

SECOND-HAND SIGHT

by "SUNDOWNER"

A CORRESPONDENT who tells me that I once taught her in Sunday School, but that she now lives on a farm and has learnt more from animals than she had previously learnt in "half a lifetime," wonders what I think of voices, appearances, and second sight. It is a curiosity that, if I were wise, I would not gratify. I would adapt the crafty Disraeli and reply

JULY 1 that I think what all sensible men think on that subject, and that what it is sensible men do not tell. But I don't feel very sensible today. If I did there would still be that Sunday School behind me challenging me to honesty and no pretending.

In any case, honesty in my case is quite harmless. I have no thoughts because I have no facts. I have second-hand facts, and facts that have come through ten thousand hands: that Luther saw the Devil; that Joan of Arc heard voices; that Saul called up Samuel through the Witch of Endor; that Blake saw and heard things unseen and unheard by his contemporaries; that British soldiers saw an angel at Mons; and so on through all the long pages of recorded history and legend. I don't think it would take me long in a good library to compile a list of a hundred cases vouched for by men of integrity and learning. There's second sight in Homer. Every village in the Scottish Highlands has its seers or sayers or foreseers. They are in Iceland and in the desert; among Red Indians and among our own Maoris; in Ireland, in Wales, in Kenya, in Patagonia. Andrew Lang spent half his lifetime pursuing them, Sir James Frazer all his life. I can't pretend to know what they could not discover, or to be able to explain what baffled Dr. Johnson on his journey to the Western Islands of Scotland. There may be something that science has so

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handbook on defrosting. Only the butler was there, drying martinis on his apron. This gave Dave, as they say, pause. Another flash took place in his mind: Why not a twist in the plot? Perfectly legitimate. Even laudable. He withdrew to another part of the house fingering his lip.

HE was early down to breakfast on Monday morning. The only other guest present was Slade Spear, who had as usual spent the night on the phone. In silence they consumed their Bran Flaxe, until Slade Spear, unable to find the singular, crossed the room to the master refrigerator, which occupied the whole west wall of the dining room. He opened the door. Mrs. Lipton fell out on the floor with a chink.

"Were you ever in Dunedin, Mr. Dawber?" Slade Spear flicked a cigarette into his mouth.

"Why, er, no, I never was. . ."

"Come, Mr. Dawber, I've been checking. You were once in Dunedin, and so you'd know what temperatures like this can do. Or rather, what can be done by temperatures like this," he added, passive for the first time. He stubbed his cigarette out with a hiss on Mrs. Lipton. "All right boys."

The room filled with mounted country police.

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far missed, something that science must always miss; and there may be nothing but hallucination and delusion, the mind making the eye see things that do not exist out of the mind, or the eye confusing the brain. It is all beyond me



PAPUAN MEDICINE MAN
"There may be something that science has so far missed"

and remote from me now whatever I would have said about it in those far off days of Sunday School and desperate belief. But there is no reason why I should not be frank about it all, if it helps anybody to know how blank my mind is.

I suspect everyone who listens for voices or sits down deliberately to pierce the curtains of sight. But genuine visionaries don't do that. Some of them do the very opposite—try not to see, and remain silent when the unseen is forced on them. I once knew a woman from the Shetlands who told me that she was "cursed" with second sight—that it tortured and terrified her. Normally she was vivacious and witty, and I have never been able to suppose that her visions were just shadows and echoes of ancient superstitions and

legends. I can't help my correspondent; but if she listened to me without sniggering when I was echoing the echoes of twenty centuries, I will accept whatever blame she lays on me now for her continuing struggle with "creeds, humbug, and wishful thinking."

* * *

A MONTH or two ago I would have questioned a statement I have just seen in the *Manchester Guardian's* country column: that cows like elder leaves. To this day I have not seen a cow eating elders, or even stripping them wantonly without eating them as they so often do with other trees. But when I was in the Molyneux Valley in

February I was told by Bob Findlay, of Island Block, that his cow lived for weeks at a time on the elders that now cover the old dredge tailings, and that she preferred them then to grass. I have forgotten the months when they were most acceptable—perhaps when the blossoms were on them, and later when the fruit appeared—but it was the first time I had heard of their interest for cows in spite of my long acquaintance with them in Otago. There is one elder where I live now, and although the cows have attacked everything else but our solitary matagouri (as we must, I suppose, spell it), they have taken no notice of the elder bush. Nor do cattle, as far as I know, eat the hundreds of elders that have appeared on the hill-sides of Central and Western Otago since I was a boy. In the fern and tussock country elders provide most of the shelter in winter and the shade in summer, and if cattle were interested in them they would not be growing so strongly or spreading so rapidly. There may, of course, be different kinds of elder, with variations of palatability. I may have the unpalatable variety, Bob Findlay and the *Manchester Guardian* correspondent the palatable. If that is the case I still have a chance to cover my only land slip with elder without the expense and labour of fencing. But the *Guardian's* note is discouraging:

One cow was stripping bough after bough, as if she could never have enough. A piece was out of her reach, and so I broke it off and threw it over the fence, when she at once ate it up, flowers and all, "with an animated countenance, the expression of which betokened her entire and perfect approval of the whole arrangement"—like Sam Weller with his sandwich on the dickey seat of the chaise from Bath.

The correspondent adds that it is rash to burn elder in some English counties since that brings bad luck for seven years. As far as I have heard that danger was not imported with the plant, but we have always been a little afraid in New Zealand of the conversion of the berries into wine. We may be more nervous when the new Transport Bill appears.

(To be continued)

E. & O. E.

A FEW days after the appearance of the July 10 issue of "The Listener," which reported A. A. Congalton's survey of social consciousness among New Zealand adults, a Wellington newspaper unexpectedly disclosed a tender spot in the otherwise hardened susceptibilities of newspaper men. Ranking the social status of various occupations, in a brief summary of the "Listener" article, the paper listed only 29 of the 30 occupations covered in the survey Number 11 on Mr Congalton's list—the News Reporter—had been omitted.

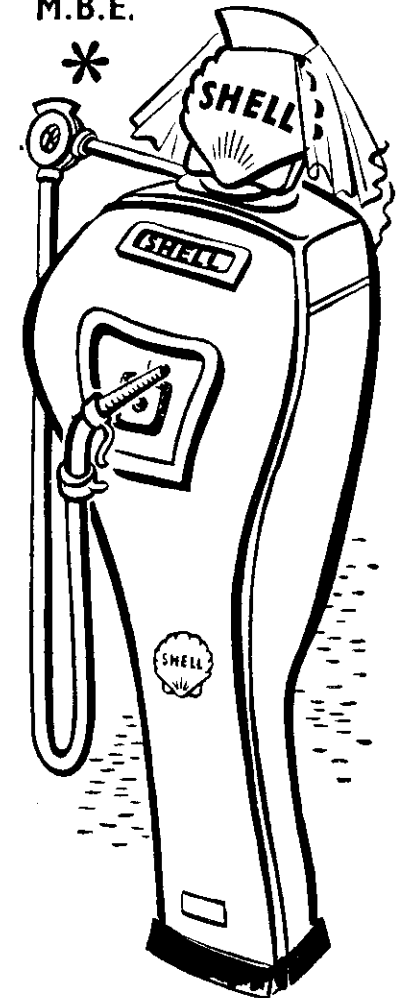
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