GOUDHURST CHURCH: FROM THIS STEEP VILLAGE STREET IS A VIEW THAT DESTROYS COMPLETELY THE NOTION THAT THE WEALD IS MERELY A PLAIN OF MUD AND CLAY

MY BIT OF BRITAIN

By H. E. BATES

(*Author of* "The Fallow Land," "The Poacher," "Spella Ho," and many volumes of short stories of the countryside)

THERE is a piece of country whose boundaries run slightly north-westward from the sea at Rye, west of the Rother Levels, and up into the higher country east of Tunbridge Wells, and then due eastward to the North Downs about Godmersham and Wye, and then back through Tenterden, Appledore, the Isle of Oxney: roughly an isosceles triangle, with its southerly point in Sussex, touching the sea.

This is my country. It is my country, that is, by adoption. After living for twenty-five years on the Midland plain, just on the edge of the Fen country, I came south to live in a country that continually created in me the restless impression that I had lived in it before. This feeling is hard to define. It merely arises perhaps out of childhood memories. As a child I often came southward with my parents, to spend holidays mostly on the Sussex coast. We also went northward and eastward, but it was only in the south that we played the game of looking for the family name. Our family had long been noted for being fishermen, butterfly-fiends, bird-lovers, naturalists; some members of it got their living from it, and it used to be said that wherever there was a wood or a river you would find a Bates; I was even proud that a Bates, though he had no connection with us, had written *A Naturalist on the Amazon*. So our game used to be to search the narrow streets and the harbour quays of those Sussex towns for fishermen, boatmen, bird-stuffers, naturalists and even gardeners who bore our name. The number we found was astonishing; I remember once that we arrived at a boarding-house, went upstairs to our rooms and looked out of the window. And there, on the opposite side of the street, as if he had known we were coming, a taxidermist had painted our name in large letters over his dingy shop. That delighted us, and still delights me. Twenty-five years later I still play the game of looking at shop-fronts for the names of these Bateses who, as my father used to say, got along quite well without hard work.

From these early experiences arises the feeling, perhaps, that this stretch of the south country is a second home. There are pieces of country—Wales is a notable example for me and I believe for many people—which create an instantaneous impression of unhappiness and gloom. You are no sooner in them than you long, with misery, to be out of them. They sour the spirit. There are towns—again the dour valley-towns of Wales, the dourer town-villages of Scotland and even some much over-praised places of the West Country—which create the same effect. But on me this triangle of Kent and Sussex has the friendly, tranquillising effect of a familiar room. Whenever I leave it, going westward to what is supposedly the rich country of Devon, or northward to the flat, downright, half-industrialised Midlands, or even for some ambitious tour to the western lochs of Scotland, I come back to it with a renewed pleasure. The easy familiarity of it folds round me, and I am glad to be home.

Easy and familiar—but also very varied and very beautiful. For this piece of country, from the wooded hollows that lie like giant birds' nests just behind the ridge of the North Downs as they run parallel to the Folkestone road to the view of Rye, standing like a medieval fortified town above the Rother Levels, is the complete and generous English pastoral. It has a little of everything except mountains. It has downland and marsh, forest and heath, corn and hops, river and woodland, pond and pasture, churches and castles, ports and the sea. Its orchards are incomparable. It grows everything, from the primroses which are like moonlight on every roadside in Spring to the quinces which glow like the golden decorations of Christmas trees in the Wealden gardens in autumn with rich loveliness.

Its little towns are monuments to one of the only two industries—agriculture apart—which have ever beautified the English township. Cloth and wool alone have left us a cultural and architectural legacy out of industries long since dead, and towns like Cranbrook, Tenterden and Hawkhurst are the legacies of cloth. Of Tenterden it is enough to say that it could sit with grace in the front row of any prize-winning selection of English country towns. That charming High Street of black-and-white and tile-hung houses of warm terra-cotta, widening to a sort of tree-lined boulevard at one end, is hardly surpassed in England. What Cranbrook lives on to-day I do not know. You get the impression of a town trying to remember what once made it important—of people idling at street corners, of shops always a little behind the times, an impression of rosy-white charm a little dusted over and dominated from every angle by a white windmill that towers above the town like a giant toy.

