

## TWO BREEDS OF GOATS?

WHEN I asked a roadman to tell me the story of the goats between Bay View and Morere he thought I was being smart. But when he asked me which goats I meant I thought he was being smart and refused to be drawn. But he was serious.

### BLACKBERRY AT THE BAY

"You think I'm just trying to be funny; but I'm not. Why did you ask me about the goats?"

"Because I've seen more goats than sheep. I want to know why."

"Exactly. So do I. This country's lousy with them. Do you know why?"

"That is what I'm asking you."

"And I'm telling you it's because we have two breeds of goats on this coast—goats with four legs that are supposed to eat blackberry, and goats with two legs who believe that they do."

"But don't they?"

"Of course they do when they can't get anything else. But did you see that mob in the clover back there by the homestead? Were they eating blackberry?"

"No, they were eating clover. That is one reason why I stopped to talk to you."

"Wouldn't you think it would be a reason for using a gun? But it isn't. I've seen them there every day this week. If you go too close to them they run down into the gully, but they're all back again in half-an-hour."

"Right there by the homestead?"

"Right there. They worship goats here. They think that if they had no goats the blackberry would push them into the sea. But every goat pushes a sheep into the sea and that doesn't worry them."

I drove on, thinking that he was right. But a few miles farther on I came to another roadman, and he was for goats and plenty of them.

"You must have goats," he told me. "If you don't the blackberry will beat you. Three years ago you could hardly walk up that face. Then a new man bought it and put on goats."

"Did he fence them on?"

"No, they come and go as they like."

"But they must eat a lot of grass too?"

"They don't eat as much grass as the blackberries do."

"You mean that with goats you can run some sheep and without them none?"

"It comes to that in the end."

THE farmers I spoke to supported the second roadman and scoffed at the first. Goats, they told me, don't eat blackberry and nothing else. There are, in fact, times when they don't eat blackberry at all. I had probably noticed that they were not eating much blackberry now. But if I came back in a month or two I would see them hanging about the blackberry patches all day, and if some runs had as many goats as sheep they would have fewer sheep still if they had no goats.

"So goats," I said to one man, "are just cheap labour. They keep your country open at a lower price than scrub-cutters?"

"No, they do better than that. They clear country that scrub-cutters won't look at. Anyhow, the more you cut blackberry the better it grows."

"You can't burn it?"

"Yes, you can burn it. You can burn anything if you choose your time. But you burn everything else too, and the blackberry comes back first. Fires have



"The goats we have bring us nothing and cost us nothing"

come nearer to ruining New Zealand than anything else I know."

"Well," I asked finally, "could you not breed more profitable goats?"

"You mean Angoras?"

"Yes, goats that would grow a fleece while they were clearing your ground for you."

"Perhaps we could, but I don't think so. If they grew fleeces they would lose them on the blackberry. In any case, I

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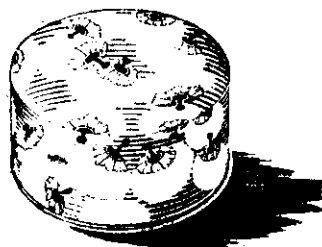
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