

# Whom the Gods Love...

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHOM the gods love die young. So do many whom the gods have never favoured. If each of us kept a record of all the people he has known who died before 40 the ordinary would far outnumber the extraordinary, the weak characters crowd out the strong characters, the men and women who merely lived and died completely overshadow the few whose lives brought light and understanding and charity. There has never been a community anywhere in which these positions have been reversed: not in Greece, not in Palestine, not in Elizabethan England, not in Concord, Massachusetts, not in our own young country in its first high-striving days. I can't believe that there ever will be.

SEPTEMBER 23

Yet Christians as well as Pagans have found comfort in the thought that their greatly loved lost ones have been taken away for some high reason, and my first thought when I heard of the death of Guy Le Fanu Young was how little we could spare him, how many should have preceded him, how rude and rough a world it is for those who enter it with his delicate mechanism. Because I was 60 before I met him, and he then only 22, there was a gap between us that remained. But we built a bridge by which we made some crossings. I think he enjoyed the few hours he spent here on sunny days, and I certainly enjoyed his conversation; though enjoyed is a feeble word. The conversation of most of us is three-parts noise: not always meaningless noise, and not as a rule unpleasant, but as far from significance as cold tea is from wine. When Guy spoke he said something. He was incapable of chatter, and he despised pretence. If he seemed sometimes to clutch at straws, mental as well as physical, that is the way of the sick, and, now and again, their important contribution. It can happen that the straws are strong sticks.

It is a distressing thought that he not only died, like Keats, before he had sorted out the thoughts that crowded his brain, but lived knowing what was happening to him; that his few, very few, mature years had to be devoted to the struggle to keep alive, and were taken from the time that belonged to his pen.

I AM glad to know that the Forestry Service is alarmed by the spread of manuka blight, and seeking for means to control it. Even if control means introducing a parasitic fungus

that may itself one day have to be controlled, that is a smaller risk than losing manuka altogether in a very few years. And that is the present prospect.

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Manuka blight seems to have been known to our specialists for about 20 years. It has been known to farmers and the rest of the public for about 10 years, and in that brief period has swept through large portions of both islands. It must be about 15 years since I heard Sir Joseph Heenan calling manuka the Plunket Nurse of the bush; but neither he nor I knew then that the nurse was already sick. Now she is very sick indeed. I don't know of any district in which there is no blight, and when I tramped recently through miles of manuka country in southern Marlborough I thought that I was perhaps taking my last look at a scene that can have changed very little since the earliest white settlers saw it and will have vanished altogether in a further 20 years. It is true that only manuka is being destroyed at present and not kanuka; red manuka and not white; but I can't believe that the white is safe. In any case, it is the red scrub and not the white trees that shelter regenerating bush.

In the meantime, we face the general fact that for a further 100 years there will be too much land in New Zealand and, for safety, too few people. Parasites will not stop manuka or any other blight as long as there are farmers interested in spreading it; and that means every farmer who has more manuka-covered land than he can clear by less dangerous methods. I have no hostility to the blight-spreader who is trying to bring idle land into production. In many cases he has sweated for years in what seemed a hopeless struggle carried on without assistance from science or the Government. Now he sees his enemy dying while he sleeps.



GUY YOUNG

When he spoke he said something

If he did not rejoice he would be half dead himself. If he did not aid and abet the process he would mark himself down as a fool. But the rest of us are fools if we simply stand back and look on—the 95 in every 100 who own no manuka but will be ruined if we have no bush. It is for us, and not for him, to get the picture in focus, and gently but firmly restrain him if he now puts salt on the tail of *Eriococcus orariensis* (the parasite, science says, that likes blight for breakfast).

I AM not going to lock my hens in cages to keep them out of the garden, to prevent overcrowding, to keep their feet dry and clean, to protect them, and myself, from rats, to thwart the bullies among them, to save yard space, or to increase my supply of eggs. I am not

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going to do it in spite of the fact that the Department of Agriculture says that it may be done without cruelty and has been done somewhere for hundreds of years. I don't want to be an efficient poultry-farmer if efficiency means giving a hen a wire cage high enough to stand up in and no higher, wide enough to turn round in and no wider, with a netting slope to stand on, a netting slope to lay her eggs on, food and water and grit in front of her, and artificial light to brighten and lengthen her days. It may be true—I do not doubt that it is true—that this is the quickest, cheapest and surest method of making fowls pay. I saw tens of thousands of hens producing efficiently by that method in America, where I also saw six cows producing milk efficiently in a clearing on a rocky hillside 40 feet long by 20 feet wide, and was told about, but did not see, a herd of 100 cows on a top floor in New York which never left their stalls for nine months. Hair-raising things can be done both to men and to animals without killing them, and sometimes without lowering their vitality until vitality no longer matters. Canaries will live (and surprisingly enough sing) in cages for 10 or 15 years if they are kept clean and get the right food and water; though their cages, to compare with a hen's in a modern battery, would be a little bigger than a cigarette packet. Pigs will live and fatten in filthy sties a few feet longer and wider than a dog kennel, and a little more draughty. I saw a Hereford bullock in Ohio fattening in a dark shed built to hold one small car. There are men in most of the jails in the world who have lived, not merely for months, but for years, confined in cells five or six feet square, sometimes without light.

The unanswered question in all these cases is what happens next. With men we sometimes know, since they occasionally live on to tell us. With animals there is usually nothing to report except their early deaths. The bullock fattens, and is killed. The pig usually dies before he is a year old. The battery hen is killed—or sold to some free-range simpleton—as soon as she has laid as many eggs as she can be made to lay before her first moult. If hens and pigs and bullocks are merely hairy or feathered machines for producing the highest possible amount of food at the lowest possible price, the case for batteries is unshakable in our present state of knowledge. If animals and birds are fellow creatures whom, though we murder and mutilate them, we do in our desperate way love, too, the battery hen has the same place in husbandry as eunuchs and castrati in politics and art.

(To be continued)

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