

# BROWNE OFF

by "SUNDOWNER"

I WAS reprovod today by Randal Burdon for complaining of the drought. Dry weather, he reminded me, was sheep weather; dry country sheep country; dry pasture, if water and shelter were available, all any flock

required in February. I deserved the reproof. All my life I have hated damp climates, damp clothes, damp ground. In general I dislike sloppy food—thin porridge, soggy toast, wet potatoes. I get needlessly worried by wet feet. If it had been possible for me to say where I wanted to be born, I would have asked for a country in which the rainfall was 20 inches or less—Australia, Palestine, New Mexico, South Africa. At no time in my life would I have chosen Taranaki or Westland, Ireland or West Scotland, Alaska, British Columbia, or Brazil. I like rocky foundations and gravelly soils, love matagouri, and hate rushes. There was no reason at all why I should have moaned about the lack of rain, except a short memory, peevishness, and a feeble resistance to mob suggestion.

But Randal made one point that I had not thought of before. New Zealand farmers, he said, were afraid of yellowing and brown pastures because they still looked at the land with the eyes of their

grandfathers. When grass shrivelled and lost colour in Britain there could be, and usually was, some ground for anxiety. Spring, summer, and even autumn there were soft, lush and green. But this is Canterbury, New Zealand—a province with a rainfall of 18 to 25 inches, high,



N.P.S. photograph

MATAGOURI BUSH—with grey warbler in occupation

dry, and hard mountains, and plains composed of a shallow layer of soil and free clay resting on a bed of shingle. Instead of being alarmed when our pastures cease to be green we should thank

God that they are becoming uncomfortable places for stomach worms and other internal pests that flourish in rank wet growth. Instead of asking the churches to pray for rain if it fails for a week or two, the dowsers to find water, or the Government to restore our rain-catching forests, we should remember that "oop from Zomerzet" is out of Somerset and away from it, away from Devon, Wales, Cumberland, and Ayrshire to islands on the other side of the world where a steadier sun and stronger winds brown off the grass, the leaves, and the soil, and externally at least dry off the men and women too.

A CORRESPONDENT whose Scots is better than my own writes to say that the poet whose language I queried last week pretended, like myself, to be a shepherd. Though he

FEB. 21 wrote as from the Ochil Hills—not far, as birds fly, from the home of my own forebears—he was in fact a teacher of English in a college for women in Edinburgh. In addition, he was not a Haliburton or a Hugh, nor had he anything to do with the creator of Sam Slick. He was James Logie Robertson, who was born in 1846 and died in 1922 after a bookish life spent largely indoors.

The moral seems to be that pretenders should stick together. If they don't or can't, they should be careful.

[[AS anyone ever taught a hen to take a hint or a dog to forget in a day what he has learnt in a year? For the first few days after my new fence went

FEB. 22 up it had no gate; when the gate was hung it had no netting; when the netting was added the hens found holes under the bottom wire. As often as they came through I chased them out, and then the moment arrived when they could no longer get out. But they could still get in, and do still come in, and if I chased them out twenty times a day it would not enter their heads on their twenty-first visit that I was not glad to see them. They are so glad to see me that when I stoop down to pick up a clod to throw at them they come running over expecting to get something to eat—a worm, a slater, an earwig, a snail, or another of the cold potatoes I threw at them half-an-hour before.

The dogs are a little less exasperating, but still disappointing. Mac learnt after one telling that he must not come through the gate. He has not learnt in a week that he must not walk round the plantation and enter by a gap on the other side of the garden. He stops dead and looks melancholy when I open the gate and make for the back door. But if I stay inside for half-an-hour and then come out he is not embarrassed to be found lying on the doorstep or asleep on the bank outside my window. However, I feel that with him progress has been made. With Tip I have made no headway at all. When I order him back from the gate he waits till I shut it and then leaps jauntily over it. If I roar at him to get back he goes back—straight over the top again—but returns the moment I move on. It has not yet occurred to him that he is a friend on one side of the fence, an enemy on the other side.

(To be continued.)

## Mellow Jane Austen

PERSUASION was the last book Jane Austen completed. She began to write it in 1815, the year in which she finished *Emma*, probably her finest novel. "The contrast between the two books is remarkable," wrote H. Oldfield Box, whose radio adaptation of *Persuasion* is now to be heard in New Zealand. "*Emma* is high-spirited, mischievous, satirical, exhibiting all Jane Austen's old delight in the absurdities of her fellow creatures. *Persuasion* is, for the most part, a gentle, tender story—mellow where *Emma* is acid."

There were two reasons for the difference between the books. For one thing, the character of the heroine, Anne Elliot, and the circumstances of her broken romance dictated the mood of the story. And Jane Austen herself had greatly changed. Family cares and failing health had softened the quality of her writing.

When he discussed *Persuasion* in the *Radio Times* before it was broadcast by the BBC last year, Oldfield Box said that the book did not perhaps contain any of Jane Austen's most memorable

characters, but in none of her books were they brought into three-dimensional being with greater finesse, and in none were they so cleverly contrasted. *Persuasion* (he said) was a charming and moving love story—and an answer to those who held that Jane Austen's writing lacked emotional strength.

New Zealand listeners are to hear a transcription of the BBC production. The story is told in dramatised form in three parts, each lasting an hour. It will start from 4YC at 8.0 p.m. on Wednesday, March 19, and from 3YC during next month. Later other stations will play it. The production is by Mary Hope-Allen (whom listeners will remember especially for her work on *The Cherry Orchard* in the *World Theatre* series) and the cast is headed by Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray, as Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot.



Jane Austen

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 14, 1952.



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