



To Be Seen In

OTAGO CENTRAL

A Koro Report

AT THE end of the day our notebooks and sketching-pads looked as though they had floated down the Kawarau River, washed ashore, and been picked up out of the mud. Nor was our own appearance much better. The crossing of a desert, a temperature of nearly 100 degrees, a visit to a coal-mine, a cemetery, and a gold-mine were the reasons—the desert was dusty, the temperature a furnace blast, the coal-mine dripping wet, the cemetery almost lost in thistles, and the gold-mine an enlarged rabbit-burrow. At least there is variety to be seen round Cromwell, Otago Central.

The prevailing wind in Otago Central is a Head Wind; geography books say westerly, but if you travel for long by bicycle, as we did, you quickly find how wrong they are. And the adage that what goes up must come down just doesn't apply: the prevailing hills are all uphill. On the way to Bannockburn, a teaspoonful of a settlement about five miles from Cromwell, we stopped for a few minutes in the shade outside what a large notice told us was the Cromwell Borough Council Public Pound. On it was a scale of charges for the sustenance of enough different animals to provide a foundation for a second Noah's Ark; and what a mix-up there would be if all were impounded at once. Included in the list were horses, mares, geldings, colts, fillies, and foals; mules and asses; bulls, oxen, cows, steers, and calves; goats; sows, boars, and pigs; rams, ewes, wethers, and lambs. But for that day at least the joke was on the council: in the large paddock, quietly

feeding without interference from either man or beast, were nine sleek rabbits.

Coal deposits in New Zealand have been estimated, after scientific survey, at several thousand million tons, and if the present rate of mining continues—at about two and a quarter million tons a year—fields will last almost indefinitely. To the national economy of New Zealand, therefore, the four or five small coal-mines scattered over Otago Central are not, at present, of great significance; together they produce each year about 7,500 tons of lignite, which in quality does not compare well with the more hotly burning, harder, cleaner bituminous coals found on the West Coast and in other parts of New Zealand. In the past, however, the coal mined in Otago Central has been of incalculable value not only to the local population, but to the country as a whole. Such a position may arise again.

Except where irrigation has brought water to relieve the dryness, Otago Central is, and has been, almost entirely treeless. To the early settler who had no alternative to building his home and planting his crops immediately, before stores were exhausted, country which was already free of trees and thick vegetation and which could be ploughed without difficult clearing was an advantage. But, later, the work of the gold-miner, who needed timber for sluice-boxes and for props to support the mine-shafts, was made almost impossible. All wood was in constant demand: prices paid were high, and an ordinary gin-case, for instance, worth a few pence would often bring as much as £3. Deposits of coal,