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not actually living on gorse, were getting more than half their sustenance from it.

I even met a farmer who said that he liked it that way.

"If I had no gorse I would have no sheep, and that goes for most of my neighbours, too."

"What would happen if the gorse got away?"

"The same thing. We would have no sheep that way either. But it doesn't get away."

"Do you grub it?"

"No, the sheep keep it down."

"What about the thickets that sheep can't penetrate?"

"We lose those."

"Do you burn?"

"Only where the sheep have given up."

"You'd sooner have gorse than dandonia?"

"No, but I'd sooner have it than scrub."

"Don't you lose a lot of wool on the bushes?"

"Yes, but we have a lot left. Far more than we would get from manuka and tawhine."

(He called it tawhine, not tauhinu, and I've never heard a farmer call it anything else.)

"If you could clear it, would you?"

"Clearing this country would cost more than it's worth."

"It pays you as it is?"

"Most years it does. We have bad years when we get nothing. But so do all farmers."

It was a strange conversation in a country settled for only a hundred years. I could not help wondering as I talked to him if our second century would not put his whole farm back into trees.

* * *

WHEN I crossed the Lewis Pass and reached Springs Junction I found the store front bright with flowers; and not only the store front. The whole area for a couple of chains each way was terraced and planted with shrubs,

COUNTRY STORE

with a fenced-in triangle where the three roads meet converted into a garden of memories. I was too late for the daffodils; though the tulips were still blooming, but a glance was sufficient to show what the scene must have been a few weeks earlier. In each plot there was a sign commemorating a desert battle—El Alamein, Bel Hamed, and so on—and although the total area was no bigger than a small sheep pen, the general effect was most moving. Part of it was the surprise of finding such a touch in such a place; but there was much more than that. There was imagination, a feeling for beauty, and the instinct to combine the two in a tribute to the men (and perhaps women, too) who had left that remote clearing in the bush to die in the African desert.

Nor could I help thinking of the difference between buying and selling in the city and doing it in the country. A city storekeeper is a necessary and useful member of society; but the more useful he becomes the further he withdraws from the men and women he serves until he is little more than a calculating machine locked away in an inner room. A country storekeeper is the friend or enemy of every customer; in nine cases out of 10 the first. He

never has so many customers that he does not know them all when he meets them, and he can never withdraw far enough from the least acceptable of them to keep right out of their lives. He speaks to everybody and everybody speaks to him—buys from him, borrows from him, confides in him, asks big and little favours of him, until so many strings tie him to each one of them that he can't hold aloof if he wants to. This is, of course, the last thing he wants, partly because the more he knows the safer he feels in his business dealings, but partly also, and in the end chiefly, because there is no longer any line between business and friendship.

(To be continued)



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