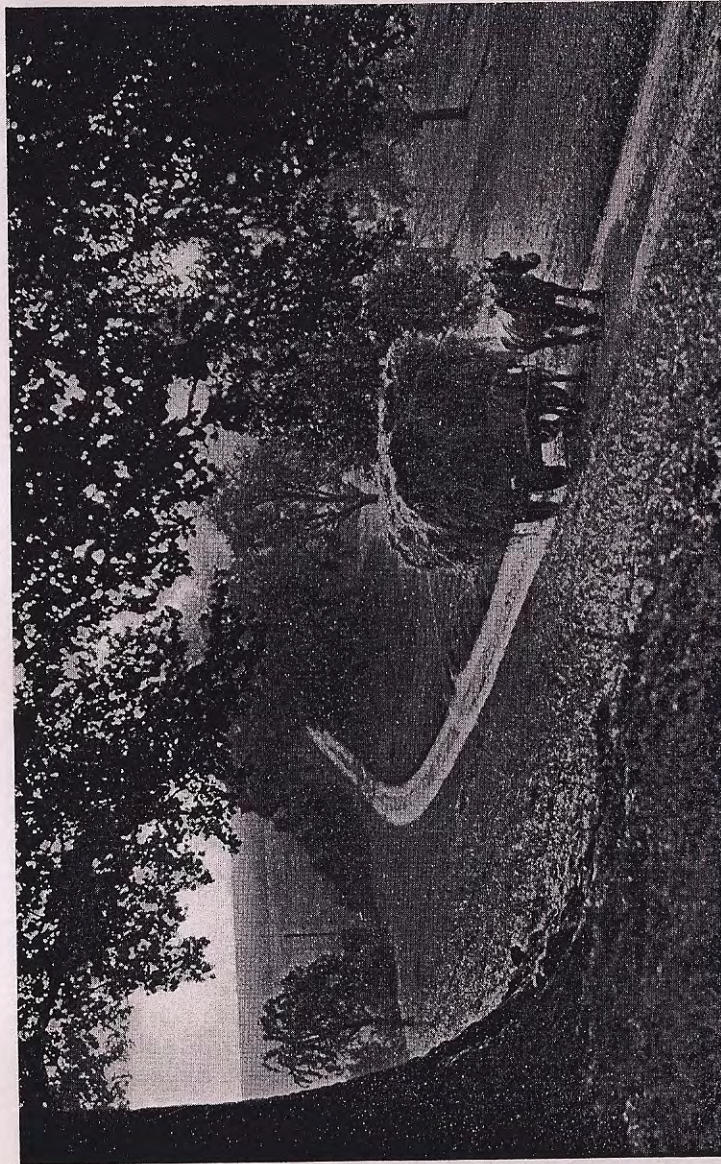


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H. E. Bates

THE
HEDGE CHEQUER WORK

I WAS born on that large East Midland plain that takes in Northamptonshire and its nine adjoining counties, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire, Huntingdonshire, Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire and the smallest and perhaps the best of them all, the dillin pig of the litter, Rutland. As it also takes in Essex and Hertford, and parts of Yorkshire and Nottingham and Worcester and most of Norfolk and Suffolk, it must be reckoned the largest plain in England. If you reckon it in terms of impressive landscape features it is probably also the dullest plain in England. Its hills, until you come to the boundaries of the Chilterns in the south, the Cotswolds in the south-west and the real hills of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire in the north, are not much more than bumps made by generations of gnats on the green skin of the land. It contains no natural lakes until you reach the Broads almost on the sea-coast to the eastward; it contains the remnants of half a dozen forests, but in countries other than England they would



15 THE EVENING HAY LOAD



16 HEDGEROW ELMS IN DEVON



17 WINTER IN A HERTFORDSHIRE LANE

THE HEDGE CHEQUERWORK

probably be reckoned as copses. Its only true and permanent natural features are its rivers, and it is in reality five river plains—six if you include the Humber—in one: the Ouse, the Nene, the Welland and the Trent flowing out to the east, the Avon down to the west. Judged by the standards of Devon and Somerset, the Yorkshire hills and dales and the magnificence of Cumberland and Westmorland and the hills of Gloucester and Derby which make its boundaries, it has nothing to offer. When I compare it with Kent and Sussex, in which most of my life is now spent, I see it as a country without richness and without any great variety of scene and colour. In my mind's eye I see it as the greenest piece of England, which it most probably is, and for some reason the most orderly. It lacks that enchanting disorder of deep-bellied hills, thick woods, sly lanes, rich coloured villages and luxuriant hop-gardens which is the south country. It is a pattern of sobriety. Against the southern plain, the great weald running from the North Downs to the South, with which I propose to compare it, it is like the homely girl compared with the beauty, the plain oak trouser-polished chair-seat compared with the mahogany Chippendale, the suet-pudding compared with the trifle. Yet, as I hope to show, this plain homely pudding pattern of elm and grass and hedges is the basis on which the entire English countryside is built. It is the very thing which makes the English country what it is: something different from any other country in the world.

