

Song in the Wilderness

by "SUNDOWNER"

I WOULD not have believed two or three years ago that the day would come when I would hesitate to destroy my gorse. But that has happened. I have an acre that I have given up trying to grub because it is a mass of big boulders, can't burn because the fire would destroy my boundary fence and

cause loss to a neighbour, and can't spray because it is too far from water. For seven or eight years, therefore, it has remained undisturbed, and now it is no longer just a neglected patch of gorse. It is something that I should like to see on every farm in Canterbury if what is there now could be contained: a reverted wilderness. Where there used to be seedling gorse only there is now gorse eight feet high, matted with muhlenbeckia, and invaded by hawthorn. Rabbits hide there, of course, and opossums and hedgehogs, but the chief inhabitants are birds—finches, blackbirds, thrushes, and occasional quail, with fantails and bellbirds coming and going, and cats and ferrets preserving nature's balance. When Jim came to me yesterday with a plan for burning this out, and clearing one of his gullies at the same time, I felt that I should agree; but I was glad when a dangerous wind rose before we lighted our matches and sent us home again. I think Jim was glad, too, though for a slightly different reason. Now we are both indulging in second thoughts.

WHEN I was asked today what happened to the zebras that used to be in the North Island I said that they were probably carried away to Mars in a flying saucer. But that was a silly answer to what I believed to be a deliberately silly question. In fact, it was a sensible question to which there is a sensible

SEPTEMBER 29 and factual answer. One zebra was accidentally killed, and the other, having no mate, was shot. They had been brought by Sir George Grey to Kawau about 1870, and are both on record in G. M. Thomson's *Naturalisation of Animals and Plants in New Zealand*, which I thought I knew fairly well in the animal section. But if I had ever

met those zebras they had left no trace of any kind in my memory. I treated them as a bad joke when they were first thrust on me, and even refused to go to G. M. Thomson for proof of their reality. Now I will have to be careful to avoid being captured by the abominable snowman.

But I wish I knew why it was thought necessary to shoot the solitary zebra. There must be someone who does know, since if the facts had not been recorded at the time, G.M.T. would not have been likely to discover them 50 years later. They are probably in a letter or a diary note which I have not read and to which, now, I have no access. Perhaps Sir George had left for England when the shooting took place. Perhaps he was feeling poor—too poor to bear the cost of another importation. Perhaps New Zealand was beginning to be afraid of rinderpest. Perhaps the old man was tired of working for an ungrateful country. Perhaps he was just weary and listless, closing in on himself, and beginning to be indifferent to external things. It was a crazy venture in the first place, but looking back after a century of acclimatisation madness, I can't help thinking that it deserved a less inglorious end.

I DON'T know how many muhlenbeckias there are in the bush, or defying drought and wind in the open. But I know that the number is too small. In my own few acres I should like three roots where I have now one, 30 bushes where I have now ten, an acre in creeper where I have now a few square yards. But

OCTOBER 1. I have enough bushes at strategic points to sit or lie on, and if there is a better couch than three or four feet of muhlenbeckia on a hillside looking straight at the Alps, I have not yet found it.

Johannes Andersen speaks somewhere about the "delicious fragrance" of muhlenbeckia in bloom. My bushes have a pleasant smell at all times, but it is never strong enough to excite my civilised nose unless I am lying on them and crushing the leaves. Then, if I shut my eyes, I could be nowhere but on a New Zealand hill, though it is a feeble reminder compared with the fragrance of manuka or matagouri. It is the muscles of my back and legs rather than the nerves of my nose that tell me most about muhlenbeckia, since to them it is luxury at the right moment and in the right places. I wish we could have beds of muhlenbeckia in our houses, but since it is essential that the plants should remain alive to retain their full resilience, I am not thinking of taking out a patent.

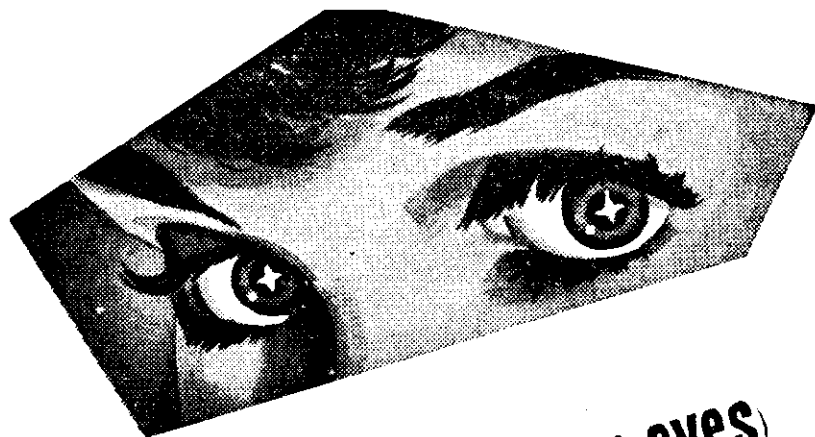
I DON'T expect to live long enough to see euthanasia legal in any English-speaking community, since we are all Christian sol-

diers more or less. But I think civilisation will come to it sooner or later, with or without the blessing of most of the churches. In the mean-

OCTOBER 3 time, I have a problem in my own garden—a pregnant ewe that can neither walk, deliver her burden, nor die. Ten days ago she lost power in her hind legs, but struggled hard to get up as often as I approached, and continued to be interested in food and drink. When she was still alive after three days, and it was beginning to be a problem to feed her, we made a stretcher out of a wheat sack and two tomato sticks and carried her down the hill into the garden. There she continues to be a problem. Though I know that she will die, and her lamb or lambs die with her; though she

must be suffering physical pain and has moments of panic when I go to her to change her position; though she is old, and even if she could recover now would go to the works after Christmas, I have not yet persuaded myself that I should end it all painlessly with a bullet. Life is all she has, and she clings to it. For what it is worth she struggles to preserve the little time that is left. Nothing living wants to die, or is capable of such a wish. Even the lamb inside her, if it is still living, is a reason, perhaps the chief reason, for her continuing struggle. A sensible farmer would kill her without compunction. So would a wolf, or a shark, or a crocodile, or a thug. I can't see my way through these situations, but avoid killing when I can.

(To be continued)



There's a light in your eyes!
..... never let it dim!

..insist on

Condor

..and get the best



The lamp with the bright future

CO3'55

LINES FOR THE GAY DECEIVER

DORELIA, in the plight of noon,
her lover fugitive—but soon
grief and the day go by, the moon
brings gallants to Dorelia.

The listener in the trees inclines
his head while sentiment refines
the delicate murmuring mandolines
which praise the fair Dorelia.

Down aisles of pearl the gay shells drift
away, apart; lake waters lift
a mocking laughter. Can your gift,
your wit, be cruel, Dorelia?

Dragoons are trotting through the park
where the pavilions glow. A spark
throbs from a carbine, something dark
sobs as he flies, Dorelia.

The Chinese lanterns beckon in
the wayward floats while, trembling, thin,
persists a single mandoline
with homage for Dorelia.

—Kendrick Smithyman