

did refrain, and was rewarded by the amusement the thought afforded me of how the lad would have fallen in the estimation of his hearers if they knew that we had been as nearly caught napping as we caught the old ruffian, when we nearly tumbled over him in a spot where we had never dreamt of finding him. However, he was slain, and all is well that ends well, and it must be admitted that the hunt had ended well for all concerned except the bull, but then, it is impossible to please everyone.

On the whole, our cattle speculations were remunerative, and we enjoyed the wild gallops over country, which really was not fit to ride over, as only lads of our age could. As giving more prolonged pleasure we perhaps preferred a day spent with whip and dogs, mustering our own cattle with perhaps, a stray wild heifer or two amongst them, to the shooting excursions of which the above is an example.

The open country in the North is a curious mixture, strips of gum land, deeply dug in awkward holes for this useful commodity by the Maoris (who in those days were practically the only gum-diggers, whites considering the occupation too degrading) lay side by side with rich chocolate volcanic land. Here the ground was thickly strewn with rugged stone heaps, gathered by the Maoris of successive generations, when one portion after another had been used as kumera gardens, and allowed to drop out of cultivation. Thickly matted fern of different degrees of luxuriance according to the nature of the soil, alike hid these obstacles from view. But over them we had to go if we wanted the cattle. It was highly exhilarating work, and if we came a cropper or two, we got up again with no bones broken, thanks to a more than usually merciful providence.

We took a special pleasure in purchasing as cheaply as we could, any settler's cattle which had strayed and become so wild that the owner

had given up all hope of ever recovering. Many a gloriously reckless gallop we had after these. One old liver and white cow which cost us some fifty odd shillings, beat us for three or four years, but she was prolific (twins on one occasion, I remember), and we eventually received a handsome cheque for her and her progeny. Beef was high that winter.

One day Bob and I had a serious difference of opinion about something connected with our partnership. I don't remember what it was all about, except that I was of course in the right. Bob was always inclined to be hot-headed, and he declared he'd dissolve the partnership on the spot. I begged him to wait till he was cool and fit for business. He distinctly refused to wait a moment, and declared hotly that he was never cooler in his life. We were out on the run at the time. I let him have his way. It seemed the easiest thing to do. We knew the colour of every beast we had, and Bob, in the absurdly dictatorial way he had on these occasions, ordered me to toss up a coin on the spot. The one that won the toss was to have first pick, and then each pick alternately all down the list.

There were two magnificent fat four-year-old steers, the others were stores as the rest of the fats had been sold. At a time when beef was fifty shillings a hundredweight, these steers were each worth at least five pounds more than the stores. But one of them was regarded by us as being much more valuable than the other, because he was running with a quiet lot of cattle close at hand, while the other was as wild as he could well be, chose his company accordingly, and haunted a very awkward bit of bush. We had often tried to get him in and failed.

Bob won the toss, but in his flurry he entirely forgot the best steer, and choose the best of the stores. "I warned you, Bob, my boy, that you ought to wait till