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SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

Rebellion in the Paddock

by "SUNDOWNER"

THE price I usually pay for a summer holiday is the loss of some carefully started young trees. This year it has been a rebellion in the cow paddock. I have lost two trees—enough in five days—but I have also lost the affection, the interest, and every trace of co-operation in a five-weeks-old calf, which had whole milk in my absence,

FEBRUARY 5 warm from Betty, and now sniffs at cold skim. She has also succeeded, in that brief period, in coercing Elsie, who is not even her aunt, into sharing the meals provided for a half-sister many weeks older.

That triumph she deserves. She brought it off by courage and persistence, mixed with more than a little guile. Now she shares every meal. It happens that Elsie's legitimate daughter is fat and lazy. Though her drinks are infrequent they are long, and it is not easy for Elsie to kick on one side while holding the door open on the other. Nor can she horn off the intruder if it is clever enough to move in from behind.

I have watched the whole performance, which goes like this. Elsie begins with "Get out, you little devil," and swings round at it. The little devil gets out, but not very far. Before the proper devil has taken hold again, the thief is butting in from the back or the other side. Elsie swings round again, and the little devil swings with her. Elsie kicks, shakes her head, and lashes with her tail, seldom getting the thief but often her fat dumpling. Then she has to comfort her dumpling, whose four hundred pounds are bewildered and trembling. If she stands still, a battle of noses begins underneath. If she pivots the calves pivot with her. I timed this performance yesterday, and it lasted a minute and a half. Then I heard "To hell with you both!" followed by a grunt and a sigh, and Elsie was chewing her cud. Except for gurglings and two thudding tails there was peace in the kitchen.

I NEVER talked to Tommy without feeling humble. When I met him first he was driving a tram, serving two

difficult masters—three if we include his union—with integrity and cheerfulness. He was then, I think, in his forties. But one day, without a warning that he could afterwards recall, he found it difficult to drive his tram.

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His eyes ached, his head swam, it was necessary to take a holiday. It was the beginning of a sickness as baffling as Barbellion's in *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*; but far more prolonged. Barbellion died at 30. Tommy went on to 70—perhaps a little farther: I never asked or knew his exact age—and at least a third of that stretch was covered in pain.

Barbellion, too, was able to tell his story in lasting prose. He knew that his name would be remembered and his work stand. His battle was fought in a scientific light—dim certainly, but always burning—and within call of scientific friends. He wrote eloquent letters, as well as his tragic diary. Tommy had Nanny—I will not try to say how much that was; but he had almost nothing else. He read while he had his eyes, and listened when blindness came. It always surprised me, when I talked with him, to note how much contemporary history he knew, and how tolerant and liberal his opinions were. I don't think bitterness ever got near him. But it is one thing to be holding on to sanity with informed and important friends looking on, and another thing to be fighting alone, in a narrow and circumscribed world, where the light of religion has faded, and art, letters, and science are distant and feeble candles.

When I saw Tommy the day before Christmas, having no suspicion then that the long night was about to end, I came away thinking of Lincoln's answer to the woman who begged for exemption for her last surviving son: "I have two. You have only one." I had eyes to see with and legs to walk away on. Tommy was paralysed and blind.

WHEN I was driving round Lake Ohau last week, at about nine in the morning, two chamois bounded across the road and almost ended in the

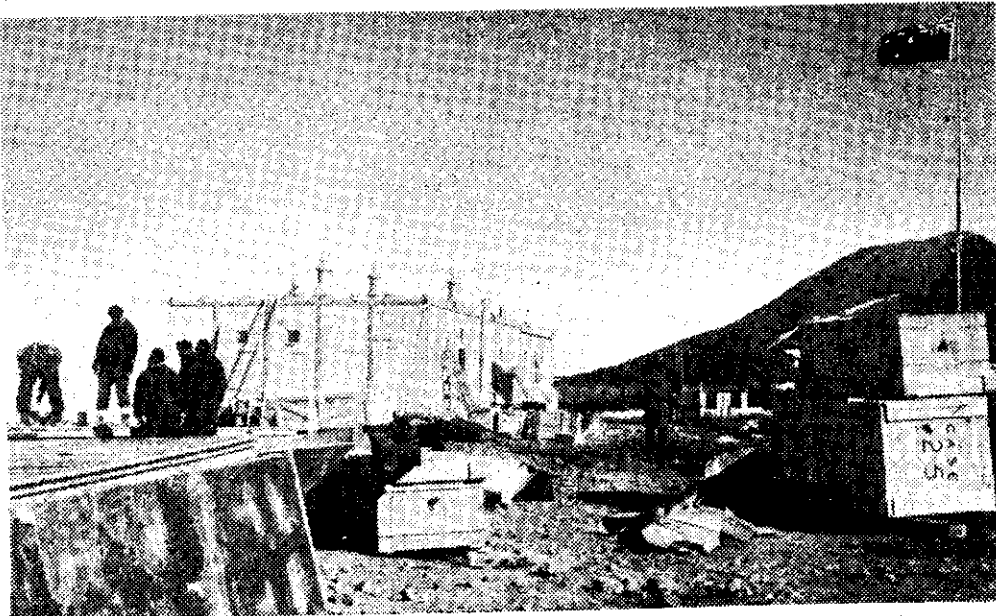
water. Then one broke back behind me and rushed off at high speed up the hill, while the other, confused and momentarily lost, dashed into the shelter of some briars.

FEBRUARY 9 Soon it, too, rushed out again, and after a few running leaps, in which it seemed to be searching for its mate, it bounded up the slope without stopping again or looking round. I read recently that a car driver had chased a chamois in the Otira Gorge and followed it for some distance at 25 miles an hour. That was on a smooth, flat road. These two seemed to be going as fast as that over tussocks and rocks.

There is, however, almost as much controversy over the speed of ground animals as over the speed of birds. In a magnificent photographic record of the animals of Africa lent to me recently by Mrs. Soulsby, of Annat, I notice that 25 miles is given as the speed of a charging rhinoceros, and also, for 300 yards, of a charging cow elephant. Cheetahs are faster, and gazelles and lions much faster for a chain or so. But these are low speeds compared with those usually given by authorities for the faster birds—ducks, for example, which have been timed at 50 miles, and storks, which have been paced from an aeroplane at only a mile or two less. On the other hand, the average rate of flying of most migration birds is surprisingly low: 900 miles in five days for a mallard, and 7000 miles in twelve weeks for Arctic terns, to quote two of the faster flights it has recently been possible to measure accurately. But with migrations that last several days we have to allow time for resting and feeding. Many of the smaller birds achieve very high speed for short distances, but it is doubtful even in their case if they ever reach 40 miles an hour. Most car drivers must occasionally have watched a bird instead of the road and noticed how soon the bird turned off. Edgar Stead once, with my rather shame-faced assistance, staged a race between a sparrow-hawk and a pigeon, which, after much twisting and diving, the hawk won. But I would like to see a sparrow-hawk chasing a chamois along a straight road.

(To be continued)

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WITH an NZBS tape recorder slung from his shoulder, R. R. Beauchamp of Christchurch recently "looked in" on operations in the Antarctic, and a programme compiled from recordings he made there will be broadcast from YA stations and 4YZ at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday, March 10. Mr. Beauchamp made the journey to the Antarctic and back in a United States plane, and besides talking with members of expeditions in the area he flew over the South Pole. The photograph (right) shows Scott Base at McMurdo Sound, which was visited by Mr. Beauchamp



Department of Agriculture photograph

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 1, 1957.