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SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

Making Fun of Mendel

by “SUNDOWNER”

I THOUGHT today when I was looking at our only black sheep that if fools did nothing worse than take up the running when the angels' feet get cold, the world could do with more of them. It needs reckless risk-takers—people who are blind and deaf when caution is shouting warnings. The heights of Abraham were climbed

by fools, the Battle of Trafalgar lost by caution. But it is not ordinary folly to say that two and two are five, or three, or any number greater or smaller than four. That is the folly of the frog blowing itself up till it bursts. It is the kind of folly men of science say laymen commit when we question their findings and pronouncements. But I don't argue that the earth is flat, I don't say that water flows uphill, I don't suggest that Jonah swallowed the whale. I don't think, or suspect, or hint that a ferret is not a fitch or a fitch a ferret. I obey all the laws that I know to be laws except those I break through weakness.

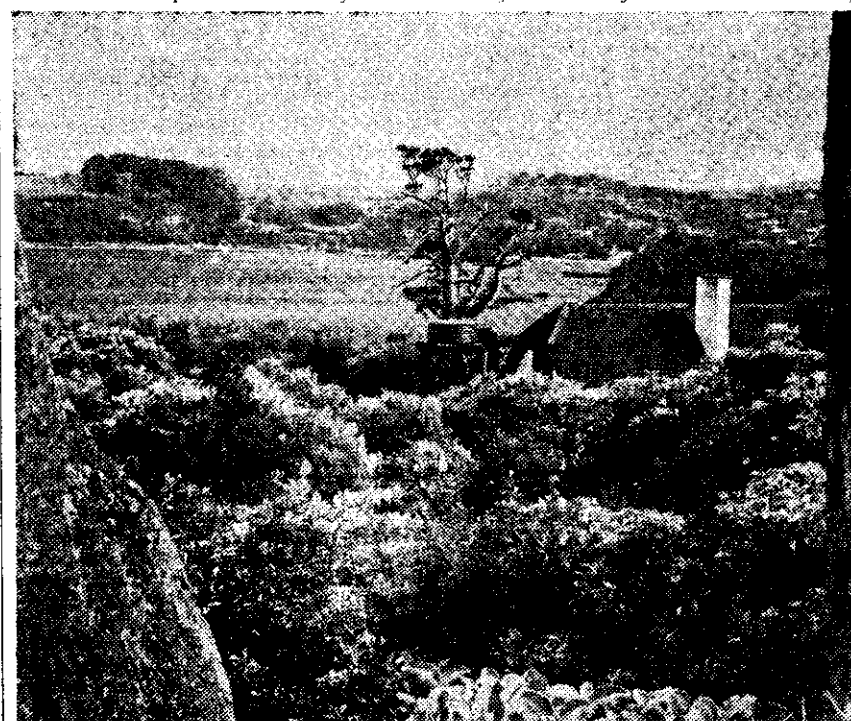
But I don't find that my sheep obey Mendel. Dinah had a white lamb when she was eleven months old. When she was two she had a black lamb to the same Southdown father. At three she had a white lamb to that father, and at four a black lamb to an undetermined father (but still Southdown). This year at five she has had a half-in-half lamb to a Shropshire father, and has turned more than half-white herself. But that is not the law. Although she has produced two and a half white and two and a half black lambs in five years, in a nicely balanced sequence, her own blackness, though it was pronounced when she was born, has been fading steadily, and was a genetic accident to begin with. The rams mated with her, if they carried black genes, have not been able to prove it in any other

mating, and the blackness produced by Dinah is therefore biologically excessive. She has been as reckless scientifically as those wild sheep of Guthrie-Smith's that turned themselves black by keeping out of reach of the shepherds for a few years and avoiding evil communications with the flock sheep.

A READER, who wonders in her covering note if she is “a crank and a nuisance,” has sent me the sad story of Moturau Moana. Moturau Moana is a large furnished home on a bush-clad headland at Half Moon Bay. It was given to New Zealand by a Miss Noeline Baker so that people interested in

Stewart Island and its natural history—botanists, geologists, artists and zoologists—could stay in it and use it as a base for their work. But most people had never heard of it. Of these who know about it not enough wish to use it to encourage the Government to go on looking after it. Now there is a danger—a strong probability, my correspondent thinks—that the place will be abandoned, and she asks all those who would regard that as a calamity to do what they can to stave it off.

This is not the place for a staving-off campaign, or for public activities of any kind. But I wish I knew what to think about such situations. It is clear enough that Governments can be embarrassed by gifts if not enough people are interested in the purpose for which they are made. The worthier the person is who makes them the more difficult it is to refuse them, and the more troublesome to accept them, since noble people are always in advance of their time and make a very small minority, in any community. On the other hand,



LOOKING over the roof of Moturau Moana to the waters of Half Moon Bay

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 28, 1956.