



Shepherd's Calendar

£200,000 REWARD

by "SUNDOWNER"

ATEN-TON load of anything on a truck—potatoes, wool, hay, or wheat—makes us look twice. I sometimes met 14-ton loads in America travelling at 60 miles an hour, but I abstained from a second look then in case I was engulfed as they shot past. Today, however, while Theo has caulked and puttied the boat in which we are fish in a shark, snake,

JUNE 26 crab, and groper-infested estuary, I have been looking at a 12,000-ton load (150,000 bags) of sorghum and wondering how it will all go into the hold of a ship. It is, of course, not on a truck or a lorry. It is a stack on the ground 20 feet high, 50 feet deep, and at least a thousand feet long; and I am told that there is another stack of the same size on the waterfront in Brisbane. There are no doubt bigger heaps of grain in Australia, and very much bigger in Canada and Russia, but I have not seen them. I can't help seeing this Queensland heap, because it is necessary to climb a hill to see round it or past it or over it.

It has, however, amused me to compare the answers I get when I ask where it came from and where it is going. One man, a lawyer, "hadn't a clue," though he can't get into his house without seeing it, or eat his breakfast, or go to bed. The editor of a newspaper thought it was going to India to be made into bread, but could not say where it was grown. A cattle farmer knew that it was grown in Queensland—"This state will grow anything"—but thought it a scandal that it should lie there exposed to the weather. He sup-

posed somebody would buy it and take it away.

The answer ought to be that it comes from half a million acres in the Central Highlands, cultivated by the Queensland-United Kingdom Food Corporation, and that it is the overflow from a £2,000,000 pig farm. Five years ago that would almost have been said and almost believed. Today it gives Queensland a pain in the neck to be reminded of what might have been. The story was not even permissible propaganda in the recent Federal election.

But I am writing this note with Frank Hurley's magnificent pictorial record of Queensland open on my knees, published as recently as 1950, and now impossible to recall or stop; and this was the position when Hurley was busy here with his camera and pen. The Corporation had put in 29,286 acres of sorghum, and "despite late planting, rains, and unseasonal frosts," had produced 7000 tons of grain in its first year. On the land not yet cultivated it had placed more than 10,000 Herefords to be fattened on the stubble after the grain had been harvested. The goal a few years ahead was half a million pigs fattened on sorghum and sent to the United Kingdom, and/or (the optimists said "and") half a million bushels of surplus grain every year to feed other animals still to be born.

It would take more research than I feel like undertaking to say what happened next; but a letter addressed to the Corporation today would not be delivered. I suppose I should not be sur-

★ **QUEENSLAND beef cattle—a** photograph taken near Warwick on the famous Darling Downs ★

prised that no one could, or would, give me a straight story about that sorghum pile.

SOMEWHERE in Queensland there is a sum of £200,000 waiting for the man who can outwit cattle ticks. It is a big reward, but not offered for nothing. I have just seen a statement by the officer-in-charge of the cattle husbandry branch of the Queensland Department of Agriculture that "ticks

The Ballad of Reading Gaol

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

is one of the last things Oscar Wilde wrote. He had gone to France after his release from prison and taken rooms at the inn in the little hamlet of Berneval, near Dieppe. For the moment he was content in the country. "If I live in Paris," he wrote, "I may be doomed to things I don't desire. I am afraid of big towns." He made friends with the people about, thought of building a house there, and did take a chalet for the season. About two months after leaving prison he wrote of the *Ballad*: "The poem is nearly finished. Some of the verses are awfully good." Soon afterwards he changed his plans and went to Naples, and there and in Rome he revised the *Ballad*. It was published under a pseudonym next year.

Arthur Ransome said of Wilde that he had now become anxious to speak and to be heard, and was no longer content to make and to be admired. And he wrote of the *Ballad*: "I know of no other poem that so intensifies our horror of mortality . . . he lives an hundred times life's last moments, and multiplies

take at least ten million gallons of blood from Queensland's cattle every year," and this, he says, is equivalent to the protein in forty thousand tons (not bags or bushels) of grain. I am always a little sceptical of estimates of that kind, but even if they are 50 per cent wild or false there is substance enough in what remains to make Queenslanders scratch their heads. Apart from everything else there is the enormous cost and labour of dipping millions of cattle several times every year to keep the ticks under partial control. I don't know how often dipping is necessary; more often in some districts than in others, I imagine, but very often in all districts if we think in New Zealand terms. The lowest frequency any farmer has given me is twice a year, the highest twice a month, but whatever figure we accept, the burden is very heavy.

ERIC BAKER joined me in journalism when he was a boy of sixteen. For the next 25 years it was sometimes one who fell by the wayside and sometimes the other, but we always found ourselves sooner or later sheltering again under the same roof. It looked like a long break when

JUNE 28 I dropped out at 65 and he, still in his forties, went on working. But we did not lose touch. Once or twice a year he wrote me letters which, though I seldom did more than acknowledge them, kept our friendship warm. With Jno. he was the last man I spoke to before I left Wellington, the last man to eat a meal with me, the last to shake hands. Now, I am told in a letter, he is dead. I accept the fact, and acceptance when it hits me is a grievous blow; but I have to struggle to believe and feel that we shall never meet again. It is still the living Eric I see, light-hearted and generous, foolish sometimes, as we all are, but only to himself, and accepting the consequences with a courage that few of us ever reach; charitable in the widest sense, helpful to the limit of his resources, free in all situations of the big and little meannesses the rest of us can seldom control or hide. The next move is mine.

(To be continued)



OSCAR WILDE

the agony of the man who dies in the hearts of all those others who feel with him how frail is their own perilous hold." Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, seldom read or heard in full, is to be read by Alan de Maimanche from 3YC at 9.30 p.m. on July 13.