For more than twenty years I felt myself to have been unlucky in having been brought up in such country. I spent a childhood unconsciously entranced by it, magnifying dribbling little brooks to the brave beauty of torrents, tiny nightingale copses to the deep luxuriance of woods. I grew up to know the ash and the elm and the willow better than any other tree because they were the staple trees of the landscape, and to know hardly any other

type of field than pasture and the massive ploughed parallels of steel clay that would later be roots and corn. I knew no other hedgerow except the rule-straight line of laid hawthorn or the high cow-rubbed umbrella-shaped variation of it that is, as W. H. Hudson once pointed out, one of the greater glories of the English landscape. But it was only natural as time went on that I should grow tired of a landscape in which a beech-tree was a rarity, in which alder or sweet-chestnut were never seen, and in which fields and copses were giving way more and more to raw Edwardian villas, rows of workers' cottages and an occasional factory. At twenty I disliked the Midlands; at twenty-five I hated them; at thirty, having left them, I began to understand them. I began to see how fortunate I had been to have been brought up on that diet of clay pudding which is as fundamental to English scenery as Yorkshire pudding is to English dietary.

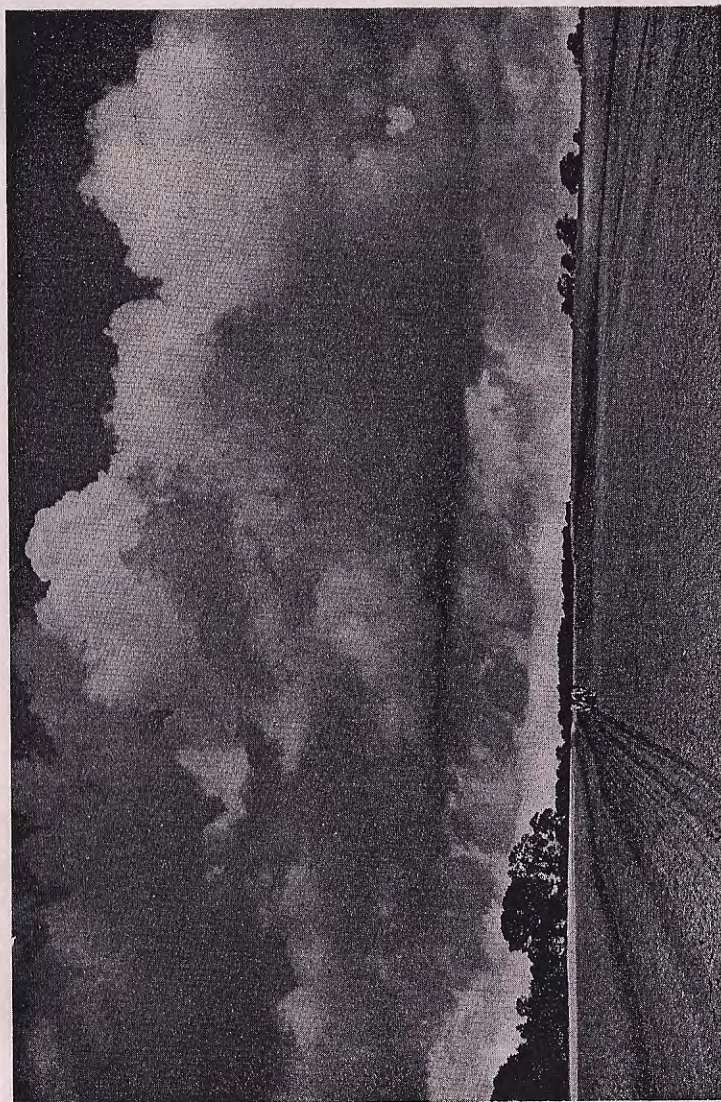
I feel that I was fortunate for this reason. A man brought up in Devonshire or the dales of Yorkshire or the Westmorland lake country is often found never to have any real taste in other scenery. He has been brought up too well; he has never known what it is to be poor. Whereas a man brought up on a flat plain diet, as I myself was, has a taste capable of being educated in any kind of scenery. For him Exmoor and Dovedale and Windermere are pure caviare; the North Downs and the Malvern Hills and the Cotswolds are piled dishes of fruit. Poverty has given him perspective. Again, fine scenery makes a man proud and jealous. To a Westmorland man there is nothing like his native hills and waters; to a Devonian there is nothing like Devonshire; and all the world knows what a Yorkshireman thinks of Yorkshire. These men are as proud and jealous of their native muckles as high-coloured cocks. In the final estimate of grandeur there is nothing in the world that can beat their own. They

