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## COUNTRY LIFE

## A.R.P. in Country Life

Four strong influences have been felt in village life since the War: the decline of the big house, the decline of the church, the influx of townspeople seeking something in the country which the post-War town could not provide, and the motor-car. Now come two others, which are, in fact, bound up with each other; the first is the drift of village populations, of labourers in search of a higher standard of living, to the towns, and with it the daily exodus of children to town schools; the second the problem of national defence. Although villages are still believed—and widely believed if the increased search for country cottages is a guide—to be means of escape, A.R.P. has now become an essential part of village life. The necessity for A.R.P. in villages hardly seems to be very great; yet reports show that rural enthusiasm and organisation is far greater than urban. In the next paragraph I give some figures showing how A.R.P. has been organised in my own small, scattered and strategically unimportant village. If it is true that enthusiasm for the defence of the country is greatest where the defence is least needed, then it would be interesting to know the reasons for that paradox. One reason is perhaps that villages are still very strongly governed by a sense of communal pride. By appealing to such pride, even indirectly, it always seems possible to move a village to action far more easily than a town. The following figures, at any rate, should interest town-dwellers.

## An Example

The village in which these notes are being written has a population of 230 adults and children; it is really three hamlets in one. It has a church, one pub, and one shop, a big house which stands empty, a school which stands empty, no doctor, no retired Major or Colonel, an average proportion of independent and working-classes. It is twenty miles from the coast, almost twenty from the nearest air-port, five from the nearest railway junction. Unimportant and right off the supposed lines of air attack, it could reasonably declare that A.R.P. hardly concerned it. Yet these are its figures: out of a population of 230 it has over fifty air-raid wardens (London needs something like a million and a half to be equally well served); these wardens have been, or are being, trained in first-aid and the use of anti-gas precautions; it has a fire-brigade, complete with full equipment, a utility squad (also complete with full equipment and lorry), and finally a mobile ambulance which is in reality a converted horse-box. All wardens and equipment have been well tested in two black-outs, both with realistic effects and casualties, both revealing extremely smooth and common-sense organisation. I cannot deny that a large part of the whole affair has been due to a generous and fortunate piece of private enterprise, but an equal part of its success is due to an easy and vigorous co-operation between farm-labourers and retired ladies, quarry-workers and bailiffs, innkeeper and landowner, gardener and stockbroker, regardless of class. It strikes me as more than interesting that such a village, typical of so many where class-prejudice is still a powerful undercurrent, should have made such an uncommonly zealous effort to provide itself with defences it may never need.

## Empty Schools

The problem of the empty school is also one which hundreds of small villages are now facing. Many children have been taken to schools in larger towns. How soon before an international flare-up sends them back? To country people the empty school house is, in fact, a sore point and a problem. Such schools, built in the 'sixties or 'seventies of the last century, were also communal efforts in a time when schools were as necessary as A.R.P. today. Raised and often kept together by public subscription, they became important parts of village life. In my own village the school—a stout stone building put up in the 'sixties, now stands empty. Nobody knows what to do with it. The village, producing seven pounds on a penny rate, can never hope to buy it; its cost as a builder's speculation is no doubt too high. It will probably be put up for auction. That being so, it is a fair bet that the village will lose it. Yet the village, ordered during the Munich crisis

to accept 300 evacuated children, needs it very badly. It cannot afford to buy it and cannot afford to lose it. In such a building, already provided with electric light, heating and sanitation, it could house many children in comfort. It would certainly house them in greater comfort than in its many already crowded cottages. It could not house or feed them, it could educate them. Meanwhile, all over the country, hundreds of villages sit holding this same absurd white elephant that is both a problem and a solution to a problem in one. For at least one of the answers to the Government-authorised query, "How many children can you take?" lies in the empty country school.

## A Superb Annual

Gardeners looking for an annual which will bloom for six months should remember *Phlox Drummondii*. Where the nemesis, for example, flowers almost as soon as pricked out and is over within a month in dry weather, *Drummondii* will go brilliantly on and on, flowering and seeding at the same time—in storm, frost, rain and drought. Ten dozen plants, the results of a threepenny packet of seed, were planted out in dry weather in May last year. They began to flower in June. Their job was to carpet the bare earth of a new rose bed, and for that reason a dwarf variety of 6 inches had been chosen. It was a gorgeous and fatal experiment. Throughout June, July, August, September and October the phloxes fought a completely successful war with the roses. They covered them with a huge humpy mass of blossom that resembled an eiderdown on a German bed. By autumn no roses were visible. The phloxes were a triumphant mass of cerise and salmon, white and chamois, purple and scarlet. They were cut prodigiously for house decoration. In October they were still being cut and were still as brilliant. In November they threw off 15 degrees of frost and emerged as lovely as ever. When they were finally pulled up, in December, they were still in bloom at a height of 4 feet.

