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of the tenements where I was reared made front-page news in a rent-strike and siege against bailiffs and police that reached its successful climax in "The Battle of Langdale Mansions."

This is the only kind of action that ever leads to anything—social reformers' "efforts" have the effect only of dampering down resentment by spreading the impression that "something is being done."

Concerning sweat-shops, Dr. Mallon says I "never seem to have met a factory inspector." That is quite true. They must have been busy elsewhere. I was, however, "coached" by my boss (on pain of being sacked) to pass myself off as earning the "minimum wage" in the possible event of a surprise visit from an inspector. This, I happen to know, is a "precaution" taken in most sweat-shops. It does not seem to occur to Dr. Mallon that in any case the very existence of sweat-shops as I have described them belies any serious pretensions of the Factory Act.

Dr. Mallon also says that the dole "is not insufficient to banish hunger." I would ask him whether he has ever tried the experiment on 15s. 3d. per week, 7s. of which have to go for rent for a room with no cooking facilities (and no outlay for crockery even if the room *were* suitable for cooking)—so that every "meal" must be eaten out? I can only tell Dr. Mallon that in my own case this sort of living brought a strong and athletic constitution to the first stages of tuberculosis, out of which I was nursed by a devoted friend with greater means than I had—and not by any of Dr. Mallon's reformers, who allowed two of my less fortunate friends to die under their very noses from the same complaint.

I also know all about Relieving Officers, who may present their more charming side to Dr. Mallon, but who in many cases leave their humanity at home when dealing with unimportant people on relief.

I have spent my whole youth as a leading member of the largest Working Boys' Club in the country, and I know the "charity racket" inside out. It has, in fact, been my lifelong ambition to write a book about it, but this is not a practical possibility for me while the present libel laws remain unamended. In my experience social reformers comprise mainly the hypocritical, the blind, and the stupid. But one characteristic they all share: smugness. Dr. Mallon proves it by denouncing my "bitterness": that reflects discredit on him rather than on me; for a "humanitarian" who has no bitterness against the evils he claims to be fighting is no true humanitarian, but something much less laudable. I do *not* hate the East End, Dr. Mallon! I hate the people who have made it what it is, and those who (no matter how well-meaning) act as cover for their crimes by fiddling with social problems which need bold and fearless action.

Yes, Dr. Mallon, bestiality, drunkenness, dirt, and suffering *are* the dominant elements of East End existence, in spite of "the other things" which George Lansbury saw. George Lansbury, if you will remember, also once "saw good" in Hitler and Mussolini: the younger people are now reaping the fruits of his "visions" on the battlefields of France.

I may "not be a good witness" for Dr. Mallon's convenience, but I think it may be safely left to East End people to judge the merits of our respective credentials for the job.—Yours, &c.,

7 Doughty Street, London, W.C. 1. WILLY GOLDMAN.

DANTE RE-READ

SIR,—May a fellow-student of Dante, who has found consolation during difficult times in the *Divina Commedia,* express his appreciation of Mr. Woodward's article "On Re-reading Dante," adding, however, two minor criticisms?

From the context it would appear that the line (as Mr. Woodward quotes it) *In la sua voluntade è nostra pace* was spoken by Francesca da Rimini in the second Circle of Hell, whereas it was actually the utterance of Piccarda Donati in the Heaven of the Moon, given in answer to Dante's question whether the spirits there felt longing for any more exalted place. Francesca, looking back on first happiness, said something very different.

The line, it should be noted further, does not stand by itself beginning a new tercet with "In," but belongs to the preceding one, to which it is bound by the conjunction "E." The same slip was made by Mr. Gladstone when writing his fine eulogy on Piccarda's speech. The passage will be found in *Morley's Life, III,* 70. To the statesman these particular words seemed to have "an inexpressible majesty about them," an opinion with which Mr. Woodward would doubtless agree.

1 Park Crescent, W. 1. E. H. HOLTHOUSE.

COUNTRY LIFE

The Obliging Duck

"Most philosophers," says Sherwood Anderson, "must have been raised on chicken farms." Yet the desire to retire to the country and "keep a few hens" remains one of mankind's most persistent ambitions. Those who think of putting that idea into practice before eggs become both scarce and dear next winter might, however, consider the many advantages of the duck. The duck, it seems to me, was designed by nature for those who are incapable of facing the complex problem of the common fowl. Where the hen is a profoundly stupid creature whose brain never seems to expand after chickenhood, the duck is remarkably intelligent, communal, comic and, above all, extremely obliging. It lays its eggs, with none of the clacking fuss of the hen, before ten o'clock in the morning. It then departs for the day's water exploration and returns for tea at half-past four. After tea it goes off again and comes back for bed at dusk. As a supplementary to its pond-diet it needs a simple meal of mash and another of mixed corn per day. It responds by laying large eggs at the rate of something like 300 a year, and a duck egg, in spite of some prejudice, is excellent eating. For beginners, the Khaki Campbell breed, delicate fawn in colour and more consistent for winter laying, is recommended.

The Countryman and War

The countryman is always more apathetic to problems of politics and war than the townsman. This is less true of the countryside in the neighbourhood of industrial areas, where the infiltration of political thought, especially in strongholds of Radicalism such as Northamptonshire, is often keen. It is in the south that there exists a dangerous apathy. The war has not yet revolutionised the attitude of the village batsman who, on being urged in a critical moment to hurry to the wicket, remarked, "Ah! but I wadn't born in 'urry." In nine months the war has not been brought home to the average countryman except by two things: the parachute and the refugee. Long before the organisation of local defence forces the countryman realised the danger of a countryside protected only by unarmed special constables. But it is the case of the refugee that touches him most closely. Urged on every side to plough and sow for victory, he sees no prospect of an increase in wages. On the land he gets thirty-five shillings; in the flax factories that are springing up he works a forty-eight-hour week for the same number of shillings. It is hard for him to reconcile these facts with the knowledge that a friendly alien, doing no work, often receives a subsistence allowance of two pounds ten.

Cheap Artificials

Proprietary brands of artificial fertilisers, lawn sand and decomposition agents are often, like bath salts, nothing but the simplest chemicals under a fancy name. Gardeners, with slight trouble and considerable saving, can mix their own. Commercial lawn sand is, for example, simply a mixture of 12 to 15 parts of fine sand, ¾ part sulphate of iron and 1½ parts sulphate of ammonia. It is quick and effective in action. A perfect general fertiliser may be made of 4 parts of superphosphate of lime to 1 part each of sulphate of ammonia, sulphate of potash and steamed bone flour. This is excellent for fruit, flowers and vegetables, and particularly good for potatoes if sprinkled in the rows at planting time. A dusting of sulphate of ammonia and superphosphate on decaying refuse will do all that a proprietary decomposing agent can. Those who like their hydrangeas blue should remember, too, that common alum is the basis, and perhaps the whole, of the colouring powders sold in expensive tins.

In the Garden

Fewer birds, more butterflies, fewer rare shrubs, more pests, seem to be the most contradictory results of the severe winter. The forty degrees of frost that killed all cistus, most rock-roses, many ceanothus and other fine shrubs had no effect on bulbs of *lilium auretum,* except to make them, if anything, more vigorous, or on gladioli left in the open ground. Daffodils were never more splendid; tulips had a clean strength and brightness without a trace of disease. Carrots, on the other hand, have germinated badly, green crops are invaded by successive armies of flea-beetle, leather jacket and maggot. Yet May 23rd was, in my experience, a record date for the first new potatoes, grown entirely without protection, in open ground.

H. E. BATES.

But for the purposes of our regulations, French men and women, most of them with relatives fighting in the allied forces, are simply classed as "aliens" and, without a word of apology or regret (broadcast or otherwise), subjected to the same restrictions as any other non-enemy foreigners.

Everyone realises, of course, that amongst those holding French passports there may be some suspicious characters, and that therefore the *bona fides* of French nationals needs to be carefully examined—the French would be the first to recognise this themselves—but surely they should have been placed in a special category assured that their cases would be quickly examined and that where there was no cause for suspicion, the fullest exemption would be given.—Yours, &c.,

K. T. BUTLER.

Girton College, Cambridge.

THE RE-EDUCATION OF GERMANY

SIR,—It becomes clear that if peace is to prevail again in Europe it must be either the death peace of Nazi rule or the peace of freely co-operating nations. For the former we need make no provision; for the latter it will be needful that Germany should be re-educated either by herself or by others. Preferably by herself, and, if we might reckon on the appearance of a prophet—a St. Francis or John Wesley—we might trust the German people to follow him as faithfully as they now follow Hitler. But failing such inward purification, how are we to help the conversion? The Christian churches will no doubt have a large part to play; so, too, should all who care for political liberty or intellectual freedom. To this immense task all good powers of heaven and earth should assemble, supplementing and supporting each other. What of psychology? Has any psychologist turned his attention to the question, How should a nation be re-educated? Can we get no help from this quarter?

In the early Middle Ages some Saxon tribes were "converted" by being driven like sheep to a lake and there baptised—a master stroke of Satan, as Dr. Arnold held. It may be we are still suffering from this master stroke and can only learn from it how not to convert: and since German education must be on German lines the best hope would seem to be in inducing a study of their own good Europeans. Goethe first of all.—Yours faithfully,

Brent Knoll, Somerset. AGNES FRY.

SOLITARY MEALS

SIR,—*The Spectator's* Competitions provide mental exercise—surely above that of the crossword puzzle—for which we must be grateful at such a time as this. I have only once competed (unsuccessfully), but the Competition provides a recreation. I am, however, amazed at the judgement of so sure an authority as *The Spectator* about "Solitary Meals." The award in Competition 36 suggests that you think that there is much to be said for solitary meals; but such psychology as we know points all the other way, and all medical advice, as far as I know it, reckons that always to have to eat alone is, at least, against the good of the individual, both physically and mentally.—Your humble servant,

H. E. BURDEN.

St. Oswald's Vicarage, Chester.

[Nothing in the report on this Competition was said in encouragement of the practice of solitary eating; surprise was indeed expressed at its evident popularity.—ED., *The Spectator*.]

PROPAGANDA AGAINST REFUGEES

SIR,—In spite of vigorous action by the Government, we are aware that propaganda directed against aliens and particularly against refugees, persists and even increases.

All must support the Government in its actions designed to preserve the country from spies or traitors. But this propaganda causes needless suffering to people who have already been through terrible hardships.

The vast majority of refugees, being themselves the victims of the Nazi tyranny, are as hostile to this régime as we are ourselves.

We appeal on their behalf to all citizens of good will to check this cruel and ill-informed propaganda, while supporting the action taken for the national safety by the responsible persons.

WILLIAM EBOR; LYTTON; RICHARD ACLAND; F. G. KENYON; J. HOPE SIMPSON; M. I. CORBETT-ASHBY; A. D. LINDSAY; JOSIAH C. WEDGWOOD, P.C., M.P.

33 Upper Richmond Road, London, S.W. 15.

COUNTRY LIFE

Pigs and Pig Clubs

With a flourish of leaflets, the Minister for Agriculture urges us to revive the times when every cottager kept a pig. He recalls the enthusiastic days when there were not only pig clubs but also, I believe, gooseberry clubs. Since that time the word pig has lost none of its meaning, though the raspberry has largely replaced the gooseberry as a symbol, and I do not know whether the Small Pig Keepers' Council is quite tactful in supposing that the pig is likely to be an asset "to the social life of the countryside." Years of bureaucratic muddling have made the cottager and the allotment holder very wary of the pig. It will need all the resources of Ministerial propaganda to bring back into rural life that annual ceremony of pig-killing so vividly described in *Jude the Obscure*. Until recently a man who kept a pig could not regard a single chitterling of it as his own. This absurd situation is now ended—"the small pig-keeper may kill and cure his pig for his own family's consumption, provided he has had it for at least two months for fattening and he obtains a licence to slaughter, either directly or through his pig club, from the local Food Control Committee." He may also sell to a local retail butcher, in the market or to a bacon factory. A good deal of information, more especially on pig clubs, may be obtained from the Small Pig Keepers' Council, Victoria House, Southampton Row, W.C. 1, and it is well to remember that in one year of the last war 400 pig clubs produced something like 4,000,000 lbs. of meat.

Local Defence

In country districts the response for Defence Volunteers has been excellent. Gamekeepers, farmers, farm labourers, lorry drivers, fruit growers, ex-service men of all kinds have been formed into village units. In the way typical of countrymen they show independence and sturdiness rather than enthusiasm. They dislike the outside control which consigns them to positions of defence which they regard as absurd, and which makes little or no use of their knowledge of local territory. That knowledge, it seems to me, may be of the very greatest importance. The position of a forty-acre field, the class of road leading to a remote railway bridge, the judgement of distances—always difficult—across country intersected by hedges; all these are things of which the countryman's knowledge is invaluable and are services which he can readily supply, if asked, in addition to his time. He is very much aware, too, of certain aspects of the parachute menace for which he feels there is not yet any adequate protection. In two months' time the standing corn crops will be targets for incendiarism. Nor does a farmer feel that his services are being well used when he is asked to leave a hundred and fifty head of cattle for a solitary post, without telephone, four miles away. The gap between the mind of Whitehall and the mind of the countryman is very large. The defences of the countryside will be all the better when it is lessened and the services of countrymen are intelligently and fully used.

Pests and Crops

When I asked the seed-merchant for a remedy for cabbage root-grub—dustings of lime or calomel are said to be effective—and remarked that it seemed an extraordinary year for pests, he replied with that sepulchral fatalism which countrymen seem to enjoy exhibiting: "Yes, but there's a war on, and you *will* get pests. Always notice you get everything in the way o' pest when there's a war." Certainly, against all expectations, spring crops have been seriously threatened, both on farms and in gardens, by plagues of leather-jacket, flea-beetle, wire-worm, root-grub and caterpillar. It occurs to me that one reason for this may be that six weeks of intense frost seriously upset the balance of bird-life. In a winter when rabbits were forced to strip young ash-trees, roses, hollies, and fruit-trees as bare as bone, the death-rate among all birds must have been extremely high. Throughout the spring there seems to have been fewer nests than usual, and the dawn orchestra, leading off as early as three-thirty with the cuckoos, has seemed scattered and thin. In spite of pests, however, the promise of crops is excellent. Cherry-farmers, and in fact all fruit growers, have welcomed a dry, warm May, in which blossom has set to perfection. Hop-farmers were pleased by a steady, rather backward spring. Cereal crops have shown no sign of the sickliness that follows a wet May. And to me it was a rare pleasure to meet in one day three farmers, one fruit, one hops, one mixed, who were for once serenely satisfied with the state of their world.

H. E. BATES.

THE CINEMA

"Squadron 992"—At the Regal and London Pavilion.——"Everything Happens at Night."—At the Regal.

For various reasons (most of them highly mysterious) documentary films have not been largely to the forefront since last September. The gaps in public knowledge which this type of production can do so much to fill have remained regrettably void, and the talents of a large group of film makers have been only tentatively employed, if they have been employed at all. It is with special warmth, therefore, that we must greet the belated appearance of the G.P.O. Film Unit's *Squadron 992*.