can never say, and never would if they could. "This reminds me of Derwentwater" or, more unthinkable still, "this is as good as Yorkshire." But the man brought up on the plain pudding country is decently humble, knowing there are places much better than his own; he knows too that there are places just like his own. The only time I went to Cheshire I saw the Midland countryside repeated exactly in the Cheshire plain, and I got from it a sense of friendliness and comfort. As I drive through the flattest parts of Somerset I see a countryside of willow and osier, elm and grassland that in its unexotic ordinariness might be any part of a dozen homely counties. The same goes for the eastern parts of Yorkshire, though every Yorkshireman will probably call it an insult, for much of Worcestershire and Berkshire and in fact for odd unexpected bits of every county in England. It should never be forgotten that most of the English countryside as we see it to-day is man-made; and that the part most completely shaped by man is this plain, fundamental chequerwork of flat field and hedgerow. And in one sense this is the only part which matters. It is the thing which nourishes the community, without which England would be poverty-stricken. It is essentially utilitarian; yet it provides exactly those pictures of which Englishmen in foreign countries are supposedly reminded at homesick moments, and which foreigners take away with them and cannot get over: the tranquil, orderly, park-like greenness, hedges of hawthorn in bloom, cattle grazing in deep meadows, sheep folded in pastures as short and green as lawns. In America, for example, they have a million square miles of countryside which will knock even Yorkshire into a cocked hat; in the State of Minnesota alone they claim ten thousand lakes; and in New Hampshire you may drive for hundreds of miles through country as rich and glorious as Devon and Somerset and the English county

THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

from which the state gets its name. But the country they cannot repeat and for which all Englishmen are deeply and honestly envied is the country about which I am writing. This, to them, is the real England.

It would be a mistake, I think, to agree that it is the real England: to the exclusion, that is, of all other parts. In praising England it is a fatal thing to extol one bit over another. For another remarkable thing about English scenery is its capacity for variation in a small space. If you travel across the plain of Lombardy from Milan to Venice you see exactly the same flat, dike-crossed, willow-spiked countryside for something like five hours. It is not possible to do such a thing in England for five minutes. To speak of Northamptonshire as if it were an elongated shape of pasture decorated into shapes of hawthorn hedges for the whole of its area would be absurd. From its north-eastern end, where its hawthorn hedges are giving way at last to low stone walls and an accompanying feeling of space and sturdy dignity, down to its south-western end, where the walls are beginning again and the land is rising like bare folds of dough towards the Cotswolds, it can produce a dozen tricks of change, though the fundamentals remain the same. This is true of all its neighbours, of all their neighbours in turn. They each have the same infinite capacity not only for variation in beauty, but also in ugliness. There is a twenty-mile strip of Northamptonshire, five miles wide, running from the Bedfordshire border to Leicestershire, where it is possible to see how badly man-made landscape withstands the final attack of man and machine. The towns, once villages of golden and russet ironstone, crowned by the most magnificent church-spires in England, are like gawky, raw-limbed boys that have outgrown their first long trousers. They are neither one thing nor another, neither town nor village, neither new or old. Red brick has broken out



18 PLOUGHING IN UPLAND, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



19 THE WINDMILL, EGGINGTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

THE HEDGE CHEQUERWORK

like a rash among the sheep-coloured and russet walls and houses of local stone, with which nobody builds any longer. The factories are harsh red scabs on the slopes of the river valleys. They do not belong there. They have made a plain, homely country into depressing half-rural, half-urban slums of industry.

The moment you step off this strip of industrial development you begin to see the East Midland plain at its best. No writing on the English countryside is complete without a reference to the architecture, and here, from Higham Ferrers on the Nene up through Oundle and Stamford and over the border into the toy hilly-hollows of Rutland, it is the architecture rather than the land which enchants. It stands as naturally on the landscape, the soft grey limestone interspersed with odd corners and patterns of gold-brown ironstone, as a flock of sheep in which there is a sprinkling of brown. This stone is exactly right for the soft undulation and calm colours of the land. It is a superb instance of nature providing on the spot exactly the right medium for man's activities; and it seems to me beyond doubt that if man had gone on using this limestone, decorating it with deeper tone-patterns of iron, this piece of the Midland plain running out of Northamptonshire into the whole of Rutland would have been as architecturally famous, perhaps more famous, than the Cotswolds themselves. But much of what was done, and done largely up to the eighteenth century, still remains. The square at Higham Ferrers, the whole of Oundle, almost the whole of Stamford are all completely entrancing. But if Stamford stands with Cirencester as a perfect example of the English stone-built town at its best the villages for twenty miles round are as absolutely satisfying and sound and beautiful as the names themselves: Rockingham, overlooking the entirely green Welland plain, Uppingham, Fotheringhay, with a superb church standing like

a small lost cathedral over the graves of kings, Elton, Deene, Colly Weston, which gives the stone tiles that are one of the best features of the whole district, Kingscliffe, Weldon, giving the famous creamy stone, Lilford, with a mansion and a stone humpbacked bridge over the Nene that is not equalled anywhere in England, Caldecott, Oakham, the silly, one-eyed, one-policeman, charming county town of Rutland, and last and probably best of all, Apethorpe. For every thousand eulogies of what are to me the much overrated villages of Devon you will not see a single mention of Apethorpe. Yet Apethorpe is the last word in villages planned and governed and preserved by and according to the standards of the great house. If all examples of rural dictatorship could produce results like Apethorpe then I would vote for a wholesale return to the principles of the Victorian squirearchy. This village does not contain a single house out of keeping with the enormous pale stone mansion standing behind its stout defences of woodland. It is the perfect thing. It has little of the picture-page picturesqueness of villages which seem to have been made exclusively for photographers and tourists; it is simply something that has been made honestly and reverently, out of the God-provided stone of the district, primarily for use, secondarily but triumphantly for beauty. Its soft handful of straight-cut stone is a magnificent example of what the English system of squire dictatorship could do at its best. It is not bettered anywhere in England.

