

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IT'S a tall story I sometimes used to hear my old grandfather tell. This big fellow went by the name of Showers, and he got the nickname because he would never answer anything but "Showers" whenever he was asked what the weather was going to be. Also he worked for the town board, and in the dry weather he'd have to drive about the streets on a water-cart, and that sort of fitted in with his nickname as well.

Anyhow, Showers was a man who was said to weigh just on twenty stone, and as he wasn't specially tall, you can imagine what he looked like. He was a good sort though; everybody liked him, with his big red face that was always breaking into a grin, and he never seemed to mind when you pulled his leg by asking him what the weather was going to be.

Well, Showers lived with his mother, just the two of them living in a small house, and there were all sorts of yarns about the size of Showers' appetite, and the quantity of meat his mother was always buying. The butcher, having his drinks along at the pub, would say how



"... You could have heard a pin drop"

it was nothing unusual for Showers' mother to buy half a fair-sized sheep on Saturday, and then be back again on Monday morning wanting another half. But everybody always said the butcher was exaggerating, because it might take a lot to feed Showers, but not as much as all that. The butcher would say, No, it was the fair dinkum truth, and he'd get annoyed when he couldn't get anybody to believe him. And then one day he told an even better one. He said that one Friday late shopping night Showers' mother had bought a whole calf and had it delivered early Saturday morning, and on Sunday morning early she was round at the butcher's house asking him please would he get something for her out of the shop, because she was right out of meat.

But there was nobody along at the pub at the time who would swallow that one, and the butcher got very annoyed, and it led to a lot of argument. And there happened to be a cow-cocky there who was reckoned to be pretty well in, and he said he'd killed and eaten a lot of meat in his time and he knew for a fact that no man, not even with the help of his old mother, could eat a whole calf in practically one day. So the butcher said all right, was he prepared to bet on it? And after a lot of talk it was all fixed up. The bet was to be £10, and Showers was to eat a whole calf, bones not included of course, between sunrise and sunset on Anniversary Day. The way they fixed it was like this: the day before the holiday the butcher was to deliver the calf to the pub-keeper, and he was to get the cook to make the meat into patties, and all Anniversary Day a plate of them was to be kept full on the bar counter, and nobody was to take anything from that plate except Showers; though it was decided Showers wasn't to be in the know, and nobody was to let on to him, but there'd be no trouble because he was fond of his beer, and if he was stood enough drinks it was reckoned he'd stay in the pub long enough to give the calf a fair go.

So everything was fixed up all right, and on Anniversary Day, sure enough, Showers came along to the pub soon after it opened up in the morning. Of course the news about the bet had got

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by FRANK SARGESON

round a bit, and there were quite a few side-bets on the go as well, so quite a crowd was there to see if Showers would fall down on the job. But he didn't show any signs of it all through the morning, though just before mid-day the cow-cocky took the butcher by the sleeve and led him round into the kitchen, and people said the butcher came back pulling a long face. And others went to look and came back and winked at their cobbles and said he'd never do it, because he hadn't finished off nearly half a great big trayful so far, and there was another big one still to go.

Though it wasn't long before things began to look up for the butcher, because Showers let himself be persuaded that, seeing it was a holiday, he might as well make a day of it and cut out going home for dinner. And once having made the decision he whacked into the patties a good deal faster, though his backers weren't too pleased when, instead of sticking to the patties, he'd one or two times reach out for a piece of bread and cheese off one of the other plates.

Then he slackened off again, which after all was probably hardly anything more than was natural, but his backers got windy when he said maybe he'd better be going home for a snooze now, because later on he wanted to do a bit of work in the garden. But he couldn't resist another few drinks first, and he'd eat a patty now and then, though sometimes he'd nearly break a number of hearts by taking one up while he talked but afterwards putting it back on the plate again. Later on, though, he began to get hungry again, and when it was getting on towards evening and the pub-keeper said free drinks all round, and let everybody eat up too—well, Showers just went right ahead. And, as my grandfather always used to say, packed to the doors though the bar was, you could have heard a pin drop when Showers took the last one on the plate, and everybody knew there wasn't a single one more to come.

Of course, the next moment there would have been wild cheers and a great hullabaloo, but some wag picked up a plate with one last piece of bread and cheese and held it out to Showers. And he didn't speak very clearly (after all, besides the patties, he'd put away quite as much beer as was good for him), but he was understood to say no thanks, he didn't think he ought to, because he'd heard a yarn about somebody having a bet on to get him to eat a whole calf before sundown.

## From North To South

THE "listeners' own session" of Station 2YH, Napier, has a coverage extending from the Chatham Islands to Kaitiaki. Tastes are astonishingly varied, with a definite swing towards "hill-billy" material. Recently the station received a letter from an N.Z. airman in a far-away Pacific island with the information that the station was well received throughout the South Pacific.



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## Courage Is Needed

"You think these visits are important?"

"There isn't a doubt about that. Since the system started, numberless difficulties have been cleared up. Here's just one case. There was a boy living out on a farm who was a great problem to his teacher. His work would be quite good for a while, then it would go right back. His writing was shocking. For a long while he would make no progress at all. Then I visited the home and found that he was a cripple and spent all his time in an invalid chair. The chair was too big, and though the parents had done what they could, the boy was forced to write in a strained, cramped position, since the tray on which he wrote was above the level of his arms. Once we adjusted that, the boy responded at once. But we come across many heart-breaking things in our travels."

"And learn a few things yourself?"

"I certainly do. The children have taught me to ride, and to be able to ride is a big point with them. Once they discover you can go out with them and are not afraid of the animals they take you to their hearts. If you were frightened at all, you'd fail. Most of the children we see are keenly interested in farm life, and they try us out to see how we react. The life is certainly full. I've ridden on jiggers, I've been held up by slips, I have eaten tremendous meals and seem to need them. I haven't been to a lighthouse yet, but there is one in my next term visit. There is also an 18-mile horse-ride awaiting me this term. Three miles are round a cliff which they say is very dangerous at high tide. But the point that particularly worries me is how to sit on a horse for 18 miles. All the same I'll do it. My prestige would suffer if I refused."