

(continued from previous page)

when they were not helping the trees to fight against wind, and drought, and weeds, and pests. Whatever they did they survived, and if some of them are now reaping rich rewards they have earned every penny many times over. They are also giving New Zealand the best stone fruit it is possible to grow in the Southern Hemisphere, and taking it out of land that before them produced very little. That, I think, is their monument.

* * *

BUT if I were a young man I would pause before I started off in their tracks. I would ask myself if I had the patience to wait while the seedling became a tree, the courage to fight wind, pests, hail, and frost, and the toughness

to live without any income at all if the thermometer went crazy one night when I was asleep or caught me without oil for my fire-pots. One man I spoke to told me that his average harvest would be about 4,000 cases, and that a single frost one year reduced him to two peaches—one under a bird's nest and the other under a branch against a wall.

"If it had happened a few years earlier I would have been out."

"It could have happened then?"

"Just as easily as when it did happen."

"Your alarm failed, I suppose."

"I had no alarm. I thought I was in a safe area."

"Do such places exist in Central Otago?"

"None that I would take a chance on now. But it costs a lot of money to buy fire-pots, and a lot more to burn them. I thought I couldn't afford them."

"What does a lot of money mean?"

"It depends on the size of the orchard and the number and severity of the frosts, but equipment can cost two or three hundred pounds to begin with, and using it up to a hundred pounds a night."

"Frost-fighting could cost you five or six hundred pounds a year?"

"Quite easily. The average is less than that, but a man not far from here spent seven hundred pounds last year."

"Was it worth it?"

"Yes, if he had the money to spend. But beginners can't always afford as much as that, and can be ruined in a week."

"Do you get frosts every year?"

"No. But we have to be ready for them every year. Last year some of us couldn't get oil. I lost half a crop that way, but the other half brought a big price."

"You are satisfied with the life year in and year out?"

"Yes. It's an adventurous life, but so is every kind of farming."

"Do your sons stay with you?"

"Some do and some don't, but we are better off in that way than dairy-farmers. The majority in this district have their sons still with them."

"If a man has several sons can the younger ones get started too?"

"Yes, so far. But the day will come when it will not be easy. Fruit farming depends on soil, sun, and water, and not many districts provide those in the right combination at the right time. But it is not a problem yet."

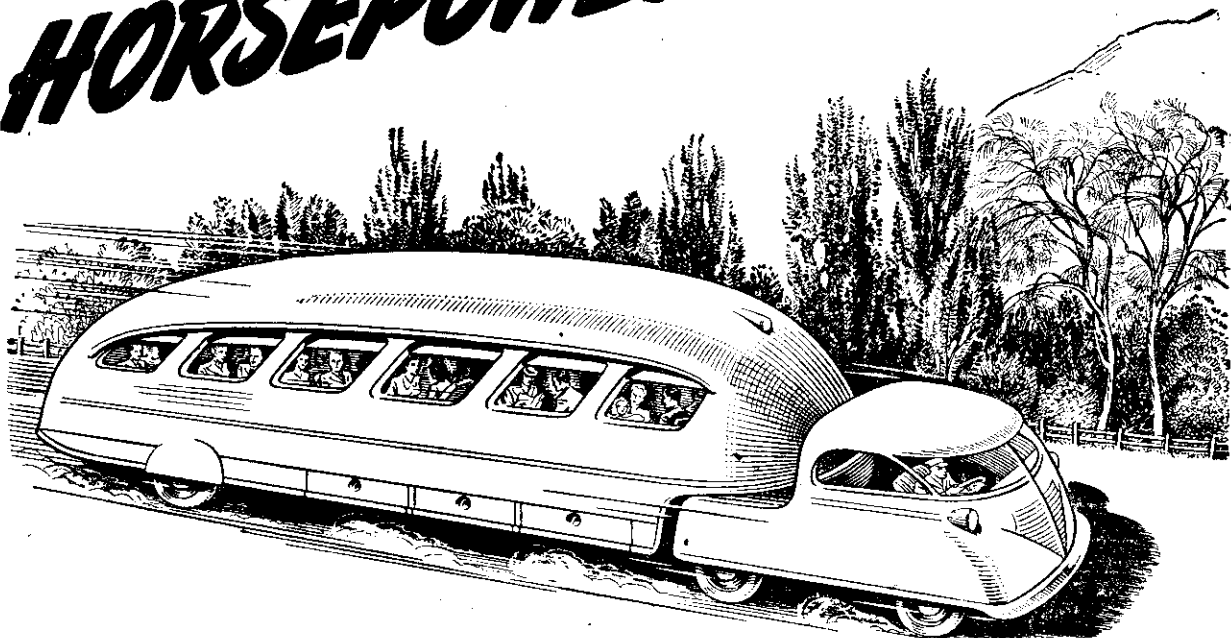
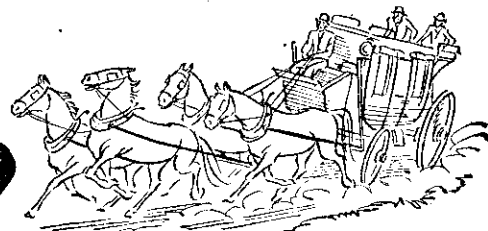
"Perhaps families will give out first."

"It is quite possible. And then Orientals will take our places."

(To be Continued.)

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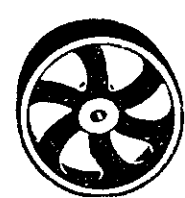
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