

to the settlers of Gore. It was a long and a hard ride, and he finally entered the town in the morning, only a minute or two before the slow goods. The townspeople gathered round quickly.

"Hurry," he yelled. "There's a raiding party on the way. Rustlers have come down over the border."

Here and there in the crowd "raiding party" struck instant fear into the hearts of guilty men. Without a questioning word, they hurried off to the Hokonui to dismantle and hide their stills. The remainder stood firm and mocked the tired and dusty rider. The border held no threat outside the Rugby season.

Garry was filled with bitterness. Could these tenderfoot fools not see the danger? Would they not take his warning? More weary now but his resolve unbroken, he wheeled his horse and headed towards the open range. Even if he had to bring back the rustlers' dead bodies, he would show these people proof.

GARRY had the eyes of a desert hawk, and he had gone not a mile when he saw it—a lazy curl of smoke leaning on the morning air. He slowed Silver to a walk, coaxed him up a bank and looked down to a grassy dip. Here was no fire for branding irons, but five burly transport operators at smoko. But Garry knew them for what they were. He could see them moving now, loading bobby calves into trucks, and loading them within yards of the railway line. The 30-mile limit might never have existed. Here was as clear a case of rustling as he was ever likely to see.

Slithering down the slope, Garry confronted the rustlers.

"Well you hombres," he said, his voice pitched low, "it looks like a red-handed catch."

The five men swung round with a curse. They looked closely at the cowboy rig and realisation flooded them all at once.

"A traffic officer in unplain clothes," they yelled in unison. "You've got nothing on us. We've not gone an ounce above our axle weight."

"You'll stretch for this," vowed Garry.

The transport operators fell silent and looked again, more closely this time. "Where's your badge of identity, officer? Produce your uniform cap."

"These," cried Garry, "are my badges," and he tugged at his guns.

The operators cast their last doubts aside. "A hold-up," they snarled and began a threatening advance.

Garry pulled again at his guns. But the Colts stuck fast and couldn't be moved. Outnumbered and outmanoeuvred, he swung Silver abruptly round and scattered the outlaws as he made for the road. But it was a brief respite. Running hard, the operators piled into their trucks and roared down the road in pursuit.

Hemmed in by high flanking hedges, Garry drove the gallant Silver hard. But the horse, jaded by its ride through the night, began to falter and the gap closed quickly. It was a desperate race. Failure and capture reared suddenly up in front of Garry as he galloped towards a one-way bridge, for dead in the



SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

AGE-OLD COVENANT

by "SUNDOWNER"

I NEVER call on Tip to help me to yard my sheep without remembering a remark made by

someone somewhere that the age-old covenant between man and dog was signed voluntarily and remains free of commitments on both sides. I don't know whether dogs are descended from wolves or

MAY 15 from jackals or from both, but their first association with man must have been brought about by self-interest. It must have paid dogs to follow human hunters and helped human hunters to have dogs chasing beside them. Hundreds of years no doubt passed before dogs had the wit to see that it was always worth while to follow men and before men realised that trailing dogs were a good defence against surprise at night and their best chance against fast animals by day. How long it took for that mutual helpfulness to lead to a constant association it is of course impossible to say, but when it did happen it was something quite different from the association between men and other domestic animals. A horse begins as a

centre of the bridge was a rancher's lorry.

There was only one chance now, and a slim one. Crouching low in the saddle, Garry twisted Silver off the road and raced him towards the river bank. It was a swift stream, but narrow. Gathering all its remaining strength, the horse took off in a leap that lived for ever in the memory of pursued and pursuers alike. It was a magnificent jump. But soil erosion had done its deadly work and as Silver's forefeet struck the opposite bank the earth crumbled beneath him. Horse and rider fell back into the water.

Garry crawled out on a sandy reach a mile below the bridge. Of Silver there was no sign at all. Wet and cold and made miserable by his failure, he struck off across country and rejoined the main road. He had no option now. He had to tramp back to town. Garry detested walking as only a cowboy can. But that stubborn Western streak held him silent when he might well have asked for a ride. Even when his feet began to hurt he held doggedly to his course. If he had to die, he wanted to die with his boots on.

EVERYONE in the neighbourhood was upset about Silver's disappearance.