I have not mentioned this stone architecture, remarkable and lovely though it is, simply for the purpose of dilating on something beautiful. I would like to go on talking of it, in its humblest and sturdiest in the stone walls which replace the hedges, at its most splendid in the mansions: Kirby Hall, Deene, Burghley House, Lilford, Castle Ashby, Drayton House, Lyveden New Building, Apethorpe, and the famous spired churches.

But this is only one bit of the green pudding country, a thumb-nail fraction of all England. The purpose of mentioning it is really to go on and compare it with something else. For it is obvious that the land, this kind of land more than any other, is nothing without the architecture, and it seems to me that the architecture of the pudding country is often far more remarkable than that of more impressive districts. It is as though the inhabitants of a plain and ordinary countryside felt a lack of any specially striking beauty in the landscape and built impressively or decoratively in order to make up for it. In the almost too rich countryside of Devonshire, for example, the greater part of the architecture will not bear talking about; it has the uninspired carelessness of a self-satisfied people. Whereas on the really flat, and to some people depressing, plain of Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire the architecture, though humble, shows many signs of being in the hands of a dissatisfied and urgently restless people. The people of the warm, damp honey-valleys of Devonshire carry on no struggle with nature; life is extremely and perhaps dangerously soft. But the people of the Fens and the outer Fen districts keep up a constant struggle; they are continually at war with sea-winds, an unhealthy countryside and incursions of flood and sea. The whole ground under their feet is artificially guarded against disaster. Such a people might easily be excused for taking no interest in what their houses looked like. Yet a continual struggle against adversity and the oppressive fact of living on a drab and totally flat surface has heightened both their need for colour and their determination to secure it. Thus the cottage architecture of the extreme eastern section of the Midland plain, over a wide area of Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire, is almost exotically colour-washed. Cream and white are not enough for these people; they must have yellow and orange, beery shades

of brown, deepest terra-cotta, crushed strawberry pink, the blue of blue-bags, an occasional fling in flamboyant red, a wash of startling emerald. In such a village as Kimbolton, a model of well-preserved rural quietness, a village in a thousand, the short, beautifully kept main street might be the home of a collection of irresponsible house-painters. It glows with orange and white and brown and green and black, one of the most extraordinary and lovely streets in England. And it is worth noting that England is not the only country in which such a desire for colour is shown by plain dwellers: the landscape of Holland is full of houses similarly coloured, so in less degree is the plain of Lombardy, and so, as a glance at the pictures of Van Gogh will show, are the plains of Southern France.

But arguments about the country have a way of not completing themselves. The flat country of Hertfordshire, the southern end of the plain, ought to oblige me by producing a remarkable architecture in stone or paint embellishments. But it doesn't. It produces something quite sober. Perhaps, rolling gently down to London like an enormous park, it is quite beautiful enough in itself. I never drive through it without a sense of extreme restfulness. All across it the hedge and elm and grass chequerwork is seen at its best, simple, undesignated, and yet somehow designed for permanence. There is nothing except the new arterial roads to disturb its placid continuance from Essex to the Chilterns. It does not suffer from the sudden upheaval which a river of any size gives to a piece of land; it is reputed to be one of the coldest places in England, but I have never seen any proof of it. The essence of its character is its green, friendly tranquillity. No foreigner, anxious to confirm any ideas that England is a sort of enlarged park, would need to go any farther out of London than this. It is the English hedgerow countryside at its undisturbed and dignified best.

South of the Thames all the countryside, plain and hill, weald and woodland, undergoes vast changes. There are northerners who call it too beautiful; we have visitors who cannot keep awake in the strong, soft air coming up from Romney Marsh and the Weald, and who, on waking, eat vastly. The south country is undoubtedly rich and good; its springs are earlier, its autumns push their full fat bellies into the face of winter and knock it almost into the lap of spring. Its variations of landscape in a short space are enormous. They have filled books. But only the Weald, I think, has any place here.

