

AFTERTHOUGHTS ON

I SELDOM go to an auction sale without wondering why more auctioneers don't stand for Parliament, or listen to Parliament without thinking how many good auctioneers are wasted in Wellington. All in all I like the auction speeches best, but that is chiefly because they are faster and shorter.

The technique in both cases is the same—voices lifted higher than the situation demands, repetition, the brain moving faster than the tongue can follow, so that many sentences are never finished, banded platitudes, unblushing and seldom concealed attempts to present only a part of the truth. Auctioneers seldom and politicians never lie: they just forget a few facts that their listeners would like to know. The assumption in both cases—it is a flattering assumption—is that the listener is not a fool.

But I find it much more difficult to keep my head at a sale than at an election meeting. I usually end by buying something I don't greatly need and allowing someone else to buy the article I especially want. Yesterday, for example, I wanted a fencing tool that sells new for 42/-. The tool offered was as good as new, but I stopped bidding at 34/- because we seemed to be getting too near to the real value. I wanted a bargain, and I allowed someone with more sense to walk away with the value. In other words, I refused a rebate of five or six shillings because I could not have eight shillings. Now I will spend five or six shillings going to town to pay the full price. Without me, however, and others like me, neither auctioneers nor politicians could

live, and it would clearly be a duller world if they disappeared.

A HAMILTON correspondent has proved to me not only that bats still survive in New Zealand, but that they survive in accessible places. The proof is a reproduction in the *Waikato Times* of a photograph of a long-tailed bat captured alive within five miles of Hamilton. Fortunately, the capture was made by a farmer and his wife (Mr. and Mrs. J. Scobie, Rukuhia) intelligent enough not to kill this rare creature, but to take it alive to a newspaper office from which it found its way to the Auckland Museum and then to the Auckland Zoo. Though I could not doubt, after some of the earlier letters sent to me, that bats still survived in out-of-the-way places, there is a big difference between believing that they survive and knowing beyond all question that they do.

The long-tailed bat has, I think, relatives in Australia, but I don't know how common they are. The short-tailed bat seems to have been a New Zealander since the beginning of time; and although it has always been rarer than the long-tailed species we can surely go on hoping now that it also survives somewhere. If the Rukuhia bat is the first long-tailed specimen seen, captured, and identified for 15 years, it is not much farther back to Edgar Stead's discovery 22 years ago of several colonies of short-tailed bats on Solomon Island in Foveaux Strait. It may help whoever discovers the next survivor of either family to remember that the long-tailed specimens have short ears and the short-tailed specimens long ears.

I FELT envious this morning when the mailman told me that he was "going shooting in from Kekerangu." It

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took me back 25 years to an expedition that now seems unreal: a long ride in Indian file through limestone gorges populated by goats; shot goats falling from high ledges and turning over slowly as they came

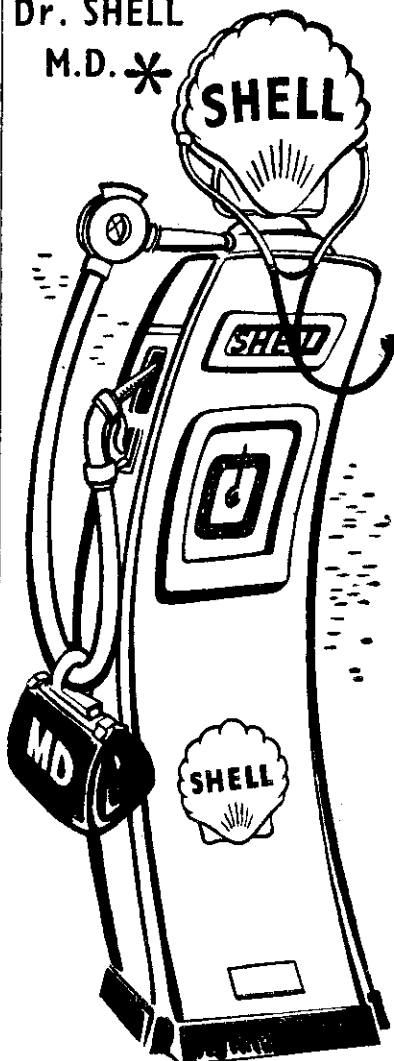
MAY 14 down—they took an appreciable time and seemed to float down the cliff faces; a boar that came by night into a hut occupied by four men; a pack-trail of mules that could have come down from the Andes; a collection of abandoned wattle-and-daub buildings from which Indians could have emerged without surprising us. But my most vivid memory is of riding round a shingle face on a track so narrow that even our horses were nervous, and on the return journey seeing a dead horse on its back a hundred feet below us with its shod hoofs gleaming in the sun. I can still remember how suddenly we stopped talking and tightened our grip on the reins.

I can't remember whether I had then read Darwin's account of his journey in 1835 through the Portillo Pass, but if I had I think I would have recalled his picture of the frozen horse; and, once we were on firm ground again, have said something about it: I can't believe that I would have forgotten this:

Bold conical hills of red granite rose on each hand; in the valleys there were several broad fields of perpetual snow. These frozen masses, during the process of thawing, had in some parts been converted into pinnacles or columns, which, as they were high and close together, made it difficult for the cargo mules to pass. On one of these columns of ice, a frozen horse was sticking as on a pedestal, but with its hind legs straight up in the air. The animal, I suppose, must have fallen with its head downward into a hole, when the snow was continuous, and afterwards the surrounding parts must have been removed by the thaw.

(To be continued)

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SOME goats are shot among the gorges in from Kekerangu, others are sniped at in Parisian salons. Here is Pablo Picasso with his latest trophies in the Museum of Modern Arts, Paris (see also page 4)



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