It is the story of the work of the men of the balloon barrage service. It details their training and it shows them going into action at a moment's notice. In these respects its presentation of technical skill and team-work contrasts favourably with the best which the documentary film has so far offered. But *Squadron 992* has much more to it than this. As might be expected from the same team that made *North Sea*, it has a human interest which is completely authentic; it has a visual beauty which is, in the strict sense of the word, rare; and it has, most important of all, the remarkable effect of making artistically real the astounding phantasy of our life under war conditions. To have thus analysed for us, in a compelling and a vital manner, the true values of our new existence is a privilege worth far more than the price of a cinema seat.

From the expositional viewpoint the film falls into three sections: first, the training centre for recruits to the balloon barrage; second, the raid on the Forth Bridge in the early days of the war; and third, the rapid delivery of a complete balloon barrage to the Bridge area a few hours later. It is very interesting to note that what in any ordinary film would be the climax appears exactly in the middle of *Squadron 992*. The raid on the Forth Bridge, brilliantly shot from every angle, including that of the diving German bomber, has a terrifying beauty which Cavalcanti and Watt have clinched magnificently by cross-cutting a poacher's dog chasing a hare while the Hurricanes scream across West Lothian after their doomed quarry. This sequence really implements the film salesman's cliché by lifting you out of your seat. And it is to pay this film the highest compliment to say that the journey of the balloon men to Scotland, and the sending up of the barrage, have an equal excitement, in a sense which would have sorely puzzled Aristotle. The convoy of lorries, journeying through the night, with the men singing their own (ingeniously expurgated) song, is something which says more for the spirit of democracy than a hundred shots of belching howitzers.

But there are many points which all film-goers will recognise with that special delight which real screen mastery always brings. There is, for instance, the accuracy with which Watt has picked out a handful of individuals from different parts of Britain and from different occupations, and shown them in relation to their new job. Not one of these characters is "built-up" in the dramatic sense. They are thumbnailed in by Watt on a wise-crack or the lift of an eyebrow, and they have the reality which you may get from the brief shout of a soldier from a passing troop train as you wait for the 8.20 to Victoria. They are part of the whole get-together of real citizens in a gigantic effort. They are slight, almost casual; but they are superbly sincere. For the rest, space must be found to praise, in addition to Cavalcanti's producership and Watt's direction, the photography, which snatches fine effects from mist and a true gold from sunlight; a commentary which is both witty and dramatic spoken by Lionel Gamlin; and Walter Leigh's musical score, which many, alas! may not fully appreciate because of the admirable manner in which it binds itself to all the other elements of the film.

It is perhaps too late to ask why a film which was shown to the French Minister of Information as early as the beginning of April has only now reached the public screens; but it is pertinent to remark that the Forth Bridge incident has by now lost much of its topicality, and that it is no encouragement to the makers of films as good as this if they are denied for so long the freedom of the screen.

Everything Happens at Night is one of those innocuous and quite pleasant films which pass completely out of the mind after a few days. The star is Sonja Henie, the location Switzerland, and the story tells of the rivalry of two reporters (Robert Cummings and Ray Milland) both for a scoop and for the lady's love. There is one "dream" sequence in which Sonja Henie skates magnificently through a forest of white pillars; the snow-scapes are pretty, and there is plenty of quiet humour.

Basil Wright.

COUNTRY LIFE

Winter Vegetables

The war has made many a gardener aware, for the first time, of the importance and charm of vegetables. In March the apparent resolve to win the war by means of the onion was so great that it became almost impossible to obtain seed. Yet many gardeners must have made the mistake of concentrating on summer crops, at the same time lacking the courage to be ambitious. It is not too late to remedy these mistakes. *Minestrone* should form the inspiration of all winter-cropping, and all its main ingredients—leeks, celery, turnips, carrots, cabbage, tomato, beans, cauliflower, parsley—may fortunately still be planted or sown. It is a soup on which we might resist a siege. Of more ambitious crops it is now too late to sow salsify and scorzonera, but not too late for planting celeriac, a turnip-rooted celery; *couve tronchuda*, an excellent flavoured cabbage of which the mid-ribs of the outer leaves are eaten like seakale; *calabrese*, a green spreading Italian broccoli; or *Chou de Burghley*, a hardy winter cabbage said to be of fine flavour. Nor is it yet too late to sow a final crop of French beans: *Comtesse de Chambord*, white; the small brown Dutch; and, if it is possible to locate a little seed not requisitioned by the French Government, a few of the green-seeded flageolet.

The Sixth Column

A two-hour night-patrol with a Lee-Metford, guarding a small automatic country telephone exchange, aroused a few disturbing reflections. Between the hours of eleven and one the night was intensely silent, the small country lane completely deserted except for the shadow of a prowling cat. As we watched the few distant searchlights swing among the stars in a sky that was never quite dark, it occurred to me that a month ago the sabotage of that small telephone exchange by a rubber-slippered Fifth-columnist would have been child's play. In a world of village constables armed only with bicycles, the cutting of telephone wires, the wrecking of wayside transformers, even the burning of crops, would have been a similarly easy matter. These dangers, though lessened, are still there. The L.D.V. forces are settling down to their assigned duties well, but in many country districts their numbers are, it seems to me, still too small. Harvest and hay-time will be hard on a farmer or farm labourer who loses one night's sleep in four. Apathy is still the danger: the apathy of the type of mind who still believes that because the countryside is quiet and remote it is also safe, a kind of Sixth Column admirably personified by the ladies who, urgently requested to receive evacuated children, declared "We have quite enough to do with the parrot and ourselves."

Petunias

The petunia, like the fuchsia and the pelargonium, has gone a little out of fashion. Yet many of the plants which have replaced it in favour—zinnia, antirrhinum, nemesia—are less satisfactory in every way. It has few, if any, of their faults: susceptibility to wilt or rust, shortness of flowering season, liability to sudden collapse. It thrives in hot weather. A bed of a very old favourite, Rose of Heaven, was planted out in May of last year. On the day of planting it showed two flowers, the next day twenty, within a week two hundred. It continued to flower until late October. No finer plant exists for the hot, dry bed against the wall of the house. There is nothing so good for the window-box as the florid velvet of Californian Giant. This year Flaming Velvet joins Rose of Heaven and responds by behaving in the same delightful way: one flower on the day of planting, and within a week scores of soft sunshades of royal maroon.

Attack on the Cuckoo

Hudson, in perhaps the most famous passage ever written about the cuckoo, calls attention to the remarkable indifference of a robin to her own ejected nestling—"slowly and dumbly dying . . . no more than a coloured leaf, or a bird-shaped pebble, or fragment of clay." This example of parental blindness to the sufferings of its own young in favour of the young cuckoo has led to a belief, I think, that birds are also indifferent to the menace of the cuckoo parent. Yet quite a common sight in the spring countryside is the pursuit, and often the persecution, of the cuckoo by birds which are its potential victims. Sometimes a cuckoo is pursued by a single bird; sometimes the attack is communal—several birds of a different species chasing a single retreating cuckoo, very like a flight of angry fighter-aircraft pursuing a solitary hedge-hopping bomber.

H. E. Bates.

A DANISH LEGION

SIR,—May I as a Dane, now a British subject, give my strongest support to the letter by "a young Dane," published on June 14th in *The Spectator*? All Danes in this country feel deep sorrow, because it looks as if their country is about to be forgotten, and because the British Forces do not welcome their offers of active service. I think that England even should try to form a Danish Legion, consisting of manpower gathered from England herself and from the Dominions. I remember that several Danes, living in South Africa, offered their service at the outbreak of the war, but so far as I know they never got any reply or acknowledgement.

The editor's remark about the different positions of Czecho-Slovakia and Denmark is correct indeed, and no Dane would doubt that. "A Young Dane," and all other Danes did, however, not mean to say that the political cases of the two countries were similar; on the contrary. But the feelings and sympathy of the two peoples are the same.

And may I propose that if it should be impossible to form a pure Danish Legion, let the Danes in this country, wanting to join up and fight for freedom, join the Norwegian units, which are said to be in England now after the evacuation of Narvik?—I am, Sir, yours faithfully, RALPH THOMSON.

53 Addison Road, W. 13.

MR. FAIRBANKS AND "THE SPECTATOR"

SIR,—I should like to tell you why I have enjoyed *The Spectator* so much that I have ordered copies for several of my friends.

I had heard of *The Spectator* for years, but I never became a constant reader of it until it was shown me by Sir Robert Holland, who was associated with us during the making of a film called *Gunga Din*. One of the things I liked most about it was its presentation of both sides of current arguments and its analyses of problems which face us all. Its intelligence, reserve and sanity were in no way compromised by its courage and outspokenness. In short, to me, as an American, it embodied within its pages many of the attributes which I had learned over the years to love best in Britain.

I, therefore, thought that no better case in point for the championing of the British way of life, its democracy and its standards, existed in such a quickly digestible form as *The Spectator*. So, in order to back my arguments with concrete proof, I began to loan my copies to certain of my friends. That appeared to clinch the argument, because as a result they began questioning me about the next issue even before it arrived. This problem I solved by giving them subscriptions, so that each of these people in turn may pass their copies out to their friends.

With every good wish for your continued success, believe me to be, most sincerely, DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JUN.

Pacific Palisades, California.

THE SPIRIT OF MAN

SIR,—Most people will agree with Mr. Charles Morgan in commending the fine and representative nature of the poetry that goes to make up Robert Bridges' book, *The Spirit of Man*, yet for many this book is marred by the wretched preface showing the narrow limitations of Bridges' mind.

Of this preface, one of the most distinguished Englishmen of this century, Havelock Ellis, has written (*Impressions and Comments*, Vol. iii, p. 29):

"I read this preface with a shock of horror . . . . the Author reveals himself as the most Pharisaic of self-righteous jingoes, as a war-monger of the kind we associate with our gutter-press, as the inspired prophet of Hysteria. . . . This preface to *The Spirit of Man* is only fit to be held in memory as a monument to the imbecility of that spirit under the influences of war."

Perhaps few would agree with such an opinion today, for only the greatest minds can retain a calm and balanced outlook in the midst of war.

Charles Morgan suggests, perhaps rightly, that the German spirit is essentially opposed to our own. Essentially different, giving a different outlook on life from the Latin spirit of the French, and to a lesser extent from ourselves. The German spirit expressed in Goethe and Beethoven represents aggression, power, man's strength in action, the Latin poetic spirit lives in the world of imagination away from the field of action. It evidently requires both sorts to keep the world going. The tragedy, perhaps inevitable, is that they should clash and try to destroy each other. —Yours faithfully, L. H. CALLENDAR.

30 Pine Road, Didsbury, Manchester.

COUNTRY LIFE

Land and Labour

The fixing of the national minimum agricultural wage at 48s. per week, and the reduction of the age of reservation for certain agricultural workers from 21 to 18, are both decisions having the same important significance. Both are an indication of the serious labour shortage on the land. Between the beginning of June and the end of August is concentrated the most intense effort of the farming year. In many districts this not only involves the gathering in of hay and harvest, but the picking of soft fruits and hops, for which special casual labour is imported. This year the crop of both strawberries and cherries is excellent, but there is a serious shortage of pickers. In some districts farmers have welcomed the formation of local helpers into Land Clubs, only to see these schemes seriously jeopardised by the demands of local defence services. At the same time, in these same districts, soldiers billeted in farms and farm-buildings have been bored by the empty activity of the long summer days. It does not yet seem to have occurred to the authorities that there is something wrong in keeping idle soldiers on land that seriously needs men for the harvesting of food.

Church Bells

The order prohibiting the ringing of church bells except as a warning of invasion by air-borne troops adds one more item to the long list of strange bell-customs. Bells have been rung for centuries as an expression of joy or sorrow, for death or marriage, fire or christening—even as protection against pestilence, famine and thunder. In "certaine Rules, Directions, or Advertisements for this Time of Pestilentiall Contagion" (London, 1625), it was urged that "the Bells in Cities and Townes be rung often, and the great Ordnance discharged; thereby the air is purified." In 1464 there appeared in the churchwardens' accounts for the parish of Sandwich an item for bread and drink for "ryngers in the great Thunderying." In Wiltshire, "when it thundered and lightened, they did ring St. Adeline's Bell at Malmesbury Abbey. The curious do say that the ringing of Bells exceedingly disturbs Spirits." I note that the new order demands that no "elaborate peal should be rung"—a slight blow, I imagine, to the pride of English bell-ringers, who have brought the art of change-ringing (twelve bells will give 479,001,600 changes) to a point of extreme perfection not equalled elsewhere in the world.

Wild Strawberries

I feel that no apology is necessary in calling attention once more to the virtues of the wild strawberry. It is the earliest and most epicurean of English wild fruits; its relation to the blackberry is roughly that of the Cox's Orange to the crab-apple. This year, on the sun-baked chalk slopes of the south country, it has already ripened prodigiously: making a scarlet groundwork, in some places, for rarer orchis. As a dessert it equals the famous *fraises des bois*, which visitors to France cherish as a special memory, and the slight sharpness of its flavour makes a jam of more distinguished quality than the cultivated fruit. In short, a free luxury. Yet it is rarely seen in shops, in country markets or on the menus offering so-called farmhouse teas. And country people, with characteristic apathy, ignore it almost completely.

Flowers as Food

The war began with a strong campaign that urged us to plough up lawns and grow indiscriminate quantities of vegetables to the exclusion of flowers. There was no mention of the value of flowers as food. Yet Miss Florence White, in a book on that subject, records half-a-dozen substitutes among flowers and wild plants for asparagus, including hop-shoots, Solomon's seal, Butchers Broom, willow-herb and elder. She gives recipes for the pickling of nasturtium seeds, lime-buds, ash-keys and elder-buds. The flowers of vegetable marrows are said to be excellent stuffed with forcemeat; Gerrard recommended the buds of sunflowers, "boyled and eaten with butter, vinegar and pepper," as "exceedingly pleasant meate." A soup of young nettles is good; puddings may be made of marigold and primrose. Enthusiasts should, however, be warned against the leaves of rhubarb, which caused a rise in the home-front casualties in the last war, and they should not experiment with cultivated crocuses as a substitute for saffron. In all there are said to be no fewer than two hundred and sixty kinds of wild food which may be gathered in Great Britain without any infringement of law. H. E. BATES.

THE CINEMA

"Primrose Path." At the Gaumont.——**"Dr. Cyclops."** At the Carlton.

THERE is a nice distinction between the "primrose path of dalliance" and the "primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." The former phrase, though disapproving, allows for repentance, even for salvation; while the latter, in the Calvinistic humour of Macbeth's Porter, keeps us firmly and absolutely damned. So "path" it had to be for Hollywood, so that the primroses could be forgotten, and it should turn, in the last reel, to the high road which is roses, roses all the way. The result is, unfortunately, rather than inevitably, a film which just stops short of being good. But it is without any doubt worth seeing, if only for the intention, and the execution, of the earlier reels.