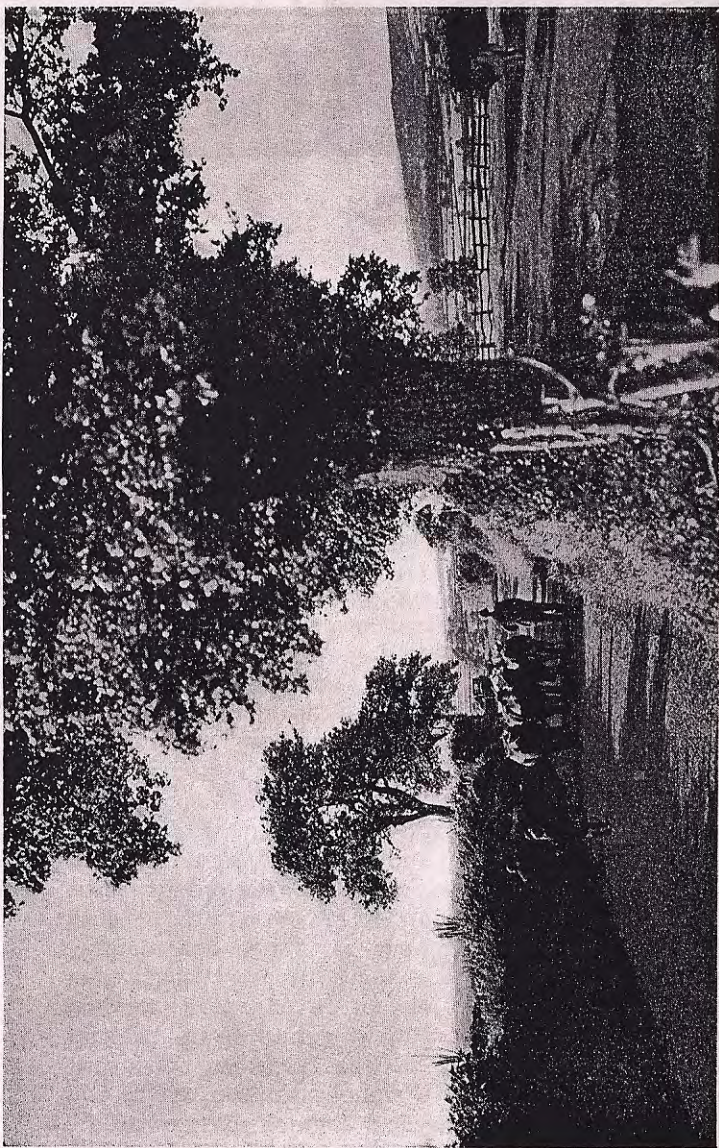
The Weald, once entirely forest, is only partly a plain. But where it is a plain it shares with the Fens the inverted distinction of being one of the unhealthiest spots in England. The thin, sallow Kentish faces indicate the consumptive price paid for the privilege of being born and reared in some of England's most beautiful villages. The land is extremely low; in winter the fat clay is a pudding of stodge that pulls the guts out of a man; in summer it turns into a land of concrete. It floods easily; it is a common sight to see hop-gardens standing like the graveyards of derelict ships. If you inquire about houses in the Weald the house-agent feels forced to remind you, in apology, "of course its down on the Weald." There is a feeling of oppression that the black rich land of the Fens never gives; the Fens have a mysterious, uplifting air of width and a sort of spacious desolation. They impress; the Weald depresses. Yet the Weald enjoys an immense reputation for beauty.

This beauty again springs almost entirely from the pattern drawn by man on the original flat canvas of the land. Here, as in the whole length of the limestone ridge from Somerset to Rutland, the natural materials for building could not have been better. The forest provided the wood, the land the bricks. The result is

one of the most glorious combinations of architectural material that England can show: the multi-coloured, winey-blue Wealden bricks and the massive age-blanchéd timbers that show up in the house-fronts like the skeletons of wooden ships. The Weald is full of such houses, and even of villages comprised almost entirely of such houses: Smarden, Biddenden, Benenden, Frittenden, Rolverden, Goudhurst, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Appledore. They are perfect examples, Biddenden and Benenden almost too perfect, of the English show village. They light up the land with their patterns of dark timber and white plaster as effectively as the colour-washed houses light up the Midland plain. Yet they belong to a world that continually seems to me entirely different. It is the creation of a world of yeomen farmers. Its chief architectural glories are its huge honest farm-houses, with their sky triangles of oasts. The great country mansion seen at its most perfect in Midland houses like Drayton and Burghley and Kirby Hall, has scarcely any place here; the sublime, heavenly spired churches of the Northamptonshire lowlands are cathedrals in comparison with the squat, square-towered churches of the Kent and Sussex plain. After a lifetime of craning, my neck at spires I can hardly lower myself to look at these humble little places. Mr. G. M. Young in an essay on the English country house has remarked that the Domesday landscape "reached its high point of pride and beauty in the middle of the nineteenth century; and its mid-point everywhere in the country house." This is right; but it is worth noting that of the illustrations which adorn his essay only one is of a house in the south country, and there is no doubt that the entire scheme of domestic and ecclesiastical architecture is less impressive here than in the Midlands, the north and the near west. I will not attempt any explanation of that fact here, though the Weald of a hundred years ago, seen through



20 THE FIELDS OF THE HOME COUNTIES: NEAR KIMPTON, HERTFORDSHIRE



21 AN OXFORDSHIRE LANE

THE HEDGE CHEQUERWORK

the eyes of Cobbett, must supply part of the answer. In winter this morass of land, impassable even for judges on circuit, its roads axle-deep in mud, was nothing but an enormous chilly pudding of sour and unhealthy clay. At the same time the plain of Northamptonshire and Rutland had reached the height of its fashion as a country retreat. One glance at Stamford, with buildings as noble as many in Bath and its six remaining churches, all that are left of twice as many, is enough to show how elegant and complete that fashion was. The Weald can produce nothing like it. It is a world composed of farmers as opposed to landed gentry, a world uninfluenced by an aristocracy which, however false and corrupt and despicable in other respects, knew the secret of building the most magnificent houses that England has ever seen.