## Crisis and Country Cottages

The September crisis had another effect on country life which still persists; it has been responsible for something like a racket in the business of country cottages. Throughout the autumn friends one had not seen for a long time turned up anxiously and expected cottages to be produced out of hats. Other and more considerate friends left it on the "if-you-see-anything-let-us-know" basis. The results were interesting. The price for what had been a labourer's cottage from which the last labourer had prayed heaven to remove him was in the neighbourhood of £1,700. Converted and charming though it was, the price was fantastic. A derelict farm-house which was nothing better than the wire frame on which, ultimately, expensive materials can be moulded into a hat, was offered at round about £1,000. A cottage, so-called Elizabethan, with a "sunk garden"—a hole in the ground decorated with lumps of slag—was offered at £600.

## In the Garden

*Iris stylosa*, which began so bravely in November, has not shown a finger since; the lemon of aconites has revived after weeks of rain. But already there are other compensations: splashes of *primula wanda*, grey-pink beards of erica, snowdrops, crocuses, the last delicious shell-pink heads of *Viburnum fragrans*, creamy fragments of winter honeysuckle, sharp electric-blue stars of lithospermum shining from the mass of black-green leaves. *Daphne mezereum* seems to have gone back rather than forward since December, but the deep pink buds of lenten-roses are like half-opened oyster shells on beds of pale new leaves, and the shrubby andromedas are walnut-red with buds. A few daffodils are in bud and a few anemones, gloomily purple. There is nothing else except a solitary fawn-mauve trumpet of *crocus imperati*, last survivor of a batch which has fed successive generations of sweet-toothed mice. In the cold sunshine it has opened out with a startling orange and purple brilliance that makes me wish I could grow it in thousands.

H. E. BATES.  
[Sir William Beach Thomas, who is travelling abroad for a few weeks, will resume charge of this page on March 31.]

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## Problem of Decreasing Wildfowl

For some years the question of the numerical status of migratory geese and duck has been causing concern to ornithologists and sportsmen. A deplorable situation has been reached in U.S.A., for example, when a drastic measure has been necessary to reduce the open season for shooting wild duck to practically one month a year. In Sweden all shooting of wild duck in the province of Jemtland has been forbidden for a period of five years. The two things have the same meaning: that wild duck, in common with wild geese and many other species of wild fowl, are decreasing in numbers throughout a large area of the world. Several factors are said to be responsible for this: cold storage, by which wildfowl have been made a commercial proposition; excessive use of decoys in certain European countries; draining of land, agricultural development and spread of civilisation, all of which have seriously disturbed or destroyed nesting areas; shooting of birds in the early spring, when paired, and of young birds not ready to fly. It must be remembered that wildfowl travel over long distances, and do not belong to any one country, so that the problem of their protection is an international one. As usual, the International Committee for Bird Preservation has tackled it, with the result that the British Section has now drafted a Bill aimed at extending the minimum close time for wild duck and wild geese both at the beginning and end of the present season. Many birds are already paired, and are nesting in February. In August many late broods still cannot fly. Protection at both times is imperative.

## The Bill

The Bill has already sailed smoothly through the House of Lords, but has been wrecked in the Commons. It has now been withdrawn in order that a necessary amendment may be made, and it will be brought forward again shortly. (The amendment stipulates that the close time for wild duck and geese is to start on February 1st, but below high-tide mark of spring tides to begin on February 21st. The date of prohibition of import is to begin on February 1st.) It is worth noting that the I.C.B.P. is being very honest about the Bill, which it admits is far from perfect, and is in reality a measure of compromise. But what it does believe is that it will give a lead in Europe on an urgent question, and that it will help greatly in conserving the stock of wildfowl in the Northern Hemisphere. Even as an imperfect compromise, therefore, the Bill, which will protect such lovely species as eider duck, mallard, pochard, sheldrake, shoveller, smew, teal and widgeon, is extremely important. Bird lovers should remember that they can help it in the usual way by writing to their local M.P., or they can help both it and the society responsible for it by becoming members of the I.C.B.P., whose address is the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park. They will find that this is not the first time that that organisation has done powerful work on problems of international bird protection.

## The First Orchard

The first of the orchards is in bloom: the orchard of hazelnuts. The trees are like bush-apples; the straight avenues between them are misty yellow with caterpillar catkins. This year the flowers are certainly longer than for some years past, and dry mild weather seems to have made them more golden. They were also much earlier; we first noted them on December 13th. Now, two months later, the first are over, the main crop is at its loveliest, the last have not begun. For the past few mornings a skiful of black cloud has come up against the sun. My gardener calls it black wind; rain never comes. If you can catch the full-blown catkins against the black wind, in the sun, they seem suddenly to burn with golden smoke.

