

the trees reached maturity more and more gold-seekers, dredgemasters, and hands, as well as diggers, began to give more time to orchard work.

Difficulties were many. No system of marketing was in operation; prices were unstable; transport, by wagon over rough roads, was irregular, costly, and unsatisfactory; few, if any, of the orchardists were experienced, their methods were primitive, and, for instance, the introduction (in second-hand packing-cases) of codling-moth left growers bewildered and unable to combat the pest except by rooting out the affected trees. Early marketing schemes were unsuccessful, and a co-operative packing venture led only to trouble. In one direction alone was progress quickly and surely made. Irrigation laid the foundation of success.

Typical of the larger orchards was the 45-acre property hardly more than an apricot stone's throw from the outskirts of the town. We went to see it. Trees were first planted there more than sixty years ago by a man who is now an Old Identity, with a beard. His son is now in charge. He has lived more than forty years in Roxburgh; he considers that, even without a beard, he is getting into the Old Identity class in his own right. The 7,000 trees on the property are made up of 500 cherry, 2,500 apricot, 500 plum, 2,000 peach, 1,000 apple and pear, and 300 nectarine; each year, in a normal season, they produce about 30,000 cases of fruit.

Six hundred sheep are run on a further 900 acres. In the early days this country was overrun with rabbits, which razed feed so close that the sheep were often without strength to stand up for shearing. Since then the pest has been poisoned out, and now more than twice the number of sheep can be run—and fattened.

"They're up among the Santa Rosas," we were told. It took us some time to eat our way to the Santa Rosas. We heard the pickers through leafy trees five minutes before we could find them; the sounds they made—voices, buckets jangling, ladders creaking, whistle of "Lay that Pistol Down, Babe"—seemed to come from every direction. At last, in the track between the trees, was one of the wagons—a converted model T Ford

chassis drawn by Daisy, a seventeen-year-old draught very fond of fruit. She is the mother of a ten-year-old daughter, Daisy. Daughter Daisy, in her turn, is the mother of a four-year-old son, Daisy.

Five pickers, chattering like a flock of birds and working with incredible speed, were filling their tins with the plums. One tree at a time is picked; it takes only minutes to strip it, then on to the next. Plums, apples, and peaches were all ripening and ready for picking. Usually there would be apricots, too, but a late frost last year had ruined the crop throughout Otago Central; at this orchard not one good apricot had been picked from the 2,500 trees. Between the avenues of trees (which are planted 18 ft. apart, "Should be 24 ft.," says the boss) are irrigation channels, the water used in the ripening period improving the size and the colour of the fruit, reducing withering, and helping to form the buds for the next year's fruit.

From overhead and roundabout was the jingle-jangle of the bird-scarers—two old chaffcutters, one driven by water, the other by electricity, have been geared down, and every minute and a half they give a tug to the network of jangling tins, the resulting racket terrifying the birds so much that they eat for only one minute of every minute and a half. In addition, about 3,000 gun-cartridges are used a year. Blackbirds and starlings do the most damage, but sparrows, which once left the fruit alone entirely, are developing a taste that grows stronger every season. Cherries are the fruit to suffer the most.

Seedlings in the early days of orchards were imported from Australia. An apricot named Early Red was renamed Roxburgh Red when it was introduced to Otago Central. Since then there have been many inquiries from Australia for this "new New Zealand variety."

We left the Santa Rosas, which the boss described as wonderful dessert plums but shy croppers, for the Red Gravenstein, always the first cooking apples to be ready. Accustomed to the manœuvre, Daisy and Daisy turned their vehicles in the narrow lane without a hand having to touch their reins. They know their