We are introduced to a story which is as tough as any that has been screened since *Marked Woman*—that remarkable Bette Davis film of which so little note was taken. The scene is a coast town, and the problem posed is, what happens to a girl whose mother and grandmother are prostitutes, when she is reaching womanhood? (Especially if the girl is Ginger Rogers.) The problem is brilliantly underlined by the director (Gregory la Cava), who uses a stark documentary technique in depicting the shabby old shack, garnished with the garish appurtenances of female allure. The girl's mother, an easy-going, affectionate, sentimental, family-loving harlot; her husband, a slobbering drunkard with a professorial past; a savage old madame of a grandmother; and an eight-year-old girl whose innocent precocity in the routine drill of the streetwalker is staggeringly depicted: these, with Miss Rogers, make up the inhabitants of the shack. They are less documentary than the building, but they have a reality of their own, and the exaggerations do not mask the director's accurate observation of certain types. At the other end of the town is a handsome young man (Joel McCrea), who runs a petrol station with a snack bar attached. He, exercising the prerogative of his sex, is as free with the girls as anyone can be who doesn't need to reck his own rede. He picks up the girl, who in passing steals his wallet but subsequently returns it, and marries her without enquiring into her ancestry. After a few idyllic weeks she rashly takes him to visit her family; the old grandmother—for no particular reason except that the plot would otherwise collapse—instructs him to believe the worst. He scorns his wife, leaves her in the best melodramatic manner, and the film goes to pieces. Not even Miss Rogers' superb appearance in the style and accoutrements of a super-streetwalker can redeem its uneasy progress towards the inevitable reconciliation, in which even the wicked old grandma is rewarded with a fat wad of banknotes. "O, come in, equivocator!"

But *Primrose Path,* in many of its sequences, has that tang of reality, that observation of certain *strata* of society, which was the hallmark of the golden period of the German film. There is a fresh, salty scene between hero and heroine gathering clams on the beach at their first meeting; there is a convincing quality in the wisecracking customers at the snack bar; and the restaurant where the wicked women go is sufficiently fusty and sufficiently smoky to be gratefully distinguished from the chromium dives of the average Hollywood film. Moreover Ginger Rogers proves once again that dancing is the least of her accomplishments; she is not merely content to be handsome; she welds her attractiveness to a genuine acting ability whose naturalness is born of art and practice, and is therefore twice as effective. Of the rest of the cast Joel McCrea is something more than competent, Marjorie Rambeau is as good as ever as the mother, and Miles Mander gives a fantastic exhibition of overacting as the drunken father; and with all that misses out the three main things which, according to the Porter, are provoked by alcohol.

The possibilities of the film in the realm of the fantastic and the macabre are axiomatic; films like *King Kong* and *The Invisible Man* appear at intervals to remind us of the ingenuity with which trick photography can waft us into the Impossible. What is extraordinary is that the convincing success of the trick effects themselves is seldom allied to conviction in the emotional effect; and ingenuity in such films is nothing if it cannot carry with it a sense of terror or a sense of fairy-tale.

Dr. Cyclops is no exception. Here we have the mad scientist who uses radium to reduce his guests to midgets; and incredible ingenuities are used to establish the mad sense of scale so produced. But there is nothing of the "cauld grue" which we get, for instance, from the country doctor's fight for life with the giant rat in *The Food of the Gods.* The household cat in *Dr. Cyclops* remains a household cat; the rat in the Wells novel belongs to a category outside our ordinary experience. Here perhaps is a defect arising from the crisp realism of the camera lens; but one prefers to regard it as lack of imagination on the part of the men behind the lens. In any case, *Dr. Cyclops* is the first film of its type to be made in Technicolor, and within the terms of novelty it is worth a perfunctory salute.

BASIL WRIGHT.

COUNTRY LIFE

The Importance of Ensilage

Here in England, apparently in contrast to the rest of Europe, the grain harvest promises to be excellent. But hay will be thin and of poor quality. The question of ensilage—*i.e.* the preservation of young green grass and other green forage by air-tight packing while the materials are still moist—therefore becomes of the greatest importance. Ensilage is not new; but new and cheaper methods are replacing the original system of expensive silos, and I do not think it would be too much to say that in war-time an extensive system of ensilage, properly organised, would be a line of national defence. There is on the market now a silo that is nothing more than a wire cage lined on the inside by bitumenised sisal-grass paper. Its powers of resistance to pressures of temperature are said to be enormous. Its cost is small, and in time, when necessary, it can be re-lined with new paper. Into a silo of this type, which can be set up anywhere, a farmer may ensilage any one of a dozen green crops, including not only young grass, but oats, peas, vetch, wheat, beans, tares, maize, pea-vines and pea-pods for canning factories, and even sunflowers. All these produce winter cattle-feed of high value; ensilaged lucerne and maize, for instance, will furnish more than double the amount of digestible nutrients per acre of many grasses.

Ensilaged Grain

One of the most interesting materials for ensilage is brewers' grain. Unlike green forage, which may be ensilaged in small quantities day by day, grain must be tight-packed within twenty-four hours. At the end of that time its internal heat is already great; it boils beerily. After some weeks it cools off, and in a few months is an entirely cool feeding material, which is said to have half the feed value of best June hay and a quarter of that of cattle cake. Bought in summer, however, its cost is extremely low. Grain is then thirty-five shillings, cake fourteen pounds per ton. Those who advocate drastic measures of temperance reform in war-time may therefore like to remember that milk is sometimes, indirectly, a by-product of beer.

A White Squirrel

White squirrels had often been reported in the neighbourhood; in one copse, many years ago, they were said to have made a colony. It was not until these notes were about to be written that I saw what at first looked like the light spring of a pure white fluff-tailed kitten. As it crossed the road, ran along the fence among a tangle of almost black branches of holly and then leapt for the dark trunk of an oak, out of the sun, its whiteness gave it a look of extraordinary airy and lovely fragility. Clinging to the oak-trunk, it looked for a moment like a creature of thistledown. The eyes were like minute buds of pink. I moved a little to get a better view of it, but when I looked again there was nothing to be seen but a white tail, blown swiftly upward among the maze of oak-leaves into the sun.

An Indiscreet Soldier

A Local Defence Volunteer, while on duty, is under the same obligations and has the same powers as a member of His Majesty's Forces; when off duty these powers relapse. Recently I gave a lift to a private soldier in my car; as a Defence Volunteer I was then off duty. Within three minutes this soldier, who belonged to the type which cannot keep a closed mouth for a single second, gave away the following information: the exact position of his unit, the number of men, the time at which they began work every morning and the time they returned at night. And finally, with an air of extreme importance, "I am on a special job." Before I could recover from my astonishment, he supplied the information that this was the construction of a secret line of transport communication. The casual blabbing of these highly important plans, complete with exact topographical and other details, was too much for me. I hastily set him down at the next corner. Giving lifts to soldiers in remote country places is a common thing, and many other countrymen besides myself must have met this problem of the soldier who cannot keep his mouth shut and must have wondered what, as private citizens or volunteers, they ought to do.

In the Garden

The culture of large-flowered hydrangeas for pots is extremely simple. Soft cuttings of unflowered shoots, four or five inches long, should be potted now. Well syringed, they will root in a light compost in three or four weeks. They may be wintered entirely in cold frames, then brought into flower by gentle heat in early spring. From then onwards they belong to the eat-and-swill class. Copious feeds of liquid manure will produce the huge flower-heads that have become symbolic of hotel lobbies but whose real place is in the formal garden, by steps or on terraces or by the waterside. They will flower more vigorously when pot-bound.

H. E. BATES.

letter. The large population of Paris is maintained by extensive immigration, the death-rate in the capital being higher than the birth-rate. And yet this same French stock in Canada has a very high birth-rate which, if maintained, will surely oust the English element; the past years have seen the tide of French Canadians sweeping westwards and gallicising the regions that they occupy.—Truly yours,

E. C. BARRINGTON.

4 Alleyn Park, Norwood Green, Southall.

COMMISSIONS FROM THE RANKS

SIR,—I had the misfortune to receive my education at a public school when the peace ballot, disarmament and the League of Nations were the dominant topics. Consequently O.T.C.s were the exception rather than the rule. I duly left school with distinctions, and was fortunate enough to have some months abroad before settling down to a business career. It was not long after the outbreak of war that my age group was called up, and I was confidently told in my interview with the Army officer that I should have no trouble in gaining a commission, and it would only be a question of serving in the ranks a couple of weeks. Many months have now gone by, I have completed my infantry training, and have obtained a very good insight into the workings of the Army as seen from the ranks. The prospect of a commission through the ranks, however, so often written about, seems more remote than ever. In fact I do not know of anyone in our battalion who has achieved this distinction during the period I have served. My application has been in some months but never a word has since been heard from that day to this. I have no friends amongst officers nor have I any influential acquaintances. It seems that because I did not pass on to a University, my knowledge of foreign languages and ability to handle men gained from my business counts for nothing. Admittedly, I am doing my bit, but what consolation is that when you know you can do so much more?—Yours truly,

PRIVATE ATKINS.

PRESCRIPTION FOR VICTORY

SIR,—Apropos of "Strategicus's" comments on Marshal Pétain's apology, it is worth recalling a story told by Julien Benda in *Un Régulier dans le Siècle*. Someone asked General Mangin (it was about 1904) what would determine the victory in the next war. "I shall never forget," writes Benda, "the tone in which he replied, as if indignant that the question could even be asked: 'It is always the same: moral force.'"—Yours faithfully,

FELIX FRIES.

91 Prebend Gardens, London, W. 6.

ANNIVERSARY OF WATERLOO

SIR,—I was surprised to see that Mr. Morgan in his article in last week's *Spectator* should make such an error as to write: "Sunday, June 16th, the day after the anniversary of Waterloo." I am a member of the college which was founded in the Duke's memory, so I should like to point out that Waterloo day, which is always a day of celebration here, falls on June 18th. Perhaps he was muddling it with the anniversary of the signing of Magna Charta!—Yours faithfully,

Wellington College, Berks. ARNOLD SAYERS.

FANNY BURNEY

SIR,—Your reviewer says Macaulay did not explain how the style of the author of *Evelina* degenerated into "the worst ever known among men," or how, as a Court official, Miss Burney declined into "something fit for her place." Macaulay, however, did explain both. Her writing became laboured and tiresome because "in an evil hour" she took Johnson for her model, and did not imitate him well. As for her wretched experience as Keeper of the Queen's Robes, Macaulay said she changed for the worse because she had accepted "a slavery worse than that of the body"; associated "only with spirits long tamed and broken in"; and was accustomed to judge every event by its effect on the King and Queen, every personality according to the royal likings and prejudices. It would be hard to offer more satisfying explanations than these.

HAMILTON FYFE.

Savage Club.

AN INDISCREET SOLDIER

SIR,—Under the above heading Mr. H. E. Bates tells us, in your last issue, how he allowed a private soldier for three minutes to indulge in "casual blabbing of highly important plans, complete with exact topographical and other details," and then left him, apparently without a word of exhortation to discretion. Would it not have been wiser and more patriotic to stop him at the first improper disclosure and give him a word of advice and warning?—Yours faithfully,

J. A. HERBERT.

Abbey House, Milton Tilbourne, Marlborough, Wilts.

GEORGE LANSBURY

SIR,—It is hoped that in quieter times an authoritative life will be published of my father-in-law, the late George Lansbury. No date can be fixed for this, but if material is not collected now it may quite likely be dispersed or destroyed. With the authorisation of his eldest son and executor, I am therefore writing to you to ask if any of your readers who may have letters or other records of "G. L." which would be of value to his biographer would be kind enough to let me have them for that purpose?

Would those who are so kind as to do this please indicate very clearly those documents that they would like returned to them, and I will endeavour, if I can arrange it, to have them copied.—Yours very truly,

RAYMOND POSTGATE.

45 Hendon Lane, London, N. 3.

COUNTRY LIFE

Idle Land

Between the war of 1914 and that of 1940 the acreage of land lost to cultivation in this country was very great. Much of this loss is also irreparable; gravel pits, building estates, factories, aerodromes and so on stand on sites once occupied by crops. No subsidy, however high, could reclaim this land for the plough. There still exists, however, a large acreage of land which is agricultural in character, but which yields no agricultural return. Much of this land exists almost solely for the protection of the amenities of private houses. One of the commonest reasons for the private ownership of a few acres of land is "so that nobody else shall build in front of us." This fear of being overlooked must be responsible for many thousands of acres of land having no other than a purely symbolic purpose. In my own district I can think of half a dozen examples of such land. In one case a fifty-acre section of the finest virgin parkland has lain idle and derelict, hideous with clumps of fallen timber, for fifteen years. It is never used, or cropped; it exists for no other purpose than to preserve a view. Until such land, of which it is estimated there are at least 8,000,000 acres, is forcibly taken over, put to agricultural use, and redeemed from an impossible idleness, much of the talk of a drive for a hundred-per-cent. agricultural output loses its point.

Rural Defence

In the more remote country districts—and probably in all—there seems little need for three separate defence services—*i.e.*, A.R.P., the special constabulary and L.D.V., whose members are largely drawn from what is virtually a fourth arm of defence: agriculture. If these services were pooled into an organisation to be called, for example, Rural Area Defence, there would be several immediate advantages. The most important of these would be that thousands of farm-labourers, at a period of the year when twelve-hour days in the harvest-field are common, would not be unnecessarily robbed of sleep. Instead of these services separately patrolling a thinly populated area at a given alarm, one service could provide an adequate patrol each night, at the same time not calling on any of its members more than one night in seven or even one night in ten. Of the three existing services only the L.D.V. is armed; and in case of serious trouble the special constabulary would, on its own confession, be worse than useless. The present system is, indeed, trying to exact more from the country worker—in particular the agricultural worker—than he can give. A system of pooled services would enable him to get both his share of duty and, more important, his share of sleep.

Hawk and Cuckoo

My recent note on the pursuit of the cuckoo by smaller birds has brought the usual explanation: that the adult cuckoo so much resembles the sparrow-hawk that small birds attack it by mistake in natural self-defence. Cuckoo and sparrow-hawk are certainly much alike (in some country districts they are still believed to be one and the same bird), but to my mind this would hardly account for the intensive attacks on the cuckoo at the very period of the year when it so menaces the domestic life of smaller birds. Again, if it is possible for a bird to recognise the sparrow-hawk as an enemy, why should it not also recognise the cuckoo? I find another explanation more possible: that the attack is deliberately drawn by the male cuckoo in order to leave the female an unmolested opportunity of depositing her egg in a selected nest. But even this, it seems to me, is doubtful. The attacks are so swift and short, and the small birds return to their bases so quickly, that it is unlikely that the female cuckoo would have time to complete her task.

In the Garden

The most beautiful of the mallows, *Abutilon vitifolium*, was cut down but not killed by frost. It is an aristocrat among wall-shrubs. The soft green leaves are vine-shaped, the stems olive-green. The flowers are large silver-mauve cups, not so stiff as hollyhocks, with centres of bright orange. Their beauty comes out clearly against a wall of quiet grey stone: a lovely sight.

H. E. BATES.

BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY

URGENT APPEAL

Thousands of our men, after heroic resistance, have fallen into enemy hands and are now in German Prison Camps suffering great strain and loneliness. We are relieving the monotony of their otherwise dreary existence by sending books, games, sports gear, musical instruments, etc. (which are safely received), but URGENTLY need subscriptions to cope with the work. Will YOU help to prove to our men that THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN? Donations, large or small, gratefully received by

SIR HUGH WALPOLE *Chairman.* or **MISS CHRISTINE KNOWLES** *Founder and Hon. Secretary.*

BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR BOOKS AND GAMES FUND,
576 Carrington House, Hertford Street, London, W.1.

(*Note: Censorship regulations preclude acceptance of gifts in kind.*)

more especially in the speech made by the Eire Minister of Defence on Sunday, June 30th, and reported in the following day's Irish Press.

