

BIRDS OVERHEAD

WISDOM after the event is not the highest kind of wisdom, but it is better than no wisdom at all.

When the apocryphal Tobit, not knowing that there were sparrows above him, lay down against a wall with his face uncovered, and his eyes being open, "the sparrows muted warm dung into them," he was a proper subject for pity. But he would not have deserved pity if he had lain there a second time. Magpies are bigger than sparrows, worm-eaters and gluttons, but those facts have not stopped me from resting my hand three times lately on the top of a post on which magpies have rested first. It happened once in daylight, and each time I have forgotten the probabilities until they were certainties. If Tobit had been as slow to learn he would have spent the rest of his days in darkness, since a whiteness came in his eyes after one filling, and the physicians helped him not. Nor was it his own prayers that moved the Lord to "scale away the whiteness of Tobit's eyes," but the prayers of Sara, the daughter of Raguel, who had buried, and had been charged with strangling, seven husbands. It pleases me that the Lord found it easier to forget Sara's record than the sanctimoniousness of the man who boasted that he had walked all the days of his life in the way of truth and justice, and done many alms-deeds to his brethren and his nation. I suspect that Burns had read the book of Tobit before he met and immortalised Holy Willie.

FEBRUARY 2 I am not surprised when I see magpies on posts or high platforms, or pigeons, or common fowls. It does surprise me when I see gulls frequenting such places. There is a third floor in the city to which duty sometimes drags me, and as often as I am there I see a gull balanced on top of a flag-pole erected on an adjoining roof. How long it stays there I don't know

FEBRUARY 3 but I have had it under observation for an hour, and could easily believe that it stays there half a day, and leaves only when it feels hungry. It does not, of course, stand all the time, or remain in one position. In general it faces the wind, standing or sitting, and when there is no wind it stands on its feet one at a time, the idle foot and leg being folded out of sight. This attitude I find quite disturbing, so that I have to discipline myself as I watch or look away. It is not as upsetting as looking at a sailor on a high mast at sea, but it does something to my head and solar plexus that I can counteract only by shutting my eyes. To the gull, however, it is apparently a most comfortable position—so comfortable that it occasionally folds its head under its wing without bringing down the other foot and goes to sleep. I suppose steeplejacks reach something like this unawareness of height after years of climbing; but birds are born with it. If they have the same kind of mechanism as we have for indicating their position in space—fluid-filled canals in their ears—these don't give the same messages as they give us. No one has even seen a giddy bird, a bird closing its eyes to shut out what lies below, or a fledgling sick with fear when it looks out over the edge of its nest.

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 "It was not said."
 "They've probably infiltrated everywhere by now. I bet they hold the levers of power in the jockey clubs and the Rugby unions and everywhere."
 "What will you do, Pancho?"
 "Shall we liberate them, Jesus?"
 "They may not care to be liberated."
 "How would you like to be infiltrated by many hombres chiquitos verdes?"
 "I have seen many things, Pancho. It is well to remain calm."
 "I think I shall write to them, Jesus, and ask them if they need me."
 "How will you know who answers? Your friends, or los hombres chiquitos verdes?"
 "I probably shall not know, but I shall remain calm."
 "I also, We shall remain calm even while listening to the radio."
 Jesus and I sat up into Monday morning, listening and remaining calm, but no more news came over, and the paragraph in Monday's local paper was hardly satisfying, either. It said: Apparatus Like Silver Cigar Falls Near Australia.
 Who has sunk my little country?

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 4, 1955.

member of a marriage that has met disaster. I find it easier to suppose that it is a runaway husband or an absent-minded wife enjoying a little freedom from a nagging partner or demanding children.

FEBRUARY 7 JIM, who sometimes says what he thinks, and sometimes what it amuses him to say to lift my hackles, calls this an average Canterbury summer. I have not seen as many Canterbury summers as he has, but I can go back in my diary for two months and find only entries like these: Very hot; hot; very hot; fine and warm; hot; fine; fine and hot; very hot; fine, hot and very dry; very hot; hot; warm; fine; cooler; slight shower; strong nor-wester; warm; very warm; hottest day this year; and so on. What used to be a drying green is a dusty square with not even the dandelions surviving. What used to be cocksfoot is dry straw that powders under my boots. Where there ought to be clover and ryegrass there is nothing at all, except in the orchard, where there has been no



"... a runaway husband enjoying a little freedom from a nagging partner."

grazing, and even there the growth is so crisp and hard that the cows are not interested when I bring them in on a rope. Danthonia is still boot-high in places, but it is drier than tussock, and has such a feeble hold in the dusty ground that it could not be grazed if the cows could persuade themselves to eat it.

Jim may be right. Canterbury may often have been as dry as it is now in this corner of it. But if that is the case my grandchildren will not sit as I do and look out day after day on thousands of acres of parched, irrigable land. They will harness the four big rivers that rush in straight and almost parallel lines from the mountains to the sea. The cost will be staggering, but not quite so heavy as the present loss of potential wealth. It is quite likely, too, that the way from here to there, or from now to then, will lead through rushes, footrot, and intestinal worms. But our children will overcome those problems when they begin seriously to study them. Then they will put up a monument to the engineers their grandfathers now keep in their gun sights.

(To be continued)



★ Young Farmers On the Air ★

YOUNG Farmers' Club members—a group of them are seen at the left at their 1954 National Stock Judging Contest—will compete this month in the annual Radio Leadership Contest. This year the age limit has been raised from under 21 to under 25. Area finals will be heard on Tuesday, March 8, from 1YA at 7.45 p.m., and from 2YA at about 7.0 p.m. (after National announcements), on Wednesday, March 9, from 4YA at 7.20 p.m., and on Monday, March 14, from 3YA at 12.33 p.m. The National final will be heard from YA and YZ stations at 6.45 p.m. on Tuesday, March 22. As in past years the winner will go to Australia to compete in the Australia-New Zealand final at the Sydney Royal Show on April 6.