

Journey to Queensland

by "SUNDOWNER"

WE were not ten minutes on our journey when I saw Ransom. He was watching me as a horse watches you when you approach from behind, not turning round to look at you, but facing away as if he neither saw you nor cared. Only horses can't grin. Ransom was grinning broadly, and eloquently, telling me without saying a word that it was a huge joke to see me there and to be caught there himself.

Ransom is one of my test cases when I think about the value of education. When I first saw him 20 years ago he was asleep in his mother's arms. When I saw him last three months ago he was on his way to North Canterbury to break in a dozen young horses; and he seemed genuinely amused when I suggested that there were safer ways of earning a living. Now here he was with a mate of 23 on his way to Queensland to break in horses on out-back stations. There was good money in it, he said, and no special risk if you were neither brutal nor reckless. A horse was dangerous only when he was afraid of you. Knock him about and he will always be dangerous.

There were no special rules for overcoming his fear. The great thing was

not to add to it. If you made him more nervous you were going the wrong way. If his confidence seemed to be growing you could be sure that your method was right.

"What about your own confidence?" I asked. "Isn't the secret of success knowing that you can ride him whatever he does when you mount?"

"I don't think so. It is certainly important to be able to stay in the saddle once you are there. But if you have handled him properly that will not be difficult. It is two years since a horse tried to buck me off, and he had been made half mad before I got him."

"Outlaws are not outlaws to begin with?"

"Not often. It can happen, I suppose. But the outlaws you see in the ring are made into outlaws deliberately. If a man comes along who can ride them to a standstill, he is not allowed to do it. If he did, there would soon be no money in them."

Well there must be a lot of horses in the world that no boy of 20 has ridden, but I accept Ransom's story so far as it goes. What interests me most however is the distance he has travelled in six or seven years. If he had gone to High



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School and University he would now perhaps have been a Bachelor of Arts. But it is unlikely that he would have been able to tame an outlaw; I don't think he would have been able to shear a sheep in four minutes or shoe a horse in half an hour; he would not have trained and run dogs in trials; and I am sure he would not be in Queensland making more money in a week in a

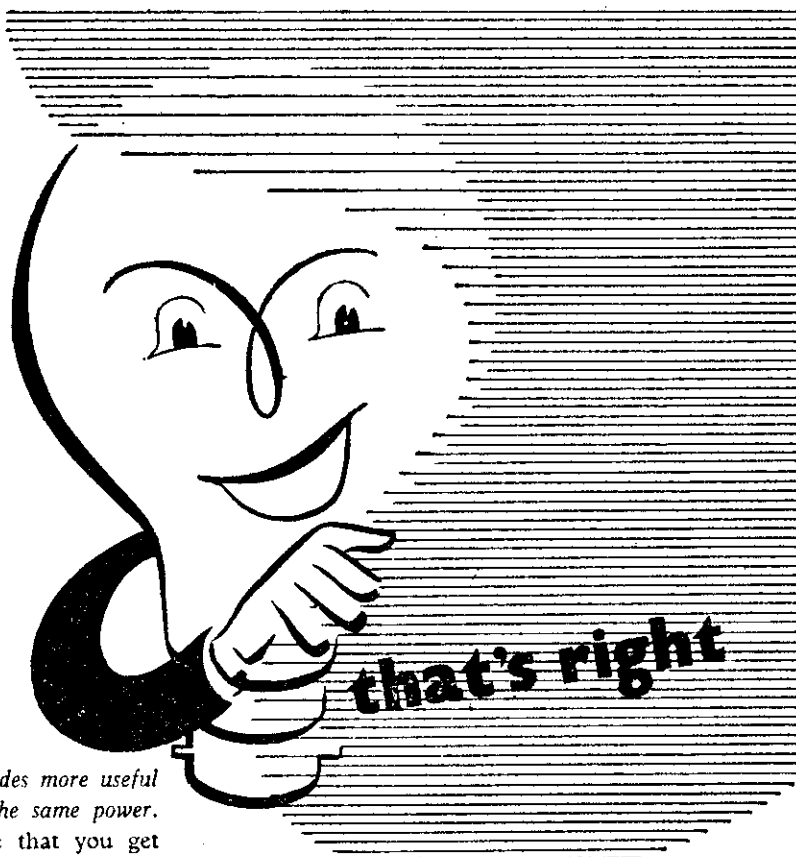
stock yard than I have usually been able to make in two weeks in a "profession."

* * *

[N a journey of a thousand miles north from Sydney I saw 20 sheep. They were three or four hundred yards away and could have been Romneys. They were certainly not Merinos. But as I

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