Northern Ireland has not the remotest intention of abandoning her place in Britain, joining a neutral country, and helping Hitler to invade Ireland. To suggest that Northern Ireland should become neutral is stark madness.—Yours, &c., M. GOVAN.

[Our article made it as plain as words could make it that Ulster could not be expected to join a *neutral* Eire.—ED., *The Spectator*.]

GERMANY'S WAR METHODS

SIR,—The morale of the Allies has been lowered by an exaggerated respect for the recent triumphs of German arms. An admitted element in these triumphs is the fanatical courage of the best German troops, but it should also be realised that the amazing success of the enemy has only been obtained by the use of other factors which are rightly execrated by every decent human being. I refer to the lying propaganda, the treacherous Fifth Column activities, and the deliberate frightfulness employed against civilians in the battle-zones to produce panic. Even the technical efficiency of the German war machine has only been built up by a prostitution of science and energy to the degrading worship of war as good.

Victory obtained by lying, treachery, frightfulness and the worship of evil may earn contempt, but not respect, and if success in modern totalitarian war can only be won by methods which outrage all decent human feelings victory with honour may be a chimaera.—Yours, &c.,
Astley, Dormans Park, near East Grinstead. T. H. IBBETSON.

"THE SIEGE OF BRITAIN"

SIR,—Webster's Dictionary defines a siege as the sitting down of an army around *or before* a fortified place for the purpose of compelling its surrender or of reducing it by assault after systematic offences and approaches. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gives practically the same definition, omitting the word around. I would invite the attention of Archdeacon Fosbrooke and Mr. Geoffrey Bowles to the two words in italics. I conceive them to be entirely mistaken in supposing that a siege only begins when complete investment has taken place. As a matter of fact, there have been famous sieges from Troy onwards where a back door has remained open (sometimes the sea) for long after the siege began.—Yours faithfully, J. H. SHACKLETON BAILEY.
The Vicarage, St. Michaels-on-Wyre, Preston.

"IF HITLER CAME TO BRITAIN"

SIR,—I have been reading Mr Robert Powell's article "If Hitler Came to Britain" in your last issue. There could not be a better compendium of the consequences which would inevitably result from a Nazi domination of this country. It is a complete answer to the fatuous assumption, voiced here and there, that our people, and especially our working classes, could settle down more or less happily under such a *régime*.

I do most earnestly hope that you will publish it as a leaflet and do your best to give it the widest possible circulation. It is propaganda of the best and most convincing type.—Yours faithfully,
Wychwood, Fitzjohn Avenue, Barnet, Herts. HORACE G. GROSER.

AIRCRAFT LANDINGS

SIR,—Questions are being asked by many people as to which Government Department is making itself responsible for the erection of posts and other barriers on open spaces.

This seems to me to be a job for the Air Ministry only. That Ministry should make itself responsible for the whole planning and, where necessary, the full cost of this work. A further reason why the Air Ministry must do this is because it is possible that so many of our fields will be traps for aircraft that our air pilots—the novices and the trained ones—will, with their machines, be damaged when they make forced landings. Certain fields in every district should be kept open, but well guarded by military or L.D.V., so that our thousands of pilots will have safe landings away from their own dromes. In the last war I was glad on three occasions to use farmers' small fields for forced landings.—Yours faithfully,
Laurel Road, St. Helens, Lancs. WM. VAN SCHAICK.

TOO FEW CHILDREN

SIR,—May I reply to the letter signed "A. R. Caton" in your last week's issue?

I never imagined that comment on the Pétains and Lavals could be read as a "gibe" at the French *people* in their bitter hour. I heartily concur in Mr. Caton's view of "the responsibility of our own leadership in the past"—is it wholly adequate even now?

Marshal Pétain's further excuse, "too few Allies," recalls the treatment of Czecho-Slovakia and Republican Spain.

As to the declining birth-rate, surely the more intelligent, sensitive and independent a community the less will it consent to multiply hostages for slaughter or starvation? If children are wanted, let the world be made fit for them to live in—Europe today is *not* fit.—Yours very truly, F. W. STELLA BROWNE.

"THE VALOUR OF THEIR OWN HEARTS"

SIR,—John Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir) wrote a history of the last war, the volumes coming out every quarter or so as the war went on. In describing a very gallant charge of the Caucasians on the Wisloka against the massed German artillery he used the phrase, "Taking counsel with the valour of their own hearts." Struck with the splendour of the word, I wrote and asked him if it was his own. He replied that he thought it was, but that there was something like it in the Greek. It seems to me that the phrase is worth preserving.—Your obedient servant, JOHN A. FOTHERINGHAM.

COUNTRY LIFE

Citizens and Soldiers

Correspondents who have written both to me personally and to *The Spectator* will be interested to know, perhaps, that the facts in the case of the indiscreet soldier have now been reported to the proper quarter. It will be remembered that a soldier, picked up by me in a car, proceeded at once to give away information about important defence duties. For my benefit, and for the benefit of other motorists who may be similarly placed, a commanding officer has given the following admirable advice:

"A citizen is bound to take cognisance of a breach of the law. A soldier is a citizen before he is a soldier, and as such is bound to observe the law. I suggest, therefore, that as a citizen it was your duty to bring an obvious breach of the law committed by the soldier to the notice of his commanding officer. I can assure you, speaking as a commanding officer, that I should be only too glad to have such an incident brought to my notice."

Sweet Chestnut Bloom

After the high colour of May-time the woods take on a dark uniformity of green that remains unbroken until the early days of July. In hot summers the blossoming of the Spanish chestnuts reaches its splendour about that time. The tree needs only four months, as against the horse-chestnut's six, between flowering and full fruition. It flowers high up, to the extreme tips of the branches, with masses of long cat-o'-nine tail flowers that are in both colour and shape very like the beards of barley just before ripening. In the winds that are so common to early July a wood of these trees, seen from a distance and from a slight elevation, blows and waves indeed like a field of ripening corn. The whole uniform woodland landscape is suddenly brightened by this rippling olive flowing exactly as the fields themselves will soon be illuminated by white and yellow fires of harvest.

Native Cheese

A note on English cheeses, written two years ago for this column, brought some interesting information, together with a large slice of mellow Leicester, which, unfortunately, arrived when I was 3,000 miles away. Since that time the interest in English cheeses appears to have revived a little. At the beginning of the war the enterprise of the French Government in devoting large spaces to the advertisement of French cheeses was typical of that country's sense of gastronomic honour. It is true that the French had 400 varieties to offer; it is equally true that no Government here has ever troubled to educate the British public on the excellence of its native cheeses. Of the thousands who eat mouse-red and factory cheddar, not one has tried Wensleydale, Caerphilly, Double Gloucester, Lancashire, Leicester or Old Cheshire. All these are good, but Caerphilly and Wensleydale, especially are cheeses of great excellence.

Women's Land Army

Farmers have shown a reluctance to state their requirements for extra labour that has, apparently, confused both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Women's Land Army. An official appeal for another 5,000 women land recruits has resulted in 4,000 enrolments, and a further rate of enrolment of 500 a week. This is good, and means that there is now a surplus of volunteers. "Many of them," the W.L.A. states, "are from luxury trades. The fact that there are now more than 8,000 land girls on farms shows that they are making good." As any farmer will tell you, it shows nothing of the kind. The organisation behind the W.L.A. takes no account of the fact, apparently, that the English farmer is a conservative and prejudiced animal. He has a very deep suspicion of imported female labour; he assumes, and probably quite rightly, that a girl trained for a luxury trade will be out of place on a muck cart. He prefers one man to half a dozen women. Here and there one hears reports of city office girls who, as land workers, adapted themselves magnificently to the bitterest winter for half a century. Reports of others only confirm the farmer's attitude. H. E. BATES.

BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY

URGENT APPEAL

Thousands of our men, after heroic resistance, have fallen into enemy hands and are now in German Prison Camps suffering great strain and loneliness. We are relieving the monotony of their otherwise dreary existence by sending books, games, sports gear, musical instruments, etc. (which are safely received), but URGENTLY need subscriptions to cope with the work. Will YOU help to prove to our men that THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN? Donations, large or small, gratefully received by

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THE CINEMA

"Let **George Do It.**" At the Empire.——"**His Girl Friday.**" At the Regal.

GEORGE FORMBY might well be described as the English Fernandel. Both in mood and in size of mouth the two stars have much in common, while the audience's reactions to their buffoonery, both in the France we knew and the England we know, have always had that same sense of warm family humour. Formby, of course, comes from the provincial music-hall, a place which one may well be pardoned for suggesting as one of the true sanctuaries of the English comic genius. His translation to terms of the screen has not been unattended with difficulties, for, in his early films, the music-hall atmosphere was not properly adapted to the tempo of film, and, conversely, in later efforts his producer failed to give him suitable opportunities to change front while retaining the old personal magnetism of his sublime father. Now, however, he has as director Marcel Varnel (the genius behind the Will Hay comedies), and the deft touches of this ingenious director fill in a living background to Formby's immense, ingenuous, and altogether entrancing personality.

It will be understood that to achieve a *première* at the Empire is not necessarily a sign of success for a Formby picture; its real welcome awaits it elsewhere, in suburbs and provincial towns. But it would be a curmudgeonly sort of citizen—even in the boiled shirt district—who did not warm to *Let George Do It.*

It is the age-old formula—the local lad who makes good in the way most of us would like to make good, that is by achieving the impossible both in adventure and in love. But the making-good of a Formby is not the making-good of a Hollywood comedian; the whole action is deliberately transposed into realms of a specially English phantasy (English indeed, for the Scots have it not). This phantasy is in the first place vulgar, in the French or Fernandel sense; secondly, it is entirely lacking in probability; and thirdly, it makes little distinction between what one may define as the possible and the impossible improbabilities. Note, for instance, the fact that Formby's surrealist dream about the capture of Hitler, by means of a barrage balloon and a rope, really differs in no wise from his escape from a U-boat by being fired from a torpedo-tube. Yet in the film the one is a dream and the other a concrete part of the plot.

The plot, indeed! A mad collection of gags and incidents concerning a ukelele player who finds himself involved in secret service work at pre-Blitzkrieg Bergen; a plot with its own insane unities and its own solid Formby foundations which are never more than a few miles from the Blackpool Tower. Never mind the plot, but don your lowest and most receptive brow, cast social inhibitions to the wind, and enjoy fully a manifestation of that special quality which in no small measure represents what we are fighting to defend.

His Girl Friday is a warmed-up version of *The Front Page,* Lewis Milestone's masterpiece which must still, after a good ten years, rank among the six great sound films. Like all *réchauffés,* it cannot be compared with the original dish. The cruel analysis of the tough method of the American Yellow press which made *The Front Page* something more than a collection of wisecracks, is here entirely lacking. As a result, the casual retention of certain scenes of real horror, such as the testing of the gallows drop, and the suicide of the streetwalker, intrude into *His Girl Friday* like messy and unpleasant strangers at a family party. The director, Howard Hawks, might well have rebuilt the plot round a less macabre subject once he had decided that it was a farcical comedy that he was after. To make the poor little "innocent" murderer a figure of fun does not solve the problem.

This criticism apart, *His Girl Friday* is certainly very funny; it is also slickly directed, and the chief parts are acted with diamond-cut-diamond precision by Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant. The camera roves with restless accuracy over the newspaper office and the press room at the gaol; and the faithful microphone follows it to record a Niagara of wisecracks. Of these a fair sample is the reply to a person who claims that the tough Editor has charm; that (retorts the beauteous female reporter) is no doubt true, seeing that his grandfather was a snake.

The wisecracks indeed tumble over each other with such rapidity that it is difficult to accept more than one in three; and it is certainly a matter for admiration that the actors not only remember their hurried lines for long periods at a stretch, but also undertake the most complicated physical movements simultaneously. Some of the scenes conjure up a vision of endless preparation and patient rehearsal which, when the polished but meretricious results are seen, raises the question as to whether it is all worth while. On balance, it probably is, at any rate, from the pyrotechnic point of view. And once again the skill of the small-part players is an astonishing vindication of Hollywood's highly organised and elaborately lavish system of film-making. Amid a host of familiar faces one may occasionally put a name to an old friend, such as Porter Hall; but more often they remain triumphantly anonymous. Without their inspired teamwork a film like *His Girl Friday* would be a drab affair indeed.

COUNTRY LIFE

Medicinal Herbs

HERBS, to most of us, mean mint and parsley; chervil and tarragon, perhaps, to the more ambitious. Of medicinal herbs our generation knows little or nothing. Yet the importation of medicinal and other herbs into this country is, or was in peace time, a large and important trade. A great part of this trade was with Italy, Spain and other countries of south and central Europe. It is now seriously curtailed. In a recent note I referred to the possibilities of flowers as food. The possibilities of flowers as medicine are something of obviously much greater importance. It is so important, and the shortage of medicinal and other herbs is now so serious, in fact, that at least one large firm of botanical importers has appealed for collectors of those commercial herbs that are indigenous to the English countryside. It has appealed specially to Women's Institutes, who have wide experience in doing such work on a communal basis. Many of these herbs are extremely common wild flowers, widely distributed; some, such as henbane, foxglove, mandrake and hellebore, are poisonous; a few, such as southernwood and violets, cultivated. According as to whether leaves, roots or seeds are needed, certain careful methods of collection and drying need to be used, and I give some idea of these in the next paragraph.

Their Collection

All herbs and roots are required dried. The term herb means the whole plant growing above ground; it does not include the root. The colour of such plants, cut off at ground level when in flower, must in all cases be carefully preserved. Leaves must be separated from the plant, without stalk, and roots must be dried when the plant has died down. Earth must be washed from roots, which must be quite clean and free from fibres. Seed should also be clean and free of husk and pod. It is possible for drying to be done in the open air, though it is a process that needs extreme care, and it is better that it should be done on wire-netted trays, in a well-ventilated barn. There are many disused oasts which for this purpose would be admirable. With a little care and some elementary botanical knowledge, many country people, it seems to me, might find in this collecting of herbs the job of war-work for which they have been vainly looking. Done by a group of people, such as a branch of the W.I., it might also be very profitable. It might even be done by groups of older children.

Their Prices

The current prices of these roots and herbs must, to the lay mind, be quite staggering. Elder flowers are now quoted at 65s. per cwt., foxglove leaves 95s., marigold flowers 120s. Among the nightmares of all gardeners I note couch-grass root at 55s. per cwt., dandelion root at 80s., dock root at 52s. Poppy petals (*Papaver Rhocas*) are high in the list at 200s. per cwt., followed by henbane leaves at 150s. Southernwood, eyebright, violet leaves, the leaves and flowers of lime, are all quoted at 80s. Camomile flowers, brewed by our grandparents into a tea that was held to be almost a cure-all, surpass everything at 400s. For some of these, and of the scores of other plants for which there is urgent need, the correct collecting time is past for this year. But very many are still procurable, and will continue to be until as late as November. Country people who are interested should, however, write to Messrs. Brome and Schimmer, 6 Leather Market, S.E.1, who have already asked certain Women's Institutes to help, and who can give any kind of expert information and advice on a subject that is, I think, full of interesting possibilities.