## Evacuation and Country People

The Government's scheme for the evacuation of children is not being well received in country districts. A friend took on the job of a house-to-house census in a village—outside of and three times as large as her own—which was too lazy to do it for itself. The results were interesting. With few excep-

tions the response varied inversely according to the ratio of the social scale. People of independent means and good-sized houses, who had little else to do but exercise themselves, their dogs or their horses, revealed a sudden genius for excuses. They came to the door as if they had been waiting for someone at whom they could fire their annoyance at the Government's ineptitude. The scum of snobbery was too thick to skim. In a house of nine rooms and three people an irate gentleman not only declared the Government to be a set of nincompoops, but seemed to hold the canvasser in some way responsible for it. "In times of peace," he raged, "townspeople look down on us country people. But in times of crisis they come snivelling to us for shelter." To which came the knock-out reply: "On the contrary. There are thousands of townspeople who at all times greatly envy your good luck in being able to live in the country." At another house a young couple whose children were away at school argued on the supposition that every evacuated child was (a) dirty, (b) mentally deficient, (c) suffering from measles, diphtheria, whooping-cough or contagious skin complaints; (d) in some other way undesirable. Their "after we have brought up our children cleanly and decently why should we be subjected to this?" was a typical heart-cry on which it was hopeless to comment. Again and again were noted the same affronted refusals to have easy lives turned upside down.

## And By Contrast

Such experiences were not calculated to improve my friend's view of humanity. But others did. It was good to have a messenger specially sent from a couple of almost eighty to say, "We will take three children. Who knows how long we shall be here? This is the least we can do." It was refreshing to hear the landlord of a little public-house argue with his wife whether they should take boys or girls, though they had already three boys of their own. On advice they took girls. It was good even in cases where no children could be taken to see a woman wiping her hands on a sack apron and talking with sympathy and understanding. It meant something to have a civil and decent refusal from houses where overcrowding was already rank. It counteracted the reply of a lady who stormed, "Yes, we have three bedrooms, but they're full." "Of what?" "Furniture!" On one point only did rich and poor seem to feel the same way: that the scheme is unsatisfactory. Everywhere there was the same criticism of it, the same feeling that a communal system should quickly take its place.

## In the Garden

Almost a hundred and fifty years ago Gilbert White complained that the "bull-finches make sad havoc among the buds of my cherry and apricot trees; they also destroy the buds of the gooseberries and honey-suckles." A year earlier he had complained that they did the same to his damsons. Today, almost on the same date, I see them devastating the *prunus pissardii*, and am forced to wonder which I should miss most: the absence of the birds or the loss of the wine-pink buds which seem to dye their feathers. A few days earlier White had "covered the asparagus beds, and the artichokes with muckle." A note in the new Nonesuch edition calls attention to the word muckle, describing it as a term still occasionally used for long cow-manure in remote country districts. This gives the word much less than its due. Muckle is still good common Midland English. I was brought up to think of any muck-heap as a muckle, and in turn of any man on his own muckle as a man not to be mucked about with. Meanwhile, I have made a load of muckle into a hot-bed, raising a temperature of 90° on the second day. The first *iris reticulata* are out, rich torches of purple, the first grape hyacinths, many crocuses, the first saxifrages, the later buttercup-yellow variety of winter aconite, the first mauve cowslip-bells of the *primula deniculata*, a renewal of *iris stylosa*, the pink and blue soldiers and sailors, the first daffodils. I break up the dry potatoes of dahlias and *salvia patius*, and a little squirrel-red vole is disturbed from among them and slithers brightly away in the sun.

H. E. BATES.

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## The Other England

Those who are still wondering whether a long period of peace may not mean the same thing as a long period of undeclared war must also wonder whether there is an alternative to Europe as a holiday centre. Let me advise anyone who has doubts about the somnolence of the European volcano to have a look at New England this summer. Anyone who goes to America with the good old British prejudice that there is nothing like England is due for some pleasant shocks. No part of the world was so aptly named as New England, and I am not the first Englishman to have travelled through the lovely countryside of Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire with a queer feeling of inverted homesickness. There is green, rich, altogether lovely country just north of Boston that continually reminded me of the best of England. The deep-wooded, shallow-streamed valleys of the White Mountains recalled the Valley of the Exe; the woods of Massachusetts are very like the woods of the English south country. But the real New England is probably in the villages: the white painted eighteenth-century houses standing back from the streets behind green lawns and weeping New England elms, the love'y, severe white Unitarian churches, the village-green where the band plays on summer evenings.

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## Flowers and Mountains

Apart from this placid and rather homely kind of countryside, extremely beautiful though it is, New England can offer a good deal more. The lakes with dreamy Indian names are a sailing paradise; there is good climbing all along the Washington Range, where the mountains too are Indian-named, and in June there will still be 10 or 15 feet of snow in the famous Tuckermans Ravine. In June too the flowers are lovely: the huge magenta and white Indian roses, flaming stretches of Indian Paint Brush, pale blue geraniums, wild yellow-and-crimson aquilegia (*A. canadensis*), miles of honeysuckle, and best of all the huge pink, white and sometimes yellow lady-slippers. All these are roadside flowers. There are alpine in Washington. But the best of the country is felt in its huge unspoilt expanses of natural beauty. Unlike the English countryside, very little of it is man-made. From the top of Mount Manadnock I looked down on a stretch of lake and forest that cannot have changed much in two hundred years. A lean, sardonic, tired forest-ranger, whose wife had disturbed him a little by falling off the mountain that morning, saw me looking. His words are the best recommendation of an entrancing countryside. "Yeh, brother," he said, "it gets you."