This same impression of rosy whiteness, mellowing in places to plum-red and cream, broken in places by the sharp striping of black and white, runs all through the villages, from Charing at the foot of the great downland beech-woods on through the Weald until the supreme expression of it is reached in Winchelsea and Rye. You might start from Charing, from the hill above which there is a view that seems to take in half England, and, by going down through Smarden, Biddenden, Sissinghurst, Goudhurst, Benenden, Newenden, Northiam and Brede, see a chain of villages which are like a row of matched and graduated stones on a necklace, warm and clean and fresh, not one out of place. The sharp half-timbering, magnificent at Biddenden, lights up the landscape; the warm-coloured tiles, clay-orange, yellow-russet, pink-brown, tone it down. The fashion of tile-hanging, of using heart-shaped or tiles of some other decorative shape to cover the house-sides, gives many of these villages their distinguished character. The impression created by even the best brick is bound to be flat. These tiles, hanging or overlapping, have something of the shadowy charm of window-shutters. They catch the falling light and hold it in a series of warm fancy parallels edged with shade. Lichen grows on them, often in ring-worms of lemon and green, so that sometimes a roof or a houseside seems to flower in the sun.

With two exceptions these villages are on the flat, tied sturdily to Wealden clay. Goudhurst and Brede are the notable exceptions, and from Goudhurst there is a view that destroys completely the notion that the Weald is merely a plain of mud and clay. From this steep village street, with its swan-pond, high-stepped houses and shining magnolias on the russet walls of tiles, the conception is of a country

whose contours are literally flowering before the eyes. Fold after fold of orchard and wood, pasture and hop-garden run away into a distance limited by the heavy line of the Sussex Downs, a series of valleys splashed blue-green by the sprayed hops in summer, by the pink and white of the spring orchards, darkened by much holly and pine and chestnut, uplifted by the red and amber foolscaps of oast-houses tipped as if with white feathers. Sometimes, especially about the Goudhurst country, you can stand on one side of a valley and see very little except the slope of the other side, its hop-gardens and orchards painted in dark parallels down the slant, the red and white splashes of farmsteads breaking up the squares of the fields, the dark holly-hedges throwing up into shining relief the yellow strips of corn. No other country in England quite gives the impression, as this does, of being ready-made Van Gogh : the shining corn, the dark parallels of crops, the folded blue distances, the red and white houses. Do painters never come here ? Sometimes as I drive through this country I stop and frame my hands against the summer valley-sides in despair because I work in words instead of paint. A whole world of landscape painting, of the truest English pastoral, flowers uninterpreted here summer after summer.

The charm of all this country lies not simply in its richness, which is remarkable, but in its rich variations within a comparatively small space. Country composed almost solely of pasture and elm and hedgerow, as in the southern part of Leicestershire, seems to damp the mind. There is country of the same kind in Eastern Yorkshire and indeed in every part of the great eastern English plain. It is when country begins to fold into a series of quickly repeated valleys and where soil and climate are so happily blended that you can grow not only standard crops like wheat and potatoes and grass but specialised crops, with all the specialised design and architecture their culture entails, like hops and cherries, strawberries and Spanish chestnuts, that landscape becomes a perfect delight. Softened by sun and sea-wind, such a district must become in time a sort of vast garden whose crop rotations are endless, a huge tract of fertile landscaping rich with more or less permanent touches of design, the woods, the orchards, the hop-gardens, that will go on delighting generation after generation. Its luxuriance is such that it overflows into the gardens. Great hydrangeas of blue and pink bloom by the houses, fuschias spill down terraces of rock, quinces glow everywhere in the long temperate autumns which, in good years, bring out the primroses in November. Not signs of the sub-tropical of course, and not to be compared with the extreme West Country, but touches of embroidery on a land already distinguished by the happy design given by great fertility.