But though the two plains are so entirely different in many ways and each poorer for lacking something which the other possesses abundantly—oast-houses and stone mansions are only two examples of it—they are alike in one thing. They are built and bound together by the same fundamental pattern: the pattern of hedge and tree and pasture. It is true that in the south country the hedges have entirely changed in character, that elm and ash have also given way to a predominance of oak and beech, and that the pastures seem less wide and rolling, but the sum of both is worked out over the same common denominator. And of all three it is the hedge, I think, which is most truly English. Other countries can produce fields, a wealth of trees beside which our own appear often very ordinary. But no other country can produce anything which, like stitchery, binds together the varying pattern of the landscape in such a way that the pattern is made infinitely more beautiful.

If this seems extravagant, try to consider the English landscape without the hedge. It would not be the English landscape. The abolition of the common field

system no doubt robbed the poor, a century or so ago, of many dearly held privileges; but in the quick hedge it bestowed a common glory on all of us. Though it goes against all my principles to say so, it was not the first time that a score for the great landowners was also a means of beautifying the English landscape. In fact I doubt if the poor have ever beautified the English landscape. It is the rich and prosperous who have left on it the hall-marks of beauty: the great parks, the woods, the magnificent country mansions, the castles, the New Forest, the beautiful southern farm-houses, towns like Bath and Stamford, villages like Long Melford and Burford. In the same way the Enclosure Acts, benefiting the rich, bestowed on us the most beautiful common inheritance, next to grass, that the English possess. Without the hedge we should all be poorer. I was brought up in a district notable for its lack of trees, but which should have been famous, as I now know, for its magnificent hedges. Without those hedges, huge lines of hawthorn umbrellas, making shade for cattle, that countryside would have been unbearably dull. Nothing else could have made it so beautiful in May-time, when the cream of the hawthorn bloom rose on the four sides of every field, making the air over-faint with scent. Nothing else could have created so happily the first rich drowsy feeling of summer.

In the South I have become acquainted with an entirely different hedge. In the Midlands the commonest hedge is undoubtedly the plain straight-set quick. Time has embroidered it with wild rose and blackberry, occasional ash-seedlings, bits of maple, but the quick remains indomitable. In the south, hedges are far more varied; quick is merely one colour, and no longer the common colour, in the pattern. If I walk out of my house I come straightway on a hedge which reads like a catalogue of shrubs: holly, dwarf oak, elder, maple, willow,

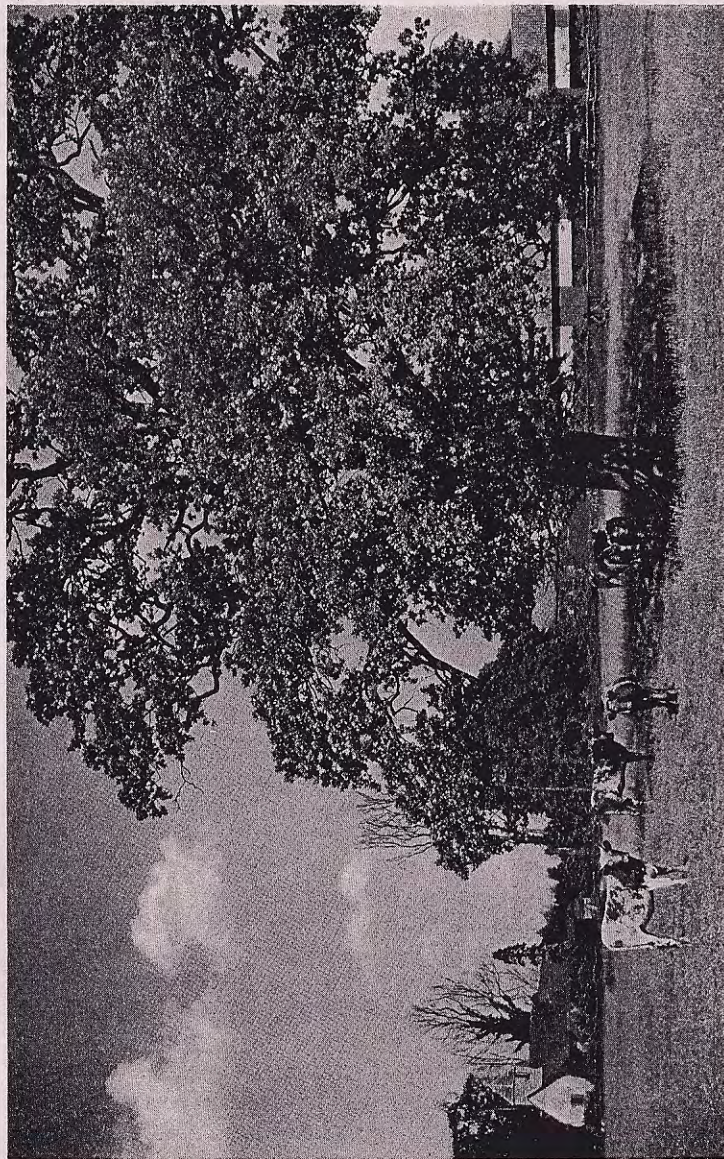
wild-cherry, spindle, hazel, wild-rose, willow, honeysuckle, blackberry, wild-clematis, blackthorn and always binding it together, hawthorn. Along other lanes I shall see other variations: ash, sweet chestnut, viburnum, dogwood, crab-apple, alder. There is scarcely any end to the variations of the South-country hedge. This means that it is a thing of constant fascination throughout the twelve months of the year; in winter the comforting polished clumps of holly and their scarlet berries and the toy wooden balls of oak apples, in very early spring the catkins of hazel and willow, the mouse-ear leaves of honeysuckle and elder, in spring the catkins of alder, the white stars of blackthorn, the emerald bread-and-cheese of hawthorn itself; in late spring the little odd trembling bouquets of wild cherry on coppery new leaves, the hawthorn bloom, in summer the glory of wild rose and elderbloom and honeysuckle; in autumn black and scarlet berries, nuts, the slit cerise-and-orange spindle seeds, old man's beard, acorns, the first bare wine-dipped dogwood branches, the shining, comforting holly again.

