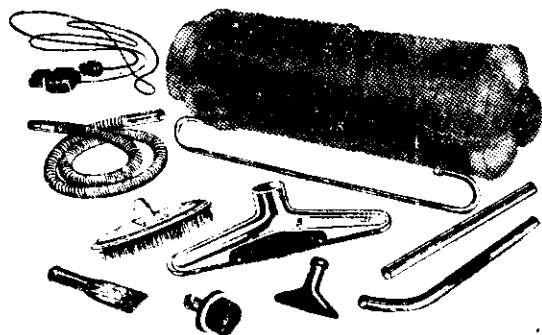


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Shepherd's Calendar

THE GREATEST BLUFF

by "SUNDOWNER"

WE don't have to live very long to know that truth is stranger than fiction as well as many times more interesting. The problem is to get the truth accepted. The more dramatic it is the less chance it has of penetrating the clouds of ignorance, suspicion, darkness, and fear in which most of us live; and then it takes cover itself. A horse-trainer told me once that the first lesson to be learnt in his business was that "the truth is the greatest bluff of all." If his horse was likely to run well he said so, and no one believed him. If he said that its prospects were poor everyone who heard him put money on it. "It would make you laugh to see how consistently liars deceive themselves."

APRIL 9 I think I could write an essay on that theme with some interesting illustrations from literature and history. I think most of us, if we had courage and honesty, could illustrate it dramatically from our own lives, telling how we chose the wrong occupation, married the wrong woman, fought in the wrong war, or entered the wrong church because the hint we gave of our real inclination or belief was not taken seriously. But there is not much risk that any of us will do this. We would not do it if we could see clearly when we went astray and why, since the cowardice that stopped us then would stop us more easily now.

But it pulls me up sometimes to discover what a poor chance the truth has even when it can do no harm. When I told Jim the other day that I had once shot off the leg of a deer as neatly as if it had been taken off by a butcher he burst out laughing, and even when he had pulled himself together, he continued to grin into the fire. But my story was true. It was 40 years old, but accurate in every particular, and I don't

blame Jim, who is still under 40, for supposing that the old fool's memory was playing tricks with his intelligence. I would blame him if he had pretended to believe something that his own intelligence firmly rejected. But if this had been an important matter, and Jim a very important person on whose goodwill my comfort depended, I might have paid a big price for that piece of truth and gained none of the compensations that the world has given George Washington.

MY recent note about an eleven-year-old bantam and a forty-six-year-old pony brought me an interesting letter today from a reader at Hammer Springs. People, she said, seldom know the age of hens, which are not often given a chance to grow old, but "we have a White Leghorn hen which was hatched in September, 1939. . . My children made a pet of her, and now when we let her out she follows us

APRIL 11 round looking for stones to be lifted so that she can find grubs. . . She would fight any hen still, and is always boss of the yard she is in. She has already nearly finished moulting, and last year she laid quite a number of eggs. . . We are interested to see how long she will live." It is all in all a better record than Mary the bantam's, though she, too, is the boss of her pen, and laid some eggs last season.

Strangely enough, my correspondent until recently also had a pony which is making a pretty bold attempt to defy time. "Though we can't boast of a horse of 50, Dusky is nearly 28, and two years ago had her first foal. I think she is going to have another this year." A pony of 28 is as old relatively as a woman of 70, so we need not worry any longer about the story of Sarah.

(I should have explained when I first mentioned her that the Wairarapa pony died the year after I saw her, and was therefore forty-seven.)

IN seven months in the United States I heard so little swearing that I had to resist the temptation to generalise. I felt safe in saying to myself that Americans are kind; that Americans are friendly; that Americans are easy to meet; even that Americans are simple. But I hesitated to say that Americans don't swear. They did not swear much to me or in my hearing, and no American in 12,000 miles of car travel, largely among farmers, artisans, and the smaller business men of the smaller towns, ever swore at me. But I am glad I never persuaded myself that Americans are clean-



People seldom know the age of hens

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 25, 1951.