled and mutton stewed.

We went in for pig-raising. A sty was built and two piglets cleaned up our own and the neighbours' scraps. They were named with the christian names of two of our leading lady citizens. This caused some embarrassment at home when their progress was discussed in front of feminine visitors. I don't know whether mother was more relieved over the termination of these social setbacks or pleased at the opportunity of returning some of the many kindnesses shown to us by neighbours when the day of the piglets' demise arrived.

Present-day adults have to go far afield to understand what isolation amounts to. Porangahau was one of a dozen small places dotted along or near the coastline of Hawke's Bay. The arrival of the mail coach brought nearly everybody to the front door. As fast as they could run, boys scampered to the Post Office. If there was the rat-tat-tat of vigorous date-stamping, anticipations ran high. There might be a letter for us. Skirmishing for places was brisk when the postmaster-lines-man-telegraphist pushed up his slide.

We were always in luck. Father subscribed to the Napier paper. Why, it was difficult to understand, for the things he said about its news and

politics must have made the editor's ears burn. But, with this certainty to rely on, we did, mostly, lord it over the other boys. So the turn "to call for the mail" was eagerly sought after. If, in addition to the *Herald*, a letter was handed through the slot, the messenger swelled with importance.

Imagine, then, the sensation when an excited urchin dashed into the kitchen with a letter from England to hand over. News from grandparents they had never seen; on the envelope a shilling stamp. Inside, sheets of the thinnest paper, criss-crossed in the spidery handwriting of the day, with news of distant Sussex, so far as grandma knew of it, and she seemed to see and hear quite a lot.

Father read out loud for the benefit of all, but when he got to trellised areas a word or two slipped into the text which we thought only bullock-drivers knew. Mother frowned. A fresh start, and a second slip. How could grandma write that? She hadn't, so mother took a hand.

"Time for small boys to go to bed; I'll read the letter to you in the morning."

That letter had been four months on its way. It had cost a shilling in postage, a shilling out of an income of thirty shillings a week. No wonder every inch was crammed with news. After she had written on all the lines, grandmother turned

the letter sideways for good measure—and father's undoing.

We had one notable building—the church. Not that it was large; it was not. But it was in perfect keeping with its surroundings. Over the altar was an exceptionally fine stained-glass window with the story of the Good Shepherd worked out. To a small boy this was its most satisfactory appointment. The parson's sermons were long, but the coloured lights playing on his surplice aroused interest very complimentary to the preacher.

Sunday school was held in the parsonage along the Blackhead road. Attendance was not all our parents expected, because of the natural desire to consort with boys whose parents had different standards. We were mostly behind with the catechism, so punctuality suffered in the effort of memorising the allotted task. Sluggishly we moved along, kicking up unnecessary clouds of dust. The crickets sang gloriously. To enliven one dull Sunday we gathered a colony in a box. No trouble to fill it.

Thrust a cocksfoot straw down a cricket's hole, wiggle, and then pull it up. Half a second later up comes Mr. Cricket in a tearing rage—"What the hell!"—to be grabbed and made prisoner. The box is soon filled, and away to Sunday school, with attention centred on the prisoners, who make quite a noise. The order for the box to be handed over is grudgingly obeyed. "Curiosity"—thy name

is "woman." The lid is lifted and the air is full of crickets, happy in release. Shrieks, punctuated by a sound box on the ears, and a boy is left alone in penance (?), under instruction to capture the tribe. An inglorious home-coming, not unmixed with pain.

The village frowned on the delinquent in public but rather enjoyed the incident in private. This was discreet, for the parson's wife was a masterful woman and held on to the subject like grim death. Why, a week later she was heard to say to mother: ". . . and you know, I never go into that room without I feel as if one of those dreadful creatures was crawling on me." She may have been right. A good round dozen went into that box and only ten turned up for ultimate release.

Our great delight in summer was the flocks of sheep which passed through on their way to the boiling-down works. These sometimes numbered thousands. A drover leading one, two, or even three in gaps along the line, with two more bringing up the rear. Dogs scuttling to and fro, obeying orders or awaiting them. Can anything equal the eagerness of a well-trained sheepdog to "beat the pistol"?

We followed the trail for miles, with a lift on to the drover's horse when we were tired, and a share of his tucker when the billy boiled.

There were other trips. Horned cattle in small lots livened things up, but one glorious summer

the village surrendered to horse-breeding. The town paddock held fifty to sixty mares with foals at foot. At low tide, mothers and foals were taken to the river for their daily drink. Hell-for-leather they followed the leader from paddock to river and then home again. Did we feel like it (we mostly did) there was always a mount to be had.

England sent a Rugby team to teach New Zealand how football should be played. A year later Porangahau took up the game. A challenge from the rival village of Wainui (Herbertville now) was accepted, and preparations, mostly of the verbal sort, went ahead apace. It was laid down at mealtimes that the game was rough and that the slaughter would be terrific. We were forbidden to go. Of course we went, but for safety's sake climbed out on the limb of a pine that overhung the playing-field.

In addition to the players there were some forty other people present—all men. It was the day of the "Maul." Nothing could be more satisfactory or exciting. As two men wrestled for the ball, friend, foe and spectator gathered round, eventually joining in. Fearful of missing details, a small lad leaned over too far and tumbled into the midst of the conflict. His father was present—another inglorious home-coming.

Friends in Napier gave a thought to us and our loneliness and made up a box of bananas, oranges and coconuts. A treat so rare could not be kept

secret. The school was invited to join the feast. Fifteen boys came that day and another two rolled up the next. Luckily, coconuts break into many satisfactory pieces, so grown-ups did not all go without.

Four years slipped by, and the matter of a better education had to be considered. We were all potential bullock-drivers, could speak the language to perfection, but there were only limited opportunities in this line and the local bullocky showed no signs of retiring. Makotuku debts were paid off; so, in the interest of better schooling, father turned in his job at the store, packed up his belongings, and we set out for Dannevirke.

3

DANNEVIRKE

In Maori style TANIWAKA

THERE MAY be a province in New Zealand more beautiful than Hawke's Bay, but no resident of that province will admit it. The full length of its western boundary is commanded by the Ruahines, which obligingly change their names as they run north. The long, four-thousand-foot ridge at the back of Dannevirke gives way to lofty, snow-clad peaks back of Waipawa, and breaks up into miscellaneous ranges nearer Napier. Jutting off ridge and peak and range are spurs reaching out to the coast in splendid hills which dwindle to rolling country before they touch the sea front. With their help, innumerable creeks shoot out of the mountains through deep gorges. Fed by the melting snows, these streams rush on to the plains in a terrific hurry, gentling down as they sweep round bend after bend, to merge into splendid rivers fringed with willows and lush meadows.

This mountain back-drop is never the same

two days running. Indeed, it changes from hour to hour. If residents would only pause to look they would see that sunny day, cloudy day, stormy day, has each its charms. But best of all is sunset after rain. As lengthening shadows creep over the land the dark greens and browns of the bush disappear into a deep blue, to tantalise amateur artists.

Near the southern end of this range lies Dannevirke, resting on an undulating plateau, six hundred feet above sea-level. Between the settlement and their mountain majesties are ten miles of hills, clad (in the 'nineties) with virgin forest. These hills are eternal, but the bush, alas! is no more. Man, despising the vast riches with which this countryside was endowed, had set to with axe, and saw, and firebrand. Week in, week out, the trees toppled down to shrivel and dry and later disappear in smoke and flame, leaving a twenty-years aftermath of stumps and logs and lonely trunks to mar the landscape. The gift of centuries destroyed in as many years, and only a fraction saved for useful purposes.

This is true despite the buzz and bustle of a score of sawmills providing builders throughout the province with timber for houses and barns; bridges and telegraph poles, woolsheds and warehouses, churches and schools, public and private works of all kinds.

The railway hauled rakes of empty trucks to

Dannevirke, seized an equal number of laden wagons and disappeared down the grade, to the noise of protesting brakes, on its way to Napier.

Fences offended the eye everywhere and were hard to forgive against the glory of these everlasting mountains. The camouflage of civilisation was beginning to show against the work of the ages in 1890. Crudities in the way of houses, rough and unpainted, with nondescript outbuildings and post-and-rail fences, offended the eye everywhere, and were hard to forget even when overshadowed by the majesty of the everlasting hills.

The township flanked the sides of High Street, which was narrow, probably because it had been cut out of the forest. Tiny shops dotted along its length made up the business area. It was the period of the general store, and most shops catered for every known household need. Advertising was done by a display of wares on the footpath, the putting-out and taking-in of which monopolised a lot of each storekeeper's time. Boots were suspended from nails driven in the verandah-posts. (Shoes, even for women, were hardly known.) Gaudy blankets swung from the rafters in the wind. The footpath was kept for rolls of flannel and towelling and unbleached sheeting and turkey-twill.

Empty packing-cases further impeded pedestrian progress or served as resting-places for the

idler and the gossip, and as a delight to small boys, whose heels drummed diligently on their resounding sides. Inside, billies and buckets and pannikins clinked in bunches from the ceiling, while axes, spades, crowbars and saws were mixed with piles of moleskins and bundles of heavy woollen singlets. Socks, grey and blue (fancy colours were held in outspoken contempt), were piled on one end of the counter, and bolts of cashmere and tweed encroached from the other, so that little room was left for serving customers.

Customers were leisurely and the service hardly less so. It was quite usual for customer and shopkeeper to go and have a drink together. At such times a small boy could come into his own, being deputed to "look after the shop till I get back." By right of this authority he would lord it over his fellows, firmly refusing permission to break biscuit and lolly tin seals but, in a spirit of practical generosity, allowing reasonable sampling of raisins, dates and currants opened up for sale.

