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Escape to the Country

Concertina Farm. By Erick Berry and Herbert Best. (Michael Joseph. 10s. 6d.)

By H. E. BATES

Every New Yorker of the literary-artistic class seems to talk about a farm. This is our equivalent of "my cottage in the country." Either this farm is just a rosebud dream, or it is a shack far up the Hudson to which the New Yorker races for rural refreshment on peace-time Friday evenings. Whatever it is, it will, sooner or later, become a book, and there is no reason at all why such a book should not be called "Concertina Farm"—the farm which folds up for the week or the winter, and unfolds for Sundays or the summer.

Erick Berry and her English husband, Herbert Best, found such a farm among the wild woods of the Adirondacks, and they have written about it in one of those books of eager personal escape which are so characteristic, and in a way so damning, of our modern civilisation.

They, as so many of us have done or long to do here, gladly left the gay gadgetry of the town for the simple fun of keeping hens, goats and bees, the joy of the chunk-wood stove, and the satisfying experience of being slightly nearer to earth than a pavement will allow. Their book is lively, in a way rather sadly flippant, and illustrated by line-drawings where photographs would have been better; most of what they do is not unexpected; you know that they will have headaches over the carpenter, the water, the heating arrangement, the hens, the bees, and so on.

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All this you can read happily in an hour or two in the train, in bed, in the Mess, or in the Sunday arm-chair. But what is really interesting about it all is its unstinted commentary on our time: that our civilisation should so annoy

us, bore us, sicken us or shame us that we should seek, as a restorative, life in tumble-down shacks in Essex or the Adirondacks, on the Thames or on the Hudson, and that the circus in Piccadilly or Times Square should seem of less account than the drama of the beech unfolding and the wyandotte laying its egg. As such a commentary, and for itself, "Concertina Farm" is recommended. It is a whiff of smelling-salts in a fainting world.

Letters to the Editor

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Commander "X," R.N.

Sir,—Your readers will have seen in the Press of March 18 the following announcement:

NAVAL AUXILIARY LOST

The Board of Admiralty regrets to announce that the auxiliary vessel H.M.S. Fidelity has been lost. Her commanding officer was a member of the Fighting French forces. Next-of-kin of casualties have been informed.

It will be a matter of surprise to those who knew him, and to the forces of the Fighting French, that the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. Fidelity was thus described. The facts are otherwise.

Commander "X" was a Frenchman by birth and a most remarkable man. After a life devoted to the service of France (and in whose service he earned four rows of decorations) he arrived at Gibraltar in June, 1940, in dramatic circumstances. Convinced of the strength of our purpose and the rightness of our cause, after selling all he possessed to buy with the proceeds two Spitfires for the R.A.F., he placed himself at the service of the Admiralty and was granted the acting rank