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ANOTHER LOOK BACK

By "SUNDOWNER"

BY returning to Otago in March I saw something of the centennial celebrations and caught something of the centennial spirit. If I had seen everything I might have modified my opinion of the smoothness with which everything went, and detected points of friction that participation in two functions only did not reveal; but I don't think that would have happened. And I am sure I should not have become aware of anything mechanical or cold in the spirit of the people.

OTAGO IN MARCH

I have never felt so strongly before that from the Waitaki south there is only one community — one faith, one language, one general plan. There are English and Irish as well as Scots, and on the goldfields especially there are still enduring foreign elements; Germans, Scandinavians, Italians, and Poles. It is noticeable still that on the goldfields Otago was never Scots in origin. Strangers came too fast there,

and poured in from too many directions, for the Scottish planners and directors of the settlement to retain control. From Roxburgh to Alexandra, and from St. Bathans to Naseby, you can forget Captain Cargill and Dr. Burns, and tell yourself that Scotland is twelve thousand miles away. But you can't do that anywhere else. I stayed for a night in Lumsden with a man whose father came from Nottingham at least 70 years ago; who was himself in his fifties, and married to a wife whose father was English too. They had a daughter of 18, and all three noticeably burred their r's. I found too that my own nephews and grand-nephews said they-er for there, Go-er for Gore, rhymed dance with stance, and without a single exception made Kerr into Kair. If there was any softening of the Scottish influence it was in the second generation rather than in the third, but when an old school-mate whose mother was Irish and father German asked me where I'd been all these yee-ers I knew that Scotland had won.

the miners who had followed Gabriel Read there 87 years earlier. There were perhaps 800 people present from all parts of the Dominion, most of them connected in some way with the vanished miners, and at least 600 of them spent some part of the third and last day of the celebrations in church. I did so myself, and could not doubt that a majority of those

THROUGH A CHURCH WINDOW



"To get Otago as a whole in focus it is necessary to look through a church window"

I AM not able to agree with those Otago historians who believe that God ruled the goldfields and that men of God set the standard and tone of life there. Whatever the goldfields were like they

GOLD AND GOD

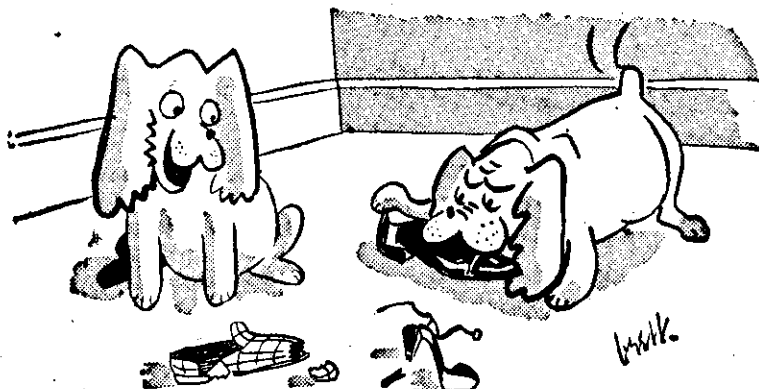
were not centres of piety, and I have very little doubt myself that the godly found all of them uncomfortable places to live in. God was of course higher in His heaven 80 years ago than He is to-day, and I don't want to suggest that Gabriel's Gully and the Dunstan were worked by agnostics who moved on later to Naseby and the Arrow. There was faith enough in all those places to build churches, and no evidence that I know of that unbelievers obstructed or scoffed. When I look back to my own childhood on the goldfields I can see a church there and a Sunday school, but I can't remember Presbyterian Sundays or any thickly religious atmosphere at all. I don't think any of the Commandments meant much but the sixth and the eighth, and when I recall what a change there was when the gold gave out and we moved away and became farmers, I must suppose that religion was accepted on the goldfields rather than pursued, that its influence was indirect rather than direct, the ruling force in a few families and at best a vaguely refining influence on the others.

who filled the pews and aisles and porches were making some kind of acknowledgment of God. There was the fact, too, that the houses of God (two Protestant and one Catholic) were still there to receive them.

I agree, too, that to get Otago as a whole in focus it is necessary to look through a church window. The goldfields were relatively godless because they were usually occupied in haste by men from the ends of the earth. But settlement in general preceded and outlived the goldfields. Nor is it possible to understand Otago to-day unless we remember that it was settled in the first place by men of strong religious faith, and that even the goldfields would have had a different history if those religious pioneers had not established themselves before gold was discovered. Gold disturbed it, enriched it, forever changed it, but to know what the change means we must remember that Otago to-day is the result of the discovery of gold by a community founded in the fear of God. If I may repeat something I said myself in another connection, everything that happened in the sixties, and everything that has happened since, would have happened differently if the pursuit of gold had not cut across the pursuit defined as man's chief end in the Shorter Catechism.

BUT I am bound to say that I wondered if this view was right when I returned to Waitahuna Gully to witness the unveiling of a monument to

IT was a strange experience to meet men and women who had been boys and girls at school with me 57 years earlier and never crossed my path since.



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