

QUESTION MARK AT LINCOLN

by "SUNDOWNER"

I NEVER visit Lincoln College without wondering who controls such institutions. I know who controls them on paper; what the formal arrangement is for both Lincoln and Massey; but who controls them in fact? Though we still call them colleges, they are in reality farm-villages in which there are facilities for demonstrations and lectures. The most eager students and

learners are, I am sure, the teachers, and dogmatic instruction must therefore be rare. But who decides where research begins and instruction ends? Who keeps the pressure on the lazy and the dull? At what point does each individual, and each group, feel the Director's hand, the collective hand of the Board, the remote and usually fumbling hand of Parliament? Has it ever entered the head of one student or of one teacher that the most dangerous hands of all are mine, and Jim's, and the storekeeper's, and the hands that milk the cows on wet winter mornings?

I am, of course, not criticising Lincoln. I am trying to praise it. But I want to know whom and what to praise most. If the right wheels revolve at the right times month by month and year by year, as they nearly always do, what drives them, oils them, accelerates them, replaces them when they wear out? I don't, Jim doesn't. The storekeeper doesn't. The irritable dairy-farmer doesn't when he goes out at 4.0 a.m.

Does democracy? Does our inherited tradition of political liberty carry over into administration? Have Lincoln and Massey become self-propelled, self-guided, self-controlled like the latest brand of rocket, or do we just think they know where they are going because there is no report when they lose their way? I see a big question mark at Lincoln every time I pass its gate, but all my questions could have,

and most of them I am sure do have, satisfactory answers.

WE live and learn, and then, too often and too quickly, forget both the teacher and the lesson. Forty-six years ago I saw a dog biting its way through a netting fence near Morven Hills woolshed. I had carried my swag from the Cromwell side of Tarras, was hot and tired, and I suppose a little dull in the head. I asked for a shake-down and something to eat,

APRIL 20 but had arrived in the middle of this wire-eating performance and had to wait till the cook, the shearers, and the shed-hands had collected or lost their money. Knowledge gained so painfully should have remained with me ever since, and the fact that it returns to me now means that it did remain somewhere. But as recently as nine weeks ago I locked an eight-months-old bitch in a netting-fronted box and found her gone in the morning. The netting was inch-mesh and new, and I bound it round the edges with a batten. But when I went out after breakfast there was a hole in the centre about six inches across, almost round, and through this the lady had eloped. Yet it was only today, when I was wondering where to dispose of the consequences, that the Morven Hills incident came back. When I think of some of the famous elopements of history I wonder how many of those fond fathers and foolish husbands kept dogs.

I DON'T know as much about Marsden the missionary as a Christian should, or as much about Marsden the farmer as a shepherd should. I know that he was one of the early workers with Merinos, and have read somewhere that he was the only man in New South Wales to persevere with the sheep brought there from Cape Colony by Captain Waterhouse.

APRIL 22 Later, I think, his enthusiasm moved from wool to mutton, from pure Merinos to

half-bred Merinos, but historians of the Merino can still trace his flock (through Betts his son-in-law) for a hundred years, and even (they say) identify its descendants today. Whenever I see his homely face, made more homely than it really was by cheap and nasty reproductions, I say to myself "There was our first experimental farmer."

But I read a note about him today in Dr. H. C. Cameron's study (it is hardly a biography) of Sir Joseph Banks that almost shook my admiration. Cameron unearthed in the Mitchell Library a letter in which a protégé of Banks in Sydney, admittedly a difficult man, wrote to Banks complaining that he could not "keep a small dog without tying him up because Mr. Marsden's rabbits are run at large, and deemed sacred." Marsden was the poor fellow's next-door neighbour, and I hope someone some day will erect a monument to that dog for its admirable intentions. It should also be in Australia's coat-of-arms, replacing the lion.

I HAVE perhaps wasted the hours I spent digging up the history of Ryelands. My solitary representative has disappeared. I missed him three days ago, but as he is not very big or very prominently marked, I supposed that I had seen him without recognising him. When it happened

APRIL 24 again yesterday I felt anxious; and when I mustered and counted today he was not present.

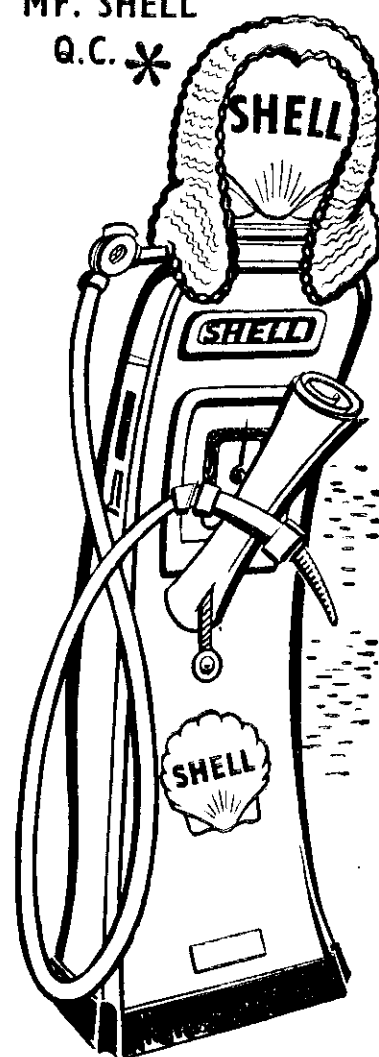
There are, I suppose, reasons for deserting sheep as for deserting men, but they are not always obvious. In this case there were rivals, but one was very old and the other very fat, and there was ample range for secret meetings. If the ewes were not attractive enough—they are big and placid Romneys—Edward has not improved his lot if, as I suspect, he has fled east. If he has turned south he will have found himself among cross-bred wethers. Both west and north would link him up with Jim's ewes, attended at present by South Suffolks, young, vigorous, and aggressive, and Edward's chances there would not be bright. My conclusion is that my ewes at his approach "gat them no heat." They may even, coming from Otago, have know how to say to him "ye're aiblins nae temptation."

But Jim has a madder levanter, more persistent and more irrational. He has a Border Leicester who refuses to stay with a flock of two-tooth half-breds in good pasture without rivals. As often as Jim turns his back the old fool takes the gate like a hurdler and heads for a flock of ewes of his own age—not even Darwin could say why. My conclusion in that case is that the young things annoy him and the absence of rivals bores him. Battle and mating seem to go together, though I can't quite agree with a pacifist I know, a man of science and a philosopher, whose prescription for the warring human race is the sterilisation of all males.

(To be continued)

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