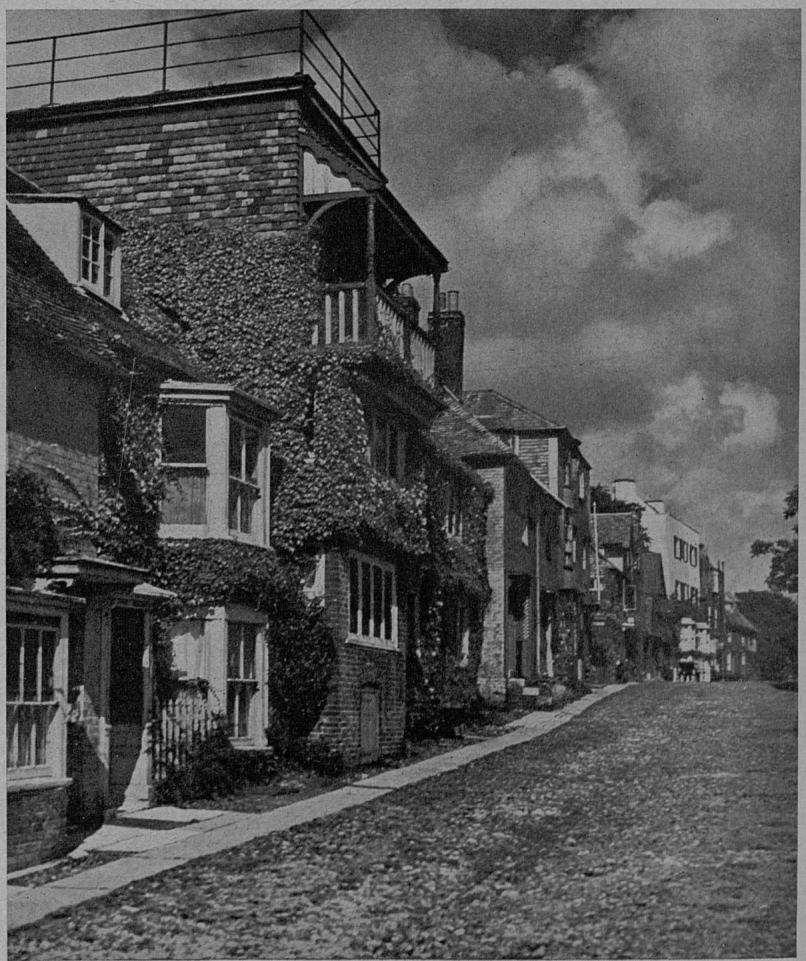
All through this country the feeling of the nearness of the sea is pleasant. From the high points of the North Downs you can see the smoke-stacks of ships beyond Dungeness, but as you go over through the green switchback of the valleys between Charing and Rye there is scarcely another point, I think, at which you can get a glimpse of the sea. Yet to know that you are travelling down to the sea, even without a sight of it until the hills break abruptly above the marshes landward of Rye, creates a kind of mild stimulant pleasure in the mind. When finally you do see the sea there is, I think, a slight feeling of disappointment. For here, about Rye and Winchelsea, the sea is in the wrong place. It is divorced from the true land, the cliff on which both Rye and Winchelsea stand, and lies rather meanly beyond a couple of miles of sea-marsh broken in one place by the mud-banked Rother, which still takes moderate ships, and farther west by the dark lonely fortress of Camber Castle, isolated between the two towns and the sea. All this, of course, is the result of a great sea-catastrophe. In the fourteenth century the sea advanced and took off this limb of land, destroying four-fifths of the port of Winchelsea in a night of natural calamity for which there is, I suppose, no parallel in our recent history. Winchelsea remains broken and enchanted, its one remaining church cut in half, the ghost of what might have been the most charming coastal town in England.

Rye remains. What to say of it after its years of arty re-discovery, I hardly know. If there is a sea-town in England that is easier on the eyes I have not yet found it. To say that everyone now knows it, that those crazy cobbled streets of russet houses and exclusive numbers are now self-conscious pictures for the tourist, is not enough. In England the beautiful town, or the town in the beautiful situation, is faced with two choices : the terrors of the tea-and-ham-and-eggs shack, with all the traps for tourists which have desolated the Gorge at Cheddar and the long glen at Matlock, or the hand of middle-class preservation. In spite of art and snobbery, there is no doubt which is the better choice, and to this Rye has long since been comfortably given up. Useless to protest that it is full of tea-shops. Naturally it is. Equally useless to protest that it exists solely for the pleasure of middle-class ladies, arty artists and cliques of writers. The port still has its trade ; ships still come up the yellow-grey Rother estuary ; fish-nets are made here by the ton, and the town has a life of its own.