Presently storekeeper and customer would return, to wander in and out of the maze of boxes and crates and bundles, the sacks of onions, potatoes, oats, chaff and flour. Treading on their heels would trot the emergency counter-hand, whom the proprietor had forgotten to dismiss appropriately. Tired of being ignored, he would finally get in the way.

"Well, sonny, what do you want?"

"Please, I looked after the store while you were out."

"Did you? You're a good lad. Help yourself to a bag of toffee."

No instruction as to size of bag, or quality.

"Old . . . is a champion; he knows how to run a store!" A permanent advertisement and a sure market for coins of low value for many a day.

A grocer was a grocer in those times. He blended his own teas (rarely striking the same blend twice), roasted and ground his own coffee, mixed a specific he called "rising," did some soap-boiling when trade was slack, and tried his hand with the candle-mould. In between these exertions he sold drapery, fitted customers with "ready-to-wears," and dealt out pounds of nails and staples or disposed of coils of fencing wire with ready impartiality.

The stores were more or less duplicates of each other, both in general appearance and in contents. A bright exception was the chemist's. He displayed two huge bottles of coloured water, one red, one blue, to indicate his calling. On late night the gaiety of the street was greatly heightened by these two spots of colour, a lighted candle helping to show them off.

There was one other odd man out—the gunsmith. His premises were outstanding because they reached a storey and a half. The upper half served as a home for his large and increasing

PORANGAHAU

Wratt and Henderson's Sawmill
DANNEVIRKE

family. A crude stair, fastened to the outer wall, provided their means of ingoing and outcoming. A start had been made with boxing it in, and had gone as far as a rail with irregular supports.

It would be hard to imagine a greater medley of interesting oddments than his stock-in-trade. Guns and bits of gun predominated, but he did some tinsmithing and served us as locksmith too. He mended clocks with unguaranteed results, and tackled watches when owners were not too fussy over them.

He was an omnivorous reader and a champion euchre player. This combination led to a prolonged stay of business at one period. An itinerant salesman with a line of Swiss watches turned up. He fancied himself with the cards. After a session with our gunsmith he took the porter's job at the pub, to work off his board account.

Then our watch-repairer settled down to some really solid reading. It being the off-season for shotguns, there were only watches to trouble him. Did you leave your timepiece for attention, he waved you over to the tray of Swiss samples and left you to tie a tag to your watch and place it in the repair cupboard. You went on your way hoping, unless you were disposed to linger and discuss books. Even then our gunsmith continued with his reading. He must have had meals, for his shadow never grew less, but when or how was the secret of his family. I don't remember whether

he ran out of books or substitute watches first, but I am sure of this: his display of ancient timepieces far exceeded in number, general variety and depth of dust the display of any other watchmaker in the province.

Heigh-ho! Here we are one-and-a-half storeys high. This brings us to buildings of two storeys. We had four—all pubs. A stranger, asked to guess at our principal business, would automatically nominate hotelkeeping. He would be right the very first time. Traders gave credit. They had to. Settlers exchanged eggs and home-made butter and cheese for daily wants beyond their own fabricating. They wiped out store debits when the cheque for their season's efforts in the bush came to hand. Such cheques called for "liquification," with the hotel proprietor as the out-of-bank-hours discounter.

This practice obtained also with thirsty men who drew fortnightly wages. Mill-owners paid by cheque, and the publican, as a matter of course, "cleaned the slate" before ordinary traders came into their own. Lucky the shopkeeper who had his account settled between the times when normal thirst gave place to abnormal. If he didn't, it was a case of waiting for next pay-Saturday and adding to the score, especially when the man was married.

Through this main street flowed a stream of newcomers. These paused for a while at some

convenient sawmill and dropped a boy, or a girl or so, at the school. Such parents were mostly land hungry. After working for a spell they would hear of some bush section within their means as to deposit and rent, and away they would go, chasing the rainbow's end, their goods and chattels on a home-made sledge trailing behind. School was over for the older members of the family and indefinitely postponed for the younger.

The school, our largest so far, boasted three rooms, a master and three women teachers. With two standards per room and fifty pupils, lessons proceeded by mass production. Every possible subject was done in unison. Reading was taken en masse, one standard at a time; recitation in chorus, both standards together; history (with dates and names of kings as central features) was led by scholars learned in such things; while geography, a pointer guiding pupils over a map of the world, was an art in itself. Select the map of Asia and spontaneously the class would tell you: "The Yenesei, the Obi and the Lena rise near the Mongolian Desert and flow north across Siberia to empty into the Arctic Ocean." Which river was which mattered not at all. The teacher seldom, if ever, had time to probe for individual knowledge.

There was one exception, SUMS. These plaguey things had to be worked on slates and the right answers were in the back of the teacher's book,

which she guarded most jealously. At the end of half-an-hour's struggle with long division, or a mountain of addition, slates were exchanged and the answers checked off. This was the time for showing real friendship. But woe betide the boy who went too far in such matters. The teacher came down hard on cheating.

The highlight of the school year was the visit of the Inspector. Every subject was brushed up until the whole place shone with scholastic virtue. Boys who had been slack in attendance were granted unexpected holidays, or sent on difficult messages when awkward tests were going forward.

The inspectorial method was simple. Packs of question cards, duly shuffled to checkmate copying, were dealt out to the nervous pupils. An hour later, together with the answers, they were gathered in and fresh packs on the next subject served round in the same way. At the end of these tests the Inspector retired to his hotel with a mass of evidence to wade through, and a day or so later produced his list of passes and failures. Classes were then adjusted in the light of his decisions.

In the year 1890 teachers depended very much on class results for increases in pay and prospects of promotion. "Results" rested with the inspector, who worked them out on the averages of successes against pupils presented. Now could be seen the advantage of special leaves and distant

messages. Such pupils, being absent, were not "presented." Nothing could be clearer. The average rose to a high level. The teacher was happy, the committee congratulatory, the householders pleased.

The big boys dominated the playground. They were big, too, many of them more than half men. Some rode to school. If they did not, there were other boys who did, and it was quite in the accepted order of things for a steeplechase to be brought off in the lunch-hour. Should the time chosen be near to afternoon school, that was just too bad. Delays in choosing the jockeys or the course occasioned no misgivings, either. Once the signal was given the whole pack, boys on foot as well as on horseback, would be off in mad career over logs, ditches and fences. The master, armed with his cane, stood at the finishing post. He was as much a judge as a constable, for he was known to throw up his hat over a spirited finish and was quite ready to settle any argument.

In adult life, the two great days of the month were "pay-Saturdays." Our many sawmills spewed their workers into High Street from any old conveyance that came handy. The first port of call was the hotel. Cheques were slapped on the counter and the publican ordered to "square me up, boss." The change handed over, "shouting" became the order of the day. Good-fellowship and lively greetings were predominant, but arguments

of the "you're-a-liar" type broke out, too. These in turn called for physical retaliation, with the barmaid begging: "Outside, gentlemen! Please!" If she was comely and popular, the combatants were quickly hustled out of doors.

Then small boys saw stirring contests from the kerbside. Nothing was barred except mauls and wedges, and these only because they had been left behind in the bush. Timekeeping was not thought of. Adult onlookers usually intervened before real harm was done, and, having brushed the fighters down, adjourned to drink the winner's health at the loser's expense.

"Pay-Saturday" was a day for women to keep out of High Street, Dannevirke. They mostly did, except when under the terrifying necessity of retrieving something of their husbands' wages before the money was gone.

Single men stayed at the pub, each of which catered for that type of trade. One, indeed, was reputed to have one hundred rooms available for this purpose. On Monday mornings, drays, traps and expresses were brought into service, the collection of their several gangs being undertaken by the mill managers—a difficult task, with escapees returning for "one more" final drink.

It should be remembered that bush work is heavy work; it is dirty work; it is wet work; it is dangerous work. A fortnight of roughing it on indifferent meals produced by camp cooks, and

bush workers were ripe for any sort of diversion when they emerged from the forest. The customary way of escape from their boredom was through the hotel doors.

Efforts by well-meaning people to cater for such needs usually came to nothing. Lucky the young fellow who was courting. His sweetheart saw to it that his standard of behaviour gave promise of a decent home. But the unattached young man, left to his own devices, contracted habits which were hard to break in after years.

The Salvation Army tried its hand. Its first officer did well to stick it out for the ten weeks he lasted. What with jostling and language, he had a sorry time. His departure was unheralded and unsung and our truculent youths were above themselves with pride.

But the Army came again. The local bi-weekly announced the coming of Captain . . . and Lieutenant . . . on the Thursday's train. Those who could spare the time, and many who couldn't, were at the station to look them over when the train pulled in. Out on to the platform tripped two of the prettiest women it had been Dannevirke's lot to see. Sensation! That same evening these two women spread their flag of defiance to the Devil and all his works. In front of the one-hundred-roomer, too. The Captain played the concertina and, with the Lieutenant rattling her

tambourine, sang a hymn to the stirring tune of "On the Ball."

Rugby football was just coming into its own, so this was a backhander with a vengeance. Knock-out number one! Next day they cornered the town nuisance and by night had borne him to his knees and claimed a conversion. Knock-out number two!

Anyone who asks for a third knock-out is a glutton, but those who knew their Dannevirke felt that one was due and held their breath until the coming "pay-Saturday."

Out from the bush poured the men, and wild and hilarious they became by sundown. That evening found those two bold women in the centre of the town, singing as though they had not a care in the world and, between whiles, beseeching onlookers to come and be saved. They came and were conquered. In a few weeks the Army ring took in the full width of High Street; our bush workers had fallen head over heels in love, and changed (some folk said "gone") was the spirit of the town.

