

NO GRACE BEFORE MEAT

I HAVE decided, on the reports of correspondents, that bats still exist in New Zealand, and are still occasionally seen; but only in out-of-the-way places. The evidence would, of course, be more convincing if a bat had recently been killed or caught. One correspondent did make a kill

MARCH 21 with a shotgun, but not yesterday or the day before. I hope no more will be shot, but a corpse would certainly end some doubts.

It seems fairly clear, too, that whistling frogs are more widely distributed than I thought when I first mentioned them. I have had no reports from the North Island, but readers have written from Greymouth, from Ross, from Temuka, from Orepuki, and from Tuatapere saying that these frogs have been heard there this summer.

Finally, I close my meditations on horn-blowing with this interesting note from Mrs. B. M. Coates, Kaiwaka:

We were most interested in your short account of the horn. We have had one in this family since the very early days, and it still hangs on the wall.

This was a run of three thousand acres, and the horn was our only means of communication, in case of emergency, with anyone working out on the ranges. To those accustomed to its sound it could be heard anywhere on the station, and that must have been some considerable distance at times, even as the crow flies.

My husband blew it without effort out of the side of his mouth, even varying the notes, which were clear and carrying. My daughter does very well, but most people just blow, the result being a blast of sound.

A FRIEND I accompanied today on a house-hunting expedition refused to look at one attractive place because it faced a butcher's shop.

MARCH 23 I might have done the same thing with less excuse, since for every chop he eats I eat two or three. But most of us are

humbugs in such situations, and snobs; prohibitionists with shares in a hotel; bishops secretly interested in breweries. We eat meat, and enjoy it, but turn our backs publicly on the butcher; slop over animals, and hire someone else to cut their throats; drink their blood and call it gravy.

It may, of course, be the first sign of grace that we are ashamed of what we do, and try to hide it. In a thousand or ten thousand years we may have ceased eating chops, drinking beef tea and smacking our lips over animal jellies, and it may occur to someone then that the pioneers in the revolution were the liars, cowards, hypocrites and pretenders of the 20th Century who tried to spread mists of confusion between their appetites and the places from which they indulged them. But in the meantime the butcher remains the unseen guest at every meal of fish,

flesh, or fowl. If we don't want him there we should not invite him. If we do invite him we should not cold-shoulder him or pretend that we don't know him.

It is, I think, a logical extension of the argument for a more honest attitude to butchers, to point out that it is not enough, if we eat meat, to accept responsibility for the existence of slaughter-houses. At least now and again we should visit slaugh-

MARCH 25 ter-houses to see for ourselves what killing on a large scale involves. I have not done my full duty in this respect, though I have twice spent a day in what we euphemistically call freezing-works in New Zealand, and once gone through all departments of what Americans, with the same combination of cowardice and humbug, call a packing-house. It was a very big and very well-conducted packing-house in the "hog and corn" State of Iowa, and the manager's office could have been the board room of a bank, shipping office, or big newspaper. But there was one wing I was asked (by the well-groomed and soft-voiced young man who showed me round) to keep away from, and it was. I suppose, ill-mannered to ignore his request. It was the place in which cattle were being felled and bled as fast as a vigorous man with a sledge-hammer could deliver his blows, and pigs as fast as they could be attached to a moving chain: a place that it would have been cowardice to avoid and that is still nauseating to remember. But I helped to build it, and am still helping to establish and maintain other places of the same kind nearer home. I can't run

away from them until I give up eating meat and growing lambs.

There was, however, one place that might have made me a vegetarian if I had been so unlucky as to see and smell it—the famous *Saladero*, or killing-ground, of Buenos Aires, when W. H. Hudson was a boy. Here are a few lines about it written when he was seventy-seven:

The blood so abundantly shed from day to day, mixing with the dust, had formed a crust half a foot thick all over the open space: let the reader try to imagine the smell of this crust and of tons of offal and flesh and bones lying everywhere in heaps. But, no, it cannot be imagined. The most dreadful scenes, the worst in Dante's *Inferno*, for example, can be visualised by the inner eye; and sounds, too, are conveyed to us in a description so that they can be heard mentally; but it is not so with smells. The reader can only take my word for it that this smell was probably the worst ever known on the earth, unless he accepts as true the story of Tobit and the "fishy fumes" by means of which that ancient hero defended himself in his retreat from the pursuing devil. . . . It was the smell of carrion, of putrefying flesh, and of that old and ever-newly moistened crust of dust and congealed blood. It was, or seemed, a curiously substantial and stationary smell; travellers approaching or leaving the capital by the great south road, which skirted the killing-grounds, would hold their noses and ride a mile or so at a furious gallop until they got out of the abominable stench.

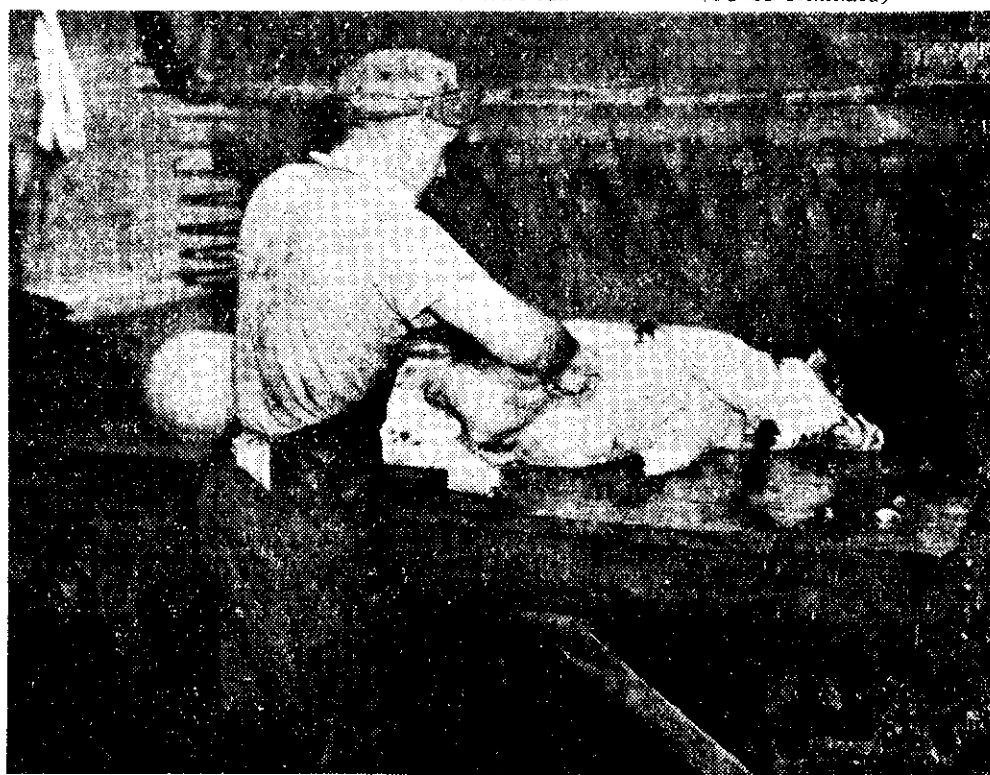
"GOODNIGHT," I said, and held down my cheek for the expected kiss.

Instead of a kiss she gave me what I believe is technically called a raspberry.

MARCH 26 "That's a nice way," I said, "to treat your poor old grandfather" (searching for her soft spot).

"What are you growling about? You've lived long enough. It's time you were dead."

(To be continued)



"We slop over animals, and hire someone else to cut their throats"



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