

COUNTING

WHEN Elsie had her last calf, and it proved to be a bull, I asked the veterinary surgeon who had helped in the delivery to take it away in his truck. That was cowardice, but not successful self-deception. I knew that he would kill it for his dogs, and hastily told myself that he would do it mercifully (as I am sure he did) and save it from the bobby truck and the slaughter-house. But I will kill the next bull myself if it is my decision that makes him die. I will not, however, think that I am clearing myself morally by forgoing the payment his blood would bring at the works.

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In the meantime it comforts me a little to know, from something I discovered today in an early book on agriculture, that the bobby-calf business is a slight advance on the practice in force not so many years ago in Britain of bleeding calves at intervals before they were killed to keep their flesh white. Today we keep them alive for a few days to make their flesh firm, but we don't torture them while they are waiting, and we kill them painlessly. It is not a great advance in 150 years, but it is better all in all than man's inhumanity to man during the last quarter of a century.

I DON'T expect to live long enough to see the last free rabbit caged in a zoo, but there are moments when I think my children may. In those moments I shut my eyes to science, base my conclusions on my own observations, and look back over 50 years. But if the experts are right, and have not been misrepresented in the newspapers, that last rabbit will have cost about twenty million pounds. I have just seen the summary of a report by Dr. K. Wodzicki, who directs the men who draw the graphs of such movements for the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and it would appear that we spent nearly a million pounds last year on rabbit control and reduced the rabbit population by about four per cent. I don't question such

figures, though I wonder sometimes where they come from; but I feel that the destruction graph will have to make some sudden leaps if the taxpayer is to be persuaded to go on watching it.

Counting rabbits is like counting casualties in Korea. Some are counted, and the rest calculated, and I have yet to meet the man of science who can check the flights of fancy. I have seen bird-counters at work, and I have had many opportunities of checking the deer-counts of run-holders and cullers. I have listened to stories by men who have counted fish; have seen stacks "moving" with rats, gullies with wild pigs. In goat-infested areas in the North Island I have tried to estimate the unknown population of goats against the known population of sheep. In all these cases I have learnt something, but it has never been what I set out to discover. The only estimates I know that usually come close to the actual figures, and never go beyond them, are those we sometimes enter hopefully in our in-

the day. That means the housewife must be freed from unnecessary tasks that tie her to sink and stove. We need better-planned houses, equipped with more labour-saving devices. More use should be made of new products, materials and gadgets which speed household tasks. Housewives everywhere will agree that we need to think out our housekeeping practices more clearly so the job is done in less time, with less fuss.

Above all, we need a new attitude to keeping house. So often we hear, "Oh I'm only a housewife," or "I'd love to do that, but there's the house and the children." A housewife is not an unpaid drudge working long hours for little reward. Each thinks only of feeding and clothing her own family and does not realise that, collectively, housewives control all the money and markets in New Zealand, and are not without influence overseas. That's a breath-taking responsibility, isn't it?—but one I'm sure New Zealand housewives with all their reserves of resourcefulness, initiative and vigour will succeed in. Never forget, housewives are people.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 10, 1953.

RABBITS

by "SUNDOWNER"

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BOBBY CALF

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come tax returns. They are no truer than we want them to be, but they are close enough to the truth (we estimate) not to arouse suspicion. Wild life counts must arouse suspicion. If they are made by men searching for truth they are more valuable than those made by propagandists, self-seekers, or sensationalists. But counting is one thing, calculating another.

* * *

I HAVE just read a disturbing story in a recent issue of *Life* about a German geneticist who has reversed evolution deliberately. Why he chose horses and cattle for his experiments, and not dogs, rats, cats or birds he does not say, since he ran a considerable risk of not living long enough to see the experiment through. As

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it turned out, however he satisfied his curiosity in 30 years, and has now distributed some of his results (stone-age horses and prehistoric cattle) for exhibition in European zoos. Has he proved anything?

Chiefly, I think, that cave artists were not such crude draughtsmen as we may hitherto have suspected. Dr. Heck's horses could have been the very animals whose outlines were scratched on bones and horns ten thousand years ago while his cattle are as far removed from Elsie and Lily as I am from the man of Piltown.

Anti-evolutionists will argue that the experiment proves too much, but I find it alarming that evolution can be reversed so quickly. If animals which lie about the same time in the womb as we ourselves do can be made almost unrecognisable in 30 years, where may we ourselves not end if we lose our way for, say, 90 years?

* * *

A TARANAKI correspondent sends me a newspaper report which may, for all I know to the contrary, be true in every particular, but it starts almost as many questions in my mind as Dr. Wodzicki's fifty million rabbits. Here the menace is opossums, which are alleged to have killed so many willow trees on the banks of the Mokau River that navigation has been interrupted for seven miles. For mile upon mile, the report says, willow trees stand dead or dying along the river bank, and in one valley in the same area the native bush is "dead or dying" for a mile and a half back from the bank. Since the damage is at least partly confirmed by the chief ranger of the Egmont National Park, it is almost impertinent to question any of it; but they must be more active, more systematic and more hungry opossums than any I have ever seen.

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I know what a few opossums can do in an orchard; I have been told often enough what a few thousands can do in the bush; but I have visited the bush off and on for 50 years—before opossums came, and regularly since they became numerous—and I have never found it easy to certify these extreme reports of the damage they have already done. I accept the possibilities, but I have not so far seen the proofs—though I lived for 12 years in the bush at Day's Bay, and took long tramps in it nearly every week-end. Perhaps I did not know the signs when I saw them.

(To be continued)



THE work of next week's Dominion conference of the Women's Division of Federated Farmers will be discussed by the Dominion President, Mrs. I. L. M. Coop (above), in an interview to be heard in IYA's "Feminine View-point" on Monday, July 13, and in the same session on Friday, July 17, a delegate will sum up the work of the conference. Both interview and report will be heard later in Women's Sessions from all other YA and YZ stations (except IYZ)

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