

No More Rabbits?

by "SUNDOWNER"

IT is not merely a surprise but a sensation to travel through Central Otago without seeing any rabbits. I saw one live hare and two dead hares, dozens of dead hedgehogs and opossums, but not one rabbit alive or dead between the Lindis Pass and the Blue Mountains. Rabbits must still exist here and there. One farmer said he knew where there were three, and another thought the Board had missed one. The three will be 300 before next summer if they are left to themselves, and even the single one, if she is a doe.

JANUARY 11

may have started another colony before anyone has read this paragraph. But the overall picture is one that has not been seen before during my lifetime.

The question is: What will the picture be in ten, twenty, or fifty years? If there are rabbits in it the explanation will be that "it will do" has destroyed the New Zealand will; but if there are no opossums it will be one of those miracles that could make me a resurrectionist.



OPOSSUM

The war against them will not be short or easy

To see New Zealand without rabbits or opossums would be worth returning for whether we came back as men or beasts. The beasts that still remain will have a shorter life when grass and trees have not to be shared with beasts that don't pay their way, but it will be a full-bellied life, since profits and contentment usually go hand in hand. Whatever happens the war against the opossums will not be short, or easy, or comfortable for birds, or free of menace to the trees themselves.

I CAN'T remember seeing so much paint in Otago or so many other signs about the homesteads of marketing margins. My memory goes back to six-penny wool and fourpenny butter, to ninepence for oats and thirty shillings for chaff, to days when labour and paint were cheap, and yet not cheap enough to transform the houses and stables. Now a few hundred sheep

JANUARY 12

mean a good income, and twenty acres of oats or grass seed a surplus to spend on improvements. It is a situation

to which I have difficulty in adjusting myself even when I see it myself.

There are, of course, the shadows, too—the sheds that once housed families long ago pushed out and scattered. Even the churches in some cases have become barns, the schools workshops or cowsheds, not because newer and more modern buildings have replaced them, but because the people who once filled them have disappeared. I suppose people get used to milking cows in a school and to loading potatoes from a platform that once held a pulpit; but it is not easy to forget the ghosts if they are your own people. Otago is, of course, a worked-out goldfield, and the sequel to gold is usually the same. Fortunately, the hills were not washed away, and sheep now paint the houses of those who adjusted themselves in time.

I USUALLY feel ashamed when a vegetarian refuses meat, and impatient when he gives his reasons. If they are religious reasons I try not to react at all, as I try to be blind, dumb, and removed when a fond mother praises her insufferable child or a guileless young husband his foolish wife. But I encountered a variation of the theme today when a bright young man from the university accepted milk, eggs, and butter, but refused bacon on the ground that meat-eating was destructive. All eating as far as I know is destructive unless there is something wrong with our juices. Some of it is destructive of the eater as well as of the food, as every glutton knows if he persists long enough.

JANUARY 13 But my visitor was thinking of the destruction that precedes meat-eating: not of the mere killing he was careful to explain, but of the cutting short of so many lives before they had run their course. It was the waste that worried him, not the mere violence that preceded the waste; the bursting of so many beautiful bubbles; the violence and wantonness and irresponsibility. Meat-eaters reduced the world to the kind of place a garden is after an undisciplined child has spent an hour in it; or a pup, or a pet lamb, or a dozen hens.

But a garden begins with destruction and lasts only as long as destruction continues. If God made cabbages He made sorrel and twitch and fathen. If He made the ladybirds, He made the white butterflies.

Meat-eating destroys wolves and eagles and deadly nightshade, but gives at least brief life to millions of sheep and lambs and cattle and pigs and birds that vegetarianism would destroy for ever. It is horrible to kill to eat, but to try to eat without killing is to end in a mental hospital. It is going back to the fanaticism of the saints who become dirty and verminous for the glory of God. We must not forget, however, that the motive of the saints was to make themselves suffer, not to be gentle to their lice.

IF I were sentimental—I suppose I should say sentimental enough—I could believe that something I have just

seen out of my window was something I know it was not. A hawk chased a young thrush from a chestnut tree into an elm, and then flew round and round the elm as the thrush floundered and chirped. Soon it would have been all over, since the thrush had apparently

JANUARY 15

just left the nest, and was in any case stupefied by fear. But a nesting magpie dived on the hawk from the top of a pine, and at once it was the hawk that showed panic. I have never seen a magpie actually strike a hawk, and I don't think this one did, but I have never seen a hawk make quicker twists and turns as it headed for the wide open spaces. Of course, the magpie did not come to the defence of the helpless thrush. It would have killed the thrush ruthlessly, and cruelly, if hatred of the big bird had not turned its attention from the little one.

I DID not succeed in saving my fly-struck lamb, though I kept it alive for six days. Nor did my application of

the maggot-destroying paint prevent a second strike when the lamb got into a hole. The second army of flies was not, however, of the same variety as the first, but greener and smaller, and the repellent was not fully effective when it dried. It prevented the second

JANUARY 19 vented the second deposit of eggs from hatching, but not the second invasion of flies from landing.

It was, however, the first attack that caused the lamb to die. A post-mortem examination showed a patch of green flesh over the loins about as big as the palm of my hand, but no live maggots anywhere, or signs in either places of inflammation. Before it died the lamb drank half a dipper of water—perhaps two pints—staggered to its feet, and almost at once fell down and stopped breathing. I don't understand what happens in these cases, but I imagine that enough poison enters the blood to paralyse the heart or the brain—though neither, to my ignorant eye, showed signs of injury.

(To be continued)



The Shirt with the

Long Life Collar

LICHFIELD

POINTSETTER

WHITE

Lichfield Point-Setter White Shirts come in a range of beautiful quality fabrics . . . For instance, there is Paladium in a fine white poplin . . . Fuji-lene in a "better than silk poplin" . . . Ripple-sheen, with extra sleeve lengths, in a luxury poplin. All Lichfield Point-Setter White Collars are guaranteed to outwear the Shirt.

LICHFIELD

Point-Setter

SHIRTS



WHITE HAS ALWAYS BEEN RIGHT

PWG