

WORDS AND MUSIC: Sportsmen's Language

"Sailors Are Fortunate, Anglers Self-Condemed; But The Climbers Are The Luckiest Of All," Says "THID" In This Discourse On The Language Of Sportsmen

ALTHOUGH they will be the last to realise it, and will doubtless blush for shame to see the statement in print, sportsmen are also musicians and poets. Rugby players may consider themselves exonerated from this accusation. Their nomenclature is as utilitarian as the game they play. In its exciting moments, Rugby does contribute some verve to the language. The worst of sporting writers occasionally discovers some spirit in words when he comes to describe the wing-three-quarter's run down the length of the field to force down. But Wing-Three-Quarter and the now defunct Wing-Forward are about the only touches of genius in naming that the game can boast. Full-Back is precisely what it should be. Five-Eighths and Centre, Forward and Half-Back—these are all mathematical in their dull accuracy.

Cricket suffers in the same way. The man who bowls is simply the Bowler, and the man who bats is the Batsman. Each man in the field is described like the specifications attached to an architect's plan. Mid-on, and Long-Off, and Silly-Slips, like the names for Rugby, have the attraction of their associations, but cannot claim true euphony.

Fencing doesn't do so badly—if you can call fencing a sport and not just a deadly exercise which has become more and more polite as human beings—as individuals, I mean, not in the mass—have learnt to control their tempers. The jargon of modern swordsmanship retains plenty of traces of its picturesque and hybrid origin.

Yachting Is Poetry

But think of those other sports where men get away from their playing fields among the factory chimneys. There's sailing, now, with yachts Beating to Windward, or Tacking off a Lee Shore. There's the Mizzen and the Main, and the For'ard Hand on the Halliards. These are perfect names for a sport which in itself is poetry. It seems necessary to get off the flat country and on to water or hills before this inspiration in naming comes to sportsmen.

The loveliest names any sportsmen use in New Zealand are surely those two found on the map somewhere near the head of the Dart Valley in Otago. Stargazer and Moonraker are the names of two mountains. If the man who named them had not been stealing the names which sailors give to two high-



From a snowfield at 6000 feet on the Sealey Range a skier looks north up the Hooker Glacier Valley to Mount Cook. The Maori name means "Cloud-Piercer"

flying sails he might be recorded by pioneer historians as the truest poet ever to walk our back-country. That they are inferior mountains matters very little.

Not far in distance from these two is Aspiring, a perfect name for a mountain which seems from some angles as if it really is aspiring towards the sky. Further south is Tutoko, and no Maori name, with its soft vowels and incidental consonants, ever managed to conjure up quite the same picture of wild beauty. Close by is Madeleine.

Ladies Left at Home

Euphonic names are surely the best for mountains. Moonraker here takes first place, but even mountaineers sometimes remember fair ladies left at home and Madeleine shares pride of place in this class of nomenclature with Elie de Beaumont, one of the few good names in New Zealand's best alpine district. It is close to Cook, that historically significant name which is surely the greatest reflection on the language ever perpetrated and maintained by that unromantic body, the Geographic Board. The Maori name of Aorangi is far better, but neither is so good as Vampire, for a fierce, narrow, peak of loose and crumbling rock and hanging blue ice above the Mueller Glacier. Maunga Ma suggests something of the same disrepute surrounding all the peaks seen along that Moorhouse Range. The rock is bad, and the ice is steep. They are actually easy enough, but they look nasty. Tasman is also saddled with the name of an explorer—and this is the most beautiful mountain in New Zealand, the hardest to climb, the greatest of all in reputation. It is saved by the name given to one shoulder: Silberhorn,

although it seems a pity—quite apart from Hitler—that we must retain the "b" and forget in this case the slim suitability of the English "silver."

Hicks—or St. David?

Another explorer, Dampier, gives his name to the third highest mountain in New Zealand. He is one of the few who left behind names we could fit to those fine-shaped masses and not feel ashamed. La Perouse is good too; but there are faddists, and purists who want us to call St. David's Dome by the magnificent name of Hicks. This worthy gentleman is unfortunate. Let his name be given to some creek or swamp on the West Coast. It will not last on a mountain that requires and demands something better.

There are too many of those proper names in Tasman Park and Aorangi Park. Time has given many of them some of the attraction of the peaks they endorse, but the most sympathetic ear receives a shock when the eye sees the form of a mountain and the ear hears the name of Haeckel.

Anglers Are Unlucky

Mountaineers have more opportunity than anyone else to play with poetry in their sport. Sailors have the points of their ships to name, and they have made the best use of their chances. Take only the most obvious ones: the keel, the waterline, and sheer, the tiller; and, besides these, all those hundred and fifty names for the different ropes, and the handy labels attached to such seamanly tools as the marlinspike.

Anglers are unlucky. They have pretended since Walton that theirs is the sport of gentlemen. They dwell lovingly on the fact that they fish in peaceful

airs, and they like every novice to imagine them strolling in the sun, or heaving rubbered thighs with pompous grace through deep, cool, slowly-flowing waters. The impression is entirely wrong. "Irideus" explains it so much better than I could, for he is an angler making a confession that angling is, like many things, not entirely what it seems to be. I can only point out that the very word angling makes me think of some gangling fish uncomfortable upon a hook. Rod, line and reel, even the utilitarian creel, these are all cruel words; each one of them exposing a sport which is the delight of men who take their pleasure by finding peace and gentility in the struggles of an animal which really has no chance. I have confessed before on this page that I catch fish; but I manage it by tickling them, so that we both have pleasure, notwithstanding the pain which this may cause the authorities. The authorities deserve it. I am in no sympathy with them. And they must first catch me, which is harder and will give them more sport than catching fish.

If I want to prove anything by this discourse, it is not that anglers are wicked, or that sailors and climbers are poets, and footballers just the muddled oafs for which they are commonly recognised; but that each sport seems to get the names it deserves.

Sailors are fortunate, anglers self-condemned; but the climbers are the luckiest of all. Just mention for me the names of the Arrowsmith Mountains: they are Jagged, Red Peak, North and Couloir. If there is a better pentameter in the language I shall take to bowls.



Wrigley's Chewing Gum freshens your palate and increases the pleasure of smoking. Chewing Wrigley's helps keep your teeth strong and healthy—there are two good reasons why. (1) Each time you chew, Wrigley's polishes the precious enamel of your teeth. (2) This healthful chewing gum massages the gums and stimulates the flow of lymph necessary to keep them firm. Strong, firm gums are the foundation of strong, firm teeth. Three delicious flavours—P.K. (peppermint), Spearmint (garden mint), Juicy Fruit (sweet). NZU26