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BIG FARMS AND LITTLE

By "SUNDOWNER"

I WAS much struck by a remark made by Dr. Woodhouse when we were walking over one of the cultivated paddocks of Blue Cliffs. Noticing that the grass was much darker on one side of the fence than on the other side, I asked if this was the result of top-dressing.

"Probably," he said, "in that particular case. But I don't really know. It

**TEMPERAMENTAL
PADDOCKS**

would be ridiculous to say that paddocks have temperaments, but I'm often tempted to think that they have. The strangest things happen sometimes. Take that face across the gully. I don't know why the grass is always better there than east and west of it, but it is."

"You mean under the same treatment?"

"Yes. It gets the same treatment in every way. As far as I can judge it has the same soil. But it always gives better results. There is a physical reason if I knew what it is, but I don't."

"So you decide in the meantime that the paddock is temperamental?"

"That of course is a joke—a cloak for my ignorance. But it is not a joke to say that paddocks have their peculiarities. I can't be sure after 25 years' close study that I know one of them."

"If you don't, who does?"

"That's just the point. I may be duller than others or not so dull; see more or see less. But I do look, and keep on looking, and thinking."

"Looking with trained eyes and thinking with a trained mind."

"Well I suppose that's true relatively. I suppose I could say that I'm partly trained—trained to the point of knowing the difference between knowledge and guesswork. But training is not enough in farming. There must be interest and devotion. If a farmer is not fond of his animals he will never get to know them. If he doesn't watch his paddocks as affectionately as he watches changes of mood in his own children he will not get to know them either—and that is the answer to nationalization."

"It would make farming mechanical?"

"Mechanical and soulless. It's horrible to think of land in anybody's hands instead of in the hands of those who love it and have lived always with it—something like having women nationalized and children reared by the State."

BEFORE I reached Longbeach the way had been prepared for me by Mrs. Woodhouse, but I don't think I would have been turned away if I'd arrived unannounced. I suspect that I would still have lunched on wild duck,

**BIG
FARM**

whisky, fruit and cream, and that there would have been the same

order in the house and out in the grounds, though Mrs. Grigg at the time had neither maid nor gardener. It had been raining hard, and the season was early winter, but although there was a good deal of mud on the road by which I approached the home—stead—the wrong road, I discovered—everything was as pleasant inside the cattle-stop as money, space, management, and good taste could make it. I found it embarrassing to have to confess that I had lived all my life in New Zealand without having seen New Zealand's most famous farm.

Those who don't know the story of Longbeach can easily get to know it if they are interested. I knew a part of it before I arrived, but it was a surprise to discover that I had been completely wrong about the most important fact of all—the physical foundations of the estate. Instead of the peat that I had expected to find, I found what the original John Grigg had the wit to see behind the appearances of things—rich firm land (a deep layer of soil on top of clay on top of shingle) temporarily water-logged by blocked artesian springs. Once he had cleared the bed of the Hinds river—a big job in those days—he had only to open the springs to that wide channel to have thousands of acres of arable farm lands, with wealth in perpetuity unless individual or national folly snatched it away.

Originally the estate was from the Hinds river to the Ashburton—approximately 32,000 acres. To-day it is only 4,000 acres. But it is still one of the show pieces of private enterprise, and I did not find myself unsympathetic when Mr. Grigg complained—a little humorously but certainly not with calm resignation—of "the things they do to us in Wellington."

I am sure they do many things that, if I were John Grigg's grandson, I should deeply resent. But I did not come away weeping over Mr. Grigg's pinched life, with his yearlings down to £1,500

and his home only spacious and gracious enough now for an uprooted Indian nabob. I thought "Uncle Walter," as Mr. Grigg kept calling him, had left Mr. Grigg a few feathers to fly with still, and when I said so he did not show me the gate. He showed me his "hope for the Grand National," I thought with more affection than pride, and he asked me to come back when the winter was over and see Longbeach under a summer sky.

But I wish I could remember, and were free to repeat, all the droll things he said about farmers who mix husbandry and politics.



"IT'S horrible to think of land in anybody's hands instead of in the hands of those who love it"

LEFT Longbeach remembering that I had myself been reared on a square mile of country, most of it fertile, but some wet and some stony, and all of it hilly and cold. While my father lived the area neither grew nor shrunk, since

**LITTLE
FARM**

he had an old-fashioned belief in paying as you go, and regarded mortgages and overdrafts as devices of the devil. How he managed to pay his way I was too young at the time to understand, but when I recall that he had 13 children, and sometimes got sixpence for wool, fourpence for butter, and seldom more than fifteen pence for oats, I can imagine now what the story must have been.

My reason for mentioning it here is the fact that farms in New Zealand don't often remain stationary in size, or in prosperity. If they don't expand they seem somehow to contract, and I have often wondered what the reason is when they do neither. I know what the reason was in my father's case, but he was 60 years old when he began to farm, and turned to the land when the decline of mining left him stranded in business.

The smallest farm in our district then was 170 acres, and when I passed it a

(continued on next page)