

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1935.

THE LAND WE LIVE IN

By H. E. BATES

SCOTTISH COUNTRY, edited by G. Scott Moncrieff. *Wishart*. 7s. 6d.

ENGLISH EARTH, by Marjorie Hessel Tiltman. *Harrap*. 10s. 6d.

THE BEAUTY OF BRITAIN, by various authors. *Batsford*. 5s.

THE COUNTRYMAN'S ENGLAND, by Dorothy Hartley. *Batsford*. 7s. 6d.

THE HEART OF ENGLAND by Ivor Brown. *Batsford*. 7s. 6d.

CLASSIC books in praise of England are rarities; beside the fictional and poetic mountains of English literature the works of Hudson, Jefferies, Thomas, White, Cobbett and company appear like the chance upthrowings of a colony of modest literary moles. This famine in rural classics has in the past been equalled only by a public famine in rural interest. Why then the sudden crop of books in enthusiastic if not classic praise of the countryside, and the fat, if not fine, harvest of public interest and pleasure in country life? The word "country" in each of these cases ought to be qualified by the word "English," for we hear little of Irish country life except in the works of Irish poets and novelists, and it is very rare indeed that a company of Scots writers are induced, as they have been in *Scottish Country*, to gather together and praise their native land from Tweed to Sutherland and even beyond that to the Orkneys and Shetlands and the Outer Isles. From these essays one gathers that the Scottish scene changes very little from year to year, except to decay; and the same reflection is prompted by the work of such a writer as Mr. Sean O'Faoláin, whose stories are set in scenes drenched in a melan-

choly Irish loveliness that even a revolution could not change. Why then this sudden desire on the part of the English to praise their country with such fervour, unless it is that they have suddenly found it changing so quickly that if they do not praise it soon they may never be able to praise it at all?

For the English countryside, as more than one writer in *English Country* pointed out a year ago, is changing, except in favoured and remote parts, with a rapidity that means something far worse than the decay which one Scottish writer sees and laments so bitterly in the Highlands, a rapidity which may mean in fact the wholesale disintegration, except for the acres in National Trust, of all the countryside so fervently and rapturously and even sentimentally praised by Miss Tiltman and Miss Hartley, and Messrs. Brown, Priestley and company, to say nothing of the army of photographers who have supplied the illustrations to their already illustrious text. To two of these volumes Mr. Priestley has contributed a preface, over-praising Mr. Ivor Brown in one and touching on the fringe of this very problem of insidious change in the other. "There can be few parts of the world," he says, "in which commercial greed and public indifference have combined to do more damage than they have done here. We have been hard at it fouling our nest for a long time now. The process continues."

The process continues, but Mr. Priestley stops, and these are almost the only

words of indignation contained in the whole 800 pages of these four books. True, *The Heart of England* contains many photographs of what are scarcely prize beauty-spots, but any bitterness of comment on them is as conspicuous as the merits of the book itself, which is as flabby a piece of writing as ever appeared outside the pages of a small-town newspaper. The characterless nature of Mr. Brown's thought and style is indeed astounding, and this book is very little better than the "churning out of that tenth-rate descriptive stuff, rehashing of old rubbish," against which Mr. Hugh Macdiarmid declaims in his vigorous, thoughtful, indignant essay on the Shetland Isles, a piece of admirable writing only matched in these volumes by Mr. Ian Macpherson's account of his grandfather's life and his own in the central Highlands. "When my grandfather married he had one cow, a bit of ground, a house, a bed, a box for a table, a seat of divots beside the fire for his wife, a bench of divots on which he could stretch his legs for himself. "The times were bitter hard . . . I've seen when there wasn't a boll of meal between all the houses in Craithie in New Year's time. I remember it fine. No early ripening oats then, Ian. And all the men out playing shinty in the snow. There wasn't a doctor in the country either. What did they do when they were sick?"

Do what they do now, get better or die and be damned to them."

"Nevertheless," comments Mr. Macpherson, "the country was gay." Why gay he does not explain, but the parallel clearly exists in England to-day. The countryside, odd though it may seem when we look at the lovely photographs of lovely places in *The Beauty of Britain* and its companion volumes, is suffering a sea-change into ugliness and provincialism and jerry-building that very few, least of all these writers, appear inclined to arrest. In the Highlands times were bitter hard, but the country was gay. In England the country becomes urbanised, but its writers rhapsodise. How is it? Can it be that the country, more accessible than at any time in its history, is at last not only fashionable but also a paying proposition?

It might be possible to answer "Yes" if it were not for the possession of some of the knowledge contained in Miss Tiltman's *English Earth*, a detailed, lively and enthusiastic account of the revolution now taking place in English agriculture and English country life in general, a book in which the reader may find out for himself why he pays half a crown for a bunch of irises in Piccadilly while a man in the Scilly Islands scythes down irises by the thousand in order to cut his losses. The economics of pigs, beef, chickens, eggs, cider, bread, apples and many more agricultural products are dealt with in this book by a writer who, though she loves her country, does not thereby believe it to be above her own or any other criticism. And here, perhaps, is the heart of the trouble. We are surfeited with a worship of beauty. And I for one long for the publication of *This Hideous England*, a work of indignation which, however, appears about as likely to be born as the legislation which might prevent its title becoming history.

THE ARYAN PATH

Vol. VI

No. 8

PRINCIPAL AUGUST CONTENTS

RACE RELATIONS - - - - -	Lord Olivier
A TORCH OF DARKNESS - - -	Maurice Samuel
GOOD LIFE IN A SICK WORLD - -	Irwin Edman
POETRY AND CHILDREN - - -	R. L. Mégroz
LEARNING FROM CHILDREN	Hugh de Selincourt
PROBLEM OF EVIL	

I. In the Romantic School - -	Mlle. C. Chonez
II. An Indian Point of View -	J. M. Kumarappa

Subscription Terms: £1 per year; 10/ half year.
2/- single copy (post free).

17, GREAT CUMBERLAND PLACE,
MARBLE ARCH, W.I.