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## The Green Plover

Why green? To those who see the bird only from a distance, strutting over ploughed land or indulging in displays of aerial acrobatics, its colour can never be anything but pure black and white. But the close-up reveals, as Mr. Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald points out in his new *Book of British Waders*, something very different, a multi-coloured bird. The predominant colour of the wings and back in summer is a gorgeous bottle-green shot with purple, so that in sunlight the plover becomes a bird of shot silk, feathers watering beautifully, the whole glory carried on red legs. These legs, as Mr. Vesey-Fitzgerald reminds us, are primarily the legs of a shore bird, a wader, but a wader whose habits are changing, so that we now take him almost exclusively for a purely land-bird. This gradual change of habit gives point to a request of Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith, secretary of the British Section of the International Committee for Bird Preservation, who is anxious to get hold of data regarding the green plover's status in this country: its nesting habits, dates and numbers of first broods, of second broods, if any, notes on weather conditions, and finally whether the bird appears to have increased or decreased in the observer's district. We take the green plover for granted; but it is worth remembering that it is still in demand as food, its eggs still considered a delicacy. Though it enjoys complete protection in Scotland and in forty-two counties in England and Wales, there are many districts where eggs are allowed to be taken up to April 15th, and two, Cardigan and

the Soke of Peterborough, where there is no protection at all. One of the things that Miss Barclay-Smith is anxious to get at is whether the early taking of eggs benefits or harms the species. Early clutches, even when reared, are often destroyed by cold, wet conditions in April; later clutches, laid when the first have been taken, are more often reared successfully. Such a point, like other points about the plover's status, could be suddenly cleared up by observation. The plover nests early, and those who have any information about its habits should send details to Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith, I.C.B.P., c/o Zoological Society, N.W. 8. She will be extremely grateful.

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## Caged Fox

Two lady friends, middle-aged, intelligent, themselves passive supporters of fox-hunting, recently had an experience which has made them think again about that sport. Looking for primroses in a wood half a mile from the nearest road they suddenly came upon what appeared to be a red setter imprisoned in a wire coop. They looked again and saw two red setters—in reality foxes. They were very shocked indeed. The foxes had been recently fed, but no amount of feeding could destroy their look of miserable caged restlessness. The two ladies hurried out of the wood. It took them a long time to reconcile fifty years of passive belief in the sport of hunting with the recollection of these two foxes, carefully imprisoned and carefully fed, waiting to be released for the amusement of a hunt that quite likely would never know it was hunting an animal out of a cage.

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## Aristocratic Pelargonium

It is a post-War fashion to scorn the bedding geranium, and with it the fuchsia and the zonal pelargonium. The fashion rests on a mistaken idea: that there is something wrong with a particular plant rather than, as Gertrude Jekyll pointed out, the people who use it. The sins of Mr. Paul Crampel have been too heavily visited on the pelargonium family, creating a mass of prejudice. The peculiar and unlikable scarlet of Mr. Crampel is unsuited to soft English schemes and light, but there is nothing wrong with the soft cerise Charles Turner or the powder-puff pink of Madame Crousse. They stretch only correct situations: demand formal terraces, where their flowers light up against stone, or the edges of formal pools, where their flowers can fall and touch and be reflected in water, spilling cherry and pink confetti of petals. The pelargonium family, so long part of country-cottage windows, is still more charming. As I go upstairs I go past seven of its illustrious Victorian members: the Prince and Princess of Wales, deep pink and veined pink with black eyes; King Albert, mauve with ivy leaves; the Duke and Duchess of Albany, crimson, pink and black, and velvet black laced with cerise; and finally, an unnamed white and a pink which look like nothing so much as the warm flannel night-caps of persons much lower in the social scale. Unfortunately, they look down at me only from pictures. In actuality, their huge flowers must have been enchanting. Does anyone ever grow them now?

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## In the Garden

The loveliest thing of the week—alas! not in my own garden—was undoubtedly a bed of the winter-flowering cyclamen, *Cyclamen coum*, a mass of dark soldanelia leaves covered with hundreds of pink, magenta, and almost white inside-out dolls' sunshades. This glorious bed, completely exposed on a cold hillside, was just at its best. But it had been in bloom for weeks. Among it were odd corners of a hybrid produced by constant seeding. They had ivy-marked leaves, very like the leaves of dog's-tooth violets. In the clear spring sunshine the whole bed looked extraordinarily cool and delicate. This hardy little creature is clearly a thing that no gardener should be without, in spite of the fact that Farrer, who had a magenta-complex, was very lukewarm about it. But happily even Farrer was occasionally wrong.

