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### SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

## Landscape Under Snow

by "SUNDOWNER"

I DON'T know how old the hills around Dunedin are geologically, or the valleys, or the bush. I have no geology, and no astronomy. But when I saw the hills under snow last week, and the city under a half-grown moon, I wondered how often the two had arrived together in the last 100 years, and how many million times it

**AUGUST 3** had happened before there was a human eye

to see it. Though it is difficult to imagine an uninhabited Europe or Asia, the mind turns easily to a manless New Zealand, and is not disturbed by the vision. The disturbing thought is that the human race has not learnt in a hundred thousand years to be satisfied with earthly visions. When such a sight breaks on us as Dunedin presented last week we call it unearthly, as if we knew, or had ever known, what unearthly appearances are.

I can see no sin in enjoying the earth, and no folly in clinging to it. Though men in all ages have reached out for something more—for beauty that endures and happiness that will never pass—it is a bad preparation for eternal bliss to refuse the bliss within reach. I see more wisdom and piety in the attitude of my old friend Charlie Johnstone who greeted me as I passed through Beaumont. When I asked if he was well, he said, "Very well. It's a good world, and Beaumont is the best part of it."

IT was lucky for Otago's winter shearers that snow came before the machines started. I am not going to call it a warning, or suggest that anyone thought it a warning; but they must all have thanked God for their escape—if "all" does not exaggerate their numbers.

I am not in a position to know how numerous this bold company is. I hope that

**AUGUST 5** it is only five or six or seven or eight; and if it is I know half of them. But if it is 50 or 60 or 70 or 80 that is still a long way short of most farmers, or many farmers, or a considerable proportion of farmers. Otago and Canterbury between them seem to have about 7000 farmers chiefly occupied with sheep, but I drove more than 500 miles last week before I saw a single sheep without a fleece. Then I came on a shed in North Otago in which shearing had just started. This means that I could multiply all my estimates by 10—suppose the winter shearers to number 500 or 600 or 700 or 800—and still have nearly 90 in every 100 farmers who refuse to be persuaded that it is not necessary for God to temper the wind to the

shorn lamb, since the lamb can do the tempering faster itself.

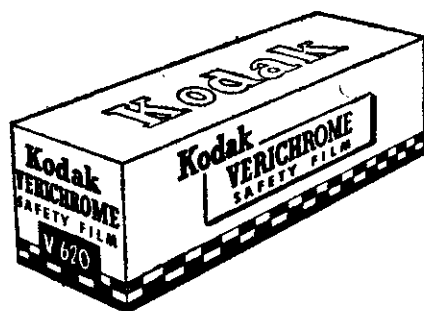
I noticed, too, during the first few hours of the storm, when it was my misfortune to be on the road, that every woolly flock without exception, and, as far as I could see without letting my eyes wander too dangerously, every individual sheep, moved to shelter if the paddock provided any. Where there were gullies, the sheep were in those. Where there were no gullies, but trees or bushes or hedges or scrub, the sheep moved into them. Where there were only wire fences on flat bare paddocks the sheep streamed along those, or stood pathetically against them. I saw nothing anywhere to support the argument that woolly sheep forget to take shelter and in a storm lose their lambs. Perhaps it is only laboratory animals that do that—symbolical sheep composed of tendencies and coefficients, fed on indices, and fenced in with Q.E.D.'s.

I WISH I knew why owls do cry—in the middle of the night and the dead of winter. Crying in spring and summer can be understood, if it is understanding a natural fact to be able to think of a reason for it. But what reason can there be for a continuously repeated cry from the bare branches of a walnut tree in 20 degrees of

**AUGUST 6** frost? Why is the owl

there to begin with, instead of in a bushy pine where all its potential victims are sleeping? It was suggested to me once that owls cry to frighten small birds into revealing

(continued on next page)



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N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 23, 1957.