By happy chance, or with deepest guile, the Army had used the ideal method to conquer a rough community. Thenceforward "pay-Saturday" lost its excitement and most of its terrors for the women, while Monday's output in the sawmills was near enough to that of other days. Bush whares felt the new influence, too, the *Bulletin*

being dropped, for interior decoration, in favour of the *War Cry*.

The boy population accepted the new order with true boy philosophy. They soon learned hymn tunes and words as interesting as the old and joined with zest in the services. They had side interests, too. The nightly collection started with the opening hymn and ended only when the faithful marched away to the barracks. The request for "another nineteen shillings to make a pound" met with an unusual response. Penny offerings, heated at a convenient fire, were scattered all over the ring, well clear of the drum, on whose head other donations resounded. "Glory!" shouted a new brother; "Hallelujah!" another; "Praise the Lord!" a third, as they stepped forward to pick up those super-heated pennies. Hell's bells! Their language was far from godly as they cooled tortured fingers on unruly tongues which had grievously betrayed them.

Converts were so many, two women would not go round. Help was at hand. Our clear-skinned, bright-eyed maidens liked the trim serge uniforms and the demure coal-scuttle bonnets. They found that glances flashed from beneath their brims flew as straight to the mark as any covertly launched from sunbonnet hoods. Thus our young women kept in step with the spirit of the times and made good their age-old inalienable right to the men marked down as their own.

There were defaulters, of course. Raillery from those not brave enough to join the circle, or still heart-free, had its influence, and many "blood-and-fire" jerseys were tossed aside or disposed of at a handsome discount. There was the case of George. His had been a notable conversion. Once the leader in all that was wild, he faced the jibes and sneers of former companions with courage and good temper. His "Peace be with you" rejoinders had them dumbfounded, while his stentorian "Praise God!" stilled the frivolous who favoured the rear form at meeting.

He had his cross. George's business in life was to deliver logs from the bush to our largest mill. The motive power was his bullock team. They would not work in this New Jerusalem atmosphere, but clung to their early training. George replaced outsize, ugly words with terms of endearment. No good. He tried out lively hymn tunes. They disdained his music. He searched the major prophets for phrases of vigour. Another failure.

His bullocks had learned their business on swear words, and nothing but swear words would serve. Turning soft brown eyes on George, they sank to earth, chewing the cud of slow reflection.

Meanwhile there was a dearth of logs on the mill skids. The foreman spoke to George; the benchman reproved him; the breakdown gang spat in his presence. Even "Slabby," the lowest of the low in sawmill society, cheeked him. All to

no purpose. George held to his faith while the bushfellers sent word of logs six deep awaiting haulage.

The day came when the big saws gathered speed for lack of big timber to bite into. So the boss took a hand. He was a gifted speaker, and chose his time well—every useful man was within earshot. They occupied the stalls with the bullocks in the dress circle, so to speak. Taking George to the centre of the stage, the boss thundered: "If you and your —— team" (dozing bullocks opened their eyes) "don't haul some —— logs" (stolid bullocks showed interest) "by dinner-time" (switching of bullock tails) "and deliver them at the —— skids" (the leaders uncrossed their legs), "you and your —— team" (straddled bullocks paired off) "are —— well sacked!"

The team understood this. They looked at George and George looked at them. They read decision in his eye and shifted uneasily. An explosion was due. It came.

"Get up, you lazy ——! What the —— are you —— loafing here for? Am I to —— starve to death, waiting for you to —— get converted? Shift yourselves, you ——, before I cut the —— hides off you!"

The result was magical. Every bullock understood; they sprang to it as a team. An hour later a six-foot log turned and writhed and plunged through mud and brush towards the skids, there

to be seized by eager hands who, with jacks and chocks, rolled it on to the breakdown frame.

Soon the big saws slowed down on a job worthy of their size, while the staccato cough, cough, cough, of the engine's exhaust told the settlement of great things doing once more. The whole mill caught the momentum. The bench-man did marvels in turning out weatherboards for the planer to shape and smooth. Sawdust and shavings rose to breast height, and the sawdust-boy, plying his shovel like one possessed, prayed aloud for night to come, he was kept so busy pushing his truck to the end of the tip.

Many bush-fires happened along, but not near enough for the home to be involved—we had to go to them, as they did not come to us. We went, and, being by this time venturesome, had minor adventures not mentioned at home. To mention one incident. On a "dare," five of us ventured a mile or so into the heart of a blaze. Using the tram track which ended in the railway yard, we had a close-up view of a fire at its fiercest, logs and stumps ablaze all round us. The wooden rails of the tram-line sent up tufts of flame and the smouldering sawdust between the sleepers made our feet hot inside our boots.

This foolishness illustrates the silly lengths to which small boys will carry a "dare." We reached the point stipulated, turned and hurried back to find the tram-line blocked by the trunk of a blazing

tree—a tree which was not there on the inward journey!

Another occasion. From a safe distance (our estimate) we watched the onward sweep of a particularly large fire approaching on a wide front. An adult companion called attention to a shed which, by general consent, was in the path of the flames. We knew the owner and liked him. With no further thought, we flew to the rescue of harness and tools stored therein. Wrenching open the door, we dashed inside, to be followed by a quarter of a ton of shingle which a mischievous whirlwind elected to deposit at that moment.

Thoroughly frightened, we grabbed all we could carry and placed them in the shelter of the overhanging bank of the creek, there to forget them until the fire was over. To our surprise, when a few days later we returned to the spot, the shed was still standing half-filled with gravel and litter; but the harness and tools we had so valorously rescued had disappeared, nor did a diligent search discover them.

The owner was peeved; he swore vengeance against persons unknown. He carried his grievance to the local "buster." The editor hailed him with delight and composed one of his bitterest articles to our address. We felt mean, and scoundrelly and depraved, but let it go at that. Pocket-money at the rate of tuppence a week was not equal to

making good one bridle, much less all the other gear.

About this time, certain seamen in Australia (or was it London?) decided they could not live on the wages offered them by shipping companies and refused to take the ships to sea. This awful state of affairs had its repercussions in Dannevirke. Our tiny railway engines used coal then, as do their bigger brothers today. New Zealand seamen caught the fever and coal ceased arriving in the port of Napier.

Fireboxes were altered and suitable lengths of wood hid most of the engine. Instead of two trains a day we had to make do with two a week. Before long, sawmill yards were stacked sky-high with timber of all sizes and lengths, awaiting trucks. Mill after mill closed down and bush workers, their resources gone, depended on the good nature of the storekeepers to keep their families supplied.

Single men hoisted their swags and tramped away, seeking scrub-cutting and such-like work at "tucker" rates. Married men, chained by their families, had to face it out. One week, two weeks, one month, nine months of enforced idleness—living on next to nothing. Porridge and potatoes, potatoes and porridge, world without end porridge or potatoes. We were thankful that the creek nearby had tuna (eels) and koura (crayfish) in plenty to give variety to this monotonous fare.

These, with occasional feeds of acid titoki or bitter tawa berries, helped things out quite a lot.

Father's jealously guarded funds slid away and, business opportunities being nil, he was on the trek again. No word for a fortnight, and then a telegram to say he had got a job. Once again there was the problem of get-away money. This was gathered in at last and we boarded the train for Napier.

There has been some kind of sequence in recording these old-time impressions, but I did attend another school at odd times. It was a one-teacher school, too. In other ways it differed from the others. So to complete this picture I ask the reader to come with me to Onga Onga.

4

ONGA ONGA

Maori for Thistle

WHO FIRST applied the name of Onga Onga to this hamlet is not on record. Whoever he may be, every sixth year or so the name was very apt, for thistles sprang up everywhere and the air was laden with thistledown on the move. Next year there were still thistles a-plenty, but the following years only scattered bushes would be seen. Then, in the fourth or fifth year of the cycle they would again take possession, smothering the landscape.

Onga Onga as a centre of population? You had to be told you were there to know you were there. In our time it had a smithy, a two-storey hotel, a small general store, a few scattered cottages, the smallest of small schools, and grandfather's workshop.

This was in the earliest days. Subsequent visits, on holiday or convalescence, noted additions to its splendours. A new store, another cottage, and, as the crowning triumph of the year 'ninety-

Hauling Logs in Bush

MAKOTUKU

The Old School
ONGA ONGA

PORANGAHAU

Frank,
Harry
and
Willis

something, a flourmill, four floors high. To support its gristing the plains round about were given over to crops of wheat and oats and barley—a beautiful sight from the mill's upper floor as the wind set the heads swaying and rippling, swishing and glinting in the sun.

Such agrarian highlights did not have the landscape to themselves, however. Two creeks hemmed in the village, wandering casually round its edges, disappearing under high banks to emerge as silver pools fringed with gorse shaded by poplars and guarded by round-topped blue-gums and stray pines.

In the middle distance stood splendid plantations, shelter-belts for stock, and further shelter for homesteads and their orchards and gardens against the gales which raged furiously at the equinoxes.

In a "thistle" year the plains were smudged with a purple sheen, in and out of which hundreds, or thousands, of sheep, cattle and satin-skinned horses grazed busily.

Should one's sense of direction be good, the saw-toothed hills east of Takapau could be located. This remarkable geological formation was a constant source of speculation, and the explanations offered were as varied as such theories usually are. To the west, rolling hills, terraced one above the other until they merged into the blue of the mountains at the back. In the

spring, both plains and hills were a treat to see, covered with a greensward which fairly shouted of fat stock ahead and dotted with lambs in ones, twos and threes. As the sun gathered strength, the green turned to gold and then to khaki, with paddocks set aside for hay flirting fast-and-loose with each wayward breeze. Each season wrought its change, and year by year, as plough and harrow worked higher and higher up their slopes, hill contours softened until they finally lost their rough outlines.