But this is not all. This is only what the hedge is. It takes no account of what lives in or under it, or what flowers it shelters. In the Midlands we never expected a hedge to yield more than a patch of violets, a run of celandines, some pinky wild geraniums, late summer riots of willow-herb in damp places. In the South every roadside hedge is a spring glory of primrose and bluebell, white anemones and violets, clouds of lady-smocks and campion; a summer tangle of foxglove and meadow-sweet, wild canterbury bell and bay willow-herb, a hunting-place for wild strawberries. The hedge, beginning as a simple device for the division of the land, has become the haven sheltering every sort of flower and weed that pasturing and the plough drive out. Taken for twelve months of the year, in fact, the Southern

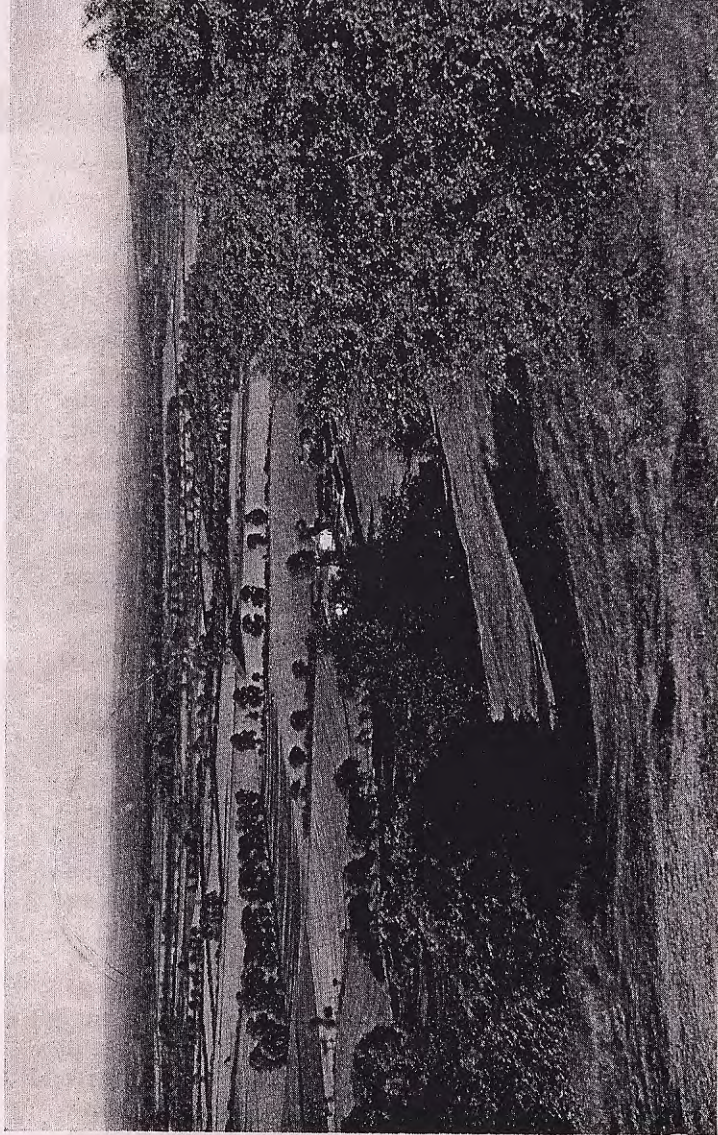
hedgerow is the most constant of all sources of satisfaction in the landscape. Yet even it, I think, reaches its glory at the flowering season of its commonest flower. When the kex is in bloom the hedge is etherealised. The light dense cloud of creamy flower lace, smothering the hedge itself, lifts it from earth. I can't remember any writer ever pausing to pay proper tribute to the kex, humblest of all flowers, rabbit-feed when young, make-believe lace in the games of little girls when in blossom, superb material for the whistles and pea-shooters of small boys at the height of summer. It is one of the things, like the hedge itself, which we take for granted. Yet I never see it now without marvelling at its effect of lace-light foam. It is something whipped airily out of the milk of spring.