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## The Wild Mezeron

*Daphne Mezereum*, reputed to love chalk but always seen at its best, to my mind, on the clay of the Midlands, has long been listed as a wild plant. Its sturdy pink-starred currant-bushes, as much an indispensable part of Victorian cottage-gardens as Madonna lilies and the musk on the window-sill, have been described by countless botanists as "found in woods and thickets." Thus the plant is something of a contradiction: supposedly happy in chalk but magnificently healthy on clay; a sturdy town-plant in cultivation, a shy woodlander when wild. The point on which it would be interesting to get information is not, however, where it grows best, but if it still grows wild at all. There are reports of it from the North Downs above Wye, where the green-flowered *Daphne Laureola*, apparently liking similar conditions, is as common as a weed, but these reports are neither first-hand nor reliable. Last year and the year before readers of this page provided about a hundred answers to a similar query about wild gladioli and wild tulips. Neither of these are common garden-plants; but *Daphne Mezereum* is so widely cultivated that it will be specially interesting to see if it survives in the wild state, and I shall naturally be grateful to anyone who can send reports of it. I need hardly say that the usual pledges of secrecy about its exact whereabouts will be given and kept.

## The Pigeon Again

It is a tiresome business to have to return, year after year, to the same subject, but it must now be three or four years since we were promised action against the rabbit pest, and two years since we were told to prepare for a war on the wood-pigeon; yet the rabbit and the pigeon still remain, with the rat, the great agricultural pests of our time. A correspondent writes from the Isle of Wight that her tame fantails are continually menaced and killed by hawks, and asks for a remedy. I am in complete sympathy with her, but I cannot help wishing that our trouble were an excess of hawks rather than an excess of pigeons. Thanks to the pigeon, the growing of winter green vegetables has become a farce. This year the N.F.U. is again organising action against the pigeon at its various branches, but I feel that a correspondent of *The Farmers' Weekly* is right when he says that methods of pigeon destruction such as evening shoots are completely futile. The mass attack on the pigeon only makes that crafty emblem of peace more crafty. A systematic and regular attack by an expert pigeon-shot working over decoys at feeding time is suggested as the only satisfactory way of keeping down a pest that grows a more serious menace to agriculture every year.

## Rabbits: An Experiment

Of the rabbit I am almost tired of talking. The deterioration of pastures and damage to afforestation schemes are only two of the many troubles for which the rabbit is responsible in this country. These troubles could be energetically and successfully attacked tomorrow if it were not for one thing. The rabbit is an article of food. In 1932 the weight of home-killed rabbits supplied to Smithfield market totalled 890 tons; in 1935 the figure had risen to 2,283 tons. Between 1920 and 1934 the number of Australian imported rabbits had dropped by 2,000 tons and the price from 16.7d. to 5.9d. per rabbit. These figures help to show how wrong is the assumption that rabbits in this country are not worth catching. It is contended by the University of London Animal Welfare Society, in fact, that rabbit-catching in England is now a highly-organised industry. This means that the method of trapping employed is, in effect, not a means of destruction, but a deliberate means of more vigorous reproduction. What this means in turn to the land and the farmer can be seen from the results of an experiment carried out in Wiltshire. Here, in 1936, three doe rabbits and one buck were fenced in a plot of grassland measuring a quarter of an acre. In fifteen months these rabbits and their progeny devastated the grassland so completely that of the original 51 per cent. of clover only 4 per cent. remained, and useful grasses had declined from 32 per cent. to 7 per cent.; at the

same time, useless grasses had increased from 10 per cent. to 13 per cent., weeds from 5 per cent. to 27 per cent., and moss from 2 per cent. to 49 per cent. These figures are contained in a pamphlet on the rabbit-pest produced by Ulaws, 42 Torrington Square, W.C.1, an admirable and virile organisation supported entirely by voluntary contributions, with reason rather than emotion as its motto. Among its publications is an excellent pamphlet on effective rabbit-extermination and rabbit-proofing.

## Hop Stringing

Probably no other crop needs such elaborate assistance as the hop, and in March that assistance can be seen taking its first form in the astonishing straw-coloured pattern of new strings that shines out from behind the twenty-foot hedges that are unique to a hop-growing countryside. No other farming occupation produces anything quite so fantastic as these huge protective slices of hawthorn, the shimmering maze of strings or the sight of men on stilts moving gigantically up and down the aisles of bare grey chestnut-poles. Much stringing, or tying, has already been done; the rest will be done this month. In May the young hop-shoots must be helped, anti-clock-wise, up the strings, and throughout the summer the crop will need more help, more specially devised tools and more washes and sprays than any other. Finally no other crop will be gathered as this will be gathered when the Cockneys descend on us in September, complete with purple suits and wasp-waists, lip-stick and plucked eyebrows, the incredibly smart limousine with Mum and Dad and our Perse, the portable radio and the Yorkshire pudding baked round the beef on Sundays. And certainly no other crop will so successfully turn the village street into the Mile End Road.

