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Through New Zealand To-day

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pushing on to Switzers; a profitable night as well as most pleasant. My host had been born on the west side of the river and now owned two blocks on

the east side, one on the present river flat, the other on the terrace some hundreds of feet higher up that must have been the river level once. He was a good farmer, with the geniality that comes partly from success, partly from good health and good sense; but he was not a typical Southland farmer. He was not a Scot, not a Presbyterian or a Puritan, not married to a Scottish wife. It was perhaps typical that he owned a trotter or two, since that seems to be one of the ways in which the farmers of Southland conduct their war with Mr. Nash. But he also owned and raced a thoroughbred, shot ducks but apparently did not fish, bred his sheep with great care, but would have nothing to do with cows, and yet could find time to locate a sitting turkey and rescue the clutch as soon as the mother started to trail them through the wet grass.

If I asked him a question he was perfectly frank and open and gave me good answers; but he had lived long enough in Southland to have Southland's caution with strangers. He gave me much information, but there was usually a little pause between my question and his answer, and a touch of emphasis in the answer, that taken together seemed to mean something like this: "I don't know why you asked that question, or what use you will make of the answer, but what I'm telling you is the truth, and I don't care what you do with it."

He was cautious, but he was certainly not conservative. "Those days are done" rounded off most of his discussions and expressed most of his attitudes.

Why did he no longer use draught horses? Because "you couldn't get a man to-day to drive them. Those days are done."

Did farmers still use drain-pipes? "Yes, when they can get them. But bull-dozers make the bed for them. Ditching days are done."

Wouldn't cows on that country pay better than sheep? "They might, but who would do the work? I've no family of my own, and it's useless trying to hire milkers. You can't get men up at four o'clock these days, and work them seven days a week. Those days are done."

And so it went on. If farmers find it hard to change their ways, he gave no sign that he did. He had come through three or four revolutions in 20 or 30 years, and did not once ask what the world was coming to. It remained a very good world to him, and I could not help thinking as I talked to him how much wiser he was than the moaners and growlers.

I READ a brilliantly horrible story once about the death of an elephant. It was the first elephant the author, a young official in Burma, had ever shot, and he had no desire to shoot it. But his prestige as an Englishman was at stake. If he refused to shoot, the contempt he knew the Burmese already

had for him would make further work among them impossible. If he did shoot, he was likely to miss or to perpetrate a slow and muddled murder

DEATH OF A HORSE



"YOU couldn't get a man to drive them"

which he had not the stomach to endure.

He shoots and hits; hits several times again, and finally brings the elephant to its knees. But it will not die. Even when it rolls over it goes on breathing and bleeding until he is sick with disgust and shame.

I CAN'T remember at the moment where I read it, or how long ago, but it came back to me when a horse lay down in the Kelso show-ring and died slowly in the presence of all the spectators. It was, I was told, a very old horse to be competing in a show-ring, but it was like the elephant; it went down but would not die. Women turned their backs on it, but when they faced round again expecting everything to be over it gave a great shudder and gasp and came back to life for several minutes.

The point of course was that its death was horrible because it was the death of a horse. All, or nearly all, of the spectators were farmers or farmers' wives who would have thought very little of the death of a calf and nothing at all of the death of a sheep. I have seen farmers' daughters and farmers' wives attending farmers' days in slaughter-houses and chattering and laughing through an afternoon of butchery. But horses don't often die, and except in mercy are hardly ever killed. Their deaths, when they do happen, are an event and a shock, and only the insensitive take them calmly. As long as she lay in the ring this game old candidate for ribbons made everybody silent and depressed; and many, when a tractor came and dragged her away by the neck, looked the other way for five minutes and pretended not to know.

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