



LEFT: The Buller River, near its outlet from Lake Rotaiti—and close by the site of Temple Sutherland's imaginary township of "Waggoners' Bend"

## TALES FROM WAGGONERS' BEND

WHERE the Nelson-West Coast highway runs along the upper reaches of the Buller River, somewhere near its junction with the Gowan, lies the imaginary settlement of "Waggoners' Bend." From here during the depression years a man and his wife and their dog set out for the surrounding bush, where for two years they tried to scrape an income of gold from the mountain streams, living on rabbits and eels and trout and wild pig and deer. The story of their adventures in the rugged country around the headwaters of the Buller is told in Temple Sutherland's book *The Golden Bush*. Listeners will be able to hear a series of 26 readings from the book, starting next Monday, May 3, from Station 2XN, and continuing later from other stations. The readings are selected and read by Basil Clarke, and the broadcasts from 2XN will be heard at 9.4 p.m. each day from Monday to Friday. They will begin from 2YZ on June 8 and from 3YA on July 19.

*The Golden Bush* is basically the life story of the author's cocker spaniel, named Angus. The book opens with his arrival at "Waggoners' Bend," and closes with his death there many years later. The record of his growth and development, his exploits as a hunter and retriever, as a show-ring competitor and a source of domestic pleasure to his owners is carefully and affectionately set down. But the book contains a larger story than this, and for many readers the real interest of *The Golden Bush* will come from its theme of life in the New Zealand mountain country on the boundaries of Nelson, Marlborough and the West Coast.

The book has something of a pioneer quality about it, in its rough humour,

its collection of curious backwoods characters, the jokes and tall tales of life along the frontiers of civilisation in this country. There are accounts of deer-stalking expeditions, and of life as a prospector found it. There are many descriptions of wild life and of the mountain and bush scenery to which the author is always sensitive, and there are anecdotes about such old-timers as George Moonshine, the Murchison prospector.

The story of "Waggoners' Bend" will be a familiar one to those who lived in the back country during the depression years. The settlement took its name from the early pioneering days when it was an overnight stop for the waggons and coaches that first linked the West Coast with Nelson in the early 'seventies. On the lower terraces of the Buller the drivers unhitched their six-horse teams in the shadow of the steep bush-clad slopes. Later the settlement boomed when it became a link on the projected Midland Railway between Nelson and the southern Main Trunk Line. But when work ceased on the railway the hutments, houses, workshops and stores disappeared as the engineers, clerks, draughtsmen, blacksmiths, tunnellers, platelayers, surveyors and hard-rock men were transferred to other jobs.

Temple Sutherland was one of those who stayed on among the concrete slabs and foundations, the rusty tins, junk and broken bottles, the blackberry and fern and piri-piri. His friends were Melody the storekeeper, the young postmaster, Waka the Maori and Bluey Benson, Old Dale, Clint Bolton and a number of other prospectors who still worked over the smaller rivers which flowed down from the mountains into the Buller.

Further back in the cleared valleys were the runholders Alan McRobert and his brother Norman, crack shots and expert deer-stalkers, with whom the author spent many days hunting and roaming through the forest country.

After the railway gangs departed, Temple Sutherland was transferred to the Main Highways pay-roll and lived for a while on the earnings of his haulage truck, either under contract or by day hire. When that source of income dried up he decided to take to the bush himself and try his hand as a digger on the alluvial river flats. His first claim was in "Goose Valley," where he set up camp with his wife Sam, and his cocker spaniel Angus.

He soon learned how to operate a sluice-box, and spent his days washing the pay-dirt, and his evenings out hunting with a .22 repeater the rabbits, deer and wild pigs which came down to the bush edge; or fishing for the trout, eels and fresh-water crayfish of the river. He had been lured to the gold by the tales of an old prospector, who used to come into Melody's store and pay for his purchases from an aspirin bottle full of gold-dust which he carried in his waistcoat pocket. But he had no illusions that he was going to "get rich quick." Later, when he had moved on to "Josephine Flat" and "Merriman's," he and his family were living on 16 or 17 shillings a week.

Some of the most interesting of this series of readings describe the author's experiences stalking deer with one or other of the McRobert brothers, Alan and Norman. Alan had lived since childhood with deer about him, and had a naturalist's powers of observation. When he was out after deer he seemed

to be able to outthink the beasts and always had a counter for the cunning of hind or stag. Deer-killing was an important part of his farming operations, his aim being to destroy as many as possible—usually about 200 every year—to prevent them from ruining his sheep and cattle pastures, where they grazed in herds by night and often by day. Wild pigs were also hunted, and the old tuskers killed off before the lambing season began.

Alan's brother Norman was equally gifted, and (it was said) once stalked a sitting hind and tweaked a hair out of her tail. On another occasion he stalked a stag for over seven hours, penetrated the cordon of its harem of 20 hinds, shot the stag from seven yards on a steep slope and held its kicking legs to prevent it rolling down the hill and damaging the tines of its 18-point antlers.

The author always keeps his eye open for the humorous aspects of life in the mountains, and some of his best yarns are about incidents which turn against himself. After two years in the bush he and his wife returned to "Waggoners' Bend," where they went into business once more as haulage contractors. When the depression ended the prospect of prosperous and peaceful years ahead was upset by the outbreak of war. The author went to Nelson to live, and spent the war as a truck-driver for the R.N.Z.A.F. Both his wife and his dog became seriously ill during their years in town, but afterwards they all returned to the Bend for a "last holiday." Angus had survived an attack of paralysis and an internal tumour, but he had now become so old that the vet. recommended his destruction.

The book ends with a description of Angus's last days and an account of what his loss meant to the childless couple with whom he had shared the hard years of youth: "In still, leafy places, where the sun glints through on the root flanges, the mosses and the mould; on hungry plains of red sorrel and green lichens . . . by little creeks and swift-flowing rivers . . . in the chill of an autumn daybreak when the voice of a red stag comes down from the swirling mists above—you will be with us in these and a thousand other memories."

*The Golden Bush* is the record of an amateur and an enthusiast, a man who fell in love with the wild bush lands and their hard-bitten inhabitants, a romantic innocent who has set down his story with exuberance and not a little sentiment. But it is a rare story and one that catches the imagination. Temple Sutherland, the author and narrator of the book, mentions in a preface that although the story is true, all the names of places and people have been changed. He was born in Scotland but has lived in New Zealand for many years. His book was published largely through the interest of the New Zealand Literary Fund, which recommended it to a publisher in England, where it was issued last year. A New Zealand edition sold out quickly, and a second has been ordered. The author is at present seeking material for a second book, which will describe his experiences in the King Country and North Auckland.