

Retreat from Addington

I AM reproved by post today for my use of the word "matagouri." "In a more or less Maori word," my correspondent points out, "ou never has the sound of au, or anything like it." If my friend had written "never had the sound" (100, 80, or even 60 years ago), I should have agreed with him. But there must have been a time when, in a

MARCH 8 more or less English word, Derby was not Darby, or Home Hume. That time has passed; and the time has almost passed, to my sorrow, for the preservation of Maori sounds. As fast as it can the Department of Education is washing the minds and the mouths of the Maori children gathered compulsorily into its schools, and the day is almost here when they will be Pakeha in speech as well as in outlook. I wish I could convey on paper what a teacher told me a few weeks ago about a conversation with a Maori child to whom she had given a ride in her car. I shall not try. But if readers with an ear for vowels will imagine how *Wairakei* sounds in Maori, in early missionary, and in the English of sports announcers, they will perhaps get a hint of what I am trying to convey.

Teacher: What school do you go to?
Child: Wyrakky.
Teacher: Oh, no, dear. *Wairakei*.
Child: The other kids call it Wyrakky.
I know that what the other kids say is not evidence or argument, but it is what all the kids will be saying in a year or two.

This, of course, does not mean that my withers are unwrung. I don't like matagouri, or think it a possible Maori word, or imagine that anything like it was ever heard by Marsden. All I can say for it is that it looks better than matagowri, and as well as matagauri, and has already driven out whatever the Maoris originally called Wild Irishman. My correspondent says that this was *tumatukuru* or *tumatukura*, but does not say how we floundered from those two words to matagowry and matagouri. We lost the Maori word, whatever it was, because we had neither the ear nor the tongue to retain it; but I am not sure that it was either of those resurrections given above. I may in future use one of them when I am

writing, but if I ever speak to Jim about my solitary bush of *tumatukura* I may find it difficult to write his reply.

FROM Addington to Moscow may be —I have no globe—about 13,000 miles. From the retreat of the Grand Army to the writing of this note is 145 years. But my mind leaps across those gaps in time and space and links them to my present activities. Napoleon, as Tolstoy made clear in *War and Peace*, did not invade

MARCH 10 Russia. The invader was all the events and influences that amounted in the end to Napoleon. So it was not I who came home last week from Addington with the wrong truck of sheep. They were brought here by all the events and influences that made me and took me to the yards on Wednesday morning. I went to buy old ewes and came home with old ewes. I went to buy Half-breds and came home with Half-breds. But I was not in the yards half an hour before I saw two pens of sheep that I wanted more than I wanted old Half-breds, that were going at a price I could have managed to pay, and that would have given me pleasure every day I possessed them. One was a pen of two-tooth Merinos, any one of which I could have carried home under my arm. The other was a pen of Cheviot-Romneys with the Romney influence well concealed. I came home without them because I could not, at a moment's notice, rid myself of profit and loss motives and bid for the love of God and Scotland. I remembered, in the part of me that is no longer romantic but mercenary, that two-tooths have fewer lambs than five-year-olds; that Cheviots have light fleeces and small carcasses, that they are fencers and wanderers, and not yet accepted in the South Island; that Merinos have slow-fattening lambs, and not many of them; that they are nervous and temperamental, and on low country about half as profitable as Half-breds, Corriedales or Romneys. I turned my back on both because it has been hammered into me all my life that sheep must keep their owners and not be kept by them; that farming is business and not fun; that wise buying

means profitable selling; and that it is as foolish to indulge fads and fancies in the saleyards as to marry a wife because she has a mole on her cheek (natural or added). But I get no comfort from the thought that I am following in the footsteps of Napoleon.

THREE times in three years I have been asked to check a note about myself while I am still here to check it. But it was not put that way. Callous as newspaper reporters become not one of the three called his note an obituary or told me that its destination was the office "morgue." That, of course, spoiled his flattery. It was no

MARCH 13 use suggesting that I would get six lines of remembrance when I died and making it plain at the same time that he thought me too weak, too timid, and too blind a boob to be told what he was doing. I am reminded of an occasion many years ago when I was on the other end of the telephone line and had been instructed to find out if a distinguished judge, known to be dying, was likely to last through the night (and rob the morning papers of the news). In desperation I rang his house and asked if there was anything further to report about His Honour's health. I have never discovered whether it was a housemaid who answered, a member of the family, or a nurse, but the message, from the sick man himself, was emphatic: "Tell them that the old b—— is not dead yet!"

My suggestion is that obituaries should appear before we die and not afterwards. I have written many tributes to the dead, and felt in nearly every case that they were written too late. Some people write their own obituaries and call them autobiographies. It is a good method for those who have the talent to adopt it. (Fortunately, their number is small.) The rest of us vanish like thieves in the night, only a little more successfully. That, I am sure, is the best method of all. But if it is a method that is not open to us—if either our vices or our virtues put a news value on us, as sanitation and religion give us a burial value—we ought to be told in advance what is going to be said about us. There could be an amendment in the law of libel exempting comment made about any man over 70, who is, or ought to be, impregnable to slander and indifferent to the laughter of his friends.

(To be continued)

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LIFE isn't all fishing in the lagoon in the Cook Islands. Nowadays the emphasis is on development—in agriculture, in health and education. In a documentary, "Sojourn in the Cook Islands," to be heard from YAs and 4YZ at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday, April 7, Bruce Broadhead will tell the story of this progress, illustrated with material he gathered during his stay in the group last year.