

AFTER HIS TIME

by "SUNDOWNER"

MY immediate reaction when I read of the death of Raymond Ward, of Rangiora, was shame that I had not found time to visit him during his illness. I am still ashamed that I did nothing, but I no longer regret that I left him undisturbed. He had no need of my visit, no hope of benefit from it, and I am sure no wish that it should be made. More than anyone else I can think of, he turned

OCTOBER 11 to the dead for company, and not to the living. The living had courtesy from him and kindness, with, sometimes, a centuries-old courtliness that I personally found embarrassing.

It was, however, an unkind cut that he had to live in the 20th Century and not 100, 200 or even 300 years earlier. But the roughest thing Providence did to him was to make him a New Zealander. He did, I think, in his youth find life pleasant everywhere; but when he saw Europe and the Mediterranean, talked to scholars and wandered into libraries and monasteries, when he saw Rome and Crete and Cairo and Paris and London, spoke Italian to Italians, Greek to Greeks, and Portuguese and Spanish to the people of Lisbon and Madrid, he realised that his world was there and not here.

I have never known whether it was good for him, or good for New Zealand, that he finally came back. He always, I gathered, until the second war came, intended, and once or twice planned, to return to the Mediterranean, where he would have settled in Crete or Spain and lost himself in the past. Hitler, and a nagging Gallipoli wound, shattered those plans, and buried him deeper

among his books in New Zealand. For 35 years, much of the time in Rangiora, he lived the life of a scholar whose mind was too full of the past to admit the present. He was not so much disinterested in the present as too busy and withdrawn to see it. Unless you spoke a new language, like the Australian aboriginal he met at a circus, he was more or less unaware of you; not rude to you, or lacking in hospitality, but seeing you only as he saw the mountains every morning, or the flowers in his garden, or the furniture in his house. The exciting days in his life were those that brought him a new bundle of books, at a great price, from his personal bookseller in London, or a new meaning in an ancient script, or (very rarely) a visitor who could discuss Camoens with him, or the mysteries of Crete, or the barbarians, Arab or Christian, but probably Christian, who burnt the library at Alexandria.

OCTOBER 17 A NELSON correspondent asks me to protest against "this dreadful treatment of the poor domestic fowl designed to squeeze out another egg or two for greedy human beings." If my correspondent means the method of increasing egg production by shutting hens in narrow cages, I am with her as far as my voice will carry. I have, in fact, protested more than once in these notes, but am glad of an excuse to repeat myself. I loathe the method, and am not at all impressed by the argument that if the hens were unhappy they would not go on laying. We treat hens as we do sheep: kill them before they are old enough to show

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once in these notes, but am glad of an excuse to repeat myself. I loathe the method, and am not at all impressed by the argument that if the hens were unhappy they would not go on laying. We treat hens as we do sheep: kill them before they are old enough to show

what we have done to them. As long as I eat eggs, and as long as I eat mutton, I am a party to the treatment of hens and sheep. I cannot therefore condemn the men and women who produce the eggs and meat for which I cheerfully pay. I can condemn unnecessary cruelty, and deny specious arguments supporting it. It may easily be true that a hen for a brief period will produce more eggs at a lower cost if she is given as much stimulating food as she can take, and no exercise. It is not true that this is a humane method, or even an economical method if she is to be allowed to live long enough to react to such cruelty. To take a young hen with 150 undeveloped eggs inside, place her in a cage too narrow to allow her to turn, give her forcing food, and then say that she enjoys laying is like saying that a person who takes cascara before going to bed enjoys early rising.

UNTIL yesterday I had lived all my life without seeing, and knowing that I was seeing, the nest of a fantail. For three days, as I struggled with a patch of old gorse growing among rocks, and perhaps nine feet high, I had enjoyed the company of two fantails, one black and one pied, which never left me for more than a few

OCTOBER 17 minutes on end and were seldom away together. But it did not occur to me that I was near their nest. Even when I noticed that they returned fairly regularly to the same bush, and seemed to fly right through it, I thought of small flies rather than of fledglings, and wondered why one bush should attract more insects than another. Then I suddenly woke up. There was a nest in that bush with young birds in it, and these were the two parents ferrying in food supplies; and almost non-stop service, since each load was so small. But I had to use Helen's sharp eyes to find the nest which, though it was big for such small birds, was effectively camouflaged until I saw it against the light above.

