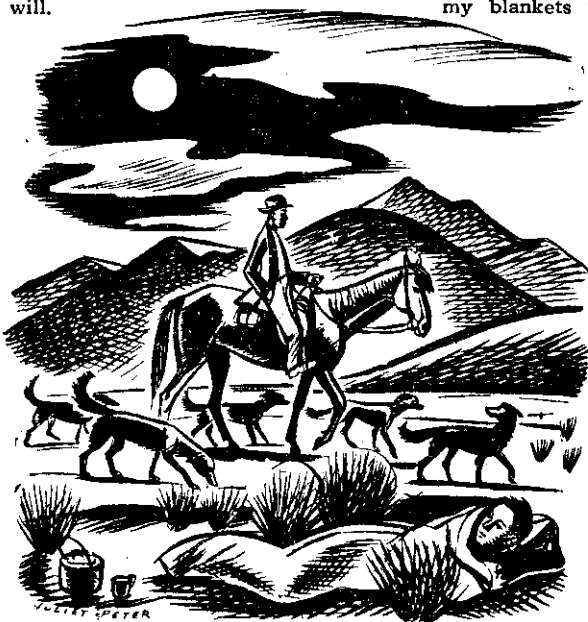


Sentimental Journey

By "SUNDOWNER"

I HAVE often wondered what the result would have been if Otago had been settled through the back door and not through the front. Entry by the back door to-day can be depressing; and exit too. The Lindis Pass is not wild enough to fire the imagination, and the approaches to it not green and fertile enough to throw it into relief. I met a Dutchman recently in Wellington who counted an enforced stay of a few hours at Omarama among the unpleasant experiences of his life. It probably is a trying place to those who come to it with their minds set on other places and who stay there against their will.



"A shepherd rode past in the moonlight, with five dogs, all tired like myself"

But that has never happened to me. My memories of Omarama go back 42 years, when I crossed the Pass with a swag on my back and lay all night in my blankets half-way across the flat too tired to sleep soundly and waking up at intervals to hear a dottle calling only a few yards away. I had apparently spread my blankets near eggs or chickens, but could not find either when daylight came. I remember, too, that a shepherd rode past in the moonlight with five dogs, all tired like myself and completely unaware of my presence though I was lying only 10 yards off the track.

My second visit was made on horseback, and I remember that my young son wandered off while I was stabling the horses and came back to ask what "all those roosters were doing in cages." It turned out that the proprietor of the stables was what the groom called "a bit of a sport," and I was not surprised to see him some years later in Christchurch during Grand National Week. I think I was surprised at the time to hear the names of some of his fellow-sports, though I would not be to-day. I could even agree up to a point that this is not an especially cruel sport, an average bout lasting a few minutes, and ending in the speedy death of one contestant and a glorious moment for the

other. I have never looked on myself, but I have taken part in sports for which far less can be said if the test is what happens to the loser.

OMARAMA to-day is a meal place for tourists and hardly anything else. But I was pleased to notice that stilts and dottrels still breed in the river-bed and that the "cathedral" was there as I first saw it all those years ago in the evening sun after my long

REQUIESCAT hot journey from Morven Hills. My face was the other way this time, and my blankets were carried comfortably in a car, but although I watched all the way to the foot of the Pass I did not find the terrace with the big matagouris in which, more than 40 years ago, I had been the guest, in his absence, of a rabbit. He was going up the gorge as I came down, and I have never forgotten his profane insistence that I should leave the road about two miles further on, go down into a dip full of matagouris and help myself to food and drink in his tent. I had never seen him before, and have never seen him since: he was a good deal older than I was then, and is now probably dead. But if I were a Catholic I would pray for the repose of his soul.

THE matagouris were gone partly because they are good firewood, partly because the burning madness is still on us. I saw signs of burning all the way up the Ahuriri and all the way down the Lindis, and when I turned up to Wanaka smoke obliterated one side of the lake.

TRAVELLERS AND TUSsocks I know that it is offensive when travellers tell farmers what they ought to be doing with their land. It is the piece of earth to which they have committed themselves and all that they possess or will possess, which they water every week with their sweat and sometimes with their blood, for which most of them go through days and nights of torture when markets collapse or fail, storms come at destructive moments, or pests enter by channels that can't be effectively closed—empty sacks, bales of hay, bird-droppings, infected mouths, skins, or feet. When I criticise farmers I feel that I am criticising my father and my mother, my brothers and my sisters—the universal family.

I am resting to-day on a farm, and as I write this note a thunderstorm is soaking some tons of hay which owner and hired helpers have worked overtime

(continued on next page)

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