

THE WRYBILL REMEMBERS.

WISDOM-LINK WITH REMOTE PAST.

As a challenge to New Zealand youth to take up bird-watching, with all its charms and hardships and risks, the veteran Guthrie-Smith's latest (and, he says, his last) book is of inestimable value. It is called "Sorrows and Joys of a New Zealand Naturalist." It shows the veteran getting into camera range of nests and young birds at all levels from ground to fifty feet, and in all sorts of positions by sea and land. The bush canary nests in the highland nothofagus (beech) forest of the Nelson hinterland at heights of frequently over forty-feet, in knot-holes of the beech. To observe the coming and going of the birds, a wooden stage is built at equivalent height in a near-by beech, and there the observer waits with his camera. The stage-material must be hoisted to this great height and secured there, and everything must be done in a way not to scare the birds into nest-desertion. After the hard work come weary vigils in all weathers. Is not this the finest and most unrewarded (financially) of all national services? Who will take up the work from which the veteran naturalist is retiring? Who will pay the price, in time and labour, of wrestling domestic secrets from native bird-life?

Down by the sea, the reader of this book sees the naturalist seeking the blue heron on rocky islets, and spying on the nest and young in spray-sprinkled caves, where the waves sing romantic tunes, but where smugglers come not. The scene changes to the shifting rivers of Canterbury (distinct from gorge-bound rivers), and here is found the nest of the wrybill, unapproachable by vermin (stoats, weasels, etc.), unless they can swim the swift channels into which a river like the Rakaia divides. With such channels on either side, the nest is defended by Nature. But a hundred years ago the wrybill had no stoats or weasels to fear. How, then, did the wrybill learn this secret of water-defences? Does the wrybill's wisdom date back to some earlier period of predatory risks of which history knows nothing?

Mr. Guthrie-Smith thinks it does. "This racial wisdom of the wrybill—though superfluous for centuries, for what had the wrybill to fear from the indigines of old New Zealand, the bat and frog, its harmless neighbours of the immediate past?—may in one period have been a trait of cardinal consequence inherited from ancestral types living millions and millions of years ago, in other times, when other more predatory beasts were prevalent."

Whatever the reason, the wrybill remembers that it is a bird of the bifurcated stream; and now that vermin are here, the Rakaia's water-courses are barriers that safeguard the wrybill's nest. Wrybill wisdom has found a purpose—but no thanks to the white man!

Some day it will be recognised that Mr. Guthrie-Smith is one of the most charming writers who have ever succeeded in gaining intimate touch with Nature. Pages 61 to 66—early morning in the forest, the daily miracle of dew and sun and wind—are in themselves worth all the money this book is sold for. Nature-lovers and all the world can join in reverence to this beautiful piece of Nature-worship.

