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Through New Zealand (XXXI)

WHERE THE HILLS RUN AWAY

By "SUNDOWNER"

IT would not be the truth to say that I was surprised to meet several armed men on the lonelier and more mountainous sections of the road between Hammer Springs and the Hope Saddle; but I might have been surprised if I had forgotten the price of deerskins.

RIFLES ON THE ROAD

Some of these hunters were youths on motor-cycles who had not much knowledge of mountains or of deer and were returning disappointed. Some were experienced men who had been making week-end expeditions for two or three years, and in most cases doing it profitably. One of them told me that his rifle was paying his rent for him—that he always got one deer and sometimes two or three and averaged 30 shillings a skin. It was of course hard work requiring knowledge and skill as well as a car and petrol. It called for a mate, maps, and a good deal of organisation. But old cars were cheap when skins first began to be valuable; he used no petrol for anything else; and he had never had to change his mate. They had, however, an understanding with one or two runholders who, as far as they could, kept other hunters away.

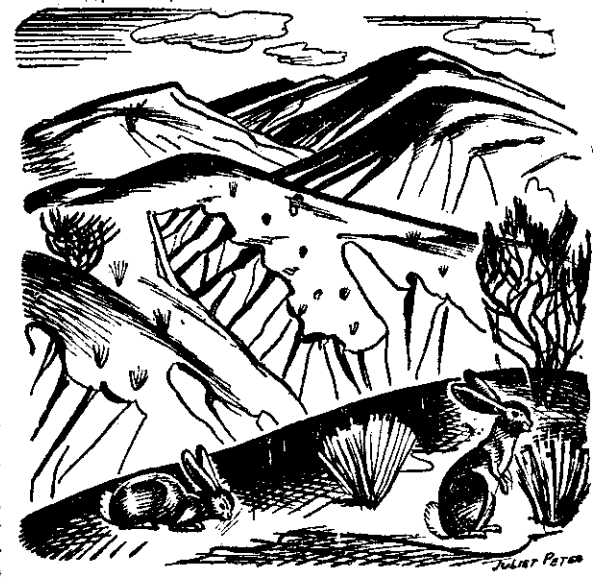
Zealand was threatened by erosion. Every fertile flat in the country had been made by erosion.

"What about the flats that are not fertile—the shingle wastes that have no soil at all?"

"Their time will come."

"Perhaps it has passed."

"Rot. Even if it had it would come again. The earth is always changing. If



"Anybody can see the hills near Blenheim running away"

"It's a case of knowing when and where to go?"

"Yes, and what to do when you get there. Runholders don't like deer, but they like them better than lunatics at large with a gun. They know that we have never had a dog or shot a sheep."

* * *

I SAW a man cutting lucerne with a tractor and left the road to talk to him. I thought at first that he was 50 or 60 and twisted with rheumatism and toil; but when I reached him I saw he was not more than 35, and that

IN A LUCERNE PADDOCK

what I had taken for a permanent hunch was the attitude he was compelled to assume to do two jobs at once. He should have had an assistant, but didn't. Now if he looked ahead all the time the mower behind him would miss patches or clog. If he looked back too often the tractor would run off the line. It was exacting work, and nerve-racking, and I was not surprised to find him irritable in conversation and given to reckless generalisations which he neither believed nor could support, but somehow hoped would annoy me.

It was especially interesting that his perversity led him into an attack on the campaign against erosion. It was "damned rot," he told me, that New

it's wearing away in one place it's building up in another."

"What about the millions of tons of soil that go out to sea?"

"If they go away they come back again. But I don't believe that nonsense. Why doesn't Grassmere fill up if so much soil goes down in every creek?"

"Perhaps it is filling up."

"No, it isn't."

"Then floods perhaps keep emptying it out into the sea."

"It's not open to the sea."

"Well, I don't know about Grassmere. I've never been closer to it than the main road. But anybody can see the hills near Blenheim running away."

"They're running down on to the flats. They're making the flats as they made this valley."

"Do you admit wind erosion?"

"I admit every kind of erosion. What I don't admit is that it's ruining us."

"Do you accept it as a threat?"

"I don't lie awake thinking about it."

"But you do think about it a little?"

"I think about it a lot. But those damned fools who write books about it don't do much thinking. They're just alarmists—ignorant alarmists most of them who don't have to live on the land."

(continued on next page)