Fifteen miles back, the mountains looked down on us in all the majesty of snow-capped rugged peaks. They divided their attentions between tripping the westerlies which hustled over the Tasman and surrendering their own snows for the benefit of many rivers and creeks which reticulated the plains. This eternal reservoir only awaits the art of the irrigation engineer to be put to a better use.

In and around this out-of-the-way place, hard-working men, cared for by equally hard-working women, won a livelihood, and raised youngsters enough to fill the small school. The first of these was one-roomed and had desk space for, perhaps, twenty children. It was the sort of school to which Mary took her little lamb. If it were not the identical school of the nursery rhyme, it ought to have been, for in the spring every girl there had a pet lamb, if not two.

It was a one-teacher school and was always "in" for one or other of the families round about, as the woman teacher was boarded out by each in turn. It was a case of "mind your manners" when she was with us, for her accounts of her experiences lost nothing in the telling when she moved on to the next home.

Boys lived a full life. There was a lot to occupy them apart from home lessons which hardly occupied them at all. There was the doing (and dodging) of many chores. Chopping wood, filling the water-barrel, getting in the cows, catching the horses, cleaning the pig-pens—a detested task. The renewal of the meat supply fell to the boys' lot, too. Mutton was the standby. This was bought by the "side." On killing days a small boy mounted a large horse and set out for the homestead. On the return journey he wrestled with a forty-pound sack of meat, thinking more of the pleasure of the ride than of difficulties in opening and shutting the series of gates which hindered progress.

It was a pleasant, easy-going life, if it hadn't been for school. This institution was very much out of favour in the 'eighties. Attendance was a compulsory obligation, imposed and watched over by stern and relentless adults, serving on the school committee and knowing too darn much of schoolboy misdoing. The injustice of it! Why, some of them had never been to school themselves. How could they know what boy scholars

suffered? A plague on them and their worship of reading, writing and arithmetic!

Contact with the outside world was kept open by the mail contractor who paid us a weekly visit in the summer and came every second week in the winter. The needs of trade were met by drays and brakes, while the wool clip moved leisurely railwaywards by bullock dray. A trip at two miles an hour, sprawled on the uppermost bale, would hardly appeal to the youth of today; yet the opportunity to get up was eagerly accepted by us as a variation of the daily round.

Improvements came slowly. Such as did come, added to the sum total of table talk, both in prospect and retrospect. The building of the Waipawa bridge was notable. The width of the decking, the length of the spans and the height above flood-level were matters of opinion and counter-opinion. But the outstanding event was the installation of the telephone. This was a mystery, very properly shrouded in secrecy.

The storekeeper-postmaster and his assistant were sworn in, and the seriousness of the oath taken (many of us thought of it as a swear-word) was most impressive. A sound-proof box was erected inside the store so that no stray customer should overhear the telephonist transmit the telegrams, though most anybody could read them as they lay around loose on the store counter. As a special concession we were allowed to speak

to the Waipawa operator. This was before the walls of the telephone-box were filled with sawdust. When the final shovelful was tipped in, secrecy, double-dyed secrecy, clamped down.

The why and wherefore of electrically conveyed conversations were discussed morning, noon and night in the store, with the postmaster-telephonist, as became his office, supporting or contradicting every speculation. His own theory was that the voice did not travel through the wire (how could it, when the wire was solid?), but in the air immediately around it, using the wire as its guide for direction. This view might have held had not a thunderstorm rolled up, a flash of lightning using the telephone as its shortest route to earth. The shock blew out the lightning-guards and smashed a dozen poles, leaving the wire, to all seeming, intact along the ground. Faced with failure in all his efforts to get a response from Waipawa, our storekeeper-telephonist reluctantly surrendered his point, but for some days wore the look of a grievously injured man.

As for the bridge, its opening was royally celebrated. Crossing the river had been difficult and terrifying, for the Waipawa was a deep and forceful stream even at so-called low level.

Before the year of the bridge Onga travellers followed the north bank to a point where the Hampden (Tikokino today) road struck out across the plains. There Onga folk turned into the

ford. "Ford" it was by courtesy only. It seldom remained "put" two days in succession. If on Monday you drove into it at right angles, on Thursday you had to drive on a long slant; while on Sunday, as like as not, there was a change of direction half-way over. These vagaries were supposedly understood by the country roadman. He drove manuka stakes into the bed of the stream as a guide to wayfarers, but mostly by "guess and by God," as sailors say.

The riverbed was a wide expanse of heavy shingle and boulders with, perhaps, two or three minor streams to negotiate. But no matter how many of these there were, the main stream was a fearsome obstacle. Seldom less than three feet deep, its icy-cold water rushed along at four or more miles an hour. Good drivers treated it with respect always. Timid and inexperienced people drove into it with misgiving and out of it with thankfulness that "that was over," mixed with unpleasant anticipation if a return trip had to be made. Once the horses plunged into this main stream it was a case of "sit still and hold tight." Words of command were useless. The rush of waters and the rumble of rolling boulders smothered anything less than a shout; and who shouts at a team doing its honest best? A firm hold of the reins and a touch of the whip kept the team moving ahead.

Sitting still took some doing, too. As the wheels

settled deeper and deeper the water came nearer and nearer to small boys seated on the floor of the vehicle. No one likes getting wet where they sit down—not even the small boy.

If, at a critical point, the jerking and jolting were varied by the upstream wheel mounting a big boulder at the moment the downstream wheel dropped into a dip, bringing all moveables with a rattle and a run to the lower side, well—hard breathing and forceful words had to be overlooked until the driver recovered control.

Few teamsters attempted the Onga crossing when the river was rising. It was sheer madness to try it in flood. But the river was worth looking at before you made up your mind to turn back, all the same. Shingle islands submerged beneath the brown floodwaters, being replaced by moveable items such as uprooted trees and sections of fence line scurrying past followed by dead animals or some crude outbuilding, giving warning of settlers facing adversity, or marooned higher up.

A bullock sweeps by, still struggling bravely against the impossible, with a despairing bellow for aid, although beyond all hope of rescue. The rain pelts down, the wind using it to help confuse the traveller who is driving into its teeth.

"C-r-r-ack!"—a blaze of vivid blue light sets gooseflesh prickling up and down your spine.

"One, two, three," you count before the thunder descends "smack" right on top of your head.

"Gee! That was close!" you think as you try to hide inside your coat collar.

"C-r-r-ash! Bang! Rumble, rumble, roar and rumble!" it rolls up-river, presently to be sent back as an echo of itself by the encircling hills, and circles round again until drowned by another peal.

The rain descends faster and thicker than ever, bouncing up from the road when it strikes. Another flash and another flare across the sky, every suspended raindrop a glittering diamond for the fraction of a second. Crash upon crash the thunder roars until a small boy, with six miles to go, clings to the mane of his horse and whimpers with loneliness.

Presently, standing before the kitchen fire, wet clothes strewn all round him, and in the comfort of a good rub-down at the hands of a kindly aunt, he recalls something of the scene in which he has been one insignificant item. Lightning slipping from cloud to cloud; the deafening thunder-claps; the roar of the gale; the rain flying in sheets; the river entering the gorge, mad with power! Each comes back to him in turn, the whole a vision of Nature at her magnificent, fearsome worst.

Apart from lessons, school life is interesting, beginning with the arrival of pupils from distant farms. A patient old horse who knows his business

better than his riders ambles up to the gate. The kids slide off and a volunteer jockey gallops him off to the school paddock. Five nippers perched along the back of an old grey mare would be sensational today, but we thought little of it. Oldest sister sits in front (on the saddle if there is one), with oldest brother on the rump. In between, each of the smaller children clings to the one in front. Once on, the riders have to stay on unless there is a fence or gate handy to serve as a dismounting-block. There are streams to cross, sliprails to let down and put up, and other difficulties to overcome. There are no accidents, and pupils who ride are far more punctual than those who walk.

The latter had varied excuses for their tardiness. These were rarely accepted. Someone with accurate knowledge told on them and there were whispers about "meanness," and threats of "You look out!"

Our women teachers passed in quick review. If promotion did not hurry them on, marriage removed them from our midst. One lady of uncertain years (this is being polite—all the girls knew the year of her birth) stayed long enough, however, to be a permanent memory. She was probably ahead of her time. We irreverently said she was mad. Having read up folk-lore, she added this, with appropriate kindergarten exercises, to the school programme. Much to the grievance of

the older boys (she accepted no excuse), they had to play kids' games in schooltime, singing the appropriate infantile ditties. The village thoroughly enjoyed this interlude, and the more the boys raged the more they were teased. The committee entered into the spirit of the thing too, and this merry can-can continued for quite a spell.

Outside school we went where we pleased. Hunger was our clock, darkness our curfew. In bed we slept three abreast, or "topped and tailed" when there were four. Should there be five, we "topped and tailed" sideways on—there was always room for one more in that voluminous bed. Merciful adults looked in at "lights out" and adjusted blankets over the flank occupants, offering up a fervent prayer for the boys to "sleep in tomorrow morning." Vain hope. The early bird had hardly got on the trail of the early worm when this skirmish line wriggled into action. First awake grabbed the upper blankets, to stand siege against the drowsy and disgruntled. Then followed pillow-fights, to the great annoyance of one-last-turn-over adults. Threats of penalties at breakfast-time weighed not at all. The boys were first to table and well away before grumbling adults put in an appearance.

We were regarded as owners' proxies by sundry dogs, and it was a common feature of the summer landscape to see half a dozen lads with a dog apiece on their way to the swimming-hole. When

we got there, our immediate desire was to escape the opprobrium "stinker" attaching to the last into the water. Pesky buttons and knotted bootlaces got short shrift under this urge. The dogs joined our merry band, either as volunteers or conscripts, the action of sharp claws on sunburned shoulders adding sting to the general hilarity.

