

The Late W. H. Guthrie-Smith of Tutira

By R. A. Falla.

BY the death of William Herbert Guthrie-Smith at Tutira on July 4th New Zealand has sustained a national loss. His achievements as a pioneer sheep farmer, skill and patience as a naturalist, and gifts as an author, outstanding as they would have been in themselves, were unique in their combination. It may be said of him that he not only found for himself the real and lasting values of life in a new land, but has shown our own generation and posterity how to find them too.

H. Guthrie-Smith was born in Scotland, and shortly after his schooldays at Rugby came to New Zealand in the early 'eighties. With a schoolmate he served a short cadetship in South Canterbury, but shortly afterwards, in 1882, became part-owner and then sole owner of Tutira, in Hawke's Bay. The story of early hardships and disappointments is told in his greatest book "Tutira," a work rightly to be regarded as a New Zealand classic, and in the best sense monumental. "Tutira" is first of all an inspired book. Its author wrote, and credited the sentiment first in courtesy to the original Maori owners, that "there are some spots on earth that seem to inspire in their owners a very special affection, as if, perchance, there might exist an occult sympathy betwixt the elementals of the soil and those who touch its surface with their feet." And of the book, "if there is anything of value in this volume, it is because of the author's affection for the spot where he has lived so long." Not often has affection been so aptly translated into interpretation: certainly never in so typical a New Zealand setting. In "Tutira" we have recorded not only the story of fifty years of development on a sheep-run, but also a vivid picture of every phase of change in the face of Nature under the hand of man.

Historically and scientifically the value of "Tutira" and of "Birds of Water, Wood, and Waste" lies in the fact that Guthrie Smith, like Gilbert White in an earlier century and another land, has written therein of observations made in one area from day to day, month to month, and year to year, and if we of to-day should fail to recognise in "Tutira" the counterpart of Selbourne, later generations of New Zealanders will certainly do so. In his other delightful

bird books Guthrie-Smith has taken his readers adventuring further afield. His pen pictures and photographs are from island sanctuaries, from forgotten corners of the mainland, and from those more remote islands that fringe the polar seas to the south and the sub-tropics northward. In each of them is found the same rare literary quality, irrepressible and whimsical humour, love of wild creatures and all living things, and a generous appreciation of his fellow men. It is not without significance that his last writing for publication was an appreciation of the late Frank Hutchinson prepared for "Forest and Bird" and printed in the August issue.

Revealing something of his character and sense of values in all his books, Guthrie-Smith did so more than any other in "Sorrows and Joys of a New Zealand Naturalist." A product of his ripe judgment and experience it presents a balanced and classic picture of the stages by which a lovely land rapidly became "little better than a home for white men." Its revelation of joy is that of the patient observer of Nature who is also unselfish enough to be an interpreter.

Mr. Guthrie-Smith was a pioneer and practical exponent of all that the Forest and Bird Society stands for. As a naturalist he combined wide knowledge with keen powers of observation. New Zealanders owe him a debt of gratitude for the interpretation of Nature contained in his books: many hundreds will cherish more personal memory of his helpfulness, hospitality and humour; and all will wish that some lasting and appropriate way may be found to honour the memory of a great man.