## Flax Prospects

Of flax, a crop now recognised to be of increasing importance, especially in defence schemes, we imported 50,000 tons last year. This represents something like 25,000 acres of growing flax and, at the 1939 contract price, a value of £300,000. Farmers must surely look into this. In Northamptonshire, where fields of flax are one of the pleasantest war memories, flax has again become a commercial proposition. In 1938, 2,200 acres were grown there, and this was enough to keep the Billing Mills working at full pressure for a year. Flax is grown under contract for this mill, which distributes seed free and collects the harvested flax in its own lorries. The crop is not a difficult one, and with good cultivation the yield is about three tons an acre. It seems, too, that flax is a stimulant to a following crop, and yields of eight quarters of wheat to the acre have been reported on land following a flax year. An increase of 15 per cent. in the yield is also reported following the use of flax-pulling machines, which replace ordinary binders. The whole thing looks an extremely good proposition, in fact, to any farmer of adaptability.

## In the Garden

Every year one flower or another stands out above the rest. Last year brought a miraculous spring for violets of all colours. This year snowdrops have undoubtedly been finer than for some years past. Beginning late, they grew extremely tall. During the whole of February they were never flattened by rain or snow and came through into March strong and clean. They were at their best, as always, in grass, especially in grass under hedgerows, and it was good to see them ramping in thousands across a paddock of sheep. But the best of the week was felt not so much in the flowers as in the burst of spring-cleanliness: lawn mown, edges trimmed, borders forked, carrots sown, onion-bed as smooth as sand after tide. There were more important things behind all this. The winter had produced far fewer casualties than had been expected; the spring itself seemed neither forward nor backward, but just right. We cheered its progress by bringing sprays of pink flowering-currant into the house, and they rewarded us by opening tassels of pure white.

H. E. BATES.

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## National Parks

Before me lies a copy of the nine-months-old *Case For National Parks in Great Britain*, issued, for twopenny, by the Standing Committee for National Parks, 4 Hobart Place, S.W. 1. Just as I am reading it there arrives the current issue of *The Countryman*, with many illustrious contributors giving their almost unanimous views on the desirability of a National Park in the Highlands. These two articles, it seems to me, form a pointed commentary on the English and their attitude to the English countryside; for the English, as much and perhaps more than any other nation in the world, love to boast of the beauty of their countryside. In doing so they have conferred on it the two most affectionate adjectives in the language: dear and old. Yet they have never yet taken the trouble to preserve any considerable area of it as a national reserve; they will suffer almost without protest astronomical expenditure on the defence of their country without troubling to see that the country left is worth defending; and sometimes it seems as if the possibility of even one National Park is as far away as ever. One of the arguments against it has been that England is too small to sacrifice large areas as national reserves. Yet the Standing Committee points out that the wilder countryside, moor, forest, mountain, heath, downland and coastline, forms approximately one-third of the total area of Great Britain. Moreover, that the potential National Park area amounts probably to almost a quarter.

## Prejudice or Indifference?

What is the prejudice against National Parks in Great Britain? For clearly there must be a prejudice, or merely perhaps an apathetic stupidity, when we lag so far behind other countries in what ought to be a very simple matter—the permanent preservation of what belongs to us. In the United States the great Yellowstone Park was projected as long ago as 1872. Since then other National Park systems with special laws have been established not only in large countries like Canada, South Africa, the Belgian Congo and the United States, but also in comparatively small and densely populated countries like Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Italy. The correspondents of *The Countryman* are arguing only for a National Park in Scotland. But, as Mr. R. M. Lockley says, "Agreed. But ought not Wales to come first?" And if we must have a National Park, preferably two, in Wales, how many ought we to have in England? There is no reasonable argument at all against the establishment of a dozen National Parks in England, for a National Park need not necessarily be huge, but only of special character, special beauty, and regarded with special affection by the people. It might be said that there is no argument except the apathy of successive Governments, for it is now ten years since the National Park Committee was set up, and eight since its report was issued. Since then the need for National Parks has grown greater, the potential area of them, unhappily, less.

## The Parish Council Electoral Farce

The present method by which Parish Councils are elected is one which has troubled rural reformers for a long time. In particular, the Councils of Social Service and the Federation of Women's Institutes have passed resolutions condemning the archaic system by which councils are elected on a show of hands instead of by a properly supervised electoral ballot. Under this system what happens is almost ludicrous. If nominations are sent in, as they should be, then voting takes place; if nominations are not sent in—as, unfortunately, in smaller villages they rarely are—then the clerk must ask for persons to be proposed and seconded, must afterwards wait for a period of fifteen minutes, and then declare these persons elected. The whole thing is calculated to produce the usual heavy-handed village humour. "Now, then, 'Arry, how about you?" "Me? No thanks. I can sit at home and look at the missus for nothing any day." In smaller villages especially the atmosphere often gets farcical, the most reluctant and often the wrong persons are elected, or, what is sometimes worse, the same old dry and drowsy council goes back for another three years. The reformers naturally seek to change all this. A secret ballot is most obviously needed, for it is

still a plain fact, in this twentieth century, that many a farm-labourer puts up his hand or does not put up his hand purely out of fear, however unfounded it may be, for the consequences. Fortunately, the country-squire-dictator is now less common than he used to be; but the large owner of property still holds power. A reform which will give equality and secrecy of voting is long overdue.

