



NOT THE DEEPEST IN THE WORLD?  
Lake Wakatipu from the Frankton Road. In the background, Cecil Peak (6477 ft., on left), and Walter Peak (5936 ft.)

## Shepherd's Calendar

# MEN WERE DECEIVERS EVER

by "SUNDOWNER"

ONE of my sisters-in-law told me that she was married to my brother for 20 years before she realised that he was below the average height. It was a happy blindness for both. But when the bus-driver told me the other day in Queensland that a citrus orchard of 250 acres was the biggest in the world, when a launch-owner told me on Lake Wakatipu that we were sailing the deepest lake in

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New York World Almanac left out all the big ships because the liner United States was *not* the biggest in the world, I wondered how serious self-deception can be. If the facts themselves are of no importance the deception is not often important. It does not matter which is right, Brisbane or Los Angeles, in claiming the biggest city area in the world. It matters that one of these cities has taken in more land than it can administer efficiently, and if the driving force was vanity, the day may come when the price will be paid in typhoid germs or benighted schools. But there is a pleasanter side to self-deception. What started this line of thought was the sight of Elsie grazing in a circle in the orchard with her tether rope broken. How long she had been in that position before I saw her I don't know, but she was two hours unattended. If she had not deceived herself my young weeping-willow would have disappeared. If David had not deceived himself into thinking that he could kill Goliath, Goliath would probably have killed him, since it was no doubt a fluke shot that brought Goliath down, and David could not have repeated it. History is studded with self-deceptions that changed the course of events quite violently, the most dramatic of all being the belief of every generation that what happens to it is important for all time.

I don't know whether my sister-in-law would have married my brother if she had known in advance that he was five feet four; but not knowing it gave her a happy life. I don't know whether Elsie would have kept on eating grass if she had known that there was nothing holding her back from a tender weeping-willow; but not knowing kept her on good terms with me. I don't know what David would have done if the possibility of a miss had come to him. It did not come, and Goliath fell. But I would like to know what another David, the shepherd Ben Gurion, thinks about it all today as he watches his flock in the Negeb Hills.

I AM surprised to see so many bumble bees in the tussocks in spite of a succession of frosts. But I find it difficult to believe what we are usually told about bumble bees—that only the queen survives the winter, which she spends curled up in a nest in a state of suspended animation.

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I don't know what there is among tussocks to feed bees so early in the year, but if the answer is that the gorse is out, the fruit trees are coming out, and the flowering currants and spring bulbs have been out for some time, I can't understand why I see fewer bees in the garden than high up on the hill. In any case, I don't see nearly enough bumble bees anywhere to fertilise acres of clover; and there never can be enough if every queen in spring is a solitary widow who, when she first emerges, has not even laid the eggs from which the workers and drones are to be hatched.

There is a gap somewhere in the story of bees and clover that biologists have forgotten to fill in. If bumble bees are necessary agents in fertilisation they don't all die in winter (except the queens). If they do all die, millions of clover heads produce seed without the assistance of bees. Darwin, I know, is against me, but I think he was fascinated

by the association he worked out between bees and human spinsters. Spinsters keep cats. Cats eat mice. Mice eat bees. So the more spinsters in a given locality the better the crop of clover.

THREE years ago we had a black lamb which, in a week less than a year later, produced a lamb that was white. Last year she produced another white lamb, and last week a lamb that was quite black. The father of the first two lambs was a Southdown ram, this season's father a

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Ryeland. The question is, will Dinah go on mixing the colours in those proportions if we keep her and allow her to breed?

Guthrie-Smith, readers of *Tutira* (now happily available again) will remember, came near, or thought he had come near, to "a pure race of black Merino self evolved." His account of the matter is a little long, and a little involved, but it comes roughly to this, that the blacks in a small flock of wild sheep living in isolation increased more rapidly than the whites, and, if it had not been thought necessary to terminate the situation, "would soon have accomplished by chance results which elsewhere have been obtained by a knowledge of the laws of breeding deliberately pursued."

I have always regretted that the experiment was ended prematurely. Guthrie-Smith was in a strong enough financial position not to interfere, and he was the only run-holder of his day well enough trained to follow the results to the end and honest enough not to dot any i's or cross any t's in the report. But he was a business man as well as a naturalist, and in this matter, I can't help feeling, he surrendered a little too hastily to business demands. It might, I think, have been different if his outlaws had grown feathers instead of wool.

(To be continued)



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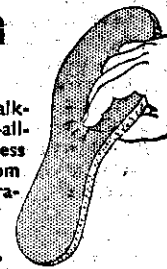
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