As you come back into Kent across the Rother Levels, where the skyscapes above the flat dyke-lands are vast and snowy with sea-cloud and the reeds flower fawn-silver by the waterside and the great hedges of hawthorn, you see the land rising again in the north, towards the Isle of Oxney and Appledore. The true marsh lies farther east, full of that odd air of remote beauty which sea always gives to sea-marshes and which has something to do with the larger and loftier area of sky that can be seen on flat land. The villages are small here, without the luxuriance of the upland villages of the Weald ; the churches are squat, often flint-faced. But there is a church here that is pleasure even to a man who has been brought up, as I was, on the cream of church architecture, the glorious diet of Midland battlement and spire. Brookland should not be missed : simple, primitive, cold as marsh air, its windows of clear glass, its font solid lead and the great wooden bell-tower completely detached from the church itself. They say that smugglers were once active in and about this stout, plain-windowed little church, and I do not doubt it at all.

At Appledore you are among the charm again : the russet and brown, pink and white houses, the neat air of reflected prosperity. A windmill or two uplifts the already high ridge ; there are long views towards the sea, then heavy woodlands that cut them off. There was a port here once, before the abruptly changed course of the Rother, in 1287, finished Appledore's days of sea prosperity. Now there is no touch of the sea : only pastoral calm, deep primrose woodland, road-dykes mauve with lady-smock in April, dark ponds lit up all summer by yellow water-lilies. And here, perhaps, is the place to say something about the roads of this piece of country. If there is anything crazier than this jumble of lanes that wriggle and tangle together like eels on their way to the coast I have not yet found it in England. It used to be a fairly regular custom of mine to drive round and about here on Sunday evenings in summer. In all these excursions I think I never navigated a course that could be called conscious or without getting hopelessly lost only five or ten miles from home. If these roads were designed to fuddle invaders or, which is most improbable, to help smugglers, then they were successfully made. There are no roads quite so irritating and charming in the whole of England.

But however you get lost on these roads there is always an unfailing compass point ; it can be seen from almost everywhere on this flatter land—the straight back of the North Downs and the great bear-skin of woodland, almost black in winter and summer, fiery-bronze in autumn, that lies above the sun-bleached loins of chalk. As the sea attracts you to the south, so this line of hills has some sort of magnetism as you turn north. And as you come up off the yellow clay, crowded with skylarks in Spring, and up the first step of the richer cherry-lands that lie on the ledge between Weald and hills and so into sight of the stark chalk that suddenly breaks into beech-woods of superb height on the hill-tops, the feeling of attraction grows stronger still. To discover what lies on the other side of the hill—this feeling inevitably draws you up the deep-carved lanes, along which the summer flowers grow richer as the soil grows poorer and whiter, up to the rising wall of beeches and the eternal copper floor of leaves swept



RYE : "IF THERE IS A SEA-TOWN IN ENGLAND THAT IS EASIER ON THE EYES I HAVE NOT YET FOUND IT"

by dark yews. The depth of silence here on hot summer days, when there is no wind and the chalk is blinding on the eyes and the rock-roses are brilliant lemon in the sun, can be immense, the feeling of isolation splendid. And on days when the warm sea-strong air blows up from the valley and the sun is very bright the whole of that flat green view below seems sometimes to tilt and rock in the drowsy exhilarating windiness of the air.

To climb the hill through the beeches and to see what finally does lie behind is a piece of the pleasantest discovery. It would be reasonable to expect the land to flatten out, as in fact it does only a mile or two farther northward, but here it breaks into a succession of steep valleys, almost pits, falling and rising grandly, flanked and topped with woodlands, furrowed by small lanes driven deeply through the chalk. If the Weald is an excellent example of man-made, man-beautified countryside, of which the greater part of the charm arises from the orchards, the woods and the architecture, these downland hollows are a good example of what you might call natural country, in which a country like England is inevitably poor. This is the sort of country, so rich in natural contour and so much more enriched by woods that are like slices of forgotten forest, which we cry out to have preserved but which in a way successfully preserves itself. For there is little man can do with these steep chalk slopes; the farmsteads here seem small; there are no orchards, no hops; you see sometimes a small strip of cornland, a few chickens, a little meadow of hay. But the land is, for once, stronger than the people on it. It stands above and outside the main stream of cultivation: strong and decorative, barren but rich, useless but remarkably lovely.