Dogs have characters, though they may usually pass unnoticed. Sturdy dogs, lazy dogs, friendly dogs, surly dogs, hard-working dogs, and aristocrats who did nothing useful joined us as the spirit moved them. Each was welcome. There was one exception—Moses. He had a rat complex, and unless boys were prepared to spend all their time rat-hunting he had no use for boys. He once caught a rat by rushing into the feed-house when the door was opened. Ever after, let anyone place his hand on the latch of the feed-house door, and there would be Moses, anxious for business. His excitement was so demonstrative, however, that he never caught another that way.

We did occasionally take pity on him and set the wire cage rat-trap. Even a haul of two or three at once did not make him a friend, and he positively did not like the swimming-hole. He had his own sideline.

He took the keenest interest in dog-fighting and was better at starting one than any dog of our extended acquaintance. On mail days he had

a wonderful time. People from the outbacks rolled up for their mail and our dog population mounted in proportion. Single dogs did not interest Moses. He bided his time. But when a drover with a full string turned up, this was Moses's moment for action. Darting out of the hedge, he slipped into the procession, treacherously nipping the heels of the dog ahead. That outraged animal turned in wrath to vent his displeasure on the next in line; Moses, being small, passed unnoticed.

Start two dogs fighting and every dog within earshot remembers bygone insults and rushes to join in the fray. On the outskirts of the general conflict hovered Moses, getting in many satisfactory bites on legs tensed with action. The row would be terrific, with Moses's yelps of satisfaction a gay crescendo to the general racket. Moses was in his glory; also three small spectators in the loft of grandfather's workshop.

The drover's horse has taken fright and bolts down the road, doing all it knows to leave its rider behind. Presently the drover regains control, digs in his spurs and returns at a gallop, cursing capably, his stockwhip a writhing, swirling, 10-foot length of stinging reprisal.

The horses at the hitching-rail with one accord snap their bridles and leave for home, while the store doorway is jammed with leggings, oilskins,

whiskers and language as irate owners burst forth in pursuit of flying steeds.

Moses was a great little dog. He never owned a boy. He could have. Three of them, watching the turmoil from the workshop, thought the world of him.

The storekeeper was another eccentric. Where Moses was devoted to his two purposes in life, the storekeeper was devoted to every interest other than storekeeping. This was the last thing in his world that he gave any real attention to. Everything else, for ten miles round, kept him interested and, on most occasions, busier than a one-armed paperhanger.

He was a bachelor, and "fed out" when he could find someone to put up with his irregular habits, and slept in the attic above the shop. This was entered through a trapdoor. A chaff-filled mattress and blankets out of stock made for comfortable sleeping. Every spring he made concession to laundry needs with a general wash. Plenty of hot water, plenty of soap, a galvanised-iron bath, and in went his blankets. With his trousers rolled up, he stepped in on top of them and, by a treading process, washing went ahead. We approved the general idea, and, on a basis of bribery, took over the treading job. It was alleged he sometimes omitted to remove his boots and was rather peeved when an interested customer called attention to it. As this eye-witness had

a reputation for "stretching," the story need only be accepted if the reader wishes.

His crazes were many. One which appealed to the boy population was a passion for fireworks. With his one-track enthusiasm, he dropped routine storekeeping. Customers knocked loud and long for attention and then, in despair, walked behind the counter to help themselves. If unable to find what they wanted, they chased the storekeeper to his lair in the kitchen-dining-room-office-sitting-room behind the shop. As like as not they would be drawn into the business of fireworks-making, to the despair of womenfolk waiting for a couple of pounds of salt, a tin of mustard, or currants and raisins essential to the midday meal.

Fierce debate raged round his decision to blend gunpowder with blasting-powder. Eventually the ayes had it, and a really lively explosive resulted. Reducing blasting-powder to the right size presented difficulties, but enthusiasm rose superior to this obstacle. Trial and error—often surprising in its consequences—proved that grinding in a coffee-mill in water would do it.

After grinding came drying. The sun was sure, but slow; so the open-hearth system was adopted. A dozen soup-plates were withdrawn from stock, spread with the powder paste mixture, and placed within (estimated) drying distance of a good matai fire.

The adjournment was then taken and the hard-worked experimenters left to partake of the dinner which awaited salt, or mustard, or currants, or raisins to round it off. They had hardly settled down when, with a rattle and a roar, a cloud of smoke and sparks shot out of the store chimney across the road. Everybody rushed to the rescue, but they could have saved themselves their hurry. When the smoke cleared away, inspection showed the sum total of the damage was many busted soup-plates and an enlarged fireplace. A spark had touched off the refined blasting-powder; all that work to do over again.

The right mixture of sulphur and charcoal, blasting and gunpowder was eventually found and, with iron filings from the smithy added (as per textbook), the village was summoned to see the outcome. This summons was peremptory, even when awkwardly timed. As each rocket was finished, the itch to see "how she would go" was irresistible. Be it lowering dusk or darkest midnight, our storekeeper rang his bell, counted heads, and, with the populace duly accounted for, touched her off, retreating smartly to watch results. "Retreat" is the right word. There was no knowing what might happen. Should it burst like a bomb or refuse to leave the ground there were sighs of relief from the women spectators. But in the absence of one or other of these faults the problem of direction occasioned apprehension.

But, as the storekeeper went to most of the trouble and shouldered all the expense, it was churlish in the extreme to refuse to attend, or fail to applaud when the odd rocket in ten sailed gracefully skywards.

The school did duty as church, and most everybody within buggy distance rolled up to the services. These alternated thus: first and third Sundays, the Church of England; second Sunday, the Presbyterian faith; fourth Sunday, the Wesleyan parson. What happened in a month of five Sundays is off the record! Nobody was in the least fussy about whose Sunday it was; everyone responded heartily to the prayers and sang lustily, after the song-leader had tapped his tuning-fork and set the pitch for soprano and bass.

Before church there was Sunday school, with the storekeeper in command. He was a Presbyterian of the Covenanter type, but, as he liked bossing Sunday school, he softened prejudice so far as to conform to the doctrines of the other sects. His methods were practical and small boys were encouraged to attend with rewards of lollies out of his stock. These were much appreciated, especially on Presbyterian Sundays, which were reserved for the issue of special confections known as Scotch mixtures. Their variety was wide and all of them were good, though perhaps the best was an item of hard sugar candy surrounding

a core of liquid honey. Thus was the mind of youth inclined and Christian faith instilled.

Onga Onga had had its connection with Maori war days. At the Hampden crossing (on the back road) trenches had been dug against Hau Hau raiders. Most times these passed unnoticed, but, in the spring, the difference in the colouring of the turf was easily picked up from a nearby hillside. Another relic of the Maori wars was the clay and straw house of three rooms which stood on a low plateau a mile or so outside the township on the Hampden road. Rumour had it that this served as shelter for the Armed Constabulary of those troubled days. In our time it was occupied by a family of schoolmates and their parents.

It will be noticed the "parents" are put last. With good reason. A more self-effacing couple it would be hard to come across. There was a cliff at the end of their hay paddock crowned with blue gums. At the foot of this cliff was a water-hole which held water in the driest of dry summers. All else failing, into this we scuttled, and out of it we crawled to lie on the hot sand until Red Indians would have welcomed us as blood brothers.

The food problem solved itself. Self-invited, we turned up at the clay house, took our seats at table, and were served as a matter of course out of the stockpot hanging from the hook in the fireplace. No matter how many of us, nor how

often we came, the open hospitality of that house never failed us.

It had a thatched roof. Indeed, it had several layers of thatched roof. This thatch was an entomologist's paradise. It harboured the widest variety of bugs, insects and crawling creatures one could hope for in such small space.

Temptations of the table found many of them as eager and willing as the self-invited guests. Hot tea was a certain magnet, but milk and sugar and butter also attracted some. Out of their quarters they tumbled in a most haphazard, reckless way. Imagine a twisting insect, with forty dozen wriggling legs, invading the sugar-basin; or a spider of noble proportions landing on the butter. Well, such things were sent to try us, but didn't try us much. We were fed and, hurrying back to our swimming-hole, took with us such male youth as could get out of sight before their defection from jobs on hand was noticed.

We were not a dead loss to this easy-going family, however, for we joined wholeheartedly in any harvesting that was in progress. Enthusiastic boys make a wonderful difference during haymaking and grass-seeding. Turning the windrows, loading the dray, spreading and tramping on the stack need enthusiasm to be properly done. Horseplay didn't matter. Hay is all the better for extra tossing.

Grass-seeding was a different proposition. When

the seed was ripe and the sheet spread, out came the flails. It was a wise farmer who saw to it that there was a spare set on hand. Every boy expected to be supplied. If left to their own devices—well, the binding of an improvised flail was never too sure and the flying end of a flail landing anywhere on one's anatomy makes a painful impression. When all was ready, away we went as if the next minute was our last.

When we tired (this did not take long), more skilled hands took over. It was fascinating watching them. No matter how small the sheet, there was always room for another beater. In turn, and to time, the flails circled overhead, to come down whop, whop, whop on the appointed spot. Each man struck the same area as the leader as they circled slowly round the sheet. Then the hay was tossed and round they went again until, the seed-heads properly beaten out, the straw was thrown aside and the seed sieved into a sack. No power on earth could keep schoolboy holiday-makers away from such activity, and, if they did drink more than their share of oatmeal-water, they perspired as volunteers and not as paid hands.

