

WHEN I WAS YOUNG.

When I was young I lived, as I do now, at Patoka, a farming district about fifty miles west of Napier. In those days the farms were large and neighbours few and far between, and the metalled roads narrow, winding and horribly dusty. There were two sawmills up the road at Puketitiri and one at Hendley, at the end of the side road on which we lived, all demolishing the native forests. I used to hate visiting those areas because they were dominated by hundreds of fire-blackened tree stumps and skeletons for many years after milling ceased. Timber trucks chugged slowly down to town with loads of enormous logs, throwing up huge clouds of dust which made it very dangerous for other traffic to overtake them even on the rare straight stretches, so that motorists crawled in to town, suffocated, carsick and frustrated. In the Thirties we children made the trip only about twice a year, as I remember, which was quite often enough, as it took forever, and my sister and brother were usually sick. Our car was an old Bean, with movable talc windows, reasonable waterproof I suppose, but not at all dustproof. At least one of our near neighbours still used a horse and cart for transport, we sometimes saw him picking up stores at the Post Office just up the road. The Post Office was not a general store in those days, but there had been a daily service car from Puketitiri to Napier for many years - at one time there were two - which carried people and goods as required.

My first trip on that road, when I was only a few weeks old, must have taken place in stormy weather, as my parents arrived at Rissington, on the way here, to find that the low level bridge over the Mangaone had been swept away, so we were all loaded on to a sort of barge which was winched across the water. We reached ^{the} other side safely, where my mother was horrified to be told by the ferryman that the previous load had capsized! I don't remember that bridge, it was replaced in the early Thirties by a long single lane bridge, high above the water, still sound but accident prone with narrow approaches and poor visibility.

In those days we had no electricity. My mother cooked on a wood stove, and every year many days were devoted to preparing a store of firewood. Several big old trees, pines, gums and wattles were cut down, using axes and long saws with a handle at each ^{end} so that two men could drive them - cross cut saws - then the trunks were cut into sections and these were split with splitting guns, tubes filled with gunpowder and fitted with a long fuse, which were inserted in one end of the log, then the fuse was lit and everyone hurried to a safe distance before the explosion, which often threw quite big pieces of wood a surprisingly long way. Those pieces of log were sawn into short lengths for the stove and

the open fire, and those then had to be split into manageable sections, so it took the men weeks of hard work to keep us warm and fed for the year. The scent of freshly cut pine and gum still bring back scenes of those days to my mind's eye, and remind me too that when we children were about ten we had our own small sized axes to chop down saplings, and a maul and wedges to split them with. We were very handy with all sorts of tools that girls didn't use in those days, farmers and their children had to be able to do many things for themselves in isolated places like Patoka.

We were lucky enough to have a telephone, a somewhat unreliable machine that ran on batteries, originally wet batteries - I remember the big square jars that had contained the necessary acids - but in my time we used dry batteries tucked into a box behind the mouthpiece, which was attached to it, while the earpiece was on the end of a cord that came from inside the box. To call the telephone exchange, which was at the local Post Office, one turned a handle on the box, and in due course was connected to the required number. The system on which this operated was known as an earth return system, with only one set of wires to carry the voices while the circuit was completed through the ground. In dry weather that gave a very faint signal, and I well remember my parents shouting, repeating and spelling to get a message through. I grew up with a dread of the telephone! The household stores, ordered twice a year, provided a particular nightmare when the line was bad. Several sacks of flour, sugar and fowl food, bags of dried fruit and other groceries, even an occasional demi-john of whisky - useful for reviving new born lambs as well as the farmer - were carted up by the lorry load and stacked in a big store room and a pantry, magic caves for exploring children. Bread and butter were made by my mother; even the yeast was home-made, a liquid brew of which some was saved from each baking and set aside for next time, when it was revived and boosted with a pint of the water in which potatoes had been boiled the night before, with a spoonful of flour and sugar to nourish it and make it grow. Several cows were milked by hand night and morning and the milk stood in big shallow bowls in a cool airy dairy overnight so that the cream rose to the top. Then it was skimmed off and used fresh on porridge and puddings, and allowed to sour for butter making. That was a laborious process, turning the handle of a small wooden or larger metal churn - the large one was shaped like a concrete mixer - until the butter fat separated from the whey and formed a lump of real butter round the paddles inside the machine. I remember the welcome slopping sound that told me the butter had "come", sometimes after a lot of effort. The cream had to be the right temperature, and not too warm and thin nor cold and thick, and often in summer big crocks of cream would stand overnight in a

nearby creek to cool, or by the fire in winter in the hope that it would reach the right temperature. It didn't always oblige. Later in my childhood the skimming pans were replaced by a hand powered separator, an elaborate machine which parted the cream from the milk, and had to be taken apart and washed and scalded immediately after use. We had a cowman-gardener to milk and tend the vegetable garden, and the separator was his job, not my mother's. Without a refrigerator it was difficult in summer to keep the milk sweet and the butter firm, and they used to stand on bricks in a pan of water under a tank stand on the south side of the house, as cool as possible, with a piece of damp butter-muslin over the top of the jugs and containers to help the process with evaporation.