It is a striking fact that the villages here are poor, and as you get farther and farther east, far outside my chosen triangle, poorer still. There is once more a charming russetness about Charing and Wye and, again far out of the triangle, a superb black and white village square at Chilham. For the rest there is no Wealden richness—for the simple reason that there was in the past no Wealden prosperity, no cloth, no rich merchants to leave out of industry a legacy of enchanting culture. It is only rarely, most notably in the Cotswolds and Suffolk, that you find that happy state of things. And perhaps it is asking too much. For it is fairly certain that if these downland hollows, rich with cowslips and bluebells and rarer orchids in spring and summer, always superb with their rolling woodlands, had been graced with towns and villages as architecturally fine as Biddenden, Smarden, Benenden, Appledore, Goudhurst and Tenterden, this break in the long ridge of North Downland would have been one of the tourist spots of England. Even as it is, it stands with West Sussex, parts of Hampshire, and even the much-praised over-ripe valleys of Devonshire, as country unsurpassed of its kind. Indeed, if there is more beautifully varied country—as I recall the Lakes, the New Forest, the valleys of Exe and the Dove I am aware that there is a powerful category of more impressive country—than that contained in this small triangle, whose sides are not longer than twenty miles if you take the straight line, then I shall hope to see it when petrol is no longer something you buy with a coupon and nurse like Napoleon brandy.

THE ISLE OF OXNEY AND THE ROTHER FLATS

YOUNG STALLIONS AS SIRES OF CLASSIC WINNERS

RIOT, the dam of Commotion, winner of the New Oaks, is very nearly full sister to Fair Trial, whose son Lambert Simnel won this year's Two Thousand Guineas. Riot is by Colorado (by Phalaris out of Canyon, by Chaucer) out of Lady Juror, while Fair Trial is the son of Fairway (by Phalaris out of Scapa Flow by Chaucer) and Lady Juror.

It is possible that a brother and sister have before been responsible for classic winners in the same season but whether this instance is a record or not, the circumstance must have given particular satisfaction to Mr. John Arthur Dewar who bred and owns Fair Trial and Riot and who has now gained with Commotion his third classic success. Cameronian won both the Two Thousand Guineas and the Derby for him in romantic circumstances in 1931.

Lady Juror was foaled in 1919 by Son-in-Law out of Lady Josephine, the dam also of Mumtaz Mahal. As a yearling she was bought on behalf of the late Lord Manton for 3,000 guineas. She was a good race-mare, winning three races worth £8,057. At the end of her racing career, and after the death of Lord Manton, she was sold in 1923 to the late Lord Dewar for 8,600 guineas. For Lord Dewar she bred the winners Jurisdiction and The Black Abbot—both by Abbots Trace—and subsequently her winning progeny have been The Recorder, Riot, Fair Trial, Sansonnet, Giftlaw and Dispenser.

The late Lord Dewar strove for over thirty years at great expense, but unsuccessfully, to breed a classic winner. He bred Cameronian but died, in 1930, before that colt had run his first race as a two-year-old. Lord Dewar left his stud, his horses in training and £1,000,000 to his nephew, Mr. J. A. Dewar, who had not previously been actively interested in English racing. His inheritance, as I have shown, included the following year's Derby winner, Cameronian, while Riot, destined to become the dam of this season's Oaks winner, was part of it, as a yearling.

All four winners of the classic races of this season have been the progeny of young stallions—Fair Trial (Lambert Simnel), Colombo (Dancing Time), Hyperion (Owen Tudor) and Mieuxce is the sire of Commotion, who was one of his first crop of foals.

Mieuxce himself was foaled in 1933 by Massine, winner of the Ascot Gold Cup of 1924, out of L'Olivete (winner and dam of winners). L'Olivete was a grand-daughter of Maximum, another Ascot Gold Cup winner.