They could not understand how he had strayed. And they were surprised when Garry sold his paddock and declared he had ridden his last horse. But then Garry was full of surprises. "No sir," he told the librarian when he proudly produced the next sack of new Westerns. "Never again. Give me something quiet and slow flowing. A pastoral novel for me."

captive, passes through a period of slavery, and may, if it is lucky, approach but not quite reach the status of a man who has to report twice a day to the police. It is the same with elephants, camels, donkeys, mules and all other transport animals that I can at present call to mind. Not one of them attached himself voluntarily to a man to begin, or stayed with him longer than man made him. Dogs chose men as deliberately as men chose dogs. Later, when they refused to work they often died, but men have often died for the same reason, and not often suffered no penalty at all.

MY father, who was over 40 before barbed wire was invented, spent his last 40 years cursing it at fairly regular intervals. I can't remember a world without barbed wire, but living with it has not reconciled me to it or made me laugh at my father's outbursts. As often as I rip my clothes on it or tear my hands, I wish with the

MAY 20 Texan quoted in Walter Prescott Webb's book *The Great Plains*, that "the man who invented barbed wire had it all wound around him in a ball and the ball rolled into hell." But clothes can be patched and skin left to grow again. It is the incurable injuries and irretrievable losses that make me properly mad—torn teats in cows, severed tendons in horses, perforated flanks in dogs. When I saw Elsie from a distance today refusing a drink to her calf I thought it was just her way of teaching her baby that life is more than mother's milk. When Will told me an hour or two later that she had a badly torn teat I remembered with sudden shame that I had removed a chain of fence when a similar accident happened two years ago and neglected to remove a second chain because that involved grubbing out some gorse. Now there is a very real risk that Elsie will remain a three-quarters cow whatever I do to heal her. Although she is the victim of my negligence, it was an Illinois farmer who made that negligence so destructive. I don't know whether it is significant or not that he lived to be 93 and his rival inventor to be a hundred. It could mean, and I am ready to think that it does, that in those two cases the Devil looked after his own.

I READ today in an interview with a visitor from South America that two of the important dates in the history of Argentina are 1840 and 1848: 1840 because it was the year in which the first Lincoln sheep arrived, and 1848 because it brought the first Shorthorn bull. In New Zealand we remember, now and again, the first dead sheep.

MAY 24 we sent overseas in ice, but I have never heard of any celebration of the arrival of living animals. There is no doubt a record somewhere of the first pedigree ram imported, and perhaps of the first pedigree bull, but it would cause mild surprise if someone suggested that the dates should be public holidays. Sheep and cattle feed most of us and clothe most of us, build



"Dogs chose men as deliberately as men chose dogs"

our houses, bridge our rivers, and make our roads, but it does not occur to us that they deserve a day of our time occasionally, and our thoughts for what they are worth. They are more realistic in South America. The pioneers they celebrate there walked in on four legs and gave each State its character. In a few years there were more sheep and cattle than men (including the gauchos). In 50 years there were 20 times as many, and far more than half of them were English in origin. Here, too, our animals outnumber us now by 20 to one, but we are a little afraid to make a fuss about it. We would sooner have the mark of a sheep on our minds than carry a ram on our watch chains.

THERE must often have been as good years as this for autumn colours, but I can't remember anything better. I have always supposed that what robs us of the colour northern countries enjoy in autumn is our autumn wind, but my pines, and even my macrocarpas, still bear the marks of a salt gale from the sea that raged for three

MAY 28 days and nights a few weeks ago. Yet most of the deciduous trees have been showing warm colour for a fortnight. The poplars, I confess, are disappointing; but fruit trees (especially pears), chestnuts, elms, and silver birch, glow in the morning mist till the mist itself looks warm. Some of the fruit trees, unfortunately, have forgotten what season it is. I have seen blossom on apples, pears, and plums, and have been told that in the frost-free areas round Lyttelton Harbour the pear trees were recently white. No trees here have been as skittish as that, but one of our lilacs is in bloom.

Inevitably, too, the prophets are busy. We are going to have a hard winter, they assure us. I never hear a gardener using the *post hoc* argument. It is never "This is happening because of that," but always "That will happen because of this." Prophecy, in spite of its risks, can never be disproved at the time. Afterwards no one remembers.

(To be continued)