

IN a leading article on "Colonial Minstrels" (*Listener*, June 1), it was said that "a ballad must tell a story, that it must be written in stanzas suitable for oral transmission, and that there should be nothing about it to suggest deliberate or literary contrivance. . . Even in a fairly recent period the isolation of its outback workers, and especially the sheepmen, fostered a campfire tradition." Such an environment is to be found in the Mackenzie Country, and almost every anthology of New Zealand verse carries at least one poem about this land. Perhaps no area in New Zealand has inspired the poet (and the artist) more, and the poems written about it could fill a small anthology.

It is difficult to imagine that practical sheep farmers would allow themselves to be beguiled by the Muse, but the names given to some of their stations suggest that they do. Here are some of the station names in the Tasman Valley alone:—Ben Ohau, Rhoborough, Dusky, Ferintosh, Glentanner, Braemar, Balmoral, Irishman Creek, The Wolds. Names such as these have something of a poetic lilt and imagination.

Boundary Keepers

Not only station owners, but shepherds also have caught something of the poetry of the countryside, and I have been surprised at the excellence of some of the verses scribbled on the walls of lonely musterers' huts. Right from earliest times this landscape has attracted poets, a fact noted by Donald McMillan, an early proprietor of the Tekapo Hotel. On looking through his visitors' book one day, he was astonished to find it nearly filled up with the poems of a guest. "I dinna ken why all the queer people want to come to Tekapo," growled Donald as he locked the book away.

Lonely boundary keepers who kept boundary in some river gorge and did not see another person for months at a time, also felt the lure of poetry. One such man was Davie Sutherland, who lived all alone, except for his faithful dogs, at the Jollie outstation. Not far from his hut is a deep hillock which rises straight out of the creek-bed. The base of the hillock is covered in native bush, but on top are bare, black rocks. These rocks have been worn smooth. Davie Sutherland knew the reason for this. On moonlit nights, especially at Hogmanay (New Year's Eve), he could see the rocks covered with crowds of dancing fairies—their dancing feet had worn the rocks smooth. Because of this, the hill was called Tomnahurich (The Hill of the Fairies). Nobody now lives permanently at the Jollie outstation, so nobody can tell us if fairies still dance in the moonlight on top of Tomnahurich. However, Miss Eona Burnett has told me that, when bringing a string of mustering horses from the top of the Jollie Valley, sometimes night has fallen by the time she reached this spot. "I have seen Tomnahurich looking ghostly in the moonlight, and I have felt that if I gazed at those black rocks long enough I, too, would be seeing fairies," confessed Miss Burnett.

Fight with Witches

In search of inspiration, one poet used regularly to walk the thirty miles from Tekapo to Mount Cook station, rest

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THE building in the title photograph is the Tekapo, Hotel



THE GODLEY GHOST

(By ERNIE SLOW)

JACK SKINNER alone can surely boast
Of having seen the Godley Ghost;
'Twas way up in the Sardine hut,
Where spooks and phantoms nightly strut.
For there, among the rocks and water,
He saw the famous Devil's daughter.

Now spooks, like fleas, they fear the light,
So to the hut they came at night.
Jack Skinner had just arrived, you see;
Back from Fairlie, on the spree.
And like all men, his happiness grew,
With some of Scotland's famous dew.

He danced with glee upon the floor,
When came a tap upon the door;
A visitor at this time of day?
A shepherd must have lost his way.
And open wide Jack pulled the door,
Then staggered back with an awful roar.

He seized his gun for open slaughter,
There before him stood the Devil's daughter;
A female form before him stood.
Jack aimed and fired as quick as he could.
With smoking gun and failing light,
I'm sure he looked an awful sight.

"I've done for her," he madly yelled,
His chest with pride and spirit swelled;
"All spooks I'll fight; all forms and sizes,
With whisky good, my courage rises."
But the night wore on with wind and rain,
When a tap came on the window pane.

