

The Sick Stay Out of Sight

by "SUNDOWNER"

I SUPPOSE it is good for us to go to hospital now and again

—not so much to get overhauled and patched up as to get readjusted. We all know that the world is full of sickness as we know that it is full of sin, but while the sinners have a way of making us aware of them—ten thousand ways, pleasant and unpleasant—

MAY 7 the sick creep out of sight.

It was a shock to me, the day I went into hospital, to realise that I had entered a world of which I knew next to nothing, that although hospital doors are always open I had passed them for 70 years without going in, that I had shirked all the obligations of the healthy to the sick, and never asked myself in what diverse pains they were met behind those walls.

I still don't know whether the thirteen patients in my ward were the casualties of a hundred or of a thousand homes. From the fact that I was the oldest occupant of a bed and that the youngest was a boy of seven, I concluded that we were an average group facing about the average amount of pain and danger. In a fortnight only one of the thirteen died and eight went home cured or convalescent—a tribute to the skill of modern surgery, but an indication also of the number of sufferers waiting; for beds were filled again as fast as they could be emptied and changed. There was never a day without a procession to the theatre or a night without a visit from a surgeon worried about a patient's progress. My own surgeon came twice a day for the first week, and even during the second week found time to see me once a day; and that primarily was professional conscience and zeal. But I felt with all the surgeons that they came not merely to see that we escaped complica-

tions but to fix the earliest date at which we could be safely sent home. The pressure of those waiting to come in was continuous. I aroused jealousy because I had been given a bed the day the doctor ordered it. The usual experience seems to be a delay of days, weeks, or months according to the urgency of the case and the prestige of the surgeon. It shames me to know that I had never once thought about the misery of that situation, never realised what it means to wait week after week for an operation of which you are probably afraid already and imagine in your morbid condition to be getting more dangerous as the days pass. I was not long in hospital before I realised what it meant, and when the day came for me to go home I felt that every eye in the ward was watching me sadly as I put on my clothes and following me enviously, and perhaps bitterly, as I walked down the corridor.

The sick, a distinguished physician said to me once, are all selfish. It would be truer, I think, to say self-centred, and kinder to remember why.

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IF I am not careful rabbits and hares will soon have stripped my ignorance as bare as they once stripped my trees. I knew when the evidence began to accumulate that I would have to accept refutation in hares, which, though it is not quite in line with

MAY 10 *Leviticus*, is near enough to make doubters careful.

But I have not handled many hares in my life. Rabbits I have shot, trapped, skinned, and gutted for so many years and in so many places that the thought would make me sick if I had not been

so thoroughly conditioned in childhood. But I had not once noticed that they eat their food twice. Here is a note from H.C.M., Dunedin:

For many years I handled wild rabbits, also the tame and domesticated breeds, under many varied conditions. For at least 20 years I had wild rabbits running in a large pen fifty feet by ten feet, with plenty of light and sunshine. There were also dark huddle boxes in which the does could keep to themselves. These rabbits were never without food, for the simple reason that they were bedded in hay always and fed on carrots, cabbage and turnips according to what supplies were available. Incidentally, when fed on turnips they could eat twice their own body weight in seven to ten days. But in spite of these generous food conditions it was my experience on many occasions to find their stomachs crammed full with hard dry faeces which were often a great nuisance to me. One of my tasks was to give an anaesthetic by passing a stomach tube down the oesophagus, and the faeces both inhibited the easy passage of the soft tube and delayed the action of the anaesthetic. Wild rabbits under special feeding experiments in which the urine and faeces had to be kept separate regularly, ate their faeces even when they had an abundance of fresh food. The usual academic comment on this was that it seemed to be nature's way of making complete use of the vitamins.

What I can say in rebuttal I can't think—unless perhaps this: that laboratory rabbits live in cages and no doubt develop morbid habits.

But the tricks rabbits play in their alimentary tracts are nothing to their reproductive cleverness, if we may believe the author of *British Mammals* (Matthews). I hesitate to repeat what he says, since I read it during a period of sickness and will be suspected of having been at the time less than lucid. Nor can I now quote or verify, since I no longer have access to the book. But the fact left in my mind by one hasty reading is that female rabbits have the power to terminate pregnancies by a physiological assimilation of the embryos. If that is true, every farmer, and in fact, every New Zealander, should get down on his knees and thank God for the millions of rabbits their mothers decided not to produce.

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IT would appear that it was quite within the power of a praying mantis to build her nursery on my shirt sleeve while I was stripped to my singlet in the garden. Two correspondents who have actually witnessed the operation have described it to me in letters, one from Blenheim and the

MAY 12 other from Hastings, and

I gather that less than an hour was necessary in both cases. The accounts differ slightly in detail, one correspondent having noticed a slight movement forward from cell to cell, while the other detected no movement at all. One saw the exuded material as "a clear froth exactly like beaten egg-white," while the other saw it changing colour and drying and hardening and "ejected like a ribbon of toothpaste from a tube." But there is no real conflict in important matters. One thinks the egg-case was completed in "about 20 minutes," while the other says she "watched for a long time"; but 20 minutes is a long time to stand and stare. The real wonder seems to be how so small a body can produce so much material in such a short session.

(To be continued)

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New Plymouth Discussion Group



THE ZXP Women's Programme panel which last week discussed the problem of parents' visits to children in hospital. From left, seated: Cydie Strang, Beryl Jameson and Betty Fleming. Standing behind is Prudence Gregory, who has conducted the ZXP Women's Programme since December last, and who has just been appointed Women's Hour Personality at 4ZB. The panel will be heard again on June 9 discussing "Whether Men Really Like Intelligent Women"

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