

COUNTRY STOCK SALE



A KORERO Report

THE DAY is fine, but his boots are too dirty for description. They squelch when he walks. Weathered-looking gaiters keep out the filth and the cold, cutting wind. They are held up and in place with thick string and two 4 in. nails. Warm corduroy trousers bulge at the top of the gaiters. The belt he made himself from the best hide. The leather is thick and with no wrinkles. If you're in the crowd, the sun shining on the buckle catches your eye. His shirt is spotlessly clean, smoothly ironed, but the top button of the collar is undone and his tie is loose from the usual tidiness. His woollen cardigan is not fastened. It fills in the wind and gives you the impression of a greater bulk than is so. In his hand is a black-covered notebook, and you notice with surprise his nails are clean and carefully cut. When he's working, his hands aren't still very often. The wind blows his straight black hair across his eyes, and he smoothes it into place without thinking or appearing to notice. While he's working he doesn't seem to smoke much, and when he does it is with quick, impatient draws on a cigarette he soon throws away. You don't need to be close to hear his voice, which is strong and without harshness. At the end of the day his face is rather strained and weary but has lost nothing of its good humour, his eyes are still twinkling, his smile is as quick.

It is Tuesday. It is the day of the Levin weekly stock sale. And it is the auctioneer we are looking at. You wouldn't like his job: it is no wonder he looks weary about four o'clock in the afternoon. The yarding has been small, the prices high, but it is that auctioneer's job to make them high, to raise bids if necessary against the better judgment of the buyers. He works on commission, and so does his firm. High prices pay the two of them. Questions are asked if there are too many bad days.

Stock firms will tell you an auctioneer's life is hard, that they often crack under the strain. Selling in the ring and in the pen is only a part of their work. These days especially, farmers ask them for advice and help in culling their flocks and herds, mating their animals, buying and selling—they are expected to be authorities on a hundred different subjects. The auctioneer himself says he likes the work, but that he supposes it is rather hard. More than anything he wishes his telephone wouldn't ring so much. It means that practically every night he can't get to sleep until after midnight. It wouldn't be so bad if only they would leave Sunday quiet, but they don't.

The stock sale at Levin supplies most of the meat for the Wellington market. Business is always brisk. And such a noise as you never heard in your life. Boots. Talk. Bidding. Dogs. Pigs.