

Rams for Sacrifice

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHEN two rams I offered for sale at Addington yesterday brought a guinea—I am not sure yet whether it was a guinea each or a guinea for two (less yard fee, commission and transport)—and the gentle auctioneer (for even a duck, the song says, is someone's mother) asked, before he knocked them

down, if the owner was present, I hid behind a man nearly seven feet high and faded quietly away to another pen. It was not the time or the place to let the joke take its course, and I decided to keep it secret till I reached home. But there are jokes that have the same effect on us as mercury, and this one escaped when I had six miles still to drive. Fortunately, my story was not at once believed, and when I did at last make it clear that it was not I but the auctioneer who was the humorist, we were safely in the gate.

But my poor Ben! My poor Oscar! A dog-tucker price covers a dog-tucker intention. Though you were both well-bred, with the proof stamped in brass in your ears, both young (four teeth and six), both free of footrot, both devoted to your work, the drought had been unkind to you. Your sides were hollow, your backs sagged, you had hairy legs, your heads were a threat to prospective mothers. So you were bought for your skins. You will hang on a pine-tree where the dogs can neither reach nor smell you, and go up and down on a pulley getting smaller and drier every day, while two animated masses of

blubber, not nearly as close to Norman blood as you were, two newly-rich vulgarians, round in the sides because they have had enough to eat, straight in the back and smooth in the legs because the shears have been busy on them, with a bloom on them that has come out of a can, and breaths puffing wheezily from lungs contracted by fat, two Fatty Arbuckles that you would have battered all round the paddock will father the lambs your Romney genes would have preserved from early slaughter. When the day of reckoning comes—*dies irae dies illa*—I hope you will not be waiting for me with fire in your nostrils and contempt in your eyes to ask why I so basely deserted you.

I HAVE read somewhere that Rossetti bought a white bull at Smithfield because it "had eyes like Janie Morris." Off-hand I can't think who Janie Morris was, if I ever knew—perhaps the wife or daughter of Rossetti's friend William Morris—but I hope it was a gentle bull, since the rest of the story in my memory is that it had to live in Rossetti's back garden.

The only white bull with which I ever came in close contact myself belonged to Gordon Jones, and has been dead, I imagine, for many years.

But if I saw him today, as I saw him then, in a ditch with his chain hopelessly entangled in the fence, I would look right past him, and as soon as

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must admit the same upbringing has given her a most charming and gracious personality."

"I never said I didn't like Sophie," Mrs. O'Leary said.

She and Mrs. Wallace exchanged edited versions of these conversations.

"The Robertsons think you have a winning way with you," Mrs. Wallace told Mrs. O'Leary.

"The Robertsons think you have a charming and gracious personality," Mrs. O'Leary told Mrs. Wallace.

Which is how things stood until the day Mrs. O'Leary and Mrs. Wallace fell out over who was to play which part in the local Drama Circle's production of *The Dear Departed*, and told each other some home truths. That evening when Mr. Robertson answered a knock at the back door he found Mrs. O'Leary standing there, looking very hot and bothered.

"I would never have thought it of you," she said; "I'd never have thought you'd tell someone I was ill-mannered and ill-bred."

"Mrs. O'Leary!" Mr. Robertson said faintly, wilting before the attack.

"Can you deny it?" she demanded; and he was just going to when his conscience popped up and reminded him he could not deny it. He stutted.

"I'm surprised at you," Mrs. O'Leary told him. "I really am."

Mrs. Robertson was about to join

them to see what was happening when there was a ring at the front door. She answered it and found Mrs. Wallace on the porch, very calm and icy.

"I just want to know the truth," she said, "did you or did you not tell Mrs. O'Leary I was cold and aloof?"

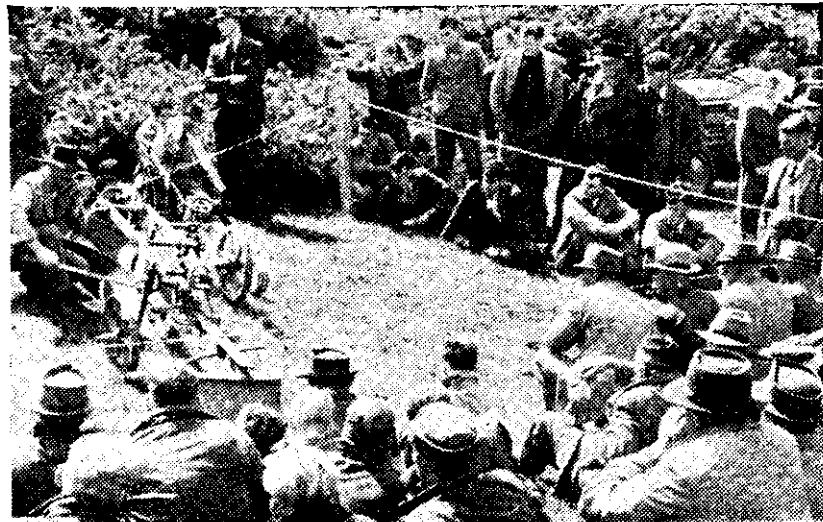
"I'm sure I never said," Mrs. Robertson began to say, when she was horrified to remember she *had* said it. "I'm sure I never meant it like *that*," she said.

