

TUSSOCK AND RIVER

by "SUNDOWNER"

BECAUSE I hate changes unless they are big ones, I have visited the same hairdresser off and on for 30 years. I have not crossed Cook Strait to visit him, or flown from Southland or Central Otago, but as often as my hair has reached cutting length in Canterbury I have headed for his chair. I have always come away rested physically and worried mentally. There was

MARCH 17 judgment in his eye; craftsmanship in his comb and scissors; respect and delicacy in the touch of his hands. He spoke when I came and went, but worked in silence. It was a thoughtful silence, not boorish and not dumb; respectful to himself and respectful to me. Like most of us, he had not been able, when he set out, to choose his path. If his father had been a doctor or a dentist, a comfortable farmer or a

death notice, I had not even known his name. Now I know that the world has lost something it produces only at rare intervals, and in one in ten of those cases, rewards adequately.

* * *

WITH a little luck, I thought today, I will get through life without shooting a bird. There will be enough animals around the Judgment Seat, battered, bleeding, and mutilated, to tear my penitence to shreds if they remember me. (Fortunately there will be no elephants.) But there will be no murdered birds and only two small bags of fish.

I can't think how it happened, but as I dozed on a bank watching Jim and John fishing for salmon it almost woke me up to remember that I

it, men who turn their backs on, and easily forget, the world, the flesh, and the Devil. When I turn my back on the world I look over my shoulder. I find it easier to turn my face to the world and bury my back on a bush or a tussock. Then, if the sun shines, I speedily go to sleep. But anglers are not lazy. They do not escape by blotting out the good with the bad. They choose the good, dismiss the bad, and then pursue their choice with passion.

For some reason that they could not understand, that I am told no one understands, the salmon laughed at Jim and John all day. They came out of the current into the pool, circled round it, rested in it, made porpoise leaps out of it. But they made no passes at the spoons. I would watch for an hour, sleep for an hour, then wake up and watch again; but it was always the same situation and the same scene. The salmon were not interested, the spoon-casters, to my astonishment, neither maddened nor conquered. When it was necessary, after seven hours, to go home, they said that it had been a wonderful day; no fish, but never a moment without the expectation of a fish, and a joy in the expectation. It was patience and virtue far beyond my range, but I may have acquired some grace by sleeping patiently near by.

(To be continued)

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"Anglers turn their backs on, and easily forget, the world, the flesh, and the Devil"

busy lawyer, Frank would have been an architect or an engineer or a university professor. They were all his jobs by the grace of God; by natural intelligence, diligence and dignity. But the grace of man is all most of us can appeal to when we are young, and it is as selfish, as stupid, as unfeeling, and as fickle as its victims usually are when they are old. I don't know his back pages: he was not the kind of man a sensitive person would question. But I imagine that he cut hair because his mother cut bread, and could not always cut it thin enough; because his father for some reason could not help him; because his brothers and sisters were closer, and their needs more clamant, than his secret ambitions. A door opened, and he went in, without knowing, without any chance of knowing, how long he would be in and in what shape, if ever, he would come out.

He came out last week at 61. When I called six weeks ago his chair was vacant and they said he was ill. A fortnight later he was very ill. Last week he was dead. Until they showed me the

had never caught a trout, never before seen a live salmon, and only once fished successfully for living things in the sea. The explanation I suppose is that my earliest years were dry-land years—no lakes, no sea, no big dams, and one swift river only of which we were superstitiously afraid. It is what happens to our protoplasm before adolescence that seems to fix the pattern of our lives, and no fish entered mine. But it is strange all the same that the habits, good and bad, of later years—as often as possible an open air life—have never embroiled me in fishing. There will be baleful eyes fixed on me when the day of wrath comes (dies irae, dies illa) but they will have lids on them and at least the power to close.

* * *

I AM not much encouraged by my piscatorial innocence. I have always heard, and always half believed, that men who fish do nothing worse. They are men of peace, men of few words, men who walk in the grass when the dew is on

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