Onga held its race meeting on New Year's Day. A totalisator meeting it was, too. In its small way it was like The Downs on Derby Day. There was every sort of scheme for coaxing money out of sportsmen's pockets. Quoits—"one more wanted for a ten-bob pool"; the gentlemen with the Amer-

ican cloth covering a trestle table who defied the world to throw a ring so as to completely encircle a number which would enrich the world by five hundred percent. The world never quite succeeded, though many tried hard enough.

The man with the three thimbles and the pea—"Come on, ladies and gentlemen! It's easy! Here's the pea. I move the thimbles, so, and—which one is it under, Jack? Your name's Harry? A good name, too. The boy's right! There it is and all! It's easy, gents! You saw the boy do it! Take a whirl at it! Under that one, son? Why, so it is! You're too smart for me. Here's sixpence. Get yourself some lemonade. Now, gents, an even quid you can't do what the boy did! Will I let the boy pick for you? Of course I will! Here's my quid! Cover it, mate! Here's the little pea! The quickness of the hand deceives the eye! Which one is it under, Jack? Harry? Why, the boy's wrong this time!"

Then there was the toy-stall, mostly popguns and dolls, and the wizard who made candy floss while you watched. Three penn'orth filled a large paper cone and lasted only a minute. There was the publican's booth and the sandwich-and-pie stall. All lively centres of interest, but nothing could quite equal the charm of the totalisator.

It provided for twenty-four starters, though a six-horse field was a big one with us. The proprietor stood behind a rail, with a satchel dripping

with notes slung in front of him. As the investor made his bet, the appropriate handle was turned, a bell tinkled, the number moved on a notch, and so did the grand total. If there was enough business, the race could be half over before the proprietor remembered to close down. Base persons alleged he was in league with the bookmakers who did open business at such times, but he staunchly denied such collusion. Were they not taking away his business?

As for the races themselves, we paid small heed unless there was a local neddy in the field. Then we were keenly partisan and cheered loudly if our colours came in first.

Race day was a great day for the whole countryside. People in their best (their best not very grand) arrived by horse, by buggy, by sulky, by dogcart, by express-load, with the humble dray doing a turn, too. Womenfolk compared children. "Hasn't he grown!" "She's just a little dear!" and so on and so forth. Men, as became the sterner sex, drifted over to the bar, reasonably indignant over the fall in the price of dry ewes, or expecting spuds to fetch a better price this year. All on holiday bent; boiling the billy; picnicking in the hot sun, or under the trees. A day of bliss, with plenty of spending-money from generous winners.

Next day, a dozen kids returned to the scene to give the grounds a thorough "once-over" in the hope of raising stray coins and clearing up such

trifles as unfinished bottles of lemonade, and thrashing the well-thrashed theme of the difference made by our jockey losing his stirrup as he came into the straight. "She should have romped in if—if—if——" Oh, those ifs!

Who amongst you has seen, read or heard of the "Penny Dreadful"? Onga loved it—more especially as it was banned. "Filling the boys' heads with a lot of rubbish." We swapped them and smuggled them into bed with us, to read them until the candle guttered out. "Deadwood Dick," "Buffalo Bill," "Calamity Jane," "Faro Nell," had their adventures for thirty-two pages, finishing with bandits in full retreat and virtue scraping home to its just reward in the very last paragraph. We were held breathless and excited by hold-ups, robberies, lynchings and near-lynchings and such-like he-man adventures. It never occurred to us that the end of the story was determined by the exigencies of the printing craft, the presses being set to print thirty-two pages of that size at once. Thirty-two such pages for a penny was not bad measure, anyway.

Parents complained bitterly, and their pleas for something better were answered by the R.T.S. people. They tried us first with "The Pansy Series." These failing, as too "goody-goody," they switched to *The Boy's Own Paper*. This was something like. Published once a week, it was bound into quarterly parts for overseas readers.

The serials broke off in the most intriguing places and the waits between quarterlies were almost beyond bearing. Lucky the boy who spotted the new issue ahead of his brothers. His was first read, by right of possession. Objections to breathing over shoulders and turnings of corners of the pages ahead by faster readers ended with:

"I'll take that book while you boys get on with your homework!"

Strangely, that B.O.P. disappeared for days until adult readers had brought themselves up to date.

5

NAPIER

We had migrated to Makotuku from Napier—it was our birth-town. The failure of the Glasgow Bank had had reactions which set us adrift, but exactly how or why was beyond our knowledge. Napier had watched us go (or did it?) without protest. It noted our return without raising an eyebrow. All the excitement was on our side. After seven years of inland life, the sea drew like a magnet, especially as there was an on-shore gale. Every free moment was spent on the Parade, watching huge rollers assault the gravel beach. While the tide was out this was interesting enough, but when it turned interest increased. The waves thundered and roared nearer and nearer to the sea-wall. We speculated where they would stop. They were sweeping up the step openings and lipping the footpath when we left for dinner. An hour later the tide was still "making," and the gale so stiff one could lean against it. Furious rain-squalls swept across the bay, shutting out the Kidnappers and most of the bay itself. The path was constantly washed with sea-

water, and an occasional outsize roller, scorning step openings, hurled itself over the wall and chased us (shrieking with dismay if we started too late) down into Hastings Street. An exciting day, a day "out on its own," closed with much scolding over the plight of clothes and headshaking about possible colds.

Next day was a duplicate of the first; the storm, if anything, more furious than ever. As an added interest, we saw the *Rotomahana* battle her way out to sea, the captain having decided in favour of ample sea room as against a lee shore.

Another day, with the gale going down and the sea flattening out, saw the *Rotomahana* back in the bay and a party of boys trudging the road to the "Iron Pot," to board the tender *Ahuriri,* which would take them out to open roadstead and the big steamer. In due course we were manoeuvred alongside, to be landed on the deck and hustled below, without ceremony, as the best way of disposing of us.

The *Rotomahana* made good use of the hours of darkness, and early next morning was giving us our first look at Poverty Bay. To our right, or, being at sea, on our starboard side (the tail end of the gale was still brisk), were the grey cliffs of Young Nick's Head, Captain Cook's landfall. They seemed to rise straight out of the sea, and, though smaller, were like the cliffs of Kidnappers in the bay we had left behind. On our left—beg

pardon, on our port side—the Kaiti hill guarded a rocky coastline which ended in a tiny island—Tuahine Point. Astern was a half-moon beach of yellow sands.

In the centre the breakwater hid the entrance to the river on whose banks the town rested. Presently, from under its protecting corner, shot out the tiniest of steamers, the *Snark*, which steamed steadily towards us. It was so small we sometimes lost sight of it in the trough of the waves. We wondered what its business could be until we found, to our amazement, that, if we wanted to go ashore, this was our means of doing so.

We watched her roll and pitch, to be presently held in position at a respectful distance, for the *Rotomahana* was doing some rolling on her own account. A contraption called a chair was rigged (it looked a maze of ropes), and shore-bound adventurers were, one at a time, deftly seated in it. At the right moment the winch hoisted them aloft and, again at the right moment, steamer and tender being both steady, let them down with a run, to be grabbed by expert hands and released before the chair swung aloft again.

This breath-taking experience was hardly over when it was forgotten in the miseries of sea-sickness brought on by the hot engine smell of the tiny cabin into which we were thrust.

Hours later (so it seemed) we cast off and,

sliding down the backs of in-rolling waves, made for the breakwater. It looked for all the world as though we were to be wrecked on its outermost corner, but, again at the right moment, a dexterous turn of the tiller took us clear of this danger, to ride a smaller wave over the bar into the river.

Presently the landing-wharf came into sight, carrying a reception committee of curious citizens. Said one of our fellow passengers:

"Half the town has come to look us over."

"Half the town! Gosh! This must be a big place if only half the town is here!"

We had arrived at—

6

GISBORNE

As THE port of entry, storehouse and rendezvous for a wonderfully productive district, Gisborne, in the 'nineties, was a boom-and-bust town, if ever New Zealand had one. It spent every copper it could beg, borrow, or steal, on speculations of one sort or another. It promoted companies to get oil from the Ngatapa hills, greatly to the advantage of the promoters. It juggled with "preference" and "promoters" and "guaranteed" shares to the point where it was impossible to decide whether an approaching citizen was stone motherless broke or a near-millionaire. When the funds were exhausted ("promotion" costs quite a lot), the oil company was left with much miscellaneous machinery on its hands, and a derrick in the hinterland of no use to anybody.

This did not stop Gisborne speculating. No gold was found in the district, but chunks of it were being dug up in Thames. Mining promoters descended upon us, and oilfield promoters handed over considerable loose cash. Well-thumbed paragraphs from the mining column of Auckland

papers were read optimistically, while quartz specimens of undoubted "colour" were dug out of vest pockets and passed from hand to hand.

"I shouldn't show you that, but you're a friend of mine. It's out of the Wild Cat Reef. . . . The shares are low today. Get in!"

Such confidences, combined with assay reports written on letterheads as brilliant as the printer's art could make them, set Gisborne agog and made the business of tracing share transfers one of great difficulty.

When "The Thames" petered out as a share-selling proposition, interest shifted to Otago and the weekly tally of gold from the Molyneux dredges had a corner of its own in the daily paper. Indeed, this news rivalled racing results in interest. And Gisborne supported two racing clubs.

Behind this froth more solid controversy raged, pro and con, over inner harbour improvement. When pro won, someone, for a fee, went off somewhere and floated a loan and country ratepayers took their financial belts in a hole, pending receipt of the next rate demand.

The loan raised and the contract let, the town settled down to a boom in trading, and commercial buildings moved two paces to the west, along Gladstone Road.

The loan money exhausted, the boom collapsed and empty shops again marred the splendour of the main street.

Presently, cautiously, timidly, diffidently, Mr. Pro raised his voice again and urged, with undimmed optimism, the need for sixteen or twenty feet of water at the town wharf and in the channel out to sea. Practical evidence, if such be needed, that hope does spring eternal in the human breast.