## Other Reforms

What is also needed is a reform which will give the Parish Council itself more direct powers. The common cry of villagers, "What is the Parish Council doing?—nothing!" has, unhappily, a sound basis in fact. It can do very little. Many of its powers are delegated, most of them are not powers at all. Its members are often ignorant of the little they can do, with the result that the minutes of the last meeting become thinner and thinner, the meetings themselves often meaningless. The crabbed, shaky signatures of aged persons adorn too many inept pages in the records of English Parish Councils. As I look back over the minutes of my own parish as far back as the eighteen-nineties I have difficulty in finding a meeting whose minutes take up more than half a page and any item much more exciting than "To Widow X, the sum of thirteen shillings." Yet, in fact, the Parish Council can be the means of propagating a vigorous rural life. Its powers are delegated, but it can consistently harass the authorities which delegate those powers, and by a system of throwing itself at bureaucratic brick walls can do something towards seeing that its parishioners are decently housed, its rights protected from injury by private persons, and its amenities properly preserved.

## The Paradoxical Farmer

As a class farmers resemble sailors. The same struggle against the weather and a single incalculable element makes them fatalists. They are invariably hard-headed and superstitious, practical and sentimental. From both, today, comes the urgent cry for subsidies. In these hard times for agriculture it is interesting, therefore, to see a perfect example of the English farmer's contradictory make-up. It stands on the London to Folkestone road; a piece of plain memorial stone carefully fenced by the sort of iron fence invariably employed by water-works. Standing just inside a field, it is approached by a concrete path. The stone bears an inscription, but of the tens of thousands of motorists who pass every week not one in ten thousand ever stops to read it. This monument is, in fact, a memorial erected by local farmers to their late Member of Parliament. As something completely useless, pointless and uninspired it could hardly be bettered. Its cost, contributed largely by a district which protests that tithes are ruining it, must have been some hundreds of pounds. Yet the local hospital, five miles distant, is crying out for beds.

## In the Garden

In the past we were inclined to scorn the half-hardy annual. We felt above the tradition which planted out stocks and asters, calceolarias and antirrhinums, verbenas and petunias. Then we met an alpine enthusiast who worshipped a calceolaria solely because it was hardy, although he clearly would not have been seen dead within miles of the now despised bedding varieties. The same was true of his alpine antirrhinums, verbenas and even a hardy pelargonium. From that time we felt it hard on a plant that it should be outcast because it was tender and because it was planted out of a box instead of out of a thumb-pot religiously wrapped in damp moss. Again, we were much shaken by a Swiss, who laughed herself silly because we allowed grape-hyacinths and *alyssum saxatile* on the rock-garden, when to her they were nothing but *les mauvaisés herbes*. How many much-praised, much too expensive alpinists are, to some peasant or other, nothing but *les mauvaisés herbes*? However that may be, we now grow plants, alpine or tender, minute or huge, solely because we like them. This year we shall be growing American zinnias, because we have been told that they were the world's best, only to be further disillusioned by the American seedsman: "on the contrary, the best zinnias certainly come from England."

H. E. BATES.

## COUNTRY LIFE

Reports on *Daphne Mezereum*

My suspicions that *Daphne Mezereum* was extremely rare in the wild state in this country have been well borne out by the number of reports on it. Where there were dozens of replies on the wild tulip, there are so far only eight or nine on the daphne. Its existence in the south of England, according to old florists, was once fairly common; today it seems to be almost extinct—thanks, as one correspondent points out, to "ruthless removal by gardeners." This correspondent reports it in three places: twice in Berkshire, and once in Kent. In Berkshire "it grows in thin coppiced woodland on a moist clay soil"; in Kent, on chalk. Another correspondent reports it twice in Hampshire, once in Wiltshire; adding that "shy woodlander" is an apt description—the magenta-pink sprays were difficult to detect among the brown fronds of last year's bracken." In contrast to these reports of it in southern woods, there are two of it on the same mountain limestone of north-west Yorkshire, and it seems to be more common here, on the bare limestone scar, than anywhere else. Here, too, according to a Durham correspondent, occurs what he describes as "a horrible thing, dingy and mangy, but interesting botanically"—a hybrid between the green-flowered *D. Laureola* and the pink *D. Mezereum*. There certainly seems to be no reason to doubt the accuracy of that description, but in all cases there is a slight doubt about the daphne itself. Is it authentically wild, or a garden-escape? One correspondent is very definite about it—"thirty years ago it was much more plentiful on the scar, now it has become more plentiful in the cottage gardens." Other reports of it come from Oxfordshire, in stony unproductive sort of soil over a stiff layer of clay, and from Sussex, where it has been claimed as a native plant since its first record in 1787.