Keeping the meat fresh was another problem. It was all home killed, and there was a meatsafe under the trees near the tank stand, tall enough to hang a whole sheep's carcass in, and walled with metal gauze to keep the flies out and let the breeze through. Curry was often served in summer!- In winter a cattle beast was usually killed, and most of it had to be corned in a huge tub of brine kept in the big dairy. By the end of winter it was not very nice to eat and I've never cared for corned beef since. At that time there were many mouths to feed, as we employed a shepherd and a ploughman as well as the cowman, who all had their meals in the farmhouse kitchen, which wasn't very big. We usually had a cook-general to help in the house, where she had her own room, but the men lived in another building. Later a married shepherd or cowman was employed and his wife looked after the other men.

Artificial light was provided by kerosene lamps and candles; I once got my candle too close to a curtain and I can still see the flames racing up it and my father beating it quickly down with his bare hands. A good many of my nightmares involved fires after that, though I must admit that others were full of wild animals, of which I had no experience at all. As time went on the wood stove was replaced by an Aga, fed with coke, dirty stuff; a kerosene refrigerator took over from the inside larder, and a petrol driven lighting plant, which even powered a radio, was installed. Electric power finally reached Patoka in 1956, and vacuum cleaners replaced the hand pushed carpet sweepers, which were assisted to gather up the dust by handfuls of damp tealeaves; and the annual struggle to hang floor rugs and small carpets on the clothes line and wallop them with broom handles to beat out deep seated dirt.

When we turned five schooling had to be considered. Before then there had been a school down our road to serve the Hendley Mill community, but that had closed and the only alternative was at Rissington. The service car could have carried us there and back, but that would have made a terribly long

y for such little children so my mother decided to teach us herself by correspondence. She heard of an excellent system based in England, the Patents' National Educational Union, and enrolled us in that. It was very broadly based, thorough and interesting - some of it stood me in good stead at University, many years later - and Mother enjoyed teaching us up to secondary school level, when we had to go to boarding school, a real culture shock for children accustomed to study alone and play together with no other company of our own age.

One beautiful summer morning our lessons suffered a terrifying interruption. It was February 3rd, 1931, and we had just stopped work for a drink and a biscuit when the world exploded around us. I felt a little shudder and thought "Oh, this must be an earthquake", since I'd never felt one before, then the earth rocked and roared under my feet, we all scrambled to cling to Mother, and she and her grown up niece, a visitor from England, poor girl, staggered with us out of the back door and across the yard, away from the building. As we went I think I saw a row of three heavy wooden wash tubs, which stood with the copper under a roof in the yard, come away from the wall and leap towards us. I can't remember whether the copper kept them company, but the concrete yard was cracking as we crossed it, and the rainwater tanks came off their stands behind us. At last it stopped and we stood in an astonishing silence in the orchard, with a cloud of little moths whirling round us, as bewildered as we. My father was several hours ride away, mustering sheep at the back of the farm, ~~was~~ where he said even the dogs were shaken off their feet, so he and Mother must have suffered a long spell of anxiety before he could reach us and find that all were safe. For weeks Mother managed to cook out of doors, using a camp oven and a funny little stove. The chimneys had been massive erections of limestone rocks with a brick top, which had been reduced to huge cairns with the brick tops, still intact, sitting awkwardly on or beside them. The heap of broken glass and ruined preserves in the pantry was indescribable, it had to be shovelled into the wheelbarrow, loads of it, and I suppose was buried somewhere deep. For some time we slept in a tent on the lawn, where we soon enjoyed playing earthquakes, shaking the furniture and rolling about. There were very many aftershocks to add a bit of realism, including a very severe one ten days later which tilted the ground so steeply that we couldn't climb up to Mother, and then found ourselves tumbling downhill towards her, over and over again; and another perfectly timed to bring down the newly rebuilt chimneys. That was by far the most exciting thing that happened when I was young.