Of his nine races Mieuxce won five and was second in the other four. The French Derby and the Grand Prix de Paris were his chief victories. His owner, Sir Victor Sassoon, placed him at stud at Thetford, Norfolk, under the management of Mrs. E. Clayton, and since her death her daughter has assumed direction of the establishment. The fee of Mieuxce was 300 guineas until this year when, "to help breeders in these difficult times," it was reduced to 200 guineas, with the provision that should the mare prove barren, an approved mare will be taken to the horse the following season at half fee. In 1939 Mieuxce covered 34 mares, 20 of which produced a living foal and there were five foals slipped and dead. Excluding the four mares sent abroad after being covered by Mieuxce, of whose foaling there is not any record, only five of the 34 mated to him were barren and his fertility was 83.33 per cent. The year before it was 85 per cent. which is considerably above the average. Mieuxce had two winners—his first—last season, Le Petit Duc and Mazarin. Each won one race.

Commotion only ran once last season as a two-year-old, and was unplaced to Reno Decree at the Hurst Park Spring meeting, when the Victoria Cup was last run there. A classic winner is expected to have high-class speed as well as stamina. A few weeks before Commotion won the New Oaks of a mile and a half she gained a very easy four lengths victory in a sprint of six furlongs at Newmarket.

H. Wragg added to his several classic successes when he partnered Commotion in the Oaks. It is safe to assume that Gordon Richards would have been her jockey if he had not been nursing a broken leg. Up to the time of that accident Richards was expecting to ride Owen Tudor in the Derby, and his friends believe that in spite of the colt's disappointing performance in the Two Thousand Guineas and subsequent defeat by Fairy Prince, Richards would have stuck to Owen Tudor. It is remarkable how a triumph in the greatest of all races has persistently eluded the most successful English jockey of all time. Commotion was not the only Mieuxce to win on that afternoon, the two-year-old Comique, who took the Plantation Stakes for Mr. J. V. Rank, being by that sire out of Cybiane.

The One Thousand Guineas winner, Dancing Time, started an odds-on favourite for the Oaks was but only third, separated from the winner by Turkana and two and three quarter lengths. If the Aga Khan had kept his yearlings of 1939 to race himself he would have owned the second in both the Derby, Oaks and Two Thousand Guineas. He bred Turkana, who is by the St. Leger winner Firdaussi, out of the Sansovino mare Tikka Rani. Turkana was sold to Lt.-Col. P. G. Robinson, and last season she won three races, ran second twice and was third once. On the day that Commotion won the Oaks, the four-year-old Winterhalter was allowed to walk over for the Haddenham Plate of a mile and a half. I expect his trainer would have welcomed some opposition, which would have given the colt a gallop in his preparation for the Gold Cup.

When last referring to Winterhalter I was in error in thinking that he was the only horse the Aga Khan had in training since his big sale in 1939. The very day that this mis-statement appeared indelibly in print the Aga Khan's two-year-old filly Mah Iran made a successful debut in the Denston Stakes at Newmarket. She is a grey by Bahram out of Mah Mahal, the dam of Mahmoud, Pherozshah and Khan Bahadur. The desire of the Aga Khan to keep this filly is readily understood. Not only is she by the best of his three Derby winners and out of the dam of another, but she is a grand-daughter of Mumtaz Mahal, who was by The Tetrarch. It was when she was mated to Gainsborough that she produced Mah Mahal. The other winning produce of Mumtaz Mahal have been Furrokh Siyar, Dara Shukoh, Mumtaz Begum, Badruddin and Mirza II.

Lord Londonderry owns a smart three-year-old colt in Heremon, winner of the Barnwell Handicap under 9st. This colt is very closely related to Rockfel. The latter was the daughter of Felstead and Rockcliffe. Heremon is by Felstead out of Rockcliffe's half-sister, Hesperis.

YEOMAN.

THE NATIONAL POSTAL AUCTION

Readers of *The Field* who wish to bid in the National Postal Auction in aid of the Red Cross Agriculture Fund (and few, we imagine, will not) should apply as soon as possible to Major G. Miller Mundy, at 30, Belgrave Square, London, S.W.1, for a copy of the booklet which gives details not only of the lots up for auction but also of the way in which bids can be made. There are many interesting things up for sale, including a truly remarkable selection of farming equipment, but for those whose leanings are not solely inclined that way pages 22 and 23 of the booklet list a fine and varied selection of sports, games, and books. Tennis rackets, shotguns, rifles, cartridges, cameras, cricket bats and books (most of them autographed by the authors) are listed—and further on is an appetising list of things to drink, to eat and to wear. The latest date for receiving bids by post, by the way, is Friday, July 18th.