In the Garden

July is an excellent month for the sowing and planting of certain winter crops, the value of which is now so enormously increased. A new garden, a vacant piece of ground, a plot cleared of earlier crops—all these can now be filled with vegetables whose season of use extends from September to spring. White and swede turnips, carrots of the shorthorn type, perpetual spinach (excellent as a soup if you do not like it otherwise), beetroot, leeks (almost the only unprotected vegetable to survive the 40° of February frost), celery, Savoy cabbage, endive and lettuce may all be sown or planted now. Kale of the asparagus variety should be sown in rows and later thinned, but not transplanted. A late sowing of French beans, among which *Mont d'or* is, in colour and taste, deliciously buttery, is still possible. Of unusual green vegetables it is perhaps not too late to try a planting of *chou de Burchley,* said to have the virtues of both cabbage and cauliflower; *petsai,* the Chinese or celery cabbage, recommended for ordinary cooking purposes or winter salads; broccoli of the perennial bouquet variety. As a supplement to all this, the value of a good deep garden frame cannot be over-estimated. H. E. BATES.

THE CINEMA

The Grapes of Wrath. At the Odeon.

THE cinema is a young art. It hardly existed at the beginning of the century. For forty years it has been largely exploited as an industry, as a supplier of cheap entertainment. There have been notable exceptions to this industrial concentration; they occurred in Russia, where commercial interests were subordinated to the vital effervescence of a nation expressing for itself a new way of life; they occurred in post-war Germany, expressing the attempts of a people to find a basic and international self-respect; they occurred in France, where men wished to confirm in vivid terms the *raison d'être* of a pure but elusive civilisation. Even in Hollywood itself the Griffiths, Stroheims and Chaplins strove, within the bonds of big finance, to bring the crude essence of truth before a puzzled and mass-produced world. In assessing *The Grapes of Wrath* it is only fair to remember the work of the pioneers; for this film is a logical development from their experiments (whether successful or unsuccessful in terms of box-office). It is almost certainly true to say that *The Grapes of Wrath* could not have been made without the previous experience of Pudovkin's *Mother,* Griffiths' *Isn't Life Wonderful,* Stroheim's *Greed,* Pabst's *Joyless Street,* and Dovshenko's *Earth.* But it is equally true to say that John Ford's *Grapes of Wrath* o'ertops them all as the sun the stars. This claim the miserable film-critic can only implement by hoping that his recommendations will persuade people to go and prove it for themselves. It is, to put it simply, the first time that the immense financial and technical resources of Hollywood have been entirely and wholeheartedly devoted to the presentation of a vital and highly disturbing human issue, to the exclusion of all sensationalism, party catchwords, political creeds, or financial considerations. *The Grapes of Wrath,* in fact, is a burning, violent and terrific affirmation of the decency of human nature. That it was made in the United States, and about conditions in the United States, is in itself the finest argument for true democratic (or, if you like, socialist) practice that has ever been presented. No considerations of so-called box-office appeal appear to have entered the minds of its makers; it is a human document pure and simple.

Those who have read John Steinbeck's novel will not need to be reminded of the story—the epic struggle of the dispossessed Dust-Bowl farmers who flee from the cold tyranny of banking corporations with their tractors and mortgages to the promised prosperity of California, whose fruit farmers advertise so glibly for eight hundred fruit pickers by means of tens of thousands of meretricious leaflets. That is the whole story. The dispossessed, in their thousands, trek across an insane continent, and meet a hell beside which their original purgatory is a paradise. An indictment of American capitalism, you may say. Perhaps. But remember our derelict Welsh valleys, our hunger marchers, our drift to the South, our Jarrows. This film, based though it is on U.S.A. conditions, plunges a stiletto of social guilt into our own breasts; and at no better moment could it do it than now, when we are fighting, in the end, for our own rights to fight for human betterment among ourselves.

The first shot of *The Grapes of Wrath* smacks you slap between the eyes—a grey landscape with a dead white sky, and a road receding to the horizon where its verges meet; slashing the foreground are the gaunt and unattainable telegraph wires; and in the far, far distance is a plodding human figure. In one shot a basic statement, and a basic accusation. This opening shot is followed by hundreds, each one composed with the combined art of a Breughel and Rembrandt, and totalling a vision of human effort and human dignity. This story of the Joad family is the essence of true tragedy; but it substitutes for the mythic Oedipus or Antigone the eternal and much more vital you and me—or if you prefer it, the but-for-the-grace-of-God you and me.

It is almost impertinent to refer to the production qualities of the film. The direction, the photography, and the editing, are devoted to a grim realism which is strictly and without exaggeration comparable to the realism of Flaubert, Turgeniev, Daumier, and Zola. *The Grapes of Wrath* is, in fact, the greatest masterpiece the screen has ever produced; in it John Ford has established in vivid and inescapable terms the knowledge of good and evil. It is the *Pilgrims' Progress* of our day and age, and it is the ultimate, violent, stick-at-nothing vindication of the democratic faith. It was made by a Hollywood company, but no Soviet co-operative unit could equal it; it is a non-party, non-political, non-axe-grinding statement; it tells us that humanity has a soul—a soul which it is worth fighting for in very practical terms "not without dust and heat."

BASIL WRIGHT.

COUNTRY LIFE

Saving Seed

A SINGLE plant of tobacco (*Nicotiana affinis*) may succeed in setting 350,000 seeds; in certain species of orchid this number may be increased to a million. Many gardeners must be wondering, this year, if it is worth while taking advantage of this prodigality, in the vegetable garden especially, by saving seeds of their own crops. If it were essential to save large quantities of flower-seeds—this summer has been admirable for dry, clean ripening—the answer would be yes. In the vegetable garden there are probably not more than half a dozen crops of which, even in war-time, it is practical or advisable to save seed. The harvesting of seeds of lettuce, cabbage, carrot, turnip, radish, even with the object of saving transport, is not worth while. Heavier seeds, such as peas, beans, potatoes, shallots, artichokes, should certainly be saved. Of peas alone a small country seed merchant informed me that he put up no less than 17,000 pint and half-pint packets every Spring. Here, as with potatoes, home-grown seed will relieve transport. Potatoes for seed should be selected from strong, good-cropping plants, and should be the size of an egg. Ripened until green, they should be stored nose upward in shallow boxes in a well-lighted but frost-proof place. Strong, stubby dark-coloured shoots are essential. Beans may be partially dried on the plant, and then finished by hanging in a dry, sunny place—the sight of thousands of bunches of haricots drying under the eaves of French houses, in the September sun, is a vivid, instructive memory.

Lime Flowers

Of one of the medicinal herbs mentioned last week it is pleasant to recall that Gilbert White, exactly one hundred and fifty years ago this week, had something to say:

"Lime-trees are fragrant" (he wrote on July 25th, 1790), "the golden tassels are beautiful. Dr. Chandler tells us that in the South of France an infusion of the blossoms of the lime-tree, tilia, is in much esteem as a remedy for coughs, hoarseness, fevers, &c., and that at Nismes he saw an avenue of limes that was quite ravaged and torn to pieces by people gathering the bloom, which they dried and kept for their purposes. Upon the strength of this information we made some tea of lime-blossoms, and found it a very soft, well-flavoured, pleasant saccharine julep, in taste much resembling the juice of liquorice."

Lime seeds also make an excellent pickle; the method is the same as that for nasturtium seeds.

Compulsory Salvage

The situation in country places often provides a comment on the situation as a whole. Salvage is one of these cases. Six weeks ago I was asked by my Rural District Council to arrange for the collection of salvage in my own parish. Meetings of parishioners were called, helpers enlisted, depots provided, all details arranged. Within a few days salvage of all kinds, paper, glass, metal, tins, bones, aluminium, poured in. In six weeks the quantity of salvage deposited by even a small village can be considerable. It had been expected that this salvage, or at least some part of it, could be collected each week. No collection has yet been made; none appears likely to be made. Somewhere behind the enthusiasm, sacrifice and common sense of the village people some department or other is asleep. The countryside, it seems, can take care of itself. Yet in the countryside there remains a vast source of scrap metal which, so far as I know, has not yet been tapped. The average English farmyard is a notorious resting place of forgotten junk; old tractors, broken tools, rusty implements, lumps of disused machinery are familiar parts of the romantic air of decay. Much of this stuff has, no doubt, been picked over by the private junk-men; but another and compulsory clean-up would still yield some astonishing results.

The Year Turns

The year turns, and rain brings a sudden touch of autumn to the July countryside. The first plums, Early Rivers, are ripe for cooking; dewberries are heavily bloomed with purple. It is possible once more to spend an hour or two in the mushroom-field. A few chrysanthemums show buds before their time; the regimental companies of zinneas are magnificent; on the bowed branches of the almond-trees the nuts hang like green peaches. From the tawny masses of the helenium daisies there is a sudden royal flickering of Red Admirals; the tiger-lilies are unfurling exotically. There is a strange quietness in bird-life; but once, during an air-raid, there is still another sign of autumn. High up against the dangerous white clouds, and for a second very like a mass formation of bombers, gathers the first flock of starlings.

H. E. BATES.

GREAT DOG OF WEIMAR

SIR,—In his efforts to flog the absurdities of spiritualism, Mr. Graham Greene himself falls into absurdities of more dangerous application. Arnold, contrasting the "tone of the city, of the centre," with the provincial tone, remarked that the former, "not excluding the use of banter, never disjoins banter itself from politeness, from felicity." Certainly it can only be an offence to those who know the range and quality of Goethe's genius to hear him implicitly compared with the dog of some stupid woman: felicitous it assuredly is not, or funny. But what is of more general importance than Mr. Greene's conception of criticism is the ill-informed attitude towards the German language and its literature which he exemplifies. He asserts that German abounds in "guttural words" and dismisses the whole German language with a contemptuous remark. I am not sure exactly what a guttural *word* is, but the guttural *sound* which occurs in German (in common with that pleasant dialect Scots English), the *ch* preceded by a back vowel, is not displeasing to the ear when correctly pronounced. What is widely and mistakenly thought "guttural" is the German practice of dividing syllables by a distinct stop or hiatus. Thus, instead of slurring words vaguely into one another, and saying "anapple," the well-spoken German says quite clearly and distinctly "ein Apfel," completing the *n* before commencing the *a*. To the southern Englishman, who prefers not to use his mouth for articulation, this may be an offence, but it is quite acceptable to those who care for clear pronunciation. Neither need the constructions of German syntax be heavy, although nineteenth-century German prose, like its Victorian English counterpart, tended to prolixity.

This is not a mere philological pedantry. The English mind still conceives the typical German as ponderous, stupid, sentimental, short-sighted and fat. It we had understood that the modern German, for good or evil, is a different type, we might not have so disastrously underrated the offensive initiative of the German army. We shall not win this war if we sit back and smile with amused superiority at the legendary figure of a slow-witted, beer-swilling enemy, when in fact we are up against something which has consistently outwitted us and held the initiative, with the slenderest resources by sheer quick-wittedness, for nearly ten years (since, indeed, long before we awoke to the fact that we were at war with it). Nor, what is equally important, shall we ever reconstruct the world on tolerable lines after this war if we mock at the great contribution of the German mind to civilisation, and rebuff those many Germans who think as we do and desire to co-operate against the evil that seeks to destroy all civilisation.

To descend to another plane, I do not know at what removes Mr. Greene has his knowledge of Dachshunde, but it is no better than one can expect from a man who calls Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* "the conversations with Eckermann" (why not talk of "Johnson's Boswell"?). I can assure him, from an acquaintance dating back to the day some fifteen years ago when one of them bit me during a walking-tour in the Rhine valley, that they are graceful, sprightly, self-willed, suspicious of strangers, disobedient, but never sentimental. If Mr. Greene has allowed theosophy to prejudice him against these animals, he will find an antidote for that (as for most other ills) in Goethe:

> Dem Hunde, wenn er gut gezogen,
> Wird selbst ein weiser Mann gewogen,

which I may very roughly translate:

> A dog, when adequately trained,
> Need be by no wise man disdained.

—Yours very truly, G. H. GRETTON.
34 Cedar Drive, Hatch End, Middlesex.

FROM WARSAW TO DUNKIRK

SIR,—Alas, I have to admit that in trying not to make the mistake of calling General Douhet "French," I did that very thing. He was an Italian; but when I said this in a public lecture a member of the audience corrected me. It was in endeavouring to avoid the corrector's mistake than my pen betrayed me.

But now may I say that, in his very kind review, Professor Brogan made an exception which is unfair to me? He is quite entitled to suggest that my memory is as treacherous as that of the people I am criticising; but surely it is unfair to suggest that this may characterise my writing on the ground of a mere *inference*. I nowhere *state* (and *I* did not intend to suggest) that M. Blum was "Premier" in March. The Morrison quotation comes *after*, not before the statement "At this moment . . ."; and the context shows that I am talking about the Spanish Civil War. M. Blum was certainly "Premier" when the Civil War broke out and for some time afterwards. I have read the passage through again and read it out to a third person. Neither of us thinks the inference valid. As to my views, however provocative and heterodox they may be, they are carefully considered and I am more likely to write badly through caution than to write well through lack of care.—Yours, &c.,

STRATEGICUS.

COUNTRY LIFE

Country Market

The war has robbed many country markets, especially in the south, of their clap-trap. The sight of a country labourer buying a suit of reach-me-downs from Whitechapel ("Fits you perfectly, Sir, perfectly. No? Now I tell you what I'll do, Sir ——") has vanished; the sellers of paragoric can no longer make the trip; the banana-boys and the rhyming-sellers of underwear, the best students of feminine psychology anywhere ("When I went to Sydney, ladies, on my floating kidney!"), are there no longer. These foreign trappings, dropping away, have left the original core of the market to itself. The produce market, the place where any countryman can sell anything from a bunch of primroses to a bushel of quinces, flourishes as it appears never to have done before. In October the market floor shone with a glow of broad colour that would have delighted Van Gogh. Fiery apples, blue-green rosettes of cabbages, carrots like torches, golden skips of quinces, pots of primula and chrysanthemum, a stray cock-pheasant, silvery shallots, rose-tinted potatoes, combs of honey, spring bulbs, foamy seas of cauliflowers were all evidence of a nation in the throes of advanced starvation. All were sold in an atmosphere brisk with humour. "Show the last case of dessert apples," said the auctioneer to the porter, and got the reply: "No dessert left, Sir. Only eaters."

The Local Nursery

Nurserymen generally are not finding times easy. The small local nursery, with a trade at the mercy of a fluctuating population, faces the winter with hard prospects. How many otherwise keen gardeners, who spend hours over catalogues, ever pay the local nursery a visit? Personally I never yet paid a nursery man a visit without receiving a great deal of courtesy, help and pleasure; or without picking up one, sometimes half a dozen, of those invaluable gardening wrinkles which no books, and sometimes not even experience, can teach. The nurseryman's last gamble of the year, his chrysanthemums, are now in their glory. It is probably the richest single flower harvest of the year. I would urge every gardener to find his local grower, pay a call and look at this magnificence; to take down a dozen names, place a provisional order for spring cuttings and try his own hand next summer. Or he might give an order for flowers now—"for honest," a nurseryman said to me recently, "I'd be glad to sell you *anything*."