"So you admit you did say it," Mrs. Wallace said. "That's all I wanted to know." She walked off. She met Mrs. O'Leary at the gate; they linked arms and went to Mrs. O'Leary's for a cup of tea.

"Of all the humbugs!" they agreed.

That is why the Robertson's house is empty now. The Wallaces and the O'Learys refused to speak to them. The Robertsons couldn't bear to live in such an unfriendly atmosphere; they sold their house and moved to another suburb, where they are known as the most likeable and considerate neighbours one could ever hope to have; and where they are trying to forget, and shuddering when they remember, the bewildering, inexorable end to their happy years in the old home.

And that is why Mrs. Wallace and Mrs. O'Leary nod to each other with so much satisfaction over the empty section: Yet, if only they'd realised, it was all done by kindness.



★ COMPETITIONS from both sides of the Tasman will be heard in the Australia-New Zealand final of the Young Farmers' Radio Leadership Contest from YA and YZ stations at 6.53 p.m. on April 10. Above, Young Farmers' Club members from the Manawatu are shown at a ploughing match watching a demonstration of plough setting. ★

I could assume the look of one who has seen nothing extraordinary at all. I would turn the other way. Then, however, I was 20 years younger and vainer, and I had no sooner moved in the bull's direction than I was aware that George Boulton, who was working some distance away, was looking at me. George was ten or fifteen years older than I was, and afraid of nothing but slackness and indolence. I had to keep on, as a man hunting a tiger in company has to keep on when he wants nothing so much as to slink away home; but the bull was not grateful. He glared and snorted and switched his tail all the time I was trying to help him, and fear kept me on the side of the fence from which everything was most difficult. Instead of disentangling him in two or three minutes I took nearly half an hour, and then, to save my face before George, I had to lead him away to a safer place along the fence, tie him up, and walk casually home again. I think I managed everything but the casualness, and until I last saw Gordon some months ago I thought I had managed that, too. But we began talking about George Boulton, whom we both greatly admired, and I knew at once that George had seen everything, enjoyed everything, and reported everything because he was too unselfish not to share it.

All in all it was a relief to be in the clear again and not have to pretend. But with bulls I am no longer afraid to be afraid. I had to face one again yesterday, a Red Poll, and the colour of their coat makes no difference to the light in their eyes. There was a hurdle between us, but a hurdle is an unconvincing barrier when you are robbing a bull of a cow that he is not yet ready to lose. Fortunately, Betty was very ready to go, and when I opened the hurdle cautiously about 18 inches she slipped through so eagerly that she dragged it after her and left the bull standing on the safe (or safer) side. I should not like to think that Janie Morris or any woman or girl in the world had eyes like those that watched me as I wired and double-wired that hurdle.

WE deceive ourselves when we think that Russia started the war of nerves. My dog knows better. Every day

when my neighbour's dog is on the chain Scamp takes a contemptuous stroll past the kennel. Every day when Scamp is on the chain Digger anoints my gateposts and barks. When both are free, they bark from their own boundaries, and, if they happen to meet on the road their casualness is only a little less marked than their cautious superciliousness. "I could eat you

for breakfast," Scamp is saying, "only I prefer not to dirty my teeth." "The last time I bothered with a cur like you," Digger is replying, "I left nothing but the brass on his collar." There they both hope it will end, and that the other will give way without an appeal to force.

It was not exactly a war of nerves when Betty, who is smaller, lighter, younger and less belligerent than Elsie, gained permanent precedence over her. It was an accident, but an accident precipitated by nerves. Betty, then a two-year-old heifer, had just arrived in a lorry, and to be sure that I would be able to catch her again—I had then neither a yard nor a bail—I put a rope on her horns before the lorry door was opened. Her resistance for a few moments was violent, and soon quite confused; but as she was not very big, and the rope was new and heavy, I was able to withstand her plunges and keep her moving round me in circles. To Elsie this was something to be investigated; but she had no sooner come into the circle than Betty gave another plunge which I accidentally converted into a charge, head first, into Elsie's flank. At the same moment I gave a rush at Elsie and a yell to drive her away, and this, added to Betty's lunge, made her give ground, and from that point onwards accept Betty as her boss. It often annoys me to see her giving way at the water trough, taking second place on the track and at the gates, and even standing back when I throw a cabbage over the fence or a bucketful of potatoes or apples. But she is incapable now of anything else. Betty, aided by my yell, dominated her without a tussle, which Elsie would easily have won if it had taken place, and the domination is permanent.

(To be continued)