

Finding and Keeping

by "SUNDOWNER"

I FOUND myself wondering at a sale the other day why Bruce Stronach found only "good people" in the back country. Was it a case of seeing best the people he knew best, starting with himself, or of finding himself so happy in the back country that everything was tolerated and forgiven? His own explanation in the introduction to *Musterer on Molesworth* is that "the other kind of person doesn't

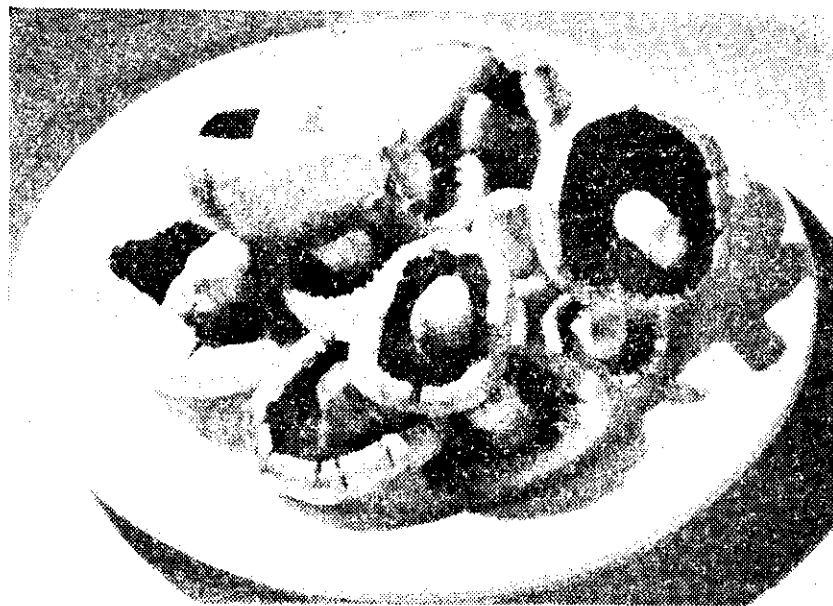
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thrive there or stay there." But I don't find it sufficient. I think the proportion of bad ones is about the same everywhere, and that if the few born bad in the back country usually find it expedient to move, the migration of bad ones from the front country will do more than fill their places. It is traditional to say that the back country boys are all MEN. I am always saying it myself; and if we mean no more when we say it than that most back country men are strong and tough, it is a safe enough generalisation. But I am not sure that we can be as sweeping morally—unless

kindness wipes out all faults, as I often think it does.

I have found thieves in the back country, bullies and braggarts. I have found pretenders there, especially social pretenders and unblushing liars. Once, but once only, I met a man in the back country who refused a hungry caller food. I remember that because it was so strange. I am not sure that Mackenzie was a bad man, but legend makes him a thief. Murders have been committed in the back country, poisonings and rapes. Illicit distillers will perhaps get by when the moral sheep are separated from the moral goats, but the back country is their favourite haunt. I have met only one of them, and if I would not choose him for a companion at a Beethoven recital, I found him a clean and cheerful hut-mate in the — — mountains.

I can however think of another explanation of Bruce Stronach's admiration for musterers and back country shepherds. I can convey it best by repeating



"Is it a sin to take what nobody has sown?"

a story told to me 30 years ago by M. C. Keane. One coach passenger asked another how he endured the flies in the hotel lavatory. "I don't" the second man said. "I go there only at meal times, when the flies are all in the dining-room." I think perhaps that Bruce

Stronach went to Molesworth when the bad boys were where I was last week.

BECAUSE I found my shirt too heavy a burden in yesterday's heat, I took it off while I was digging potatoes and

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