But flowers are only a moderate part of the life of a hedge. Its position as a sanctuary for small birds and animals is unique, and the records of English small bird life would be poorer if it were not for the hedge. This is not the place to begin a disquisition on bird life, but the springs of most of us would be poorer if there had never been such a thing as a bird's nest in a hedge. The moment of crushing up against the hedge, the thorns pricking the body, the groping forward with one hand, the last stretch of fingers to the nest, the moment of touching eggs, the cold shock of touching raw, featherless young birds: these are all things which the hedgerow, more than anything else, has allowed us to experience infinitely. I see my own children, even at the age of four or five, reach out for this experience of nest-hunting in hedges more eagerly than for any other experience in the countryside, and I find it satisfying to think that in adult life it will be the hedge that provides them with one of the richest of childhood memories.

The Southern countryside produces one other type of hedge that is not seen elsewhere. It is the colossal,



22 PASTURES NEAR THE LITTLE CHURCH OF BERNERS RODING, ESSEX



23 THE FIELD PATTERN OF THE VALE OF AYLESBURY FROM THE CHILTERN

pecially trained and pruned hedge of hop-gardens, composed generally of thorn and trained to reach the height of, and make a screen for, the hops themselves. These enormous slices of hedges reach a height of ten, fifteen, or even twenty feet. They are unique to the hop-growing countryside, form the only example of a hedge trained to protect a specific crop. In fact there is now a cult of hedge-cutting, in Midland districts especially, which virtually means the removal of the hedge from arable land. Hedges are hacked so low in order, apparently, to give crops more air and light, that they have ceased to be any protection against wind and cattle at all. A well-laid hedge, like a well-cut ditch, is rapidly becoming a rarity in the countryside—to the complete detriment, as I see it, of the nature and character of the land. Well and properly laid, a hedge is just as beautiful as when in full growth, a supremely satisfying thing to mind and eye. Good hedges and good drainage are, in fact, two of the fundamental necessities of a good agricultural system, yet both, drainage especially, are now often painfully neglected. Before the 1914-18 War the two jobs, like thatching, bred real craftsmen, men of special ability, true to a tradition. The land is poorer for the loss of these men, who were a natural part of a prosperous system.

For, as I see it, the real beauty of the English countryside depends almost entirely on the vigour and prosperity of the agricultural system behind it. This is obviously not true of places of particular natural beauty like Dartmoor or the moors and mountains of Cumberland, Yorkshire, Wales, Derbyshire and so on; but it is undeniably true, and most true, of the type of country with which this essay is specifically dealing. The pudding countryside, unspectacular, quiet, homely, derives its beauty almost solely from the care and order with which it is governed and worked. Like a garden, which begins to

be hideous as soon as neglected, it depends almost exclusively on the activities of man for its charm. Grass can be properly green only when properly grazed or cut; arable becomes a wilderness of thistle and dock as soon as plough and seed are withheld from it. If ever the English agricultural system should collapse—and at fairly regular intervals there are signs of its doing so, though it never does—the humble green pudding countryside would be the first to suffer and go into decay with it. We make a great struggle, and rightly so, to preserve acres of downland and moor and woodland and forest from the dangers of so-called progress. We rightly estimate that it would be a catastrophe if the English countryside were bit by bit robbed of such natural features. But if the day ever comes when the English farmer can no longer afford to grow oats and barley, wheat and potatoes, to lay fields for hay, to graze cattle and herd sheep, then we shall be faced with a still deeper catastrophe and the loss of a kind of beauty which we take as naturally for granted as the air we breathe.

Perhaps we take it too much for granted? Consider the English landscape without moor and fell, downland and mountain, and then try to consider it without this plain, pasture-and-arable pudding which is a common part, almost, of its every county. Consider it without fields of wheat, pink-bellied oats, grey-mauve sweet stretches of beans in flower, yellow splashes of mustard, white seas of barley, fields of white peas, blue flax, hops, lucerne, roots, sanfoin, potatoes in flower; all the established crops of the English landscape. Consider it finally without grass and hedgerow, the common and constant elements which bind the whole pattern together. Consider for a single moment an English landscape deprived of these simple and accepted things. And then ask yourself how easily you could give them up.



24 GRAZING FIELDS NEAR SNITTERBY, LINCOLNSHIRE