

(continued from previous page)

"Not even your takings?"

"No. We have good wash-ups and bad, but the whole district knows our average."

"You are not afraid of competition?"

"No, that doesn't worry us either. Water is our only anxiety. We are both third-generation miners and have our own water-rights, but at present we haven't enough water to keep the nozzles going night and day."

"Because of the season?"

"Yes. Our water comes from the mountains several miles away, but it has been a warm and dry summer, and the creeks are low."

"What happens in winter?"

"The supply stops altogether then because of the frost. But the harder and rougher the winter is the better the supply is next summer."

"How high are you here?"

"Well above 2,000 feet. But Central Otago is a good place for anybody who will stick it out and work. When the water stops we go rabbiting, and that can be just as profitable as mining. I have often made £200 in the off-season with a gun and a couple of dogs."

"Are you the only miners here or are there others?"

"No, there are several others. It is not as it used to be, when you counted miners by the hundred, but there are at least a dozen men round about who live as we do."

"Is gold the only mineral?"

"It's the only mineral worth bothering about. But there is a lot of zircon too. You've heard of zircon, I suppose?"

"I don't think I have. In any case I can't remember what it is."

"Have you heard of tungsten?"

"Yes, that sounds more familiar. Is zircon another name for it?"

"No, but they are related. Every yard of this dirt contains about 1/6 worth of zircon, but we have no means of saving it in commercial quantities."

"It is still reasonably profitable to work the gold? You are not just carrying on for romantic reasons—because your father and grandfather were here before you?"

"Well I suppose I *am* sentimental about that: not only about my father and grandfather, but about a dozen or more generations of mining ancestors in Cornwall. We can trace them back to about 1400. But every acre of this ground contains about £1,700 worth of fine gold, and recovery depends chiefly on water."

"Why has mining ceased in general?"

"Because the water has been taken for irrigation."

"But if you can take £1,700 an acre out of this land, that is as much as good farming land would produce in 200 years, and more than this class of land would produce in 1,000 years."

"That is our argument precisely. We are not destroying good land, but getting the best possible return out of bad land. And we don't destroy it either. Have you seen those larch trees up by the swimming dam?"

"I was there this morning."

"Well, only a few of them were planted. The rest are self-sown, and they are spreading all over the old tailings. If we had the right to fence our worked land it would be a forest in 30 or 40 years."

"Without planting?"

"Without any assistance at all but protection against rabbits and farm

stock. It would pay the country handsomely to give us the right to fence. You can imagine what trees have to fight against here in a hard winter."

"Who would suffer if you fenced?"

"Chiefly the rabbits. Though the trees are winning against all opposition, they would win faster if the opposition were weakened. It is a situation that was not foreseen when the Mining Act was drafted."

"Were you not surprised yourself when the larches began to spread?"

"Yes, I suppose I was. But I'm past that stage now. I see trees as the answer to alluvial mining wherever the tailings retain moisture. There will be a forest here in another hundred years."

(To be continued)

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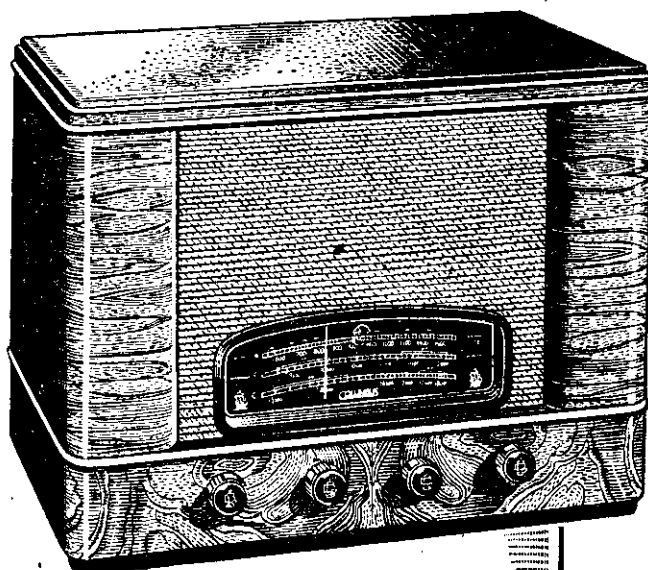
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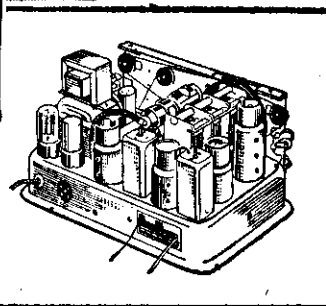
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