Rural Salvage

The farce of country salvage schemes goes on. Collections of paper are made once in two or three months, if at all; collections of small scrap iron and glass only when appeal upon appeal has been made; bones lie mouldering in heaps. Nor does larger scrap get better attention. Here an engine of over a ton has waited for six months to be picked up; on a neighbouring farm are quantities of disused agricultural machinery that will, apparently, never be fetched. The result? Scrap ceases to be saved or delivered to the depots. The inference? That scrap collections are not, in rural areas at least, a workable proposition. The remedy? To abandon the rural part of the scheme with good grace, thus saving many rural authorities, already hard worked, a great deal of trouble.

Country Canteen

To civilian town-dwellers it may seem an exaggeration to say that the rural canteen is, to the average soldier billeted in the country, about the most important thing in life. Thousands of soldiers are now quartered at out-lying farms and mansions, in parks and in countryside of which the beauty is unquestionable, but which are, unfortunately, miles from the nearest fox-trot, Ginger Rogers or plate of fish and chips. In such situations the village canteen, with its dart-board, games, cards, tea and trestle-table of food, has something of the atmosphere of a school-treat. I suggest in fact that the village canteen is more important than the village Spitfire fund. No village should, or need be, without one. If a charge of a penny per head is made for admission it will be found that food, and very good food at that, can be sold at cost price. What that means to men in the heart of the country may be gathered from the fact that in a village where the nightly attendance at the pub (no piano, no wireless, no food, and no noise on the accordion please!) is half a dozen, the average attendance at the canteen is a hundred.

H. E. BATES.

amusements of England and America—the flics and talkies and music-hall songs—and realises what songs and what poetry the Athenian carried in his heart, we may wonder whether we have progressed as far as we suppose." Sir Henry Stuart Jones and his fellow-workers have at least shown us the better way.

HILDA MATHESON

(*ob.* 30 x. 40.)

By V. SACKVILLE-WEST

I ALWAYS thought of her as a sturdy pony. The tragedy to us, her friends, is that the pony was not so sturdy as we thought! It trudged, trotted, and sometimes cantered, but in the end it wore itself out carrying loads beyond its strength. We, her friends, knew that she was ill; we knew that she was overtaxing her health; we begged her to relax; we nagged; we begged her to consider herself for once instead of always considering others. She wouldn't listen. The Scottish pony trudged on. She made no fuss. She just insisted on going on with her job, whatever that job might be. She knew that she ought to give in, but it was not in her nature to give in. So she carried on with her jobs, and so she died.

Her jobs, what were they? I slide quickly over the work she did for Lady Astor as her Parliamentary Secretary. I come down to the moment when Lady Astor sent her to see Sir John Reith, and Sir John, struck by the competence of the young secretary, persuaded Lady Astor to release her for his own service. This marks the moment when Hilda Matheson entered the B.B.C. The creation of the Talks Department was the first big job that she undertook. She had the vision to see the importance of this new thing. She saw the wireless programmes not merely as a means of distributing news, but also as an educational possibility for influence, for entertainment, instruction, and general good. The opportunity was hers, and she made the most of it. She had the gift of getting people to speak; she knew how to choose her speakers and how to manage them; she knew how to inspire her staff with her own enthusiasm. It was an entirely new venture; there had never been such a thing as a Talks Director before.

She left the B.B.C. after, I think, seven years, with a wrist-watch on her wrist and a bonus in her banking account. Sir John Reith and the Corporation had not treated her ungenerously according to their lights.

The next job she undertook was the African Survey under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Only her friends knew fully how richly the gratitude of the Commission was deserved. Lord Hailey fell ill, and it was left to Hilda to complete this enormous record, running into nearly 2,000 pages of close print. For this work she was given the O.B.E.

So she went on to another employment of national importance. The Joint Broadcasting Committee was formed for the purpose of putting British programmes on to foreign stations. The propaganda value was obvious, and when war came her hands were full. But her work was complicated by the fact that many of her staff were necessarily of foreign nationality, and in that unfortunate panic at the beginning of last summer some of them were snatched from her and interned. To her ordinary work, already more than enough for her tired strength, she now added the struggle to get her friends and helpers released from the camps. She succeeded, indeed, but the price she paid was her own life. When the inevitable operation had to be performed she had no longer the stamina to survive it.

She is gone, because she would not spare herself. I do not believe she ever thought of herself at all. Her work, her friends, their troubles, their needs—never her own. Selfless, loyal, sometimes too loyal; gentle, but never weak; modest, but strong in her convictions; determined, but never aggressive; a spirit as clean as the air on the slopes of the mountains she loved, she was not only the best of friends, but in the noblest sense a servant of the State.

COUNTRY LIFE

Birds and Raids

My attention is constantly being drawn to the fact that "the birds hate the air-raids." But oddly enough, though I must by now have watched some hundreds of dog-fights, frequently accompanied by machine-gun fire too close to be pleasant, I have not yet seen any reliable signs that birds are distressed by or even aware of intense local air activity. The average air-battle takes place at a height of four, five or even six miles. Is it conceivable that birds can be affected by air disturbance from that height? Bombs are a different thing. Pheasants set up an immediate croaking at the sound of a neighbouring explosion: but this has always been their natural reaction; and as I recently described on another page of *The Spectator*, fish will leap high out of the water at the impact of a bomb. But I have no evidence of bird distress generally. It is possible that many people have been misled simply by the seasonal activities of such birds as rooks, starlings, jackdaws and plovers, which constantly exhibit signs of communal excitement and agitation. But if any readers of this column can give reliable instances of birds behaving strangely during raids it would be very interesting to have them.

The Onion Problem

More than five years ago, when no one could possibly have dreamed that onions would sell for a shilling a pound (a price of nearly £6 per cwt., as compared with 6s. per cwt. for potatoes), a note in this column drew attention to the fact that we in England grew only 5 per cent. of our onion requirements. Even then the Government were, by considering the imposition of an increased duty on imported onions, going to do something about it. Whether this increased import duty was ever imposed I do not know; but the effect on the situation was negligible. We have continued ever since to rely on Dutch, Egyptian, French and Spanish onions—beautifully grown, beautifully graded, beautifully packed—for something like 90 per cent. of our requirements. Yet the onion, in this country, grows magnificently. Its cultivation, on a large scale, has been called specialised, yet its requirements are, in fact, no more exacting than those of the mangel-wurtzel—*i.e.*, fine sowing, early thinning, and constant use of the hoe. The trouble is, perhaps, that English farming has no tradition of onion-growing, just as it has had no tradition of flax-growing. It has begun to acquire the one, however, and could, of course, acquire the other. Even a controlled price of something like £40 per ton must conceivably mean something to the conservative farming mind.

More Vegetables, More Imagination

More sweat than imagination seems to have gone into the campaign for the increased production of vegetables, which appears generally to have been based on the Continental gibe that the English eat nothing but cabbage and potatoes. In our own garden, which had previously barely sustained a family of six for part of the year, an interesting experiment was made. It was decided that potatoes, except early varieties, should not be grown; that peas were too much of a luxury crop to be grown almost wholly for the benefit of birds. Instead, it was decided to grow as many two-purpose, two-season vegetables as possible, inter-cropping, catch-cropping, successional-cropping wherever possible. Of carrots, six sowings were made, the first in March and the last in September, under glass; the results were excellent. Lettuces were not sown between mid-summer and September. Instead, turnips were sown wherever ground became vacant. Extra trenches were made for leeks and celery; salsify, spinach, beet, scorzonera, chicory, Portugal cabbage, yellow swedes, celeriac were grown, with good results, for the first time. Red cabbage was grown to be cooked as much as pickled; calabrese, maturing in early autumn, was discovered to be a sprouting broccoli without parallel. Planting was carried on, with onions and spring cabbage, until October; sowing went on, with broad beans, until November. All this has produced three results never obtained before: a garden as packed with produce for winter as it ever was for summer, a large store of roots, an infinite variety of delicious things. Imagination, indeed, has not only ensured that we shall not starve; it has put us in the lap of luxury.

H. E. BATES.

COUNTRY LIFE

Preserving the Countryside

It is pleasant but surprising news to learn that the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society has now been in existence for three-quarters of a century. Seventy-five years ago Hardy's novels had not been written, *The Amateur Poacher* had not been written, and George Hunt was a small boy in a Surrey town, over which "an air almost of the eighteenth century seems to have lingered." To me it comes as a surprise to learn that in 1865 a group of people should have felt that the rights and beauty of the countryside might, if not watched, slip from the people's grasp. The work of the society they formed has been invaluable ever since, and now the society feels quite rightly that "it would be deplorable if the work which has been carried on for seventy-five years past, and has increased so much in recent times, were now allowed to languish." It faces a deficit of £400 on the current year: a debt which increased subscriptions by parish councils, no less than private help, would do something to lessen.

Milestones

The milestones of every English road have been removed. But where? For a century, in some cases for two centuries, rural authorities have preserved them assiduously. It would be unfortunate if these historical, and in many cases beautifully inaccurate and fantastic landmarks, were to be lost. Those that marked the roads from Ware to Cambridge, as the Commons Preservation Society points out, were painted with the arms of Trinity Hall. There were many beautiful examples in the Cotswolds, many more in Yorkshire, and, indeed, notable examples everywhere in local stone, local lettering, and local imagination. I hope the sentimental English attachment to survivals of the past will see to it that no misdirected patriotic zeal breaks up the iron and stone of these rural antiques into Hurricanes and hard core.

Woods and Youth

Woods and forests cover twenty-three per cent. of the earth's total surface; the United States has an estimated reserve of 385 billion cubic feet of soft timber, but is cutting four times as fast as she grows; Canada has an estimated total of sixty-one and a half billion cubic feet of soft woods, and fifty-two million cubic feet of pulp-wood, but is cutting twice as fast as she grows; in Europe the former estimate of two and a half billion acres of good timber has been reduced by a third. In England there are 3,500,000 boys and girls between fourteen and eighteen, but only one in eight is receiving education. Have the facts about timber and the facts about children some connexion? The author of *Our Woods in War* (Acorn Press, 4s. 6d.) thinks they have. "Youth," President Roosevelt has said, "can batter itself to death against the stone wall of political and governmental ineptitude," and Mr. George Godwin, who also wrote an account of the Indore system practised on Iceni Farm at Surfleet, wants to see the problem of depleted forests and depleted adolescent education made part of the same problem. To me his book is a very stout and very convincing argument for the case.

State Ownership

He wants to see other changes in the organisation of English forestry, among them State-ownership of forests. Again the facts are interesting. In England the total forest area represents only 5.6 per cent. of the total land area; of that area 86.4 per cent. is under private ownership. Between 1914 and 1918 a million acres of English woodland were cut; only a part was replanted. The standard of silviculture, as the result of State-ownership, is greatly superior to that under the English system; yet, according to Professor Troup, any opposition to State-control comes not from private owners whose woods are well preserved, but from those whose woods are neglected. Mr. Godwin calls attention to the grave condition of Savernake Forest after the great frosts of early 1940; to the grave situation where vast quantities of fallen timber can lie rotting during a war in which the transport of coal is a major problem. Every countryman can see that scandalous state of affairs repeated, in a smaller way, in the copses and woods and parks of his own parish. And, like me, he will be forced to agree with Mr. Godwin's melancholy conclusion that unless we act at once we shall wake up after the war "to find the country denuded of its forest wealth." H. E. BATES.

THE CINEMA

"Our Town." At the London Pavilion.

THIS film is pure both in its interest and execution. It is also completely unorthodox in technique; and it contains no stars. As a result it is difficult to place, at any rate as far as criticism is concerned. That it should be judged on the highest standards is certain; but its philosophical approach is hard to pin down, chiefly because the visual impact is stronger than the words spoken by the characters, and the melting quality of softly photographed movement may tend to give a larger part to the emotions than the theme really warrants.

It begins with a pleasant-faced middle-aged man who stands on a hill and tells the audience about the little town of Grovers Corners, in New Hampshire—its population, climate, occupations, and so on; its typical residents, with their families. He calls on prominent citizens to supplement this information, which they do, even to the point of answering questions presumed to come from the audience (here an ingenious trick of sound perspective is used). Then we follow the fortunes of some of the inhabitants. Nothing sensational, just marriage, birth and death; choir practice, gossip, family affairs. At times our commentator (who turns out to be the local drug-store keeper) interposes, signalling the passing of time, or even putting back the clock, returning to the past to explain the present. This reversal of temporal progress is important, for it prepares the mind for an astonishingly mystical final reel.

But before discussing this mystical sequence it is necessary to analyse a little further the persons and incidents selected from the odd score of years with which the film is concerned. The main story deals with two families; the son of one grows up with the daughter of the other; marries; moves to a farm; has two children, nearly losing his wife in the delivery of the second. The hopes and fears, no less than commonplaces, of the boy and the girl take up a large measure of the film, and are placed against a background in which the life of their parents plays a major part. Less emphatically a number of other citizens weave their existence into the story, including the milkman, the clergyman, and the pathetic figure of the choirmaster whose love of drink overmasters all too often his love of music.

The director, Sam Wood, depicts their simple lives, their simple contacts, with a tenderness unequalled in any film since Murnau's *Sunrise*. The limits of our experience as ordinary folk are never overstepped. All that happens is that our own experiences are idealised. What we in our own lives have felt, or still feel, is abstracted into a Platonic world, where the things of the mind are real, and the things of circumstance shadows. Herein, of course, lies the film's major defect. The town we see is too cosy, too idyllic, to approximate to general life even in peacetime civilisation. A mental comparison with *The Grapes of Wrath* instantly reveals which is the greater work, and which the more urgent in terms of the abilities of film-making. *Our Town* is gentle and reminiscent; it calls for no fury, no sympathy, no flash of mental or emotional thunder; it represents the haven where we would be, where even grief is natural and part of the soil—a haven denied to too many in the twentieth-century world. The dwellers in Pittsburgh, in Hamburg, or in Birmingham will find no approximation to their circumstance and environment, and therefore will realise less fully the truth of the simple sentiments which *Our Town* does in fact express and which they have in some measure actually experienced. For their Ma Joad is a truer, nobler and perhaps a more recognisable figure.

There remains for consideration the mystical finale. When the girl lies near death on her second childbed she visits in spirit the ghosts of her forbears in the hillside graveyard. She talks with them, simply and solemnly, and they answer her from the wisdom of those who are sinking into forgetfulness of their earthly life. Then, a ghost herself, she revisits her home, on the occasion of her sixteenth birthday. She sees her family and herself, sees the scene with the eyes of experience since obtained, and of unknown prophecies now fulfilled. Smiling through tears and ecstatic in agony, she attempts to speak to them to explain the splendour of life which she now sees; but they move through her unsubstantial form unwitting, until it is to the audience that she must deliver her message. The message is a question and is memorable less in its wording than in its mood which recalls another question asked by Coleridge: "If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke—Aye! and what then?"

BASIL WRIGHT.

