

● PICTURES OF RUIN

● *How Man Has Abused Wild Nature*

● THE MURDERED BUSH OF THE AKATAREWA

MR. A. H. GIBSON, of Ngaio, Wellington, is one of the best informed critics of the mistreatment of the indigenous forest by New Zealanders and of the ruin which has followed on indiscriminate clearance of the bush. He has the experience of a lifetime to back up his denunciation of the white man's abuse of the bush and the land. In a letter to the President of the Forest and Bird Protection Society, he describes the spread of all kinds of weeds consequent on ignorant settlement methods, and he contrasts the pristine beauty of the ranges and valleys between the Upper Hutt valley and Waikanae, traversed by the Waikanae road, with the present melancholy scene of desolation and destruction.

"I see by the paper," Mr. Gibson writes, "that the Government is much concerned at the damage being done by deer and other grazing animals to the catchment area of the Rangitata and other Canterbury rivers. But why don't those responsible see that the laws concerning keeping the land fairly clean from weeds are observed? Look at those hills just to the north of Wellington City, you will see them getting choked with that pernicious weed, Tutsan, nearly related to the St. John's wort. Now, as the late Dr. Cockayne often said to me, once that weed gets a good hold of the hills, it will be for all time; the cost of eradicating it will be too heavy! This is exactly what it is doing, if it has not already done so. Yet had the law concerning keeping the land clear been enforced from the beginning, there would have been no difficulty. But if you would see how much in the way of destruction can be done to the natural bush covering and its replacement by every conceivable noxious weed, such as gorse, broom, blackberry, brier, Tutsan wort, Oxeye daisy, Ragwort, you should take a trip to the Korokoro Hill, at the back of the Wellington Woollen Co.'s works, and you will see hundreds of acres so converted. Or you should travel along the road running from Upper Hutt through the Akatarewa Valley to Waikanae.

"I can remember the Akatarewa Valley in 1885. It was then teeming with bird life of every kind. There were the kaka parrot, pigeon, silver-eye, tui, bellbird, parakeet, weka, kingfisher, huia, piopio, kiwi, hawk, grey duck, blue (or mountain) duck, morepork, and the little native bat. The place was alive from end to end with the birds of the bush. Rimu trees were there, also the rata, honeysuckle, fuchsia, wineberry, and innumerable other species throughout the valley. If one entered the bush and walked any distance through it one found a humus of decayed leaves and soil from two to three feet deep in places, an undergrowth of young trees, ferns, nikau, supplejacks, and creepers of all kinds. The river through the valley abounded in eels which we used to go after, in the evenings, until the mosquitos became too troublesome, while the little native bats fluttered around us and the moreporks hooted from the overhanging branches, and the wekas called to each other from the depths of the bush.

"In the year 1931 I was one of a party to motor through this same valley from Upper Hutt over to Waikanae. It was the afternoon of a lovely summer's day. Not one bird from end to end of the valley did we see or hear, save that on the site of a sawmill we saw two Australian magpies. The silence of the grave brooded over the valley. The river itself was choked with gravel and in many places had eroded the banks. There was no bush at all until about halfway through, when we entered what had been left and preserved. But it was no more like the forest of 1885 than the bird-life it sheltered, if indeed there were any birds at all within it.

"The trees were dead or dying, and there were marks around many of them denoting where some animals had rubbed their horns, and destroyed the bark covering. The ground itself was hard and flinty, and quite destitute of its former covering of humus, as devoid as indeed it was, too, of any pretence of a second growth springing up to replace this wastage. All was silence, desolation, decay, and death.