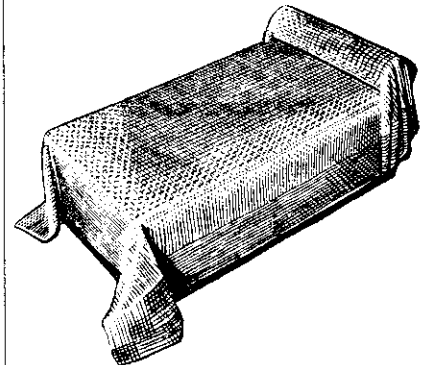
Then I behaved stupidly. Instead of withdrawing, as Helen did, and leaving the bush undisturbed, I turned back to it before I went home for lunch and very gently, as I thought, pulled the bush to eye level for a closer inspection. But it was eye level for the fledglings as well as for me, and the shock gave them enough strength to flutter out. I withdrew at once, hoping that they had not fallen to the ground, and were still near enough to the level of the nest to scramble back again. But all I could see when I returned at five, and again at six this morning, was one fledgling, not quite ready to fly, clinging to a dead branch about ten feet away from the nest and being fed there by its parents. The other members of the family—one, two, or three—may also be alive still and receiving attention, and may even be back in the nest, but I dare not risk looking for them. If they are still alive they are safe from hawks, and I have made it as difficult as I can for cats to reach them, but we had seven degrees of frost last night, and a repetition of that tonight would be too much for an imperfectly feathered body sitting alone on a dead stick.

(To be continued)

WHANGAREI, Waikanae, Waikouaiti —the sandy sandwiches there eaten must much accelerate the natural erosion of New Zealand teeth. Meat between bread slices got its name, they say, from the Earl of Sandwich . . . but the facts of a modern holiday suggest a more obvious derivation.—Joan Stevens in *Here's My Discomfort*, an NZBS series.

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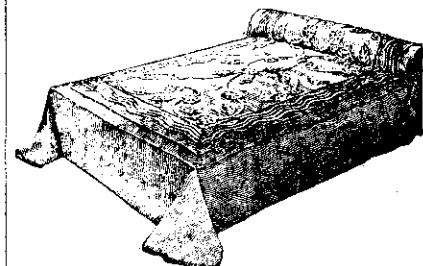
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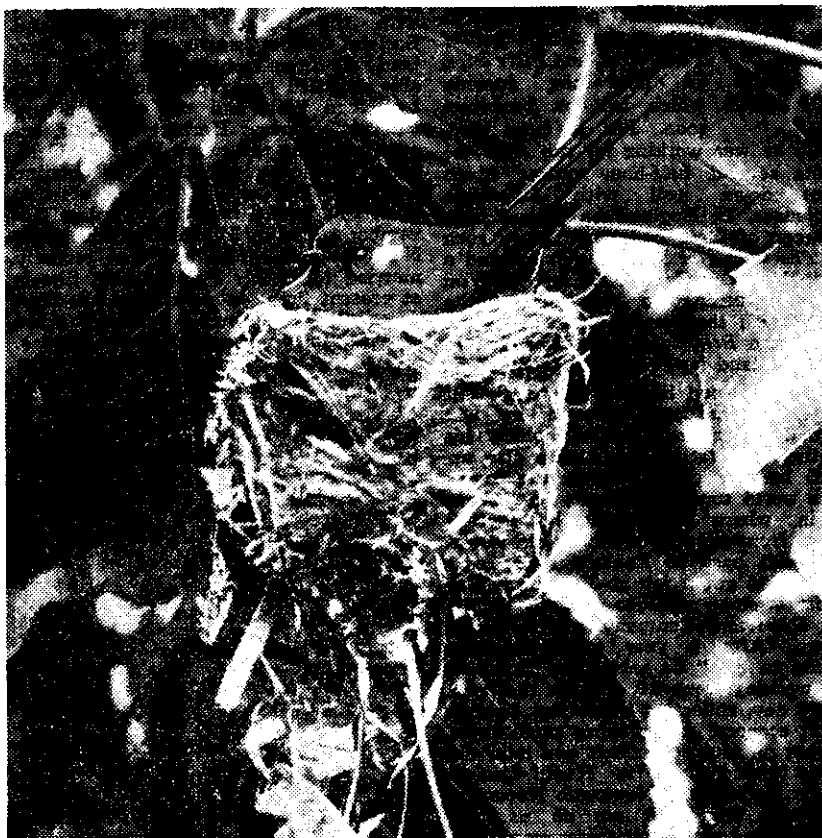
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