RURAL SALVAGE

SIR,—May I suggest to Mr. Bates that it is a mistake to draw a general inference from a limited experience, and, in war-time, to *publish* it may easily be a national disservice? In many districts rural salvage is not in the least a "farce." When it is a farce it is a reflection either upon the zeal of the householders or upon the organising ability of the District Council. In this district, after trying various methods, we find the best results are obtained by house-to-house visits, at regular intervals, of the Council's refuse lorry. One week it collects worthless refuse for the dump; the next week it collects paper, bones and small scrap, kept separate from each other for salvage; and a representative of the Ministry has expressed himself entirely satisfied with the efficiency of the collection. What one Rural District Council can do other Councils can do, and ought to do. With regard to scrap-iron, Mr. Bates has apparently not come across Mr. Morrison's exhortation to build the scrap heap sky-high if not collected, and never mind if it is not needed at present, for it will be needed presently. If it is not there when it *is* needed, Mr. Bates's "farce" may prove to be a "tragedy."—Yours faithfully,

H. IRVING MINTER,
Chairman of an R.D.C. Salvage Committee.

SIR,—The defeatist attitude of Mr. H. E. Bates on rural salvage is greatly to be deplored. What may take place in his village is certainly not the case in many villages with a better sense of patriotism. Mr. Bates suggests that salvage in rural districts should be abandoned so as to save the rural authorities a good deal of trouble. If, however, the rural district councils are too slack, or, for some reason are unable to deal with salvage, then the inhabitants should themselves tackle it.

In this village paper has been collected for many months by volunteers, and the sale of it has resulted in about £4 a month, which is used for providing comforts for the Forces. The system was fully described in *The Spectator* of March 29th, 1940. The schoolmaster has been responsible for collecting scrap metal and has so far got about 15 tons, and has had no difficulty in disposing of it. It is similarly collected in other villages in this district. Surely what is done here can be done elsewhere What is wanted is encouragement and not discouragement. To suggest giving up salvage because it may be difficult is a deplorable attitude. Yours faithfully,

A. C. MYERS, Lt.-Col. (ret.).
Silver Birches, Bovingdon, Hemel Hempstead.

SHOULD ROME BE BOMBED?

SIR,—I would like to be among those who express their strong support of "Janus's" contention that the bombing of Rome would be an outrage which we would all be ashamed of when the war is over and most of us even when it is in progress. Surely the Forum, the Colosseum, the Vatican and its treasures, and the early churches are possessions of all peoples and of all generations. A disaster to the Vatican Library would be a calamity no greater for Italians than for the scholars of every race and time.

When it is remembered that Rheims Cathedral, that flowering of 200 years of the finest French architecture, sculpture and glass-work, was the victim of ignorant German gunners in the last war, that the French, because of their trouble with the Druses, after the last war shelled Damascus, the oldest city in the world, and that long ago the Peking Summer Palace suffered grievously at the hands of British troops, it is surely time to regard the precious things of the world as outside the war zone. That our enemies do not have such scruples is to me no argument. Let us hope that the Italians will look upon the Cairo Museum as outside their military objectives.—Yours faithfully,

F. R. S. BALFOUR
Dawyck, Stobo, Scotland.

THE PRICE OF MILK

SIR,—Perhaps Messrs. Morgan and Procter will kindly inform us why it is that while the farmer gets about one shilling per gallon for milk, the housewife has to pay three shillings? Does distribution actually cost twice as much as production? Surely so large a disproportion calls for explanation.

Milk is now treble the retail price it was a generation ago. Yet recently a big dairying firm declared a dividend of 15½ per cent. on its ordinary shares. Is it not high time that the welfare of the consumers—unquestionably a primary interest of the nation—received proper consideration?

Not long ago the Milk Marketing Board were spending large sums in advertising "Drink More Milk." I suggest that a cheaper and more effective way of increasing its consumption would be a substantial reduction in price. Every mother would gladly buy more if she could afford it. As well advertise water as milk!

Economies in the public lighting and transport services have been effected by eliminating redundant intermediate agencies. That is clearly indicated as the remedy for the present wasteful extravagance in our milk supply.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

D. E. AUTY.
St. Andrew's Manse, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire.

COUNTRY LIFE

Evidence on Birds and Raids

At the time of writing the evidence on birds and air-raids is scanty and unconvincing. A Sussex correspondent observes that "directly the rat-tat-tat of the machine-guns begins (or even before) the birds fly hither and thither as if looking for some refuge to which they can go. They don't settle down till quite a long time after the fight is ended." It is significant, I think, that she does not say what birds. A Berkshire correspondent is more exact. "In the dead of night, before the feel of the concussion from a bomb has gone, the rooks are making a most terrific din." Even this, however, does little to convince me. Rooks frequently make a terrific din; their agitated communal behaviour during or before wild weather is well known. Small birds similarly grow very agitated and "fly hither and thither as if looking for some refuge" for reasons quite unconnected with gun-fire. And looking back over the columns of *The Spectator* I see that another correspondent is concerned over the decrease in birds' nests and bird population this summer, and is inclined to put that down to air activity. Again I think this is mistaken. Large-scale air-raids did not begin over England until the nesting season was almost finished, and in my mind there is no doubt that seven weeks of arctic winter had much more to do with the decrease in nesting, which was certainly very noticeable, than the later dog-fights.

More Observations

Since writing the notes of last week I have tried to check my own previous experiences of birds in raids. On Sunday I was very conveniently bombed, but the only noticeable agitation among small birds was that among my four small infants as we lay in the grass. Later in the week I was walking by woods and water, where bird-life is extremely active and varied, during a two-hour air-battle in which two planes were shot down above me and machine-gun fire seemed almost continuous. The wind was northerly and cold, with bright sun, but instead of agitation among birds there seemed few birds to be agitated. A single heron took off like a heavy grey bomber from the frosted reeds, and the wren and the kingfisher which I see almost daily in the same places were there as usual, quite normal and quite unagitated, as if nothing were happening. Otherwise bird-life was scarce, and if there were a conclusion to be drawn, it might be that birds are being driven away by raids. Unfortunately for that theory there is also a scarcity of rabbits.

Vegetable Seeds

By the time these notes are read the first of the New Year seed catalogues ought to be in the post. *Apropos* of vegetable seeds, a correspondent writes to ask for the name of a good book on that side of gardening. There are many answers to that, but one of the best of them would be a reliable catalogue. To the many excellent English catalogues it would have been possible to add, in peace-time, the remarkable list of Vilmorin, Paris, whose collection of vegetables (beans alone running to six pages) was a revelation. This year the early ordering of seeds is of the greatest importance. It should not be forgotten that there is not only a shortage of onions, but of onion seed. In normal times a great quantity of commercial lettuce seed, particularly of early forcing varieties, came from France and Holland, and with it special varieties of carrot. Some seed merchants have already announced that certain varieties of onion will not be available for trade distribution, which may be the forecast of an acute shortage in spring. The popular campaign for seed-sowing will not begin before February or March, but any good gardener will be well advised, I think, to place his order in December.

Sun-Dogs

The sun-dog, the vague rainbow-coloured sky-shape that precedes rain, has been extremely common all through the days of autumn gales. Its position in relation to the sun, a little to the right, does not seem to vary, and as a forecast of imminent rain it has, on my observation, not once been wrong. But occasionally, and often at the same time, one could observe a new phenomenon: the sun-dog of the dog-fight. It, too, was only a vague handful of rainbow light, a drift of exhaust or oil-vapour caught and coloured by some accident of sun; one more of the freaks of sky-beauty that no age but our own has seen.

In the Garden

In the garden, among the last roses, the ragged scraps of potentilla and verbena and the wind-torn pansies, *Viburnum Fragrans* creates a miraculous touch of spring. There is something of ethereal and Oriental delicacy about this shrub which, at the end of November, breaks into hundreds of delicious shell-pink blossoms, with a tender fragrance of almond, and continues to flower all winter. It is many years since Farrer discovered it wild in China, where it had the reputation of being the best-loved plant in gardens. Meanwhile, as its first pink petals are shaken off by the wind, the English winter begins to produce its usual oddities. Crocus and snowdrop leaves begin to break the earth, and with them the first daffodils and the first bleak primroses.

H. E. BATES.

well known. I hope, however, you will avoid future reference to a subject upon which you are so imperfectly informed.—Yours faithfully,
7 Fort William Terrace, Belfast. (Rev.) A. LYLE HARRISON.

THE PRICE OF MILK

SIR,—In reply to Mr. D. E. Auty's letter on the Price of Milk published in your issue of December 6th, I would say at once that his figures are not in accordance with the facts.

Whilst December figures have not been decided, in November, 1940, the farmer received an average of about 1s. 10d. per gallon while the distributor sold at 2s. 8d. Readers will therefore see that there was a difference of 10d. per gallon and not 2s.

Milk may be treble the price it was a generation ago, but it is a fallacy to suggest that the welfare of the consumer has not received proper consideration. Lord Perry's own report indicates that, if anything, the service to the consumer is too elaborate and should be curtailed.

In connexion with Mr. Auty's suggestion that milk should be cheapened in the interest of increased consumption, surely he must have heard of the National Milk Scheme designed for this very purpose and which enables every mother having children under five years of age to purchase milk at 2d. a pint or to get it free in necessitous cases. Obviously this compares most favourably with prices ruling a generation ago.

In regard to the last paragraph of Mr. Auty's letter, I am unaware of any intermediate agencies which could be eliminated. In my opinion those that do exist, *viz.*, the creameries and wholesalers, are performing an essential national service in balancing quantities and supplying retailers in thickly populated areas far from the service of production.—Yours faithfully, R. H. MORGAN.

MR. CHURCHILL AND DEMOS

SIR,—I must take strong exception to Miss Barbara Ward's assertion that I regret that Mr. Churchill was made Prime Minister. I wrote nothing of the sort. She had evidently become confused by my lack of approval of an attack on Mr. Chamberlain which I believe was not deserved. Miss Ward also suggests that in my criticism of Versailles I am following German propaganda. I expressly deny this on p. 295, when I say it was well to coerce the Prussian element in Germany: my criticism of Versailles is that of Mr. Churchill—that it lacked a constructive plan for Germany (see pp. 195-6). To this I add myself that it brought disorder on the Danube.

It is, of course, perfectly true that I am very critical of the results of adult suffrage, and that Mr. Churchill is also so I prove on pp. 64, 173, 209, 228, 251 and 292. Mr. Churchill's criticism of public opinion in regard to recent years is the burning theme of his speeches and articles, because the people would neither arm against Germany nor conciliate her, when in his view they should have done both. He made further criticisms of democracy in the chapter called "Demos" of *The Aftermath* and the Romanes lecture at Oxford, reprinted in *Thoughts and Adventures*. His distrust of the people's judgement when inflamed by war is stated unequivocally on p. 96 of *The World Crisis*.

What is one to hope for the future? I know of nothing better than Mr. Churchill's hope for a real society of nations, freely co-operating. I sympathise with his praise of the monarchies, believing them to have brought much more freedom and felicity than the democracy, the Socialism and the dictatorships which have followed on revolution; and in conclusion I would thank Miss Barbara Ward for trying her best, though sometimes vainly, to follow my exposition of the life and thoughts of the Prime Minister. She has been taken by surprise, and so, to some extent, was I. ROBERT SENCOURT.
Lord Leycester's House, Warwick.

[The assertion attributed to Miss Ward by Mr. Sencourt in the first sentence of his letter occurs nowhere in her review.—ED., *The Spectator*.]

"RINGING GROOVES"

SIR,—"Down the ringing grooves of change." This phrase, often quoted, has bothered me at intervals for over fifty years. I have been a busy man with little time for browsing, but its use by Reginald Dingle in a review in the *Nineteenth Century* of Demant's *Religious Prospect* has determined me to clear up what Tennyson referred to. His general meaning as to change is clear enough; but "ringing grooves." What are they? Can you or one of your readers suggest a clue?—Yours faithfully,
Vole Way, Mansfield. ERNEST HOLCOMBE HEWLETT.

PEZIZA COCCINEA

SIR,—In "schoolroom days," long ago, we frequently found the red cup fungus in the narrow valleys of that part of the Cotswolds situated between Gloucester and Bristol. Growing in damp hedgerows on a fallen moss-covered twig it was a charming sight. We had no name for it.—Yours faithfully, C. A. PHILPOTT.
1 Polyphant Cottages, Padstow, N. Cornwall.

COUNTRY LIFE

Peziza Coccinea

If the Provost of Worcester, who writes to know "whether a thing so beautiful and so conspicuous has ever been noticed by any writer about the English countryside" can turn up issues of *The Spectator* for February 12th and February 26th, 1937, he will find there the results of an interesting correspondence on *Peziza Coccinea*, the enchanting miniature scarlet fungus now more properly called a *Geopyxis*. That correspondence reached me from many parts of England and revealed that this tiny winter fungus has received the tribute of not only one English name, but very many. Mr. Lys may therefore take his choice of Jew's Ear, Scarlet Elf Cup, Soldiers' Caps, Moss Cups and Jerusalem Stars. In some districts it is common enough to be gathered and sold, in a setting of moss, as a table decoration. There is also a variety *lactea*, pure white or cream, which is, however, very rare.

Rural Salvage

The correspondents who have criticised my remarks on rural salvage overlook certain important points. Because I set down certain facts does not mean that I am responsible for them; nor, I think, does criticism mean a lack of patriotism, otherwise many M.P.s, most of the Press, and a large percentage of the rest of us would be guilty of it every day. "To draw a general inference from a limited experience" may be a mistake; but to suppose that my own area is the only one in which salvage is unsatisfactorily handled would be nonsense. And there is, of course, a reason why it is unsatisfactorily handled. This has nothing to do with the villagers, who have their own salvage committee and salvage depots, but is simply that in so thinly populated an area (the parish population of 200 is spread over many square miles) the contractors to the rural district council do not find it a paying proposition to make more than very infrequent journeys. And this, I find, is the official reason for the delinquency. An attempt to overcome this very real difficulty in thinly populated areas is now being made by substituting car trailers for lorries. This still leaves the problems of larger scrap metal untouched. Not all villages have schoolmasters; some even lack schoolmistresses; some, like my own, even lack schools. Nor do I see even the most zealous of schoolmasters carrying away, single-handed, engines weighing a ton. Anything farcical in the rural salvage scheme is not of my making. I simply state the facts in the hope (very faint) that the criticism implied by them may result in something better.

Soldier Poachers

It is not surprising that the bored soldiers, billeted at an outlying farm or mansion in the heart of the country, should turn to poaching. But there are several sorts of poaching, and poaching with a fully loaded service rifle is something new. Even in the hands of a trained soldier a rifle does not cease to be the subject of accidents, and a gamekeeper friend tells me that when he recently captured two soldier-poachers roaming through thick woodland they had lightly forgotten that a rifle has a safety-catch. One gun promptly went off over his head. From a poultry-keeper comes a complaint of still another form of poaching. The loss of chickens and laying hens is, in these days, a serious thing, but the loss of pedigree cockerels, invaluable to the breeder but as tough as rubber to the eater, is something worse. It occurs to me that there is room for a little co-operation here: an occasional hour's rabbiting for the troops will hurt no one. And since Christmas, as every soldier knows too well, comes but once a year, it may be better to make a present of a fowl or two rather than have a dozen removed in a sack.

