

Book Reviews

New Zealand's Famous Murders

Baby-Farmers, Bushrangers and Bandits Feature in Dominion's Criminal History

OF all crimes, murder is the one which retains a firm and permanent grip on the public imagination—raids and "conversion" of motor cars are featured prominently in our papers, but they are relegated to a back page should a murder be committed in the district. Newspapermen the world over find that, however dull the news may be, a murder will always sell their paper. The modern craze for the detective story shows how firm a hold the crime of murder has obtained on the public imagination. But if these imagined crimes are thrilling, how much more so are the accounts of actual murders—the hunt for the criminal, the final tracking down, the trial, and, at the last, the final grim penalty; for that reason alone "Famous Murders in New Zealand" should be read by all those who, whether they admit it or not, are lovers of that creation of modern fiction—the "thriller."

THERE have in the history of this country been many enthralling and occasionally world-famous murders, but most of those which created a stir at the end of last century and the beginning of this have been forgotten—indeed, many that occurred but recently are vague memories only to the general public, for the memory of the "man in the street" in these matters is notoriously short. Mr. Jack R. Sheehan's book comes, therefore, at an opportune time: the murders described in it are within memory of a great proportion of the reading public, and the book thus affords an excellent opportunity of reviving memories of the stirring happenings of yesterday—and the day before. The stories range from the old gold-mining days to the

post-war period, and form an interesting contribution to the history of New Zealand.

The book includes the story of Frederick William Eggers, who, as many will remember, held up the pay-car of the State coal mines at Runanga, near Greymouth, in 1917, and killed two of the occupants, wounding the third. Mr. Sheehan's excellent powers of description are perhaps at their best in the vivid picture he paints us of the hunt for, and capture of, the murderer.

There is also the case of the Winton baby-farmer, the only woman ever to be hanged in New Zealand—though from the facts it would appear that she richly deserved her fate. It was estimated that at least 22 children had passed through her hands during the

six years she carried on her trade at Winton, and not more than four or five were living when she was arrested.

Another well-known murder that is represented is the only case in this country of a man being hanged on the evidence of finger-prints alone. This was the murder of the postmaster at Ponsonby, Auckland, in 1920. Practically the entire weight of the prosecution's evidence lay upon the finding of a finger-print belonging to the prisoner on one of the cash-boxes of the post-office. The police department had an officer brought over specially from Australia that there might be no possible doubt of the prisoner's guilt. This, like, indeed, most of the murders in the book, was no hastily-conceived effort, but a careful and thorough study of the habits of the unfortunate postmaster had been made.

Wellington, too, has it representative in the person of Stephen Boshier, who, in the late 'nineties of last century, murdered an old storekeeper and his wife—with whom he had been on friendly terms for years—in their shop at Petone, in order to obtain their money.

The famous case at Timaru in which Thomas Hall, a nephew of Sir John Hall, a former Premier, married a society girl in Timaru, and then calmly poisoned her father and attempted to poison her, is the subject of an exceptionally well-written article. At the time of the trial there were many influences at work attempting to hush things up because of the social standing of the parties, but Mr. Sheehan has refrained from taking sides, and gives a very clear and enlightening narrative of the case.

A notable feature is that, of the seven murders here described, only one is performed for reasons other than monetary gain; the absence of the "crime passionnel" in New Zealand has been remarked before, and here it is strikingly illustrated.

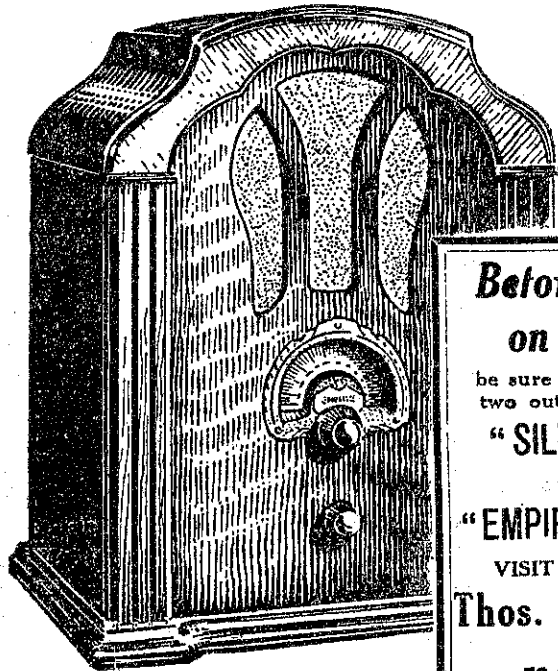
In an all-too-short prefatory note Mr. C. A. L. Treadwell, the well-known Wellington barrister, has some interesting remarks to put forward on the subject of murders in general, and he concludes with a sentiment which every reader of this excellent little book will heartily endorse: "This is probably the first collection of murders in this country, and it will deservedly find a large and appreciative public."

"Famous Murders in New Zealand," by Jack R. Sheehan. The Waverley Press, Wellington. Our copy from the publishers.

Ideas for the Student of Commercial Art

A RECENT publication which should appeal to all interested in showcard display is a handbook by W. L. Mitchell, who has had 40 years' first-class practical experience and is one of Australia's leading showcard writers. The contents include original showcard layouts for all classes of goods, scrolls and slogans, symbols, panels, stencil, masks, lettering, ornaments, monograms, and many bright ideas such as "startlers" for engaging attention, price panels, etc. Altogether there are 246 designs, 24 plates, and five pages of expert instructions in this little book, which is published in a handy pocket size.

"Show Card Layouts," by W. L. Mitchell, Robertson and Mullens, Melbourne. Our copy from the publishers.



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