There followed a terrific war of words in street and mart and newspaper column. Traders (in the name of progress) quite willing to try again; settlers (anxious to let sleeping dogs lie) professing themselves content to pay high lightering charges for the rest of their days rather than send good money after bad.

But Old Man Ribber. He don't say nothin'; he must know somethin'; he just keep rollin' along. Filling up the holes gouged out of his bed, disdainful alike of extensions to breakwater and groyne and depth of water on the bar.

Fortunately, neither optimism nor despair concerned those hundreds of hard-working men and women, who did the town's work, reared families numerous enough to fill the school's eight classrooms, and leavened trade with their weekly earnings. This rearing of families was not easy. There was work in plenty, but the amenities needed in a closely settled area were absent. There was no water supply, and therefore no drainage. Diphtheria and scarlet fever were common, while a dozen typhoid cases were accepted as normal in late summer. As there were few

wells, residents depended on rain-water stored in tanks. With dry spells running into weeks, rigid economy had to be observed, schoolboys getting away with "a lick and a promise" without reproof. Should a house be endowed with two tanks, then water was borrowed by "one-tankers," the carrying being the wearisome chore of the boy fool enough not to keep out of sight.

Gladstone Road lay ankle-deep in dust, and satisfactory clouds were raised by boys who aped the ways of railway engines. In reverse, this dust turned to liquid mud in winter, which, being scraped to the edges, distressed incautious people trying short cuts. Side roads looked after themselves unless they could boast a councillor in residence.

But what cared the youngsters? There were rivers to swim in, surf to float over, and sands to race on. Christmas and Easter tents were unfolded on the Upper Waimata. Given a flat-bottomed boat for transport, a good time was had by all. If, in settling the age-old problem of "whose turn is it to go?" "I went yesterday," the laying-in of stores was irregular, what matter? Mullet and an occasional kawhai could be caught at high tide. Fresh out of the water and straight into the frying-pan no finer meal could be served. Should there happen to be an orchard on the opposite bank, as, strange to say, there usually was, fruit in season figured on the menu too.

At the head of the Turanganui, Nelson Brothers had established their freezing-works when this industry was in swaddling-clothes. No doubt "trial and error" had had a major influence on its architecture. Certainly a more miscellaneous aggregation of buildings would be hard to imagine. To a stranger the effect was that of a lot of lean-to's propping up the main building. For many years this pioneering firm had this enterprise to itself. When a frozen-meat steamer dropped anchor in the Bay, the tug *Tuna* would churn its way downstream with a string of barges in tow, to the joy of small swimmers who liked the waves it caused.

Three bridges spanned the river between the works and the Bay. A movable section in each provided for tug and schooner traffic. But the *Tuna* scorned these conveniences. The funnel was hinged and, at the right moment, the deck-hands swung it back until the bridge was cleared. At such moments the engineer-fireman was generous with fuel, and nasty words reflecting on his parentage passed through the engine-room skylight.

We did, on one occasion, see two of the bridges "swing," a schooner-rigged trading scow having goods to discharge at an up-river wharf. Foreknowledge of this event reaching the school, the day's detention squad was multiplied tenfold, as authority's reprisal.

The town straggled countrywards. Roebuck

Road (a mile from the Post Office) being reckoned suburban, Aberdeen Road, which squared off from the north end of Roebuck, was definitely country. The houses there were not cheek by jowl, or familiar in matters of domestic lendings as in the town, but select and apart and on visiting terms only on first Tuesdays or third Wednesdays, as the case might be.

In this wasteland of unsold sections, broom and gorse and tea-tree held sway; a happy hunting-ground for disciples of Deerfoot the Shawnee and Chingachgook the Mohican. No safer retreat was available to a boy needed to chop some wood or to fetch some water. Stalking one another in emulation of our Red Indian heroes, we seldom remembered that, nearby, lived men who had stalked and been stalked in deadly earnest. The Old Men's Home, consisting of half-a-dozen cottages, stood there. It sheltered veterans of the Maori and other wars.

One old chap was reputed to have been unhorsed in the Charge of the Light Brigade. He never confirmed this claim, but, as he had a sabre-scar reaching from shoulder to hip, we reckoned it was true. Another said he had watched Te Kooti land on the coast on his return from the Chathams and helped chase that warrior into the Urewera after the Waerenga-a-hika massacre. Adults had no patience with his vivid stories; so youth, too, showed him scant respect.

But if this constabulary man was sniffed at, Te Kooti himself was respected. Although his raid had occurred years before, and he had been granted a full pardon in the meantime, rumours of his presence in the ranges, or of his coming down the coast, gave imaginative youngsters fearsome tremors if sent messages after dark. Happily, our Gordon setter deemed it a privilege to accompany us at all times. With him on leash, we felt delightfully reckless.

Not that Gisborne was defenceless. Far from it. Our Hussars swanked it on parade and in training camp in most convincing style. Their uniforms were gorgeous, being copied in detail from those of one of England's smartest regiments. In full dress, with busby aloft and carrying heavy swords, they were a sight to make the gods rejoice. Boys and girls thought a lot of them; but not the defence authorities. An inspecting colonel stopped off at Gisborne during their annual exercises, put them through their paces, and, after telling them what he thought of them—this was quite a lot, and all of it unpleasant—pulled a paper from his pocket, read it through in a voice to make the earth tremble, and told them they were disbanded.

Gisborne answered back, as only a lonely, injured town could, and telegraphed and petitioned higher authority, but without avail. Much to the disappointment of the schoolboy population (who

visualised themselves as some day swaggering it in those resplendent uniforms), neither argument nor petition disturbed the Defence Minister. The Gisborne Hussars became a memory.

Some time later a Maori hui was held at Te Arai, ten miles out of town. It lasted many weeks. To help proceedings it had a band. This band was gorgeously arrayed in what looked like Gisborne's Hussar uniforms. It is possible that they were.

Let us return to Roebuck Road and its no-man's land. There were lots of unusual happenings in its well-screened recesses. Physical combats and other trials of strength, both spontaneous and stage-managed, were brought off here and gave those familiar with its by-paths lively satisfaction. Pitch-and-toss, New Zealand's brand of "two-up," had regular devotees. But cock-fighting was the most exciting, if the noise of the spectators was a guide. I had no other, because males of tender years were kept at a distance.

Saturdays were given over to beach picnics, to excursions over the Whantaupoko hills, or to canoeing on the rivers. Of these there were two—the Turanganui, the wider of the two, and the Waimata. The first was more estuary than river. At high tide no nobler inland water could be asked for. At low tide the streams narrowed to less than fifty feet, flanked with ugly mud-flats. Foul mud it was, too, as we found to our cost when retrieving caps and other possessions flung

on it by bullying mates. The Waimata had deeper waters, and its steeper mudbanks were a great joy to swimmers. Face down, they slid "splosh" into the cool waters below. Once started, nothing could stay the slide. Did a cockle-shell edge upwards obtrude—well, it had to be put up with as cheerfully as might be.

Rob Roy canoes were in high favour, and boy owners drove some hard bargains. Despite their tiny size, the canoeists ventured over the bar and out into the Bay. We all wanted to be able to say that we had made this voyage. From the end of the breakwater out to the outermost buoy (the red one) was the standard laid down, but, if a steamer lay at anchor, paddling round her was an additional triumph. Should the mariner tie up to and board one of the wool ships—well, he was in the same class as Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama. Capsizes were not unusual, but, beyond wet clothes and lost boots, there were no serious consequences.

For out-of-school-hours entertainment we depended on ourselves, our house or someone else's being thrown open one evening each week. Bands of Hope were popular sidelines with all the churches, and, as each respected the other's dates, this helped a lot. The instruction hammered home the horrors of drink and the difficulty of refusing the second glass after the first had been taken. Youngsters were pressed to sing or recite, but

most of the items were given by adults. There were good voices, too, which would never have been heard but for this opportunity.

One gentleman in particular favoured us a lot. He took the pledge about once a month, kept it for a couple of weeks and sang to us on request. The third week he slipped a bit and sang to us whether he was asked to or not. He was the whole programme. Good and all as he was, this was too much. Pea-shooters and pearl barley were brought into action, with his mouth as target. His downfall was sure.

Temperance lecturers came and went. They hired the town theatre, and the Blue Ribbon Army took the stage behind them. One notable visitor was an elocutionist who (so it was said) recited his lectures. He chucked in Hamlet's soliloquy and bits of Tennyson; so we were allowed to go, for the uplift. His hair was lank and long and black. He had a sallow complexion (the girls called it "olive"), and when with vigorous gesture he swept his hand through his locks the phalanx of lady supporters went into raptures. When he called for men brave enough to outface ridicule from their fellows, to accept the blue ribbon of defiance to alcohol and all its lures, every engaged young man stepped forward. This was the only way to secure peace in the nightly courting and so out-distance rivals.

Missioners and evangelists looked in, too. They

had good audiences. Their stock-in-trade was emotionalism. Those converted at the beginning of the meeting sat beside the unyielding during the prolonged prayers, steadily suggesting the need to be saved. Why, boys who could swear like troopers and did not hesitate to steal marbles gave in like anything!

At the end of a week or so, twenty or thirty converts were hard at it. At the point where citizens were greeted with "Praise the Lord; are you saved, brother?" by neighbours of shocking ways, the town cooled off and the mission was left to enthusiasts.

This sort of thing kept us entertained, but was not in the same street as a touring company. One such happened our way when the town's fortunes were low. It failed to earn enough to pay the theatre rent, or the hotelkeeper or the carrier, or the pianist, and it seemed likely to owe them still more if it didn't get away by the next boat. Most of the townsfolk accepted the situation philosophically, but not so the people set out above. They were very spirited in their efforts to help these lame stage-folk over their stiles.