Ploughing the Commons

It is possible that the demand for an increase in home-grown food will set many parish councils wondering if they can make a contribution by ploughing and cropping the village green, the local recreation ground or any other open space over which they have control. Potatoes will be their obvious thought. Potatoes are an excellent first crop; they will clean the soil and, on virgin land, may yield as high as ten tons or more per acre. With a controlled price of something like £6 per ton and a yield of ten tons per acre the average village green might therefore be expected to give a crop with a face-value of two or three hundred pounds. Unfortunately many commons and village greens are ill-drained or not drained at all, and in a bad summer the potato yield per acre might fall as low as five tons. Unfortunately too, contrary to popular belief, potatoes need good cultivation, the cost of which may reasonably be reckoned at £30 an acre. These figures are approximate, and may vary from one district to another; but it is fairly safe to say that the average parish council would lose money on its farming adventure. Moreover the figure of 8,000,000 acres of derelict English farming land, to which I referred earlier this year, has not yet, I think, been significantly reduced, and I shall leave readers to work out for themselves what the potato tonnage for even part of that enormous acreage could be.

H. E. BATES.

country, and now millions of Americans listen to the B.B.C. short-wave broadcasts. I have urged ——, who is now at the Ministry of Information, to try to get them to give the names of British towns which have the same place-names in the U.S.A. as often as possible. Millions of Americans live in such towns and villages, as you well know—and they cannot help but apply the news to their own towns."

The fifty destroyers from America are to be given the names of towns and villages which exist on both sides of the Atlantic. Such links should be strengthened wherever possible. Countless American cities, towns and hamlets are eagerly and anxiously awaiting news of the fortunes of their mother-town. Is it really in the national interest that they should be denied it?—Yours faithfully,

Felbrigg Hall, Roughton, Norwich. R. W. KETTON-CREMER.

FREE TRADE OR PROTECTION

SIR,—In your issue of December 6th the author of the article entitled "After Victory" quotes one by Mr. George Peel in which he is said to observe that in 1929 under Free Trade British exports and re-exports reached a total of £839,000,000. Under Protection they had fallen in 1938 and 1939 to £532,000,000 and £485,000,000 respectively. From this Mr. Peel appears to deduce, and your commentator to accept, that Free Trade is vastly superior to Protection. But surely before any such deduction can be made it is necessary to know what happened in the intervening years, and which years were under Free Trade and which under Protection. May I supply the deficiency?

The following is a table of the exports and re-exports, year by year, from 1929 to 1939:

Year	Amount	Year	Amount
1929	£839 million	1934	£447 million
1930	£658 million	1935	£481 million
1931	£455 million	1936	£501 million
1932	£416 million	1937	£597 million
1933	£417 million	1938	£532 million
1939	£485 million		

Now Protection came into force on March 1st, 1932, so without being very far out we can call the years 1929, 1930 and 1931 Free Trade years and the following years Protected. A glance at the table will show that the whole of the fall to which Mr. Peel draws attention, and more, had occurred by the end of 1931; that during the first year of Protection the fall continued, but that thereafter there was a steady rise until the end of the year 1937. The years 1938 and 1939 I think may be disregarded. I should very much like to know whether your commentator on a study of the above figures is, on second thoughts, prepared to endorse the deduction so glibly made by Mr. Peel.—Yours truly, W. A. WELLS, News Editor.

Empire Industries Association, 9 Victoria Street, S.W. 1.

THE EVACUATION PROBLEM

SIR,—As you mention in a recent issue places must be found at the reception end where evacuees can live in reasonable comfort. Reception authorities, however, while most anxious to do everything in their power in this connexion find the task well-nigh impossible owing to absorption of accommodation by "others." The entire lack of understanding by the Government as to this is amazing.

Take my own town—typical of many. On peace-time standards we could have accommodated a large number and said so after the required Government survey of "habitable rooms" in *January, 1939.* Since the declaration of war large numbers of military units, officers, men, W.A.T.S., &c., have poured in (we are a military centre) and occupy hotels, hostels, requisitioned houses, quarters and billets. War production works have moved here with their personnel and employees, housing accommodation being absorbed. Government departments have likewise absorbed a large hotel and many billets, and other Government departments have "earmarked" premises and billets which are thereby sterilised and not available even for "billetable bombed." Add to all this the arrival of various business undertakings and their employees, educational institutions and scholars and hundreds of others who think our town is more "healthy" than theirs. Our "pint-pot" was full before the pitiful arrival of the bombed evacuees.

All halls and premises are requisitioned or "earmarked" by Government departments so that we cannot open hostels, and they, the private evacuees (some from other reception areas) and the billeting authority are all scrambling together for accommodation. There is no co-ordination ordained by the Government The Ministry of Health (Evacuation Authority) do not know (or care) what other Government departments, much less private individuals, are doing, and the billeting authority is not consulted in some of these cases. No check is placed on the movement of business concerns or non-billetable persons into the reception areas if they think they would like a change of air. The very most the billeting authority can do with the unfortunate "billetables" is to extend every sympathy and help and get them in somehow "somewhere." It is impossible in circumstances such as ours to ensure that they are given reasonable comfort.—Yours faithfully, CHIEF RECEPTION OFFICER.

COUNTRY LIFE

Unorthodox Planting

Most gardeners are slaves to the calendar, many to a point of superstition. In some Midland districts many gardeners will not plant a seed before March 18th, whatever that particular date may be supposed to signify. In both North and South Good Friday is held to be the right and proper day for planting early potatoes, whether that day falls at the end of March or the end of April. The unorthodox, in my experience, often reap the better harvests. For this reason I am considerably attracted to the theory expressed in *The Gardener's Calendar* (which ought to be on every gardener's shelf) that January is not only a safe but a profitable time for the planting of main-crop potatoes. This revolutionary theory, by which late potatoes are planted three months before the earliest varieties, will shock every gardener of the conservative school. Yet the reasons given for it are perfectly sound. Root development is greatly improved; the sets need be neither pruned nor chitted; and, most important of all, yields are said to be extremely heavy. Pests and frosts are all that may seriously endanger the success of this scheme, but a dusting of lime will take care of the one, and the fact that dahlias left in the open ground survived 40 degrees of frost last winter will dispose of the other. Most gardeners could thus experiment with a dozen sets, and watch the results of a crop which will be two-thirds of the year in the ground.

Frame Crops

The unorthodox gardener, taking a risk or two, can now, in fact, do a national service. He will not wait for March for the sowing of short-horn carrots, but will sow in a frame, on a slight hot-bed of leaves or manure, in December and January. He will raise peas, broad beans and, later, French beans in pots and boxes in the glass-house, whether heated or not. He will plant early and well-chitted varieties of potato under the stagings or in frames that can be protected in severe weather. Every source by which early vegetables reached this country is now completely cut off, and no gardener could buy himself a more profitable Christmas present than a garden frame. In it he can raise, two or three months earlier than normal, vegetables which are now luxury imports, following them in summer by cucumbers or, just as simply, melons of the cantaloupe variety, which in my experience offer no difficulties at all, and, at seven-and-six a time, are a crop for plutocrats.

Fewer Starlings?

For years we have been confronted with the increasing menace of the rabbit in agriculture; in six weeks the weather of early 1940 did more to solve the problem than all the machinery of Westminster. In that period thousands of rabbits died, not frozen, but starved to death. Holly trees stripped as white and bare as skeletons stood everywhere as their memorial. Before the war, agricultural authorities were similarly concerned about the rapid increase in the numbers of starlings, of which I believe an approximate census was at one time being taken. It now seems likely that the starling must have suffered as severely as the rabbit from the unforgettable period of frost and starvation that began the year. That intense sunset congregation of thousands of birds, reinforced by smaller quivering companies that bore down on the same trees evening after evening, until the whole flock exploded into a flight of communal ecstasy, has now become a rare instead of a common sight. In my own district at least that evening gathering, with its excited stormy vibration of wings and voices, can no longer be seen.

December Hedge

A magnificent example of the hop-garden hedge, almost twenty feet high and composed almost entirely of hawthorn patched with dark rays of ivy, stands opposite another, planted of poplar. On clear, cold December afternoons the sunlight is almost scarlet. It pours through the naked fawn-cream branches of the poplar, clouding them with pink and touching the great hawthorn hedge into continuous flame. As it falls lower the intense red light strikes the two hedges almost horizontally, broadside on, and the long flanks of ripe haws burn with a reflected brilliance that is not their own. For a few moments, just before sunset, among the masses of polished ivy, they have the bright splendour of holly.

Poultry Manure

All manures, especially artificials, are increasingly difficult to obtain. Poultry manure is much advertised, but it seems worth recording a season's experience of it. Long ago I was given a warning that, on onion crops, it encouraged attacks of maggot-fly. This year it was heavily used in light soil where turnips, carrots, cauliflower and cabbage plants in many varieties were subsequent crops. All suffered severely from root-grub; the turnips were totally useless; ninety per cent. of the cauliflowers collapsed; at least fifty per cent. of the cabbage plants failed to reach planting-out size; the carrots alone failed to be seriously affected. But no crop was attacked on unmanured soil. H. E. BATES.

COUNTRY LIFE

Living in the Country

Anyone going to live in the country is at once confronted by problems which never arise in the town: water supply, light, drainage, neighbours who are jealous of the view, the law regarding boundaries or trespass, labour rates, omissions (such as refuse collection) in the public services. Most town emigrants enjoy the dream of living on their own produce, keeping a few hens, even dabbling with a farm. It is a shock to find that it costs anything from £60 upwards to build a septic tank, that a storage capacity of 3,000 gallons is only just enough to ensure an adequate household water-supply, that poultry-food is expensive, that neighbours are often tiresome and villagers uncooperative, that the pheasants walking about the lanes like tame fowls are not for you to pick. There has long been a demand for a book of sound and unsentimental guidance in these and the countless other problems of country life, and at last it has been done. *Living in the Country* (Black, 7s. 6d.) is by Frederick D. Smith and Barbara Wilcox, who are a farmer and his wife. In an honest, practical way it deals with the entire mechanics of rural life, offering conclusions on housing, farming, small-holding, poultry-keeping and other rural dreams that are, I imagine, the result of hard experience. It is nowhere idyllic, and for quite half the book not even optimistic; yet wherever it is possible to test the book by parallel experience its conclusions and advice are incontestably right. It stands for a rural policy based equally on imagination, common sense and sound economics, and no reader of this column ought, indeed, to be without it.

Farming Policy

Scarcely a week passes without a report from somewhere in England that "this branch (*i.e.*, the N.F.U.) deplores the attitude of complacent self-satisfaction displayed in the House of Commons with regard to agricultural policy." Certainly that policy must strike many farmers as one of strange contradictions. In summer, for example, fruit-farmers were promised a fixed minimum of £8 per ton for plums; they succeeded eventually in making the equivalent of six and eightpence. In autumn arable farmers are asked to grow more food; before autumn gives way to winter they are informed that an intensified call-up will take more and more men from the land. For the second time in twelve months they are asked to plough up more pasture, the suitability of that pasture for arable crops rarely being taken into account. Much converted pasture yielded grain crops during the past summer that were a fiasco; yet every day one hears of poor and inferior land being ploughed under compulsion. A quarter of a century ago farmers blasphemed against just these same things.

Asparagus Peas

A new pea, which appears to be an improvement or variation of the sugar-pea, itself little grown in this country, makes its appearance in the current seed catalogues. The plant is semi-creeping, with spreading stems of about twelve inches, the flowers tinted red. The pods, rather odd-shaped, squarish, with winged ribs, are two or three inches long. Gathered when young and tender, cooked and eaten whole, like those of the sugar-pea, they have a flavour of asparagus. Such a combination of the two most distinguished vegetable aristocrats of the English garden should be well worth trying.

Year's End

After a year of astonishing meteorological records—one day we may know the number of hours of sunshine given by a summer that was a dream of temperate loveliness—the land looks in splendid condition. The young blades of wheat are a clean, bright emerald; field-beans are thick and sturdy; the pastures, which looked in September as if they would never recover, are now rich and dark after rain. There are some signs, at last, of better drainage everywhere. The oaks, which began to turn colour in August, held green leaves until early December and are still not utterly bare as I write. And as these last leaves colour the boughs and the bracken turns to fox-colour beneath them after rain, there are the infallible touches of spring: first snowdrops, a few violets, tracks of silver in the sallows, a drip of green honey among the hazels. Thrushes sing in the early evenings and blackbirds go love-sick on the lawn.

H. E. BATES.

THE CINEMA

"The Thief of Baghdad." At the Odeon——**"All This and Heaven Too."** At the Warner.

The Thief of Baghdad was so long in the making that it had to be very good in order to live up to the expectations fed by the frequent publicity statements about the magnificence of the colouring and the ingenuity of the trick-work. Fortunately for all concerned, it is certainly the finest Technicolor effort so far achieved, and the tricks, with a few exceptions, are convincing and exciting. The film is, in fact, a gigantic and extravagant Christmas pantomime, and, like all good pantomimes, it has points of appeal for children as well as for grown-ups.

For the children there is Sabu as the thief who, among other things, is turned into a dog and back again by the wicked Vizier (Conrad Veidt), releases the enormous djinn from the bottle and is taken by him to a vast palace on the roof of the world, fights a deadly combat with a giant spider whose web is as big as the roof of Waterloo Station, and finally saves everybody's life by a last-minute rescue on the flying carpet. For the grown-ups there is the course of true love running anything but smoothly for the dispossessed King Achmed (John Justin) and the beauteous princess (June Duprez); there is Conrad Veidt as the aforesaid Vizier, muffled in a sinister burnous and up to no good; there is a beautiful study by Miles Malleson as a doddering old Sultan with a passion for mechanical toys; and, of course, masses of dancing girls, swirling crowds, torturers, Nubian slaves, palanquins, and all the other trappings which made *Hassan* and *Chu Chin Chow* so successful.

Throughout the film colour is used effectively and nearly always with taste. Vincent Korda, the art director, surrounded himself with a galaxy of well-known designers such as John Armstrong and Oliver Messel, with the result that even the most colourful scenes have a sense of space and design which Hollywood products have never yet achieved. The opening shots of the film are specially exciting—a huge galley with rust-red sails plunging majestically through a blue-green sea.

The magical scenes are very satisfactory. The enormous djinn trying to stamp on the diminutive form of Sabu, who is no bigger than his big toe, the sudden storm summoned by the Vizier to wreck the hero's boat, and the terrifying toy which does a Siva-like dance before stabbing the Sultan to death—all these are the true stuff of fairy-tale. Only the scenes of the flying horse fail to come off; the superimposition of a cartoon figure on a realistic background is here too palpably obvious to achieve the magical touch which is needed.

With *All This and Heaven Too* we return to the now fashionable three-decker film. Presumably, people like their films to run for hours and hours, even when, as in this case, the story hardly warrants it. Based on a real event in the 1840's, the story tells of the tragic amour between an aristocrat and his children's governess. It is delicately directed, Bette Davis registers pathos and resignation, and Charles Boyer quivers with sensitivity; but it really does not merit its enormous length, despite the fact that it is said faithfully to reproduce the novel of the same name. If this sort of thing goes on we shall soon be sitting through a thirty-reel transcription of Charles Morgan's novels with not a word omitted, and praying for the return of the two-reel slapstick comedy.

BASIL WRIGHT.

NIGHT IN MARTINDALE

NOT in the sound of water, the air's noise,
The roar of storm, the ominous birds, the cries,
The angel here speaks with a human voice.

Stone into man must grow, the human word
Carved by our whispers in the passing air

Is the authentic utterance of cloud,
The speech of flowing water, blowing wind,
Of silver moon and stunted juniper.

Words say, waters flow,
Rocks weather, ferns wither, winds blow, fires go.

K. RAINE.