

TALE OF THE LONESOME PINE

(By Hugh Ross.)

THE PASSING OF THE FOREST PRIMEVAL.

[*This is a story of man's stupid slaughter of native forests on steep watersheds—the tragic loss of natural capital in the vain quest of a passing profit.*]

ALREADY it was dark in the hollows, but on the hillside facing the west, where grew the Lonesome Pine, a little pale twilight yet lingered. A star or two, brighter than their fellows, pointed the frosty blue sky. Chill as the breath of an iceberg a wind came sweeping along the hillside, searching among the stumps and decaying forest trees—trees that, felled by the white man's axe, lay in aimless confusion, rotting—wasting. . . . The wind went on, and rustled the leaves of a small patch of bush in a rocky gully. Borne on the wind came the mournful cry of a more-pork.

In the bush-patch the birds, already abed, lifted heads from wings and listened. Again More-pork called; again. To-night, however, his voice sounded different; sounded more melancholy. Tomtit, snug in a lawyer bush, turned to his neighbour. "Listen," he said. "Listen to More-pork; he's got a cold."

"And not to be wondered at in the least," answered the neighbour, a small silver-eye who was trying vainly to shelter behind a leaf. "On a night like this he's lucky if he doesn't freeze. Winter must be coming on in earnest," he finished, edging closer to his leaf.

"Winter coming on? I believe you're right, Silver-eye." The speaker was a Bell-bird up in a Red-maple. "Winter—I wonder if we'll manage to find enough food to keep us alive until summer comes round again?" "I will," said Tomtit confidently. "Lots of grubs among the stumps—if a fellow can only get at 'em," a little wistfully.

"There aren't too many flies about, though," a Fly-catcher remarked. "Very, very few, in fact; and I can remember when I could catch all I wanted." "Before the bush was cut down?" asked Bell-bird. "Yes, before the white man took away—our home." Other voices joined in: "There was food for everyone then. And we never noticed the cold so much, either. We

were sheltered from the storms and winds, too. Now—it is terrible."

Tomtit, whom nothing ever daunted for long, chuckled, saying: "Fancy it being cold enough for old Morepork to catch a cold."

"He's jolly lucky to be able to catch anything at all these times," shivered Silver-eye, as he shifted uneasily on his perch. And then he got the fright of a lifetime, for More-pork himself, who had arrived like a phantom of the night, said softly: "Oh, no, I haven't got a cold at all. . . . Tomtit was wrong. I merely changed my call; that was what was wrong."

"But your voice sounded husky," protested Tomtit. "What *did* you call out, anyway?" he asked suddenly.

"I said, 'Poor Pine, Poor Pine.' He has just been telling me his life's story, and I felt very sorry for him. He has had a dreadful time of it since all his friends were cut down. A worse time, I believe, than we birds. In fact," said More-pork sadly, "he is dying. Listen, everyone, and I will tell you what he said."

"I went to him to-night," said More-pork, as he settled down comfortably on a branch, "on quite private business; I wanted his permission to build a nest in his trunk. It was really an ideal site. The wind had blown one of his branches off, and in the place where it had grown — sheltered, too —," More-pork sighed.

"Lonesome Pine was silent for sometime after I'd put my notion. Considering it, I thought. 'More-pork,' he said slowly at last, 'did you always have a lot of trouble finding a suitable place to build a home?'

"Only since all the bush has been felled," I replied. "Before that it was easy enough."

"'Before the bush was cut down, yes,' he answered, 'and to think, More-pork, that five years ago all this hill-side was green and yellow with trees. Five years, and look at it now.'

(Continued bottom next page.)