## Garden-Escape or Alpine?

The theory of garden-escape is also held by another correspondent, whose name unfortunately I cannot give. As one of the largest landowners in the kingdom, he is in the privileged position of being able to report on the habits of the daphne, both wild and cultivated, from all sorts of places. He too produces the old story—"till last year, when they were uprooted and carried away by visitors (or gypsies), there were three good specimens in a wood of mine on the heavy weald clay." These were in the middle of the wood, "which is a very big one," and could hardly have been bird-sown. In complete contrast to this, he reports it high up on Ingleborough, growing in the interstices of the limestone rocks. Here, he adds, it is reputedly wild, but I am sure he will be glad to be reminded of Farrer's description of it in the very same place: "in one savage fold of the lonely hills under Ingleborough it has dwelt apparently from the beginning of things, as an alpine plant in an alpine situation." He then goes on to describe it on the shaley soil of Derbyshire and finally in a garden situation where "my original bush has increased to over 80, most of them bird-sown." As one who has struggled for nearly ten years with one bush, which in that time seems to have grown smaller rather than larger, I can hardly bear this. But it is good to know from this charming letter, and others, that *Daphne Mezereum* still has such energetic powers of survival in the most diverse places.

## The English Hedge

As I write, there is a touch of green, a bird's mouthful of bread-and-cheese, on the hedges. It is a reminder that the hedge, the quick-hedge especially, is not only the thing which binds the whole English landscape together, but also the very thing which sets it apart from any other landscape in the world. It was W. H. Hudson, in a notable passage, who praised the English quick-hedge as it should be praised, and reminded us that England is at its best when the cream drips from the huge Midland hedges of cow-rubbed hawthorn. Yet the hedge, product of the Enclosure Acts, is a comparatively new feature of the countryside, and by its character a hedge may be roughly dated. Straight hedges of quick, so common in the Midlands, are generally of later date than the crazy, high-banked, infinitely varied hedges of the south and west, which read like catalogues of shrubs: holly, dwarf oak,

elder, maple, willow, ash, wild cherry, spindle, hazel, wild rose, dogwood, sallow, honeysuckle, wild clematis, alder, sweet chestnut, crab-apple, blackthorn. There is, in fact, no end to the variation and charm of the south country hedge, making me think that if we were offered the choice between losing the English lakes and losing the English hedge many of us would prefer to lose the lakes rather than the common element which binds the whole English pattern together.

## A Farmer Accuses a Hunt

It was Mr. Henry Williamson, I think, who said that in matters of country life the local paper was more interesting than all the national dailies put together. Certainly the local paper carried this week a startling item which the daily Press seems to have missed. At a branch meeting of the National Farmers' Union in Canterbury a local farmer made the astonishing allegation that during an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, when he "had to put up with every kind of restriction," the East Kent Hunt went gaily through his land, through premises with the notice Path Closed: Foot-and-Mouth Disease, and through his neighbours' land. "Even on the day my cattle were slaughtered the hunt went by in full cry on the far hill." There seems to be no reason to doubt the word of this farmer, who qualified everything by saying, "I do not want to be vindictive"; but if such allegations are true they form an extraordinary example of, as the farmer himself goes on to point out, "one law for the rich and one for the poor." The N.F.U. rightly considered reporting the affair to the Ministry of Agriculture, and it is clear that the matter ought not to rest there.

## The Agricultural Wage

It is the local paper, too, which carries the story of the munificent increase of one shilling a week in the wages of male agricultural workers of over 21, accompanied by the usual outraged protests from the farmers themselves—"the farm labourer could now buy more for his money, and it was all nonsense to talk about starvation wages." The standard rate of agricultural wages in East Kent is 34s. To me this is either a starvation wage or else my ideas of starvation are a little strange. I am glad to read the proper retort to such a protest: "according to farmers, the agricultural industry is always in a bad way. They never heard of anyone making money until the question of compensation arose, when the Government or Air Ministry wanted to take over a piece of land." Meanwhile the drift of men from the land increases, and, as it increases, the vigour of rural life proportionately lessens. In my own village, during the last eight years, not a single young man has left school or other employment to work as an agricultural labourer, whereas a dozen have left the land to work at something else, preferably in towns. That makes clear to me, at least, what the countryman thinks of the difference between thirty-five shillings and starvation.

## In the Garden

This year, as in others, the most-talked-of things in the March garden have been the lenten-roses, the pink, plum-red, green-white, and mauve-speckled hellebores. Bought for a few pence, planted in the wrong situation, never awarded a moment's special attention, my plants have been a source of infinite satisfaction throughout the cold springs of several years. Their pure, in some way unearthly flowers, ranging from greenish-white to a kind of cloudy claret, begin after the Christmas roses in February and go on until May. Like old soldiers, they never die; they simply fade away with a papy, beautifully preserved grace among their handsome bottle-green leaves. In many ways they are even more satisfactory than Christmas roses; they are more upstanding, are never dashed or muddled by rain. They never need to be covered by glass. And even among the royal purples of iris and crocus and the first daffodils they have a way of looking very aristocratic. They are so distinguished and decorative that there is always a temptation to bring them indoors, but in warm rooms they are wilingly unhappy. They are most glorious in the dour days between winter and spring.

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