

The rest of the story is told in a letter to his employers. "Just before sundown we came to the pass to the West Coast through the Snowy Mountains, and on looking down a very abrupt hill we saw the sheep and one man keeping them together. When I got to the flat below the man was preparing to turn in for the night. I rode up and collared him and tied his hands. Being regularly knocked up, I meant camping for the night, so I laid down and took a feed of his damper, mutton, tea, and sugar. Foolishly, I untied his hands, but took his boots away, thinking three were surely enough for him. After we had stopped about two hours, we heard some suspicious calls, the dogs began growling and the sheep broke camp." Sidebottom then decided

Mackenzie was taken up in the following year; four years later there was eight runs pasturing 17,500 sheep.

Since sheep-stealing was a common enough offence in New Zealand in those days it seems natural to ask why a sheep-stealer should have given his name to a region which equals in natural grandeur the alpine scenery of Switzerland and Italy. Moreover, when we sift truth from legend, Mackenzie becomes a shadowy figure. It is not known for certain where he was born, when he came to New Zealand, where or when he died, or where he lived the greater part of his life; there is even some doubt about his name. He is supposed to have come to Otago in 1847 from Australia; and for many years it was believed by the settlers of the Mataura district that he had buried the proceeds of his sheep-stealing in Stuart's Bush, near what is now Edendale. After his escape from Sidebottom he was recaptured, brought to trial in Lyttelton, and sentenced to five years penal servitude. Even the reports of his trial are conflicting. After he had escaped three times the authorities wearied of him and he was freed on condition that he left the country. There is a story that years later he came back to the Mataura district and dug up his buried fortune.



*Stacking oats.*

to travel back by night, but ran into mist almost immediately, and his prisoner escaped. At the foot of the Mackenzie Pass there is now a monument with this inscription in English, Maori, and Gaelic: "On this spot James Mackenzie the Freebooter was captured by John Sidebottom and the Maoris Taiko and Seventeen and escaped the same night, 4th March, 1855."

At the end of his letter to his employers Sidebottom noted that "there seemed to be a fine plain just at the back of the Snowy Range and a first-rate pass through the mountains to it." A month later a Christchurch paper reported the discovery of "a plain of immense extent capable of depasturing sheep" beyond the mountains in which Mackenzie had been captured. The first pastoral lease in the

There seem to be two reasons why Mackenzie made a place for himself in history. One is sheer force of personality. Upon everyone who met him, even for a few moments, he seems to have left an indelible impression. He was, we are told, "of large build, with red hair, high cheek bones, and piercing ferret eyes"; his manner was a blend of insolence and cunning, and a favourite affectation was that he spoke only Gaelic. One story about him is typical, whether or not it is true. Before he came to Australia he was a drover and dealer in stock in Scotland. The City of Aberdeen was giving a banquet in honour of Queen Victoria, and Mackenzie contracted with the banquet committee to deliver bullocks at a cut price. After he had collected his money it was discovered that he had stolen the bullocks from the estate of the committee's chairman. The other reason why Mackenzie looms so large in the