Standing there, mid't falling water,
Jack saw once more the Devil's daughter;
Two loud reports, a mighty crash,
That rent the window pane and sash.
And Skinner sank with eyeballs red,
Upon his old and trusty bed.

He prayed the Lord would send the light,
To end this most distressful night;
He stirred the fire, more light to keep,
And went to bed. But not to sleep.
While resting on his cozy bed,
The wall was rapped above his head.

"I've been a John Hop in the Force,
I've steered erratic in life's course!
I've taken mad men to the cells,
I've flirted with the pretty belles;
But never such a night I've spent,
With nerves and spirits badly rent."

Upon the hillside, cold and bare,
He saddled up the old grey mare;
"It's for my life I'll ride this race,"
He called for Phar Lap's mighty pace.
Pity Skinner in his plight,
As he rode out into the starless night.

He dashed o'er rocks, through scrub and water,
But following fast came the Devil's daughter;
His spurs sank in like spearing fish,
His whip came down with an awful swish;
And from the mane right to the tail,
He rode for life—he couldn't fail.

With speed to burn, I'd not retard her,
But old Jack Skinner was working harder;
He spied the lake of bluish water,
When upon his back sprang the Devil's daughter.
He called for he'll—he called afar;
He called for Hamilton's racing car.

By W. Vance

The sheep, they scrambled up the rocks,
And wild birds flew away in flocks;
And birds that never flew before,
Flapped their wings, as off they tore.
He jumped the well-known station gate,
'Twas six foot high—he couldn't wait.

Dog kennels upset, and sheep dogs, too,
Flew at the sound of the hullabaloo;
And crashing through the door, half shut,
He galloped into the Shepherds' Hut.
Dave Sutherland shouted "Earthquake! Fire!"
And out he dashed in his night attire.

The old mare's head through the window came,
For Skinner kept riding, might and main;
A crash of timber, an awful shout,
The old mare is through; the wall is out.
Dave Sutherland yelled out, "Damn his eyes,"
As the hut, it reeled, and then capsized.

Into the swamp and out again,
Jack wheeled his mare for the Glenmore plain;
Bruce Murray jumped out of his cozy bed,
"Sounds like an earthquake here," he said.
The mules and horses madly fled,
The bull stood fair upon his head.

Then Skinner made for the river water,
Racing for life from the Devil's daughter.
Once more he galloped for the station light,
And now he looked an awful sight.
His eyes they glared like balls of fire,
His hair stood up like fencing wire.

His moustache would clean a 12-inch gun,
For Skinner then commenced to run;
He flattened the henhouse midst jolts and jars,
The roosters fled right to the stars,
With a mighty effort, and pain and sweat,
He upset Bruce Murray's wireless set.

Around the house, on a beaten track,
He went so fast he saw his back;
The shepherds rushed, but held aloof,
As Skinner climbed up the homestead roof,
As game as Kelly, and riding yet;
They hauled him down with a fishing net.

Then falling at the squatter's side,
The Devil's daughter he defied;
"Oh, thank the Lord," he madly raved,
"Oh, thank the Lord, for I am saved."
For Skinner didn't care a jot,
As he gulped down whisky, piping hot.

Shepherds still swear, up in the snow,
You can hear those phantom roosters crow;
And travellers, as they pass that way,
Hear them crowing night and day.
And o'er the mountains, rocks and pools,
Three weeks were spent to find the mules.

The bull was found, all stiff and sore,
Just nineteen miles this side of Gore;
Some horses alas, were never found,
Some say they're in the phantom pound.
So the boss gave out the following rules,
To shepherds, rabbiters, dogs and fools.

Employees make note and fear,
For whisky is forbidden here;
For months of snow creates less slaughter,
Than a visit from the Devil's daughter.
But they say that whisky often leaks,
Upon the well-known Godley Peaks.

But they mix it well with sparkling water,
To keep away the Devil's daughter.