The theatre proprietor came down hard for a special benefit performance with himself seated at the ticket office. The actors thought this a good idea, but not so their other creditors. They thought it would be better to sell tickets from door to door. Being a working majority, they had

their own way and, as a committee of ways and means, they put the town council to shame. Their canvass reached the portals of the school. Result—a gallery ticket to "Conn the Shaughran," our first real-to-goodness play. It was the best show ever. The choice bits were bandied about for many a long day. "Oh, Conn! Why did ye die?"; the keening cries; the wagging feet; the sly nips at the bottle of potheen; the indignation (very lively with us) over the villain's plot to inveigle the heroine into a runaway adventure (how we trembled when she agreed); Conn's uncanny knowledge of all that was in the wind; his successful interferences; well—weeks of rehashing (all the boys wanted to be Conn) never cooled our enthusiasm. Months later, the cry, "Why did ye die?" would conjure forth a keening yell which told of gallery tickets well used.

There was some talk (not to say scandal) over the adjustment of the accounts, but sufficient was set aside for steamer passage money to be met. The carrier's son assured us, in confidence, "The old man did all right," while the publican's four-year-old sported a new tricycle in the sight of the envious. However, the players got away, leaving Conn a ripple on the pool of school life.

At this school we, for the first time, experienced a dividing line between classes. Perhaps the luxury of one class one teacher, one teacher one room, had something to do with this. Brothers

in higher classes hardly recognised younger brethren, and an air of authority was adopted in the back yard if juniors lowered their guard for a moment.

When the senior crossed the road to the High School the barrier was between scholars and school kids. Challenges and jibes flung through the palings, even if pointed and painfully personal, were ignored. But a little patronising notice might be taken of the junior when he had an odd sixpence to spend. If he could be persuaded to visit a certain orchardist, all the better. This man had a weakness—a love of Euclid. A lower-school sixpence went as far with him as an upper, if properly handled. Possessed of that sum, a small boy would be persuaded to play up to this enthusiast's weakness. How the dickens do you cross the Ass's Bridge? Over goes the barrow. A dusty path is smoothed off. With a twig the proposition is duly set out. As soon as the pair are intimately engrossed, the conspirators put in their appearance. Their request for sixpenn'orth of figs, or peaches, or apples, or plums, receives scant attention. This is the moment for the puzzled student to become obtuse—obtuse to the point where an anxious instructor dismisses importunate customers to serve themselves. An excellent sixpennyworth is eaten by all, the actual purchase being handed over to the student as

compensation for his self-denial. It was his sixpence, anyway.

The stranding of the *Moa* was badly timed; so early that all good schoolboys were asleep. She came into the Bay with a wild southerly on her tail and, against all precedent, tried to clear the bar at low tide, hoping the waves in the river would lift her over. They wouldn't.

This was an event out of scale with the normal, but our master treated it with extraordinary indifference. The headmaster came to the rescue. He was a whale for week-end compositions, and granted an hour's release, clouding this generosity with his usual imposition to balance the loss of school time.

We got away at ten o'clock and returned at three, the little matter of four unauthorised hours not weighing too heavily. The southerly had hardened during the day and, the deck cargo of timber getting loose, we got busy hauling piece after piece above high-tide mark. The call to all hands to heave on some salvage-line found us strung out to the surf's edge. We must all be in everything, and no one thought of letting go, even when the cry, "Hold tight, all!" told of an outsize roller sweeping in on the rescue gang.

The hours sped by. We couldn't return to school while the excitement lasted. Eventually consciences played their part. Wet through with rain and spray, the advance guard, a little apprehen-

sive, yet full of pride in well-doing, presented itself with an explanation that explained nothing. Six stinging cuts on each cold hand was the master's answer. The main body rolled in ten minutes later, but the edge of the master's wrath was turned. A bare two cuts apiece. Schoolmasters should be just. His name was mud. But, anyhow, what fools we were not to have kept with the main body! Unity means strength.

But we had a real wreck. The *Spray*, a topsail schooner, entered the Bay with all sails set. A shift of wind made the beach a dead lee-shore. The *Spray* tried to beat her way out, but each tack brought her nearer the breakers. There was some difficulty in shortening sail, schooners of the 'nineties being manned for fine-weather trips, so the anchor could not be dropped.

The school gathered on the sandhills and waited with bated breath for the moment when she would touch. This she eventually did, but without any fuss. We could only tell by the waves sweeping over her as she lay broadside to the rollers.

There was a great to-do. A volunteer to take a lifeline presented himself. Smeared with oils, he entered the waves and struck out, his head appearing on the crest of rollers, or disappearing as he dived through them when they curled over. Ten minutes (we all claimed it seemed like thirty) and he reached the *Spray*. To our confusion he

stood up, handed his precious lifeline to the mate, turned and waded ashore. In between the breakers the depth was only some four feet. We might have thought of this, for the *Spray* drew very little more. The crew clewed up the sails and presently waded ashore too.

Next day: "Which of you boys saw the *Spray* come ashore yesterday?" Half the class signalled. "I expect a two-hundred-line essay from you on Monday about what you saw." Darn it! Rank injustice. We witnessed the event in our own time!

We forgave him. He had one redeeming bad habit—a passion for golf. His enthusiasm got him out of our bad books on many an occasion. He was steadily reducing his handicap and "stop in after school" meant nothing to us. At 3.30 p.m. (closing time) he shouldered his clubs and left. A minute later the detention squad followed suit. He never looked behind. He had the rudiments of a gentleman in him even though he was a schoolmaster.

The school had a reputation for success at examinations. The big test of the year was "the Scholarship," open to Standards VI throughout the Education Board's district—East Cape to Woodville. Year after year Gisborne topped the list. This was a source of great satisfaction to the town and particularly to the teachers. Their reputations were enhanced and the committee's re-

commendation for a better job had so much extra pull.

The secret behind this yearly success was "forced feeding." The Standards Examinations came off in August, while the Scholarship test (two days) was held in December. The candidates sitting for this higher examination were heroes (or heroines) in the intervening weeks. They worked when all the rest were free, and reports of preliminary try-outs in this or that subject were freely discussed.

When the two days' written papers were handed in and the heroes appeared once more in the playground, they were pointed out as of a race apart. This continued until the results were published in the *Herald*. Those who topped the list (ahead of rival schools) were congratulated enthusiastically; those who won their scholarship but allowed a boy from another school to gain higher marks were made to feel they had let the school down a bit; while those who failed to win a scholarship just made their way out into the workaday world and no more to-do about it.

The choice of careers was limited. The banks between them took on one junior a year. There were no large insurance offices; only agents. The legal profession was mostly a father-and-son arrangement. Apprentices were two a penny and that was about the wage paid, too.

The school curriculum took small note of the

more obvious openings. General labouring and farm work, with a spell at the freezing-works in the season, required no scholarship. Neither did shearing, mustering and shepherding on the surrounding sheep stations. These vacancies were filled on happy-go-lucky principles; so the boy was lucky whose father was able to give him a start with definite prospects. He was "lucky" in another sense if he was placed on a sheep-run except as a roustabout. There was competition from overseas; many run-holders had cadets, whose people paid premiums for them to learn this business. If this premium was paid on the instalment plan, such youths were kept busy as cheap labourers until their parents got tired. Should it be paid in a lump sum, then the cadet stayed on until his employer could locate another premium. A suitable excuse (or no excuse at all) was found for sending the youth about his business. It would never do for the next new chum to compare notes with him. The discharged cadet competed in the unskilled labour market until the opportunity offered to stow away on one of the four or five wool ships lying in the roadstead. Short-handed as most of these windjammers were, a husky youth, at a shilling a month, was more than welcome.

Some of these cadets got their own back, to the delight of the townsfolk. One particularly unscrupulous employer of this cheap labour had an

"instalment" boy on his hands for an unusually long spell. If there was an awkward way to do a job, this boy chose it. (Possibly it was his way of getting even.) The pair were busy setting a new strainer. The boss was at the bottom of the hole, easing it into position while the cadet steadied the post as it slid over the edge. The boy was small and the post got away, finishing its downward journey at lightning speed, and taking a swipe at the boss's shin before it finished up on his foot. When the moans and curses had subsided somewhat, our cadet looked down the hole and, in a voice quivering with anxiety, asked:

"Did I hurt you, Sir?"

Complete silence, tense with emotion for a full minute, then this crescendo of feeling:

"Did you hurt me?

"Did you hurt me?

"DID YOU HURT ME?

"SIR!!!"

This story got on the move, as such stories will, and with embellishments to suit almost any occasion, greeted the wounded run-holder wherever he went. So, instalment due, overdue, or not due, that boy got his walking ticket.

Local apprenticeships were in demand. They gave some certainty of employment. The wages were poor; boys in their fourth year could not keep themselves.

But if the boys had a tough spin, girls were even

worse off. The boys did get a few shillings a week from the start. The girls got nothing, being "on trial" for some months. Then they received half-a-crown per week, rising by multiples of that coin until, at the end of two years, they might be receiving as much as seven and sixpence. It was a bold girl who asked for a further rise. She was mostly refused. ("Times are too bad just now.") But if it was granted, she was more than likely to get a week's notice with the first payment. Girl labour was plentiful.

For myself, my luck was in. The government instituted its policy of cheap telegrams—twelve words for sixpence—and an additional telegraph messenger was put on to cope with the expected increase in business. I got the job at the (then) unheard of commencing salary of ten-bob-a-week, paid monthly.

So ended my school days.

GROWING UP IN THE FORTY MILE BUSH H. COM