

any other country one will find exactly the same thing. In the pages of *The Listener* there are other artists whose illustrations of facial grimaces are not drawings of anything that occurs in life, but are there to give emphasis to an impression. That being the case, whether Russell Clark is successful or not depends largely whether the mass of his audience in time understand his symbols and get something from them.

That brings me to a wider field—the place of Russell Clark in New Zealand art. Why, for example, is he known among some Canterbury College students as Cabbage Tree Clark? The reason is that Russell Clark has, by eliminating the fussy details of the leaves of the cabbage tree (*cordyline australis*) suddenly shown New Zealanders something new about what could well be our national tree. The cabbage tree is so much a part of our landscape that we don't notice it. After looking at Russell Clark's studies of cabbage trees, we can't help seeing how these particular trees stand out in the bush or the open paddock. The painter has shown us more than we saw before—the character of a New Zealand tree. This, of course, is one of the functions of an artist.

Or consider his Maori studies from Hokianga and the Urewera in black and white, water colour, oil paint or terracotta. Here is no sentimentalised tourist view of the Maori. Here certainly is the fun and the animated talk on the marae, but there is also the sombre resignation, the dignity of the women and the social strain put upon the Maori race by the white man's alleged civilisation. If Russell Clark's only contribution had been his Maori studies, he would have been known in the history of New Zealand art as the man who gives us eyes to see the Maori. Before him, our artists saw through western "cleanliness-is-next-to-godliness" eyes, through Pharisaical eyes or through rose-coloured spectacles or perhaps eyes that were merely blinkered.

Some may superficially say that Russell Clark's colours—his dull yellows, his olive greens, his khaki shades, his blacks are merely the colours of the mid-century of the Western world. But this is only to say that there are fashions in art and that the acceptance of these fashions makes art easier to understand and that Clark is familiar with contemporary work abroad. But he is also familiar with Tintoretto and El Greco and that is what some critics miss. They say, too glibly, that Henry Moore has done it better, but one can equally say that artists like Moore and Picasso have said so much and said it so well that it is of no use anybody trying. But there are other levels in the hierarchy of art and there is still the contribution that a man's own personality can make. Russell Clark has a mind and feelings which accept certain shapes, angles and relationships, and the possibilities of their harmonious rearrangement are infinite. And this is what Russell Clark is doing. He is fusing all the artists that appeal to him and all the shapes and lines and



"This is . . . not Professor Gordon at a cocktail party"

SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

Back to Curtis Island

by "SUNDOWNER"

I DON'T know whether J.M.R. wrote to prevent me from perpetrating a howler so many hundreds of miles from home, or to pull my leg gently, if his letter found me dozing in Queensland's sun. From bulls he moved stealthily to rocking chairs ("knowing your interest in them"), and before I knew what was happening I was being told that if I felt like going off my rocker I should get in touch with The Sittin', Starin' 'n' Rockin' Club of Stamford, Conn. As well as I can remember I have never belonged to a club in my life, but if I ever do feel that the time has come to be more sociable, rocking chairs will have a better chance with me than bowls, bridge, or Rotary.

Meanwhile, I stay off my rocker because I can't interest a cabinetmaker in getting me back. A few months ago I visited most of the furniture auction rooms in Christchurch and several of the furniture factories; but the auction rooms had not seen a rocking chair for 20 years, and the factories looked at me with mild surprise.

The culprit, of course, was Sir Truby King, who put it into every young mother's head about 40 years ago, that the hand which rocks the cradle hurts the child. So cradles disappeared. Then the grandmothers found eyes fixed on them if they soothed their nerves on a rocking-chair, and the chairs followed the cradles. Now we are all off our rockers from Kaitia to Bluff—and that, I am sure, is one reason why I was so disgustingly sea-sick the other day on a five-hour launch trip to the Barrier Reef.

But it surprises me to discover that rocking chairs are disappearing into attics in the United States. When I went to Salem, Ohio, in 1949, to look

colours that appeal into a different and individual result.

Clark is not Moore and cannot imitate Moore (he wouldn't try) for much the same reason that Clark emotionally cannot accept Rubens with his overripe shapes. Clark's curves and shapes have an "acid" or "sharp" quality. That gives him his distinctive style, but beyond that he can handle paint in a very skilled manner, his handling and colouring of clay is already first-class, he seems not yet to have mastered the full possibilities of wood, with stone he is very accomplished indeed.

All judgments on art are subjective. There can be no absolute standards. But, bearing these reservations in mind, New Zealand can be pleased that it has reached the stage where it can produce an artist of Russell Clark's stature whose work came to maturity in New Zealand.

for a cousin who had been as long there as I had been in New Zealand. I found him sitting under an oak tree in a chair swing. When I called on the Editor of the *Washington Post* he put me in a comfortable arm-chair, but sat himself in a rocker and rocked it all the time I was with him. Rockers were in use in nearly every home I visited, though they were often on back or front verandahs, and were then usually suspended from the roof. It is serious that this "fine art of beneficial floating" is beginning to be neglected, and that "these graceful, animate pieces of furniture" may soon become museum pieces. I don't know how many Americans are off their rockers already. But I can't help wondering how the rest of us will fare if the others go off too suddenly.

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I FOUND myself wishing today that I had never lent, and lost, my copy of Marco Polo. I was reading the obituary of a Queensland grazier of 83 whose first job when he left home 68 years ago had been to follow a mob of cattle from one station to another ten months away. That made me think of Marco's

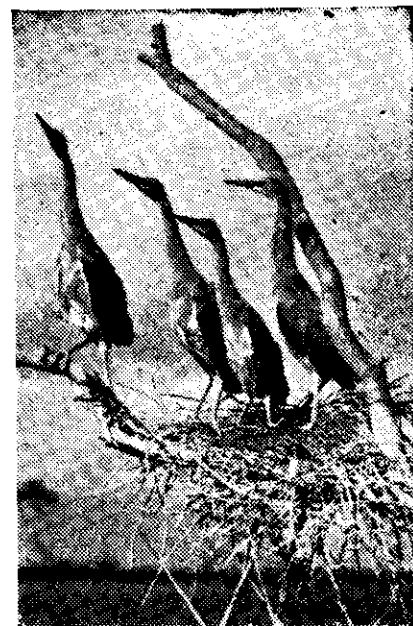
statement that when he came to the city of Bokhara he could get no further for three years. What held him up, I could not remember, or what he did while he was waiting. But I have often wondered, and find myself wondering again, if Marco ever wanted to arrive anywhere. I think he found it easier than most of his contemporaries to take events as they came and the world as it was, and I am sure that if he had worn the shoes of Matthew Flinders, whom I can never forget on this Queensland coast, he would not have ruined his health and shortened his life by throwing himself against his prison bars in Mauritius.

But most of us are not Marco Polos. Queensland must have been a tough place 68 years ago, and following a trail for ten months a raw experience for a lad of fifteen. But I think the ride back must have been worse than the outward journey into the wilderness, since there would be nothing to think of for 3000 miles but home and the weariness of getting there. I have always found journeys away from home shorter than the same journeys back. So, I think, do most people who have a home to return to. And I don't forget the Liverpool sailor whose chief reason for liking Australia was that it kept him twelve thousands miles away from his "bloody old woman."

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AFTER spending a sleepless night thinking of the brolgas on Curtis Island I turned back on my tracks determined to see them somehow. How bad were those holes on the road. I asked Eric the truck driver, and how far were they from the birds? If we took a pick and shovel, an axe, and a strong rope, could we not battle through to a point from which our legs could do the rest? Eric had a poor opinion of my legs, but he rose to the adventure.

It was the roughest truck ride I had ever had, since Eric's method was to



Young Australian white-fronted herons on the nest

stop where he had to in creeks and sandbanks, but to bump round fallen trees in top gear and crash through standing scrub with his foot hard on the accelerator. I had a stiff neck for days afterwards, pains in my arms and legs, and a very sore seat. But I had memories that will last as long as I will. I had watched dozens and dozens of brolgas at close range, scores of ibises, and many hundreds of ducks. I had seen a brolga lay and break an egg, blundered on nesting swans, listened to the most ridiculous cackling by kookaburras, and to strange noises by an unseen bird that Eric said was a mopeke in a hollow tree. Whatever the bird's name was the notes were sepulchral—high hoo-hoos, followed by descending hee-hees, which never overtook one another and sounded like thumps inside a tub. Three times on our wild rush through the bush kangaroos leaped across the track in front of us, and remained in sight for several hundred yards. We saw no foxes or dingoes. But when we left the bush and reached soft ground we ran into little groups of pigs which looked at us for a moment with "wild surmise," and then broke for cover. Once when Eric caught a sucker in an isolated clump of bush, and left me holding it while he searched for its mate, five boars and two sows passed within a few yards of me, but were as respectful to me as I was to them. There was, of course, very little time to stand and stare, and to stop even for a minute or two was to be attacked by clouds of mosquitoes and sandflies. From these there was no escape all day, though there was some alleviation of the torment when Eric made a fire of "buffalo chips" so that we could eat our lunch in the smoke. But I knew that if there had been no insects there would have been no bigger game, since it is the number, variety, and ferocity of the mosquitoes and sandflies that keep this area a sanctuary. In any case, insect bites, even if you lack the strength to abstain from aggravating them, leave you in peace after a few days. A hundred white herons watching you from one small tree will stay with you for the rest of your life.

(To be continued)