

ONE PAIR OF HANDS

by "SUNDOWNER"

AS often as I work with my neighbours, visit them, or visit farmers in other districts, I feel that two farms in three are short-handed. And I am not thinking merely of tidiness, or of the spick-and-span touches that pay only aesthetic dividends. I am thinking of efficiency and productiveness, of the things not done that should be done, and of the things done over and over again that it should have been sufficient to do once. It depresses me, too, to notice how often the man with least money is the man who allows most to slip wastefully away—not through improvidence or laziness or lack of intelligence, but through inability to secure his steps and hold what he already has. It is like driving sheep on an unfenced ridge with only one dog: if you send him ahead to hold the mad ones, the sulkers, and breakaways run down into the gully before you can stop them; if you bring him back to rescue them the leaders give you the slip.

Even on this small holding I find myself neglecting one task for another, or half doing both, because my time is too short and my pocket too shallow to do everything thoroughly. I leave my gorse to cut posts, and have more gorse to grub when I return; leave the posts to cut hedges, and get no more posts out for a month. Rabbits raid the garden because I can't find the money, the material, the time, and the energy simultaneously to enclose it in a rabbit-proof fence. My paddocks run at right angles to the road and so get eaten out at the back where the soil is light, and hardly grazed at all in the front, where the grass grows rank and long. To keep the sheep where they ought to be means putting the fences where they ought to be, and that requires labour, which I can't find, posts which I require labour

to cut and assemble, wire which is available only at a prohibitive cost, and an entirely new sole of grass to justify the improvements and pay for them. It is a situation which I see duplicated wherever I go, not always so obviously as this, and not always so wastefully, but on three poor-man farms in four as unavoidably.

NATURE moves in mysterious ways sometimes, not always, as far as we can see, beneficent ways. But she has been good to this house in sending us a cat from the hills who is neither male nor female anatomically, and neither one nor the other temperamentally. We have, in fact, had to call

JUNE 22 it Id (lengthened sometimes into Iddy) since we shall not know until it dies in which mould nature originally cast it.

Id adopted us about a year ago when we had another cat, an unmistakable female, and while that cat lived Id remained wild. It would come for food but not eat out of our hands or drink in our presence. Then an epidemic removed the other cat, with her two half-grown sons, and Id very slowly changed. It is still shy, still uneasy about eating and drinking in public, and still untouchable if there are strangers about. I can stroke it on the back or front steps—it in fact runs to them to be stroked the moment I go outside—and after a little it will purr, and finally outdo all cats I have ever seen in showing its enjoyment. But a clumsy stroke, or a stroke made the wrong way as it turns about, at once ends the interview.

I am not sure that I am regarded yet as a friend. If I have been working some distance away, but not too far, I may discover when I am returning that Id is

following at a discreet distance. When I read in the open it will approach to within a few yards if the grass is long and wait there as long as I remain in the same position; but friendship goes no further than that. There is never such boldness as lying on my lap or going to sleep within reach of my hand; never a suspension of vigilance.

Id is a mystery, but a most discreet, useful, and healthy mystery; gets no colds, does no snuffling, leaves no hair on cushions or mats, makes no attempt to steal. There is no outward sign that it has been sterilised the ancient male way or the new female way: it is more like a worker bee—a female whose femaleness has been held in suspense and transmuted to better uses. But Id knows what bees don't know—how and when to rest. They work themselves to death in a few weeks. Id looks like out-living her owner.

A FRIEND has written expressing surprise that I should have harboured bees of unknown ancestry. "You apparently don't know," he says, "that bees have to be bred up to a high productive standard to be worth keeping in any kind of box. It is as foolish to keep

JUNE 26 any kind of bees as to keep any kind of cows or any kind of fowls." I certainly don't know how good or how bad my bees were—whether I had a strong swarm or a weak one to begin with, and whether, in the brief life that remained to them, they gave me good, a bad, or an indifferent return. I know that they made as good honey as I am able to buy, and made it all without cost to me. I imagine, too, that my fruit trees and clover were helped a little, and I can't think of anything I should enter on the debit side.

As for breeding up to a standard, as we have long graded up our cows and are beginning now to grade up our fowls, I am for it if it can be done. But I have read somewhere that there are difficulties. One of these, I believe, is the waywardness and inconstancy of queens, which refuse to mate with drones from their own colony. Though I might not know a queen from a drone if I saw them together, or a drone from a worker, I have read that when a queen goes on her nuptial flight she flies fast and high to escape the drones she knows, and looks wildly round for a stranger. If this is the case there can be no guarantee that she mates wisely from the point of view of honey production, or comes back carrying good-tempered genes. Drones are, of course, her progeny only; but workers require two parents, and one of them is very likely to be an outsider. So far, the only way to overcome this difficulty, and thwart fickle queens, is to fertilise them artificially, and that, I think, is now being done in a small way in Britain and the United States. But it will be a long time before it is possible in New Zealand to give queens a pedigree or prevent them from having treasonable traffic with the riff-raff they clearly prefer to drones with their own blue blood.

(To be continued)

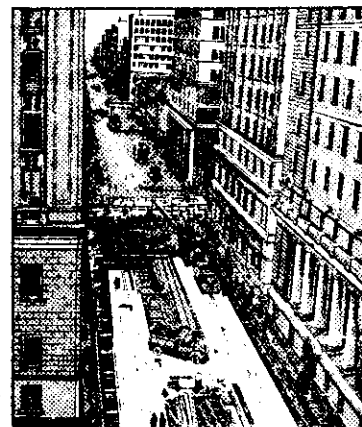


NEWS COLUMN

TORONTO GOES UNDERGROUND

Toronto has steadily grown into a 'big city', and within its 35 square miles live nearly three-quarters of a million people. A further quarter of a million live in the surrounding suburbs.

There is only one main north-south street, Yonge Street, seven miles long, and since the city's business district is situated in one relatively small area at one end, a considerable proportion of the people must use the road almost every day. Moreover, Yonge Street, which was first laid out in the 1790's, is narrow, and the stream of



cars and street cars is often brought to a standstill. The Toronto Transportation Commission has found it next to impossible to maintain regular services and adequate speeds. The Commission made an exhaustive study of the situation, and in 1946 a plan to construct an underground railway system was approved. It was estimated that the scheme would cost \$30,000,000, but rising production costs since 1946 have added 15 per cent. to this estimate.

The method of construction being used is known as 'cut and cover'. The roadway is excavated a block at a time to a depth of about 18 feet. A temporary deck is placed over the excavation and normal street traffic is resumed.

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