

Rivers Running Clear

by "SUNDOWNER"

NO one now can see the gold-fields as the first miners saw them. No one will ever see them like that again, even in imagination; since all the men who saw them as they originally were are dead. Here and there a vigorous old man lives on who was born before gold was discovered; or a vigorous old woman. There is one living within ten miles of me. But to have seen our creeks all clear and

MARCH 31 our rivers all blue, to have seen them with eyes old enough to take them in and minds mature enough to reproduce them almost a century later, a survivor would have to be 110 at least. We have nobody left as old as that, and our pre-gold-mining landscape is therefore lost forever.

But the next best thing to seeing gullies, hills, rivers, creeks and flats as they were a hundred years ago is seeing them as nature is now everywhere restoring them. For the first time, if I can trust my memory, I drove last week from Dunedin to Rae's Junction without seeing one discoloured stream. The Taieri was not as clear as the Ohau, say, or the Clutha above Cromwell, but it can never have been visibly free of mud once it entered the Taieri Plain. North and west of Milton, however, the streams are everywhere now running clear. At Glenore, where the water has been yellow as far back as my memory goes—more yellow than any other water I have seen because it flows over gravel that could have been mixed with mustard—there is now clear water flowing over moss-covered stones between scrub and grass-covered banks. It is the same at Waitahuna, at Gabriel's Gully, and at Beaumont. It is not the past that

has come back, since the past never returns physically or spiritually; but a new present, leading to a new future. And the most splendid change of all, of course, is in the Molyneux River, which the people of my generation have never before seen. That, too, is different from the noble river our fathers first saw, and in diverse ways contrived to cross. But it must be nearer than anything else is to the obstacle that stopped them 93 years ago and kept them looking and wondering and more than a little afraid.

A FRIEND who is looking for a farm, and read that one was to be sold by auction in this neighbourhood, wrote asking me how much it was likely to bring. I replied that it was worth £70 or £80 an acre, but might easily bring a hundred pounds. It brought £186 in a very few minutes, dashing my prospects of employment as a valuer.

In the sale of goods and chattels that followed I was asked to value a portable hut. Here my qualifications were better, since I had just provided myself with a new motor-shed. I said £25, believing that the hut had come from the Department of Railways after an indefinite number of years of service, but realising that someone might offer up to £50. Bidding started at £120, and ran quickly to £145. I therefore renounce, formally and forever, my claim to value fixed or movable property.

But I do so with a good heart. I am 50, perhaps 100 per cent richer than I thought I was. Although I am always beaten down when I have anything to sell, and tickled and made foolish when I want to buy, I can now die knowing that all I have to do to leave more behind me than I have ever possessed is

to die quickly. If I linger on into a depression the magic will not work. But that would be bad manners. I have had wealth thrust on me by the judgment of my neighbours, and it would be poor citizenship to linger about long enough to prove them fools.

I HAVE often thought, and I am sure often said, that for every man with an eye for sheep there are two or more with an eye for horses and cattle. So far we have produced only one James Little, and we brought him here from Scotland. Though it would be rash to say that we have produced a Bakewell yet, with sheep, horses, or cattle, we have produced several men capable of challenging overseas standards in horse flesh and beef, and this one man only who has made history with sheep. Perhaps our best achievement so far

APRIL 3 with cattle was to produce and educate James Scrimgeour, who, though he lost both eyes in the 1914-18 war, and is now an Australian, is a world-famous breeder and judge of Polled Shorthorns.

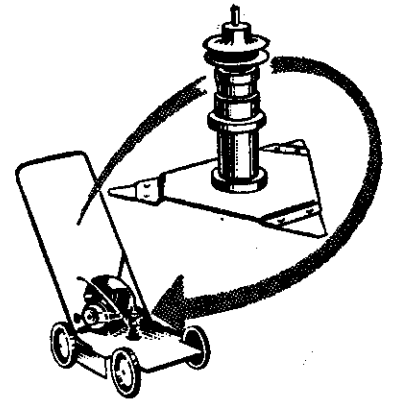
In any case, it both amuses and comforts me to notice when I visit Addington that two buyers in three buy blind. They can read mouths and feet, and perhaps the capital letters of meat and wool, but they are as slow as I am with the small print. They, in fact, remind me of my own dismal days at school reading Latin: I could feel my way through Tacitus, but I never quite knew where I was in Virgil; and I did not stay long enough to find out. I have seen a man bidding for a pen of Corriedales and then turning to ask if they were Halfbreds. I have seldom heard a buyer question the advertised description of a line of sheep or its repetition at the pen-side by the auctioneer. Three out of four buyers hold back at the outset, not in the hope of reducing the competition, but to hear someone else suggest what the sheep are worth. If market values were real values, measures of worth and not of habit or fashion, few of us would dare to open our mouths.

IT was suggested to me today by one of my brothers that "It will do" was not always an excuse for slovenliness. When New Zealand was first settled, he pointed out, not many families remained where they first came to rest, and not many expected to remain there. On the goldfields no one did. It was not therefore laziness, but prudence and good sense, to do no more in these first resting places than was necessary and could be paid for, so that "it will do" implied "until we know how long we are going to stay."

It is a point worth making, and worth remembering, but it leaves a good deal unexplained. I could, I think, with a little effort, find a dozen additional excuses for loose wires, rabbits, footrot, ticks, fleas, punctures, blight, grass-grubs, distemper, twitch, mastitis, gorse, and a hundred other troubles that afflict the just when the just get tired before they reach the end of the road. It is easier not to make the effort; to be a New Zealander and fall back on the